

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[ OUR TAKE ]

## The lodestar of We, the people

At 75, the Constitution continues to be a visionary document that guides the Republic

On November 26, 75 years ago, the members of the Constituent Assembly (CA) passed a resolution approving the Constitution they had drafted under the leadership of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. It became the founding document of the new Republic that came into being on January 26, 1950. Since then, it has served as the lodestar for "We, the people", in whose name it was proposed and approved.

In over seven decades, the world's longest-written Constitution, often spoken of as a work in progress—there have been 106 amendments to the document in 75 years—has held together a country riven by multiple fault lines. The ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity, highlighted in the Preamble, have guided political parties of different ideologies that have been in office. It has been the reference book for the judiciary to step in when the legislature or executive strays. The basic structure doctrine proposed by the Supreme Court in 1973 underlines that the constitutional ideals form the bedrock of the Republic and warns against disturbing that foundation.

For a country that had faced the brunt of colonialism and imperialism since 1857 when this land came under the British crown and a society that had been weighed down by the inhuman social order perpetuated by the caste system, freedom in 1947, the (then) risky gamble of universalising franchise, and an idealistic Constitution that followed were truly liberating. The making of the Indian Constitution itself was a grand project. Its members represented the religious, linguistic, ethnic, social, regional, and political diversity of the nation. Each provision (395 Articles, organised into 25 Parts and 12 Schedules) was formulated after extensive debates and the outcome was a remarkable document for multiple reasons. A Constituent Assembly mostly composed of people drawn from the privileged sections of the society agreed on a vision that offered a view from below, privileged individual rights over communal privileges, and secured the rights of minorities. It established a social and political democracy based on the principle of one person, one vote, one value.

Continuing incidents of social violence—centred on caste, faith, gender, and wealth—suggest that the ideals of the Constitution are far from being realised. But blame not the document for our failure, hold those responsible for its implementation accountable. The future life of the Constitution, and of the Republic itself, hinges on we, the people, our political agents, and our institutions imbibing the letter, spirit, and intent of the document and working to realise its ideals.

## Let science guide on sustainable farming

Based on the science of the time, the Green Revolution brought food security to India. India's mammoth Public Distribution System for grains, its impressive farm exports (most prominently, rice), and its mid-day meal scheme, among others, were built on this foundation. At the same time, the practices it engendered have taken a toll on soil health, groundwater, agri-biodiversity, agri-productivity, and even air quality. It is against this backdrop that the Centre has backed natural farming—an about-turn from the chemicals and high-yielding seeds-led Green Revolution, towards what its proponents claim is a farming system rooted in eco-sensitivity and traditional agricultural knowledge. The ₹2,500-crore National Mission on Natural Farming is in step with the government's stated aim to improve soil health and reduce groundwater/irrigation dependence.

However, the Centre must ensure that indulgence in natural farming does not hit farm productivity. A recent academic paper from ICRIER pointed out that scientists at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research-Indian Institute of Farming Systems found significant declines in wheat and *basmati* rice yields under natural farming methods. The implications for food security, farm income, and inflation, can be debilitating for the country.

The pressing need is for investment in agriculture research and the development of new technologies that can weed out the second-generation problems of the Green Revolution. That calls for improved agri-extension services, better planning of crop cycles, and even shifting out of cereals in water-deficient areas. Sri Lanka's recent disastrous experiment with chemical-free farming that led to a massive foodgrain shortage is a warning not to put all our eggs in one basket.

## On climate, India must reclaim leadership role

The COP29 outcome suggests that India needs to rethink its domestic and international climate strategy

An angry Indian delegate dismissed the outcome document of the recently concluded 29th Conference of Parties (COP29) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as an "optical illusion" which had been "stage-managed" by the Azerbaijani hosts. The stage-managing of the multilateral negotiating process and the selling of optical illusions by advanced Western countries is a long-running saga of short-changing developing countries in tackling the challenge of the global climate crisis.

Up until the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009, India did not hesitate to call out Western hypocrisy and mean-minded selfishness. Its position in the climate negotiations was clear and compelling: Countries that had freely signed up to the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC concluded at Rio in 2002, must fulfill their commitments. The principle of historical responsibility acknowledged that the climate crisis was taking place due to the stock of greenhouse gases, mainly carbon, which had accumulated in the earth's atmosphere since the dawn of the industrial age in the 18th century. Current emissions added incrementally to that stock but the main responsibility for the accumu-

lated emissions in the atmosphere fell on the industrialised countries. They were committed to reducing their emissions in absolute terms. These reductions were negotiated through the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC and were subject to a strict compliance procedure, with significant penalties if they were not delivered. Western countries led by the United States (US) went about systematically evincing the UNFCCC and gutting the Kyoto Protocol. The shredding of these legal instruments which began in Copenhagen, was completed at the COP16 in Paris in 2007, where we ended up with a universal pledge and review system and, most importantly, jettisoning the principle of historical responsibility. In signing the Paris Agreement, India gave up its most important negotiating lever, that of holding the developed countries to their legal undertakings under the UNFCCC. The Paris Agreement superseded the UNFCCC and the international architecture that had governed the climate change domain since Rio was changed forever.

I was India's chief negotiator on the climate crisis up until the Copenhagen summit. In the run-up to Copenhagen, a view started circulating in government that India should take a more accommodating stance, that it should be part of the "solution" rather than seen as a perennial nagayer; that if India was seeking "a seat at the table", it should not always be seen as championing the interests of developing countries. That India derived its strength precisely because

it was seen as articulating and defending the interests of developing countries, was neglected in our deliberations. We lost credibility with our core constituency and our hopes of getting Western support in terms of finance and technology were belied. Since Paris, Indian negotiators have been valiantly trying to regain some lost ground, bringing back the notion of equity and climate justice. But the Baku outcome suggests that with regard to the climate crisis, India will be on its own, that its expectations of significant infusions of capital and technology to support its energy transition are indeed "optical illusions".

We must rethink our domestic and international climate strategy.

On climate, India is a sui generis case, and this complicates the formulation of an effective negotiating strategy. Its overriding challenge is energy poverty, with per capita primary energy consumption being one-third of the world average. In terms of kilowatt equivalent, in 2022-23, India had a per capita figure of 7,143 kw, compared to 31,061 kw for China and 78,754 kw for the US. Being the world's most populous country, it is no surprise that even with such low energy availability, India in macro-terms is the world's third-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, though still far behind the US and China. These emissions will inevitably rise as the economy continues to register 6-7% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. In the US, emissions are on the decline, while China's are plateauing and will begin to decline sooner rather than



Shyam Saran



It was our flirtation with the West that eroded our standing in our natural constituency

later. Inevitably, India will be in the crosshairs as the only large emerging economy with rising emissions. There will be pressures to retire coal-based thermal power which will remain the mainstay of our energy system for the foreseeable future.

The good news is that achieving energy security for India requires an accelerated transition from fossil-fuel-driven economic growth to one progressively more reliant on renewable sources of energy such as solar energy and cleaner sources of energy such as nuclear energy. Currently, we are heavily dependent on imports of oil (90% and gas (47%), and even high-quality coal (35%). These are subject to supply and price volatility and affected by geopolitical disruptions. It is in our interest to progressively reduce our import dependence and accelerate the adoption of renewable and cleaner sources of energy. India's great advantage is the scale of its economy and bright prospects for its growth. With the right mix of policies, this can be leveraged to attract both capital and technology.

India has taken a clear-cut and even defiant stand at Baku, and this is

welcome. This was applauded by the large constituency of developing country delegates. We need to regain our leadership of this constituency which alone can give us bargaining strength. In the run-up to Copenhagen, I travelled to several developing countries to build a consensus on our negotiating posture. At that time, the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) still functioned as a coherent and influential group. It was our flirtation with the West that eroded our standing in our natural constituency. Since the Paris Agreement, which was the result of a cynical deal between the US and China at the cost of other developing countries, the BASIC is no longer an effective forum. China was remarkably muted at Baku not wanting to draw attention to its position as the world's largest emitter. There is space for India's leadership in the Global South but that will require a sustained and concerted diplomatic effort.

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary and served as the Prime Minister's special envoy and chief negotiator on climate change (2007-2010). The views expressed are personal

## Museum & academy to mark Constitution at 75

India celebrated the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India on November 26, 2024. On this very day, 75 years ago, the Constitution of India was adopted, with 300 members of the Constituent Assembly gathered to write the future of India. It is truly remarkable that the Constitution of India was drafted at an extraordinary moment in history when a new beginning was envisaged for an old civilisation.

While there was every reason to rejoice that we were coming out of nearly two centuries of colonial rule after fighting a non-violent struggle to seek independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, we were dealing with our own historical challenges. BR Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, in his last speech to the Assembly on November 25, 1949, discussed the idea of social democracy and observed: "Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of... social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life that recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life... They form a union of unity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy... Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Without fraternity, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Without equality, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constant to enforce them." In a way, Ambedkar was predicting the challenges of the future.

That said, this is an opportune time for India to establish a Constitution Museum and Rights and Freedoms Academy that will do justice to our history and heritage and commemorate this historical milestone. The reasons for establishing such a museum and academy are:



C Raj Kumar

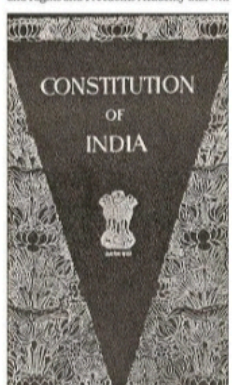
One, to promote civic education on the history and values of the Constitution. Democracies are built around the idea of people believing and participating in nation-building. The Preamble of the Constitution rightly starts with the words, "We, the people of India...". The Constitution of India is a binding document that comes together a diversity of people to believe in a cause and an ideal that is larger than their own. It was part of a collective imagination that was borne out of collective struggles that fought against colonialism to build a democratic society. The goal of the Constitution Museum is to narrate and illustrate this story of India through the history, evolution and values of the Constitution that shaped its creation. It is a moment in time, when we can reflect on the journey but also appreciate the opportunity that was given to us as a people to build a new democracy, a modern nation on the bedrock of traditional society.

Two, to promote greater understanding of the Constitution-making process. It is important that we, as a nation, educate ourselves more about the Constitution-making process. The Constitution is not a document whose relationship ought to be limited to law and order. Every citizen of India has a stake in it and finds their voice and identity through this founding document. The Constitution Museum will be the institution that will fulfill the responsibility of developing civic consciousness and awareness among Indian citizens in the Constitution-making process. This is already part of our history and heritage, but it ought to become part of our future and destiny.

Three, to celebrate the contribution of all the members of the Constituent Assembly. We have a historical opportunity to recognise and celebrate the extraordinary contributions of all the members of the Constituent Assembly. While we may be aware of the contributions of several leading members of the Assembly like Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and BR Ambedkar, much less is known about the larger composition of the Constituent Assembly which had 300 members who represented the diversity of India. Among them were 15 outstanding women whose contributions to the debates of the Constituent Assembly remain less known and not recognised. The Constitution Museum will serve as the repository of all such information for present and future generations.

The Constitution Museum should also have the Rights and Freedoms Academy which will trace the evolution of various rights and freedoms in the Constitution through the tracing of the 75-year journey of the Constitution. This will be the greatest tribute that we can offer to the members of the Constituent Assembly but also to the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India.

C Raj Kumar is founding vice-chancellor, OP Jaiswal Global University. The views expressed are personal



We must educate ourselves more about the Constitution-making process

[ DROUPADI MURMU ] PRESIDENT OF INDIA

In the true sense, the Constitution was the outcome of our long freedom struggle. The ideals of the national movement came to be enshrined in it.

## India-Canada ties and the immigrant question

The recent pro-Khalistan separatist acts of violence and targeting of the Hindu Sabha Mandir in Brampton have resulted in a diplomatic fallout and disrupted the relationship between India and Canada. Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi condemned the attacks and asked the Canadian government to "ensure justice and uphold the rule of law". However, relations between the two countries have been disturbed since last year, when Canadian PM Justin Trudeau spoke about the alleged intelligence linking Indian agents with the killing of Canadian citizen and Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil. India dismissed Trudeau's assertion as absurd and unhelpful, and in a fit-for-fact move, both countries expelled diplomats and issued advisories to their citizens. This friction between the two countries has caused extreme restlessness and anxiety among Indian immigrants and the diaspora in Canada.

Canada has emerged as one of the top destinations for Indians migrating abroad. Its multiculturalism, high wages, employment opportunities, good living standards, social security, and education often attract Indian youth to choose Canada as their destination. Indian immigrants, comprising foreign workers, students, businessmen, and other groups, form the highest share of immigrants and a rapidly growing non-ethnic group in Canada. In 2023, one-third of Canadian immigrants were of Indian origin. According to the Government of Canada (2022), the number of Indians who became permanent residents in Canada rose from 32,828 in 2013 to 118,095 in 2022, and the number of applications for the same is still the highest, followed by the Chinese.

Over a period, Indian immigrants (train gain) have critically contributed to the Canadian economy. Most International Mobility Programme work permit holders are Indians. The government of Canada claimed in 2022 that the enhancement and protection of diversity as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society is codified in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, and any discrimination is formally prohibited. The Indian diaspora in Canada is a heterogeneous, diverse, and sizeable community made up of Punjabis, Tamils, Bengalis, Gujaratis, Malayalis, Goans, Telugus, and Maharashtrians. They have significantly enriched the cultural-religious diversity and strengthened the inclusive social fabric of Canada.

The number of Indian students in Canada is sizeable and growing. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (2022) stated that out of the total international students (807,750) in Canada, 40% were from India, Canada owes \$4.5 billion to the Canadian economy in 2022. Most international students applying for new study permits are Indians.

However, the dispute between the countries has adversely affected the education and career prospects of Indian students presently in India and their families. Bhagyaresh, a Pune-based parent whose daughter is currently pursuing education in Canada, says, "We perceived Canada as a safe destination, but now, incidents have created endless restlessness among parents and students. The education and careers of many students are at stake. I hope things will be normal soon."

Recently, the Canadian government has tightened rules for international students and announced its new federal policy to limit immigration, citing economic pressures. Hundreds of Indian graduates are at risk of deportation and hence protest against this. Students from India have ended the Student Direct Stream (SDS), one of its fast-track student visa programmes popular among Indian students. The SDS was launched in 2016 to help post-secondary students from India and other countries.

Including India, process their visas more quickly. The shutting down of SDS would adversely impact Indian aspirants seeking to pursue higher education in Canada. India-Canada bilateral ties are underpinned by shared values of democracy, cultural diversity, expanding economic engagement, and long-standing people-to-people ties. Therefore, resolving the dispute between India and Canada is urgent, particularly considering Indian youth engagement in Canadian education, employment, and entrepreneurship. Not ensuring adequate safety for immigrants could negatively impact the Canadian economy considering its dependence on Indians. Growing anti-immigrant sentiments, xenophobia and racism could have deleterious consequences for Indian immigrants. Therefore, it is a subject of deep concern.

S Irudaya Rajan is chair, and Kuldeep Singh Rajput is post-doctoral fellow, International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD), Kerala. The views expressed are personal

## EXPLAINED



@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

## Why Income Tax Department has introduced PAN 2.0

AANCHAL MAGAZINE  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 26

THE 10-DIGIT alphanumeric Permanent Account Number (PAN) issued by the Income Tax Department is set to have a slew of upgrades — enhancement of the QR code feature — for new and old cards, a completely online application process, and a merger of all existing identification numbers to make PAN as the common identifier for businesses.

The Union Cabinet approved the PAN 2.0 Project on Monday to make PAN the "single source of truth and data consistency." With PAN already linked to Aadhaar, it is expected to become a strong source of identification and information for authorities.

Existing PAN cards will continue to be valid under PAN 2.0, according to the FAQs is-

sued by the Finance Ministry on Tuesday. The existing PAN holders need not mandatorily apply for the new card but can upgrade their PAN free of cost. Their number would remain the same even after the upgrade.

**What is the PAN 2.0 Project?**

PAN enables the Income Tax Department to link transactions such as tax payments, Tax Deducted at Source (TDS)/Tax Collected at Source (TCS) credits and income returns with the department.

Essentially, PAN acts as an identifier for the person with the tax department and remains the same once allotted.

Further, TAN stands for Tax Deduction and Collection Account Number, a 10-digit alphanumeric number issued by the Income Tax Department. TAN has to be obtained by person responsible for deducting or collect-

ing tax at source. It is compulsory to quote TAN in TDS/TCS return, any TDS/TCS payment challan and TDS/TCS certificates.

Under the PAN 2.0 Project, with a financial implication of Rs 1,435 crore, the existing PAN system will be upgraded and its IT backbone will be revamped, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said during the Cabinet briefing on Monday.

"There were repeated demands from the industry to have a common business identifier. They used to say they don't want different (identification) numbers, a single number would be beneficial. The project will make efforts to make PAN as the common business identifier. All PAN/TAN/TIN will be clubbed under this system," he said.

Currently, PAN-related services are spread across three platforms: the e-filing portal, the UTITSL portal, and the Protean e-portal. These services will now be integrated into a single, unified portal. "This one-stop platform will handle comprehensively issues/matters related to PAN and TAN... By doing so, the I-T Department endeavours to simplify processes, eliminate delays, and improve grievance redressal mechanisms," according to the FAQs.

**What are the features of PAN 2.0?**

The QR code features, which began in 2017-18, helps validate the PAN. This feature will continue with some enhancements.

The project also aims to set up a "mandatory PAN data vault system" for all entities

using PAN data, including financial institutions, government agencies, and central and state government departments through an online validation service.

"The PAN related information is used by many entities such as banks, insurance companies... So these (entities) who take details of PAN, they will have to keep PAN data safely, mandatorily through the data vault system," Vaishnaw said.

An official statement said the project will enable a technology-driven transformation of taxpayer registration services to improve ease of access and service delivery.

**What does it mean for individuals and businesses?**

Of the 78 crore PAN cards issued, 98 per cent belong to individuals. A senior Finance Ministry official told *The Indian Express* that

"PAN holders having an old PAN Card without QR code have an option to apply for a new card with QR code. In PAN 2.0, the submission of applications is going to be online (paperless)." Also, PAN 2.0 will help weed out duplicate PANs and minimise instances of one person holding more than one PAN, the Ministry said.

For businesses, this would mean a seamless, common system for filing various tax challans and returns. "In the PAN 2.0 Project, all PAN/TAN related services will be hosted on a single unified portal of ITD.

The said Portal would host all end-to-end services related to PAN and TAN like all, validation, correction, Online PAN Validation (OPV), know your AO, AADHAAR-PAN linking, verify your PAN, request for e-PAN, request for reprint of PAN card etc.," the FAQs said.

## EXPLAINED SCIENCE

## OCEANS OF WATER MAY BE HIDING WITHIN URANUS AND NEPTUNE: STUDY

USING A simulation, a new study has proposed that there might be an ocean of water inside Uranus and Neptune. The hypothesis could explain the strange magnetic fields of both worlds, which are unlike any other in the solar system.

The study, "Phase separation of planetary ices explains nondipolar magnetic fields of Uranus and Neptune," was published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* on Monday. It was carried out by Burkhard Militzer, a planetary scientist from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Strange magnetic fields**

Earth's magnetic field is generated in its core, producing a clear north and south pole known as a dipole that roughly aligns with the axis of the planet.

"It's like there is a big, giant bar magnet inside the planet," said Heidi Hammel, an astronomer and planetary scientist at the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy. "That's true for Jupiter, Saturn, Earth and some of the moons of Jupiter as well."

When NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft flew past Uranus in 1986, however, it discovered something unusual. "The magnetic field was hugely tilted and off-set from the center of the planet," Hammel said.

At first, scientists thought the disordered field could be explained by a suspected giant impact early in Uranus' life, which had knocked the planet on its side. But then the spacecraft flew past Neptune three years later and "its magnetic field was also significantly tilted," Hammel said.

**The layer of water**

Militzer's proposal aims to settle this debate. It is based on simulating the motion of 500 atoms to model the interiors of the two ice giants, and it suggests there is a layer of water about 8,047 km thick inside the two planets sitting beneath their outer atmospheres.

"We think it's an ocean," Militzer said.



AMRITABH SINHA

Uranus is the third largest planet in our solar system. NASA

"There's hydrogen mixed in with it, and it has a high conductivity that's important for the magnetic field."

However, this ocean would have a pressure 60,000 times greater than that at Earth's surface, so it would behave more like a supercritical fluid — a combination of gas and liquid — than like water on Earth.

Crucially this water would be separated, like oil and water, from a carbon-rich layer below that divides the ocean from each planet's core.

Previously, scientists had thought the interiors of the two planets would be more mixed. "The new thing is that the water separates from carbon," Militzer said. Usually, he added, "when you pile hydrogen on top, the water layer dissolves." But the ice giants might have formed with less hydrogen than Jupiter and Saturn because of their larger distance from the Sun.

This layer of water, not the planetary cores, would then be responsible for producing the disordered magnetic fields of the two planets.

The finding could also inform a proposed return to Uranus next decade by NASA.

THE NYT

## EXPLAINED CLIMATE

## Dismantling of climate talks

The disappointing deal on climate finance at COP29 could be the beginning of the unravelling of climate talks. This is not a surprise as developed nations have been taking apart the climate system over the years



THE COP29 climate meeting in Baku ended in disappointment last week. On the main issue of finance, developed countries agreed to mobilise only \$300 billion for the developing nations every year, a three-times increase over their current mandate of \$100 billion but way short of at least \$1 trillion that all assessments said was required. Even this nominal scale-up — the needs already run in trillions of dollars — is not supposed to happen immediately but only from 2035.

This is not the first time that the annual climate conference has produced a disappointing outcome. Each one of them in the last 15 years has delivered much below expectations. As a result, the discussions and outcomes of these summits have been almost completely delinked from the requirements of meeting the temperature targets mentioned in the 2015 Paris Agreement. While science says that the world needs to cut its emissions by at least 43% by 2030 from 2019 levels, all assessments of current actions estimate that global emissions, even in the best-case scenarios, would be barely 2% down by that time.

The underwhelming deal on climate finance reached in Baku might just be the beginning of the unravelling of the climate talks.

**Inherently unstable**

It is not a surprise that the current international arrangement on climate change has turned out to be this ineffective. It is the only major multilateral system which is completely aligned against the rich and powerful nations. Usually, the rules of any international forum reflect the prevailing power balance, and are mostly in favour of the powerful, as they are the ones who decide on the rules. The climate change architecture, as represented by the 1994 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), goes completely against this norm.

In this system, the rich and the powerful — a group of about 40 including the United States and most of Europe — are the main culprits for causing climate change, and the rules are stacked heavily against them. They



Demonstrators during a protest for climate finance at the COP29 UN Climate Summit in Baku, Azerbaijan, on Saturday. UNFCCC

have been made solely responsible for cutting their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and also for providing money and technologies to the developing countries to help them fight climate change. These responsibilities were fixed largely with the "polluter pays" principle. Since the developed countries were mainly responsible for emitting GHGs over the last 150 years, it was only fitting that they be asked to take responsibility for cleaning it up.

However, equity and fairness are rarely the main drivers of international relations. How this climate structure was allowed to be built up, with the rich and developed countries fully participating in the process, is an interesting and intriguing question that has not yet been settled definitively.

It was not before the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the precursor to the Paris Agreement, was finalised that the developed world realised that this system could hurt their interests and disrupt the prevailing global power balance. The Kyoto Protocol took forward the principles enshrined in the UNFCCC and assigned specific targets to each of the developed nations in accordance with their "guilt". The targets were to be fulfilled in a specific time frame, failing which they could be penalised.

This is probably the only instance of an inherently unstable multilateral system being created.

**Dismantling begins**

The efforts to dismantle the system began immediately after the Kyoto Protocol came into effect in 2005 after the requisite number of ratifications. Although the US played a key role in finalising the Kyoto Protocol, the country never ratified it.

The idea was to tear down the structure brick by brick, not in one go. The crucial differentiation between the developed and developing countries in the assignment of climate responsibilities was repeatedly targeted. This was done to ensure that the failure to meet targets could not be blamed only on the developed nations and instead be shared with everyone.

The first attempt to replace the Kyoto Protocol with a new agreement was made in Copenhagen in 2009 but it failed. Developed countries worked for another six years and succeeded in Paris. But even while it was in force, till 2020, Kyoto Protocol targets were completely ignored by all the developed countries. Many of them walked out of the Kyoto Protocol.

The Paris Agreement made fundamental changes to the way climate responsibilities were structured till then. Emission cuts were not the sole responsibility of the developed countries any longer. Everyone had to "contribute" though in a "nationally-determined" manner. There were no assigned targets for developed countries, their emission cuts also

had to be decided by themselves.

**Emission cuts inadequate**

As a result, emission cuts have been nowhere close to what is required. The European Union is expected to cut its emissions by around 60% from 2019 levels by 2030.

The US has been the biggest laggard. Despite the much-touted Inflation Reduction Act the US is only aiming to cut 50-52% cut by 2030 from 2005 levels, which is about 45% from 2019 levels.

If the world has to reduce its emissions by 43% by 2030 from 2019 levels, equity and fairness demand that the US and EU should have been aiming for about 80-90% reductions.

The sharp distinction between developed and developing countries on emission cuts was broken by the Paris Agreement. But developed countries were still solely responsible for mobilising finance and transfer of clean energy technologies.

**Dilution of finance responsibility**

The developed countries argue that the scale of finance requirements has increased manifold, and many other countries have grown rich in the last two decades, so they must also be asked to contribute to climate finance. The first attempt to expand the contributor base happened in Paris itself but did not succeed.

It was one of the core issues being discussed as part of the finance agreement in Baku, and some criteria for roping in more countries were suggested. But the developing countries managed to thwart it again. Essentially, China, which was a target of the expansion effort, put its foot down.

In the bargain, the developed countries limited the quantum of climate finance to be raised by them — \$300 billion and no more.

The dismantling of the international climate structure has been across the board, which has led to a continuous decline in the trust of developing countries.

However, it is still the only multilateral forum where small nations such as Tuvalu or Marshall Islands have a voice, and an influential one.

These countries also benefit from some climate money flowing to them. It is not enough but better than nothing at all.

The climate talks would possibly continue to have limited utility for some more time. However, its effectiveness as a global forum to fight climate change is declining steadily.

**YOUR GO-TO INSTITUTE FOR GENERAL STUDIES PREPARATION**

**VAIJRAM & RANI**  
Institutes for IAS Examination

Prep Course Name	Prep Course Name	Prep Course Name
<b>General Studies Comprehensive Programme</b>	<b>General Studies Pledging Comprehensive Programme</b>	<b>Prep Test Series</b>
12 Months + 6 Months MSP	2 Years + 6 Months MSP	6 Months
5 <sup>th</sup> December 2024	18 <sup>th</sup> December 2024	6 <sup>th</sup> December 2024
Available in Classroom and LIVE-Online Mode	080-8220-8330	<a href="http://www.vaijramandrani.com">www.vaijramandrani.com</a>

## Recalling stories of women who helped draft the Indian Constitution

RISHIKA SINGH  
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 26

ON CONSTITUTION Day (November 26), President Droupadi Murmu recalled the role women members played in the Constituent Assembly, the body tasked with formulating the Constitution of independent India.

The 299-member Assembly had 15 women members, including prominent figures such as Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. But it also had lesser-known women from diverse backgrounds who participated in debates on gender, caste and reservations.

**Ammu Swaminathan (1894-1978)**

In the book *The Fifteen: The Lives and Times of the Women in India's Constituent Assembly*, authors Angelica Aribam and Akash Satyawali wrote that Swaminathan hailed from Palakkad, Kerala. Following her marriage to the much older Subbaramu Swaminathan in her teens, she became interested in politics.

She strongly opposed the restrictions im-

posed on widows, such as shaving the head and renouncing jewellery, after seeing her mother's experience. Swaminathan contested Central Legislative Assembly elections on a Congress ticket from Madras in 1945 and then became a member of the Constituent Assembly. She spoke about the Hindu Code Bill and its relevance for gender equality. "When she mentioned that the Bill affects the women of the country more than the men, the male-dominant House erupted into laughter," the book said. Post-independence, she was elected to Lok Sabha from Dindigul, Tamil Nadu.

**Annie Mascarene (1902-1963)**

Mascarene was born in Trivandrum (now Thiruvananthapuram) in a Latin Christian family, considered to be at the lowest rung of the caste system. Despite her social status, she went on to study and teach law.

Lower-caste Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims could not vote in the local legislature at the time. Mascarene actively campaigned for a government based on a universal adult franchise, despite being targeted by her political opponents.



(Left to right) Ammu Swaminathan, Annie Mascarene, Begum Qudsia, Dakshayani Velayudhan and Renuka Ray. Archives, Wikimedia Commons

She later joined the Congress. As part of the Constituent Assembly, she spoke about the need for a strong Centre in the early days of the republic, while emphasising the autonomy of local governments. Mascarene contested as an independent candidate in 1952, winning from Thiruvananthapuram.

**Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul (1909-2001)**

Qudsia's father was a politician with roots in the royal family of Malerkotla in Punjab. Her privileged background led her



to formal education but not without objections, with an uncle issuing a fatwa against her convent schooling.

Qudsia and her husband decided to join politics in 1936. Though conservative groups criticised her candidature, she won from a non-reserved seat. Despite being part of the Muslim League, she was among the few members opposing separate electorates based on religion. Her views on the idea of Pakistan were more complex. She believed it would help uplift Muslims but possibly harm poor Muslims in India fol-

lowing a division.

Initially, she decided to stay in India. Post-independence, she became a UP Rajya Sabha member in 1952.

**Dakshayani Velayudhan (1912-1978)**

Velayudhan marked several firsts — she was the first Dalit woman to graduate in science in Cochin (now Kochi) and the first Dalit woman in the Cochin Legislative Council. Belonging to the Pulaya community, considered a "slave" caste, upper-caste professors in her college would refuse to show her practical experiments.

After working as a teacher, she married a social worker at Mahatma Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram in Wardha. In 1946, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Malabar, aged 34.

She disagreed with Ambedkar on the need for separate electorates, saying the provision went against nationalism. "He is the only leader of the Harijan community and his non-co-operation with the nationalist forces is a great tragedy..."

Unlike her peers, she could not continue a political career due to financial difficul-

ties but remained involved in the Dalit movement.

**Renuka Ray (1904-1997)**

Ray was born in Pabna, present-day Bangladesh. Her father was a bureaucrat, while her mother was one of the first women students at Calcutta's Presidency College.

A meeting with Gandhi in 1920 led her to quit college and join the freedom struggle, where she went door-to-door to raise awareness. Ray later studied at the London School of Economics.

After her return to India and marriage, she was engaged in activism for women's issues, such as the rights to divorce and inheritance. Ray also represented women's organisations in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1943 and then became a member of the Constituent Assembly.

She opposed women's reservation in legislatures, saying it would be "an impediment to our growth and an insult to our very intelligence and capacity." Ray became a Lok Sabha MP in 1957.

**LONGER VERSION ON**  
[indianexpress.com/explained](http://indianexpress.com/explained)

## Pull, don't push

Capability centres need enabling environment

One of the more exciting developments in the business services sector over the past few years has been the development of holistic global capability centres, or GCCs, which serve large multinationals. Many of these have been located in, or planned for, India and represent a significant increase in scale and value added for the domestic sector. Naturally, there is healthy domestic competition when it comes to the location of the proposed GCCs. The government of Karnataka has released a strategy targeted directly at GCCs. It has now been announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah that the state government plans three dedicated parks for GCCs — in Bengaluru, Mysuru, and Belagavi.

Mr Siddaramaiah's focus on GCCs is both useful and necessary. The services sector, enabled by information technology (IT), has long viewed Bengaluru in particular as home, but there is no doubt that the sector has risked being left behind by technological, governance, and corporate developments over the past few years. But it must also be recognised that the basic requirements for GCCs to flourish in Karnataka — as in any other state — are those which are broadly applicable to all new investment, particularly foreign investment. These include the availability of land; upgraded infrastructure, including roads; reliable, cheap (and ideally green) power supply; and an easy dispute settlement. In the past, the Karnataka government did not cover itself with glory when it came to these. The state has sometimes taken the lead on tax and regulatory disputes. Its focus should be on increasing clarity, not reducing it.

Urbanisation is a crucial factor when it comes to moving up the value chain in business services. About 85 per cent, according to some estimates, of India's IT and IT-enabled services exports in particular come from four states — Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu. Dynamic urban centres make this possible. The government of Karnataka stresses the importance of "balanced regional development", but it must also recognise that it is world-class urban centres that will attract investment. "Beyond Bengaluru" is a good slogan, but it can be made a reality only when other urban centres in the state have connectivity, facilities, and quality of life comparable to the Bengaluru-Mysuru cluster.

In his discussion of GCCs, the chief minister added the state was already a "preferred destination" thanks to its "unmatched engineering talents and the highest number of AI (artificial intelligence) professionals globally". He added a reference here to initiatives designed by his government to create an "industry-ready workforce". It is a fact that human resources concern rank high on how GCCs, which are human capital-intensive, evaluate destinations. The government must also recognise, however, that an "industry-ready workforce" is not one that discriminates against "outsiders". No company planning a GCC wants to be embroiled in complicated political disputes over who counts as a local and who does not when it comes to hiring. Initiatives designed to improve the productivity and potential of the residents of Karnataka are clearly welcome. But harsh regulation that requires job reservation for locals is not. In general, investors respond better to carrots than sticks. The government in Bengaluru should focus on the supply of suitable local candidates for GCCs rather than forcing labour demand to adapt.

## Searching answers

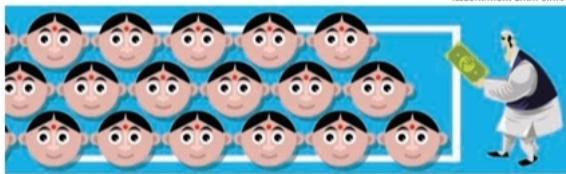
Forced divestment of Chrome can shake up the market

The Department of Justice (DoJ), in the United States (US), recently suggested that Google be forced to divest the Chrome browser as part of a 35-page portfolio of suggested remedies to reduce its dominance in the online search and advertising space. This is in a federal antitrust case where the court has already found the search-engine giant guilty of monopolistic behaviour but is yet to announce remedial measures. Google has responded to the DoJ suggestions by characterising them "extreme". The court may or may not adopt any of them. Moreover, the new Federal administration may instruct the DoJ to dial back its recommendations. Google would surely appeal any order that imposed a forced spinoff of the Chrome browser. If it occurs, it would significantly change digital markets. While it is easy enough for users to switch browsers, most users don't. Hence Chrome holds market share, especially in the Android smartphone environment.

Although it is also easy to switch search engines, similar inertial behaviour patterns allow Google to remain, by far, the dominant one with over 90 per cent market share. The coupling of the dominant browser and search engine makes it easy to track surfing patterns, and Google has been repeatedly accused of monopolistic behaviour that favours its own services and products. If Chrome is indeed forcibly divested, Google's dominance would be broken or, at least, decoupled and difficult to maintain. The new owner could tweak preferences and features to create a more level playing field. In turn, that may lead to more competition and innovation in search and advertising. Of course, it would be necessary to ensure that any new owner did not develop a similar stranglehold.

Google can make several arguments in favour of not forcing a spinoff. One is simply that it would not receive market value, whatever that may be, in an enforced sale of the browser. Another point is that the default settings of the browser and search engine can easily be changed. If, for example, the browser icon is not on the home screen, and there is no default search engine, users of new devices would have to set their own preferences. This technical fix would, however, leave the preferences of the vast base of current users undisturbed and that favours Google. A third argument, which is quite cogent, is that the monopoly has been already challenged by the rise of generative AI. ChatGPT and similar large language models (LLMs) have changed search business and the ways in which results are presented.

An LLM prompt is very different from the entry of keywords in an old style search, and results are summarised very differently. Google is less dominant in this area and GenAI has thus led to a shakeup in digital marketing. Assuming Google retains ownership of its ad server Google Ad Manager (GAM), it will retain control of ad auctions for much of the internet. Apart from GAM and the Android operating system, Google would continue to have levers in the form of Gmail, GooglePay, YouTube, Google IoT hardware, etc. to collect user-data. A more fragmented digital market would be a more competitive market and would surely drive innovation. Google launched its search engine in 1998 and rapidly achieved dominance in a nascent space. But almost three decades down the line, that space is ripe for change.



## A boost for cash transfer

Assembly election results will trigger demand for a bigger cash transfer scheme for women

There is now near unanimity among those who have analysed the results of Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand that women power in electoral politics has witnessed a new dimension. It is no longer a question of promising welfare schemes or cash transfers to voters. Targeting such benefits at women voters in particular seems to have begun yielding better electoral outcomes for those political parties that announce them in good time.

Just a few months before the Assembly elections in Maharashtra, the Eknath Shinde government launched the Ladli Bahin scheme in August 2024, providing ₹1,500 each month to over 10 million women in the state. In Jharkhand, the Hemant Soren government decided in October 2024 to raise the assistance amount promised to women under the Malya Samman Yojana from ₹1,000 every month to ₹2,500. The Yojana was launched in August 2024.

Not to be outdone, the opposition political parties in the electoral fray had also promised similar cash transfer schemes for women, if they were voted to power. It was no surprise that the voting percentage among women saw a significant increase in these Assembly elections. And going by the verdict, it seems clear that women voters had greater faith in the promises made by the ruling parties in both the states. A promise, after all, was only a promise. In contrast, the ruling parties in Maharashtra and Jharkhand had rolled out these schemes well before the elections, and women voters had already benefitted from them as they saw the promised money in their bank accounts.

To be sure, wooing women voters is not new in India's electoral politics. Many other states have framed welfare schemes specifically for women. Not all of these states may have rolled out these schemes just before the elections. But that women could play a decisive role in electoral battles had been recognised long ago.

Remember that the states of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar had introduced schemes to stop the sale of potable alcohol. One of the main reasons for such a decision was to prevent domestic violence by drunken men against women and to stop men from using their earnings to buy alcoholic beverages, driving their families to financial ruin. Andhra Pradesh rolled back its prohibition policy on alcohol but Bihar continues to espouse that cause. Bihar's decision to provide free cycles to girls who joined school and West Bengal's provision of monetary benefits to girls who would study before getting married were also aimed at wooing these electoral constituencies in their states.

In recent years, the Delhi government made travel on buses owned and operated by it free for women. Madhya Pradesh had also launched the Ladli Bahin Yojana, which was the model for Eknath Shinde's welfare scheme for women in Maharashtra launched earlier this year. This list can be longer. But the point is that state governments have moved on from just framing schemes to benefit women during their rule to announcing specific cash transfer schemes or freebies, meant only for women, just before the elections. The Assembly election results in Maharashtra and Jharkhand have shown that such an approach works.

So, expect two possible outcomes in the days to come. One, the states that will go into elections in the next couple of years will unfailingly try to craft similar cash transfer schemes for women and roll them out before the Assembly elections. And the opposition political parties will also make similar promises if they were to be voted to power. None of them will make the mistake of even allowing an impression to be created that they would discontinue the cash transfer scheme started before the elections.

In a country where the per capita income is just about ₹2.1 lakh a year or \$2,500 (compare that with \$12,000 in China), such welfare schemes will always carry a big attraction for voters. Yes, states that have

RAISINA HILL  
A K BHATTACHARYA

So, expect two possible outcomes in the days to come.

In a country where the per capita income is just about ₹2.1 lakh a year or \$2,500 (compare that with \$12,000 in China), such welfare schemes will always carry a big attraction for voters. Yes, states that have

In a country where the per capita income is just about ₹2.1 lakh a year or \$2,500 (compare that with \$12,000 in China), such welfare schemes will always carry a big attraction for voters. Yes, states that have

## India's economy: Moving towards normalisation

India witnessed three years of heady growth, with average real gross domestic product (GDP) growth of around 8 per cent. Financial markets responded exuberantly to this world-leading performance. Recently, the growth momentum has moderated, which we view as a process of normalisation, returning to a more steady rate of expansion. This phase of strong growth was accompanied by concerning spillovers in some sectors, which macro-prudential measures are now aiming to contain.

We address three aspects here. One, the factors driving this cyclical moderation in growth. Two, the "steady vs steady" argument extends to the consumer credit cycle. Three, whether an extended period of tight monetary policy will lead to a greater growth sacrifice.

Firstly, tight financing conditions and the lagged impact of idiosyncratic factors — such as general elections, a slowdown in construction activity, delays in project outlays, and adverse weather conditions (ranging from heat waves to heavy unseasonal rainfall) — have emerged as cyclical speed bumps. Our proprietary GDP Nowcast model, along with sub-indices for key growth drivers on both the demand and supply sides, provides insights into the direction of the economy.

Industrial activity and net exports (goods and services) have held up, whilst investments (machinery and equipment) and consumption have lagged at the halfway mark of the fiscal year. Factors such as the regulatory action-driven slowdown in unsecured loan growth, and the inflation fight that has pitched consumers against producers have entailed some economic cost. Lastly, clear signs of a pick-up in private sector capex are still absent. Our previous study established that forward-looking growth expectations and corporate profitability typically convince firms to step up capex commitments. Diversification in the export basket, towards a higher share of manufactured goods and well-faring service

trade (professional services in particular), has lowered the cyclicality in its contribution.

Public investments are gaining ground, with the states' capex expected to get a hand from the next round of concessional loans provided by the Centre. Recent state election results underscored that political stability is also essential in maintaining the momentum of infrastructure spending. The Centre's capex disbursements need to rise by 52 per cent year-on-year between October 2024 and March 2025 to recover lost ground, making it an uphill task to fully meet the budgeted targets. As discussed below, consumption is likely to continue punching below its weight. A modest pick-up in the momentum in the second half, driven by easing inflation, less restrictive policies, and increased public capex, are behind our 6.7 per cent growth forecast.

We expect medium-term growth to stabilise at 6.5-6.6 per cent, stronger than the FY19-20 pace but moderating from the post-pandemic years. Combined with nominal GDP growth of 9-9.5 per cent, and foreign exchange (FX) reserve assumptions, we see room for India's nominal GDP (in US dollar terms) to become the third-largest in the world within this decade.

Secondly, the steady vs steady argument also extends to the consumer credit cycle. Banks' retail lending grew at a high double-digit rate in FY23-24, prompting tighter vigilance from the authorities, particularly regarding the unsecured portion of the portfolio. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) identified several areas of concern, including the delinquency rate in the credit card portfolio, which was higher than that of all other consumer credit sub-categories as of March 2024. The RBI also highlighted the exposure of non-banking financial companies-fintech lenders and small finance banks to this segment.

Easing consumer credit and slowing consumption are occurring at a time when employment

poor revenue-raising capacity and borrow more to fund such schemes will face major governance challenges and fiscal problems. This challenge has now become even more complex with women-centric schemes making fresh claims on the governments' welfare budget. The concept of a moratorium on welfare schemes is an old idea in India's political economy. A freebie once granted can hardly be discontinued. All that can happen is to substitute it with a bigger freebie. State budgets will, therefore, be even more constrained in the days to come.

The second impact could be on the Union government. Surprisingly, women-centric welfare schemes have not yet made a big impact on the Centre's finances. There are many central schemes meant for women — the Saksham centres that help women affected by violence, the Swachh Griha scheme to help women in distress with financial assistance, the Beti Padhao Beti Bachao scheme aimed at addressing the declining child-sex ratio and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana that facilitates conditional cash transfer to promote maternity benefits, among others.

There may be many more such schemes to help India's women, but the financial allocation for these schemes amounts to very little. Take a look at the total outlay of the Union ministry of women and child development, which includes schemes for children as well. Only ₹23,165 crore was spent by this ministry in 2019-20, or about 0.9 per cent of the total expenditure of the entire Union government. Five years later, in 2024-25, the outlay of the same ministry will go up to only ₹26,092 crore, and its share in total government expenditure will fall to 0.5 per cent.

There is another way of judging how the Centre has spent on schemes for women. A statement on Gender Budget provides details on the different schemes that the government implements for the benefit of women and girls. That statement shows a better picture of the government's share on women and girls, the government spent about ₹26,731 crore in 2019-20 and this amount will more than treble to ₹1.12 trillion in 2024-25. But there is a classification problem in the calculations under Gender Budget. Allocations for rural and urban housing have also been included here, which are not really women-centric schemes. Without the housing allocation, a money spent by the government on women and girls went up from ₹8,615 crore in 2019-20 to ₹31,725 crore. This was not that big an increase.

With the power of women in reaping electoral dividends now being recognised in these Assembly elections, it is likely that the Union government's budgetary outlays will also reflect a bigger increase in the allocation for programmes that benefit women. But as recent election results show, electoral benefits are secured only when there is cash transfer to the intended beneficiaries. The forthcoming Budget may, therefore, give a big push to cash transfers for women. Of the four groups of Indians that the Modi government nurtures, the youth, the poor, and the farmers have already benefited from cash transfer schemes in recent years. It is now the turn of women. The government has shown a commitment to the Centre. For those in the government committed to the idea of fiscal prudence, the challenges have got a little more difficult.



RADHIKA RAO

trade (professional services in particular), has lowered the cyclicality in its contribution.

Public investments are gaining ground, with the states' capex expected to get a hand from the next round of concessional loans provided by the Centre. Recent state election results underscored that political stability is also essential in maintaining the momentum of infrastructure spending. The Centre's capex disbursements need to rise by 52 per cent year-on-year between October 2024 and March 2025 to recover lost ground, making it an uphill task to fully meet the budgeted targets. As discussed below, consumption is likely to continue punching below its weight. A modest pick-up in the momentum in the second half, driven by easing inflation, less restrictive policies, and increased public capex, are behind our 6.7 per cent growth forecast.

We expect medium-term growth to stabilise at 6.5-6.6 per cent, stronger than the FY19-20 pace but moderating from the post-pandemic years. Combined with nominal GDP growth of 9-9.5 per cent, and foreign exchange (FX) reserve assumptions, we see room for India's nominal GDP (in US dollar terms) to become the third-largest in the world within this decade.

Secondly, the steady vs steady argument also extends to the consumer credit cycle. Banks' retail lending grew at a high double-digit rate in FY23-24, prompting tighter vigilance from the authorities, particularly regarding the unsecured portion of the portfolio. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) identified several areas of concern, including the delinquency rate in the credit card portfolio, which was higher than that of all other consumer credit sub-categories as of March 2024. The RBI also highlighted the exposure of non-banking financial companies-fintech lenders and small finance banks to this segment.

Easing consumer credit and slowing consumption are occurring at a time when employment

trends remain positive, suggesting that the underlying concern is more about leverage levels.

On an aggregate basis, household debt as a percentage of GDP has been inching up in the past eight quarters. Household balance sheets have benefited from the inflationary boost from wealth effects, but defences of the higher income brackets are stronger. The cumulative increase in the cost of living continues to weigh on purchasing power. The GDP deflator is up a cumulative 25 per cent since the pandemic (indexed-2019). The intention to de-lever further might tend to cap consumption in the near term. Stabilising the cost of living, along with ensuring job security, will be key near- and medium-term prerogatives for the administration.

Third, the monetary policy committee continues to maintain a cautious posture, highlighting limited room for rate cuts in the face of above-target inflation. With food prices, particularly volatile vegetable prices, driving inflation in recent months, there is ongoing debate on whether policymakers should tap ex-flo headline inflation as a gauge for policy. There is some merit in this argument. The arrival of kharif crops is expected to temper prices, along with only a third of the inflation basket growing above 4 per cent at this juncture. Our trimmed mean measures are also running below the headline.

Concerns over second-round effects have yet to materialise, as inflation expectations, rural/urban wage growth, and business cost expectations remain contained. Therefore, an extended period of tight monetary policy might entail a bigger growth sacrifice. The only risk in this argument is the currency, which has come under pressure from a bid dollar and portfolio outflows. The record weekly drop in foreign reserves highlights the scale of intervention that was required to keep the currency from sinking through rough seas. Nonetheless, one could argue that the strong build-up in the reserves was precisely for such a "rainy day". The forward-looking policy bias might create room to lower rates in early 2025.

The author is senior economist & executive director, DRS Bank

## Wrestling with patriarchy



BOOK REVIEW

VEENU SANDHU

Sakshi Malik's book begins with a tickle, but it's not funny. The wrestler is trying to resist the police from pushing her into a bus. The men and women in khaki are there to detain the wrestlers and their supporters who have been protesting against the Wrestling Federation of India and its president, Brij Bhushan Singh, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, and they are having a tough time getting Malik to comply. She is, after all, an Olympian, in fact, India's only female Olympic medalist in wrestling. It's not easy to get her to budge or

loosen her grip once she is in position. And then someone yells, "Tickle her!" — a move that takes the strength out of her, giving the policewomen the opportunity to bundle her into the bus.

When India's champion wrestlers took to the streets demanding action against Brij Bhushan, and later threatened to throw their well-earned medals into the Ganges, there were enough television crews around to capture the action live for all the world to see. What they didn't see was an Olympian jumping out of the bus she had been pushed into, being chased by the police through Delhi's lanes, hiding, walling in vain at a construction site before being led back to the bus. They also didn't see what the medals meant to her, particularly the bronze she'd won at the 2016 Rio Games, which she'd framed so that she could one day show it to her children and tell them about the time when her mother was something, Nor did TV viewers see another champion

wrestler, Vinesh Phogat, hitting herself in frustration after Jat farm rights leader Naresh Tikait took the medals away from the wrestlers just before they were to throw them into the river.

Malik's book, *Witness*, tries to show to the world many of the things it missed amidst the flashing cameras that focused only on certain snippets of the wrestlers' story. It is not, however, an account of the wrestlers' protest alone, though that forms a large part of the book. And why not? The protest and its outcome is a reason Malik chose to quit professional wrestling despite having many fights left in her.

The name of the book comes from her own, Sakshi ("witness"), though this wasn't the name given to her at birth. For the initial few years of her life, she was called Sofia, a name her mother gave her for reasons no one seems to know. The shift from "Sofia" to "Sakshi", too, came about just like that when her brother started calling

her Sakshi after a classmate. *Witness* is a memoir, and a brave one at that. It is the story of a girl whose father was a conductor with the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and mother an *angamawadi* worker, who was born into a conservative, feudal society in Haryana, who chose a sport dominated by men with its *akhara* and *dangals*, and who went on to make a name for herself before an incident that made national, then international, news prompted her to step off the mat.

This is not, however, a rah-rah account but a layered story. It is also Malik's attempt to set the record straight with some fellow wrestlers, one of them being Manisha, and question the intentions of certain figures, such as the farmer leader Naresh Tikait.

The book offers a front-row view of the lives of sportspeople, in particular women, who are engaged in sports that

do not enjoy the kind of spotlight that cricket or tennis attract. Wrestling is a rugged sport. You're literally going to fight your way to make it big here, and that fight isn't restricted to the mat. Sometimes it includes travelling in a train sitting on a blanket on the floor outside the toilet on the way to a tournament.

Coming from a closed society, it's natural to wonder how Malik reached where she did. What also isn't clear is the role of the women she grew up around, starting with her paternal grandmother in a Kohtak village who would wake up earlier than the others to cook breakfast for her daughter-in-law who worked. Her mother's support, both when it came to her choosing wrestling as her sport and when she told her about being molested, stands out. But then again, this is not an uncritically enthusiastic account of the role of the

women. In another chapter, Malik writes about how she had to fight her mother hard to marry the man of her choice.

What also comes through is the role of the men, who stood firmly by the women, both at home and at the protest site. As she writes about these men and women in her life, Malik comes across presenting a picture of what true feminism looks like: Men and women standing side by side, equal, each there to support the other.

She also speaks about femininity, and how, with a wrestler's body, strength and power, it is not so much conscious about her strong, muscular arms that she would almost never wear sleeveless clothes.

She narrates her uncomfortable encounters with Brij Bhushan Singh, of how she tried to ward him off, and stay focused on wrestling. She writes about how she tried to stay so close to why she chose to finally speak out after having kept her head down for a long time.

It takes courage to stick one's neck out and be a witness. Sakshi Malik doesn't hold back.



WITNESS  
Author: Sakshi Malik with Jonathan Selvaraj  
Publisher: Juggernaut  
Pages: 300  
Price: ₹799

# 12 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE  
RED BEANS AND RICELY YOURS.  
—LOUIS ARMSTRONG

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY 1911  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## DISCUSS ADANI & MORE

Open up the floor of the House: There cannot be a more fitting way to mark the Constitution turning 75

THE WINTER SESSION of Parliament began on a sobering note with the presiding officers of both Houses rejecting the Opposition's demand for a discussion on the matter of the US indictment of industrialist Gautam Adani. This refusal meant that both Houses were adjourned within an hour of convening. On November 20, US prosecutors alleged that Adani, his nephew and six others had paid "over \$250 million in bribes to Indian government officials, to lie to investors and banks to raise billions of dollars, and to obstruct justice". In his pre-Session remarks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: "Unfortunately, some individuals rejected by the people are continuously attempting to control Parliament through disruptive tactics for their political gains." There are reasons, however, why the government should reconsider this view and open Parliament's doors to a participatory discussion on this matter, as indeed on others that demand the attention, across party lines, of the people's representatives.

In this case, the company in question is one of India's biggest and most influential corporate entities. Adani companies directly employ over 46,000 people with total revenues in excess of Rs 3 trillion. Various Adani companies are deeply involved with building up India's physical infrastructure and therefore their success will likely have a deep bearing on the economy. According to one estimate, in terms of market share, Adani companies reportedly handle 30 per cent of India's ports, 23 per cent of airports and 20 per cent of cement business. The group is also India's largest private player in coal-fired power generation and has made ambitious pledges on renewables. As such, adherence—or lack of it—to the highest standards of corporate governance reflects as much on the case of doing business matters in India as it reflects on the Adani Group. This is more so because this is not the first time that the Group has been at the receiving end of such allegations. In January 2023, US short-term Hindenburg Research had accused it of "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme over the course of decades". In fact, those allegations had led the Supreme court to direct SEBI, the stock market regulator, to investigate the matter. The latest indictment isn't by a short-seller, it's the US Department of Justice and US market regulatory agencies and Exchange Commission. Adani's denials to authorities here also call into question the role of SEBI and broaden the scope of this matter to encompass issues of the independence and competence of institutions.

But there is an even more compelling reason why the government should reconsider its position in Parliament: Because in a deliberative and argumentative democracy, a debate cannot be, it should not be, stillborn merely because the Opposition won fewer seats in elections. And because, in a large and layered democracy, with checks and balances, the winner does not take all. It is the job of the Opposition to question the government. Those who did not win the mandate to sit on the Treasury benches have been voted to sit across the aisle and perform that role. Therefore, to call the Opposition the side "rejected by the people", is political stump speech, not a thought for Constitution Day.

## THE TRADE SALVO

Trump's tariff plans could impact global trade. India must be deft in navigating changing environment

DURING HIS CAMPAIGN for the presidential election, Donald Trump had advocated levying a 60 per cent tariff on imports from China, and 10-20 per cent on others. At a talk at the Economic Club of Chicago, he argued that higher tariffs would help facilitate manufacturing in the US, rebalance trade with other countries, and improve government finances. The president-elect has now gone a step ahead, announcing on a social media platform that after being inaugurated in January, he would impose a 25 per cent tariff on all products from Mexico and Canada, and levy an additional 10 per cent on China. The tariffs are expected to be in place tentatively until the countries clamp down on drugs and illegal immigration. The three countries account for a significant share of goods imports to the US.

The imposition of steep tariffs, which are essentially a tax on imported goods, could possibly disrupt supply chains, become inflationary, raising costs for consumers and business, and have implications for interest rates. In fact, Trump's proposals could end up costing a typical household in the US more than \$2,600 a year, as per a study by economists at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. However, the policy of raising tariffs appears to have found favour across both Republicans and Democrats. In 2018 and 2019, during his first administration, Trump had levied tariffs across several product categories. The Tax Foundation, Washington-based think tank, has noted that the Biden administration not only kept most of them in place, but also announced additional hikes. Protectionist impulses now guide policy choices of many erstwhile advocates of free trade.

India has been excluded from Trump's initial trade salvo. However, in the past, he has called India a "tariff king" and a "very big trade abuser", indicating that he may well ratchet up the pressure. India will need to navigate the changing global political and economic environment deftly. The government could leverage bipartisan support in the US for strong ties between the two countries to negotiate with the Trump administration. Alongside, it must now towards making the economy less protectionist, and draw on its political capital post assembly election wins, to push through contentious but necessary reforms. It needs to take the country an attractive investment destination, and take advantage of the opportunity that Trump's trade moves may open up.

## JUST RAJMA

Hallmark of a good dish of beans is comfort and nostalgia — no wonder rajma ranks among world's 50 best bean dishes

IMAGINE, FOR A second, that when Jack (of the Beanstalk fame) traded in his family's cow, the beans he got in exchange were not the magical kind. That, unlike in the story where the beans lead him to his destiny as the Giant-slayer, they were of the type that could only be stewed and eaten. For rajma lovers, rejoicing at the news that their favourite dish ranks among the 50 best bean dishes in the world, as per a recent *Taste Atlas* poll, that would not be a bad trade-off. For those who appreciate the yielding richness of well-cooked kidney beans, few things can match up to the pleasure of dipping into a hot dish of rajma-chawal.

Common beans — the loose group to which rajma/kidney beans belong, along with their popular varieties like pinto, cannellini and navy/haricot — may have originated in South America, but their versatility and heartiness have ensured that they've become a staple across the world. From India to Spain, Jamaica to Turkey, different cultures embraced beans, infusing them with unique flavours and pairing them with all manner of ingredients, from meat and vegetables, to mushroom and rice.

Yet, the hallmark of a good dish of beans, above even its incredible adaptability, is comfort. Consider, for example, the fact that the most notable bean-based dish to come out of El Bulli, the storied Spanish restaurant which originated the concept of molecular gastronomy, was a humble "family meal" bean soup. Soothing rather than challenging, warming rather than astonishing, unlike most of Chef Ferran Adrià's other creations. Or, can through the rest of the *Taste Atlas* list and note that almost every bean dish listed on it, from the Portuguese feijoada to the Egyptian ful medames, is a beloved home-cooking staple so infused with nostalgia that it is a culinary time-machine taking one back to past of simple, shared joys. It turns out there is something magical about all beans.

# A question for the Opposition



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

It needs to ask why 'democracy in danger' is not cutting ice with voters. It has to show what it can do with democracy

BOTH IN INDIA and the US the electoral plank that "Democracy will be in danger" or the "Constitution is in danger" has not worked. Elections are a competition over comparative credibility. The outcomes are always a result of lots of factors, from macro narrative building to micro strategy management. Sometimes a plausible message has an ineffective messenger. So, reading mandates can be hard. But anxiety over democracy itself is not cutting ice with voters. Even the brief use of the "Constitution in danger" discourse in India was about preserving reservation not democracy. "Democracy" is not an electoral slogan. This fact bears reflection.

There are many possibilities here. The first is simply the paradoxical situation where voters are in the midst of exercising their electoral franchise, and they are being told democracy is in danger. Voters are confident that whatever our anxieties about democracy, the electoral system, though not perfect, will be functioning enough when correction is needed. None of the classical attributes of dictators like military rule are visible. In terms of vote shares, the electoral landscape is still competitive. Voters are still sophisticated enough to vote Congress for Lok Sabha in Nanded and elect all BJP MLAs for the Assembly in the same constituency. There is simply no deep anxiety over electoral competitiveness.

What about other constitutive elements of liberal democracy, rights like freedom of expression, checks and balances, respect for procedures and so forth? This is where the dangers of the authoritarian turn in democracies are most palpable. Yet these anxieties are blunted. It is very hard for Congress in India or the Democratic Party in the US to position themselves as unalloyed champions of free speech. The Right has, with some justification, managed to convince voters that if there are differences on these constitutive rights, these are at best differences of degree not kind. Second, there is what you might call room for "statistical innocence" in the terms of social control being applied. You still do not have mass repression. Control works effectively through exemplary targeting. And the paradox of modern

Modern democracy relies on constitutional protections like individual rights. But modern democracy also promises representation and agency. The promise of representation is not the division of power based on some pre-existing ethnic or social cleavage. It is, rather, the ability to produce identification with a leader or a party, that strange alchemy by which a leader becomes ours or the government becomes mine. Democracy is a field in which this identification is produced, and those who do it most successfully are indeed speaking for the people. Electorally dominant leaders like Trump or Modi produce this identification.

censorship is that it draws attention to the object being censored. So, experientially, the world does not come across as a censored world, as much as a censorious world, even though forms of social control operate and some individuals may pay a heavy price.

The rhetoric of checks and balances and "institutions in danger" has a similar effect. The Right has convinced significant parts of the electorate that these checks and balances were not actually protectors of liberty or people's interests. Instead, they were structures devised by old elites to thwart the power of the people; old, often corrupt, oligarchies or undemocratic intellectual vanguards used them to exercise power over the people. These checks and balances and procedures were not protecting democracy, they were subverting it. So, in fact, giving them short shrift is empowering real democracy.

That this critique is both plausible tells you something about both the old elites and about modern democracy. Modern democracy relies on constitutional protections like individual rights. But modern democracy also promises representation and agency. The promise of representation is not the division of power based on some pre-existing ethnic or social cleavage. It is, rather, the ability to produce identification with a leader or a party, that strange alchemy by which a leader becomes ours or the government becomes mine. Democracy is a field in which this identification is produced, and those who do it most successfully are indeed speaking for the people. Electorally dominant leaders like Trump or Modi produce this identification.

The second element is agency. A successful people does things together. They come together in a form where they can be said to exercise collective agency as a people. Socially, the people are plural. Every society has all kinds of groups in it. But for the people to be able to act to some purpose, they must have a modicum of unity; they must acquire a will. They must be more than the sum of their parts. So called populist authorities promise this sense of agency. They do away with checks and balances in the name of empowering the agency of the people. It is

also in part why centrist and Left politics, which takes social division to be central, is failing. It is not that the Right will not do social engineering. The BJP has been masterful at caste coalitions. But unlike the Centre and Left, it has not let go of the idea that India is more than a collection of castes or regions. Somehow the kind of politics of distribution that Congress is playing with the caste census, or on race that the Democrats were seen to play, is identified as disaggregative. It is seen as disempowering the people, dissolving their will into lots of little parts. The Right is walking away with the identification and agency dimensions of democracy.

The agency and identification dimensions are genuine in a democracy. But they also contain its greatest dangers. It is often easier to generate a sense of united agency, not on long term diffuse goals like development or even national power, but on visible enemies as targets. Where is that "unity" manifest? In the Indian case at least, the BJP has concluded that it can walk away with the agency dimension by Hindutva. The condition of a united sense of agency and identification is marginalising a particular minority like Muslims, or at least confining their power to narrow limits. Or it can require constantly inventing enemies of the nation that are out to subvert it. In the US, politics is more complicated. But what is common to both is that the politics of unity constantly requires a performance against some target. The outcome in India is dangerously communal, as we are seeing in UP.

But it is not clear that this problem can be addressed by yelling "Democracy in danger!" when communalism is now the agency dimension of democracy. It will have to be addressed on its own terms. The question for the Opposition is this: While its critique of eroding checks and balances may have validity, it still needs to offer a conception of democracy that produces identification and a sense of agency. It has to show what it can do with democracy. Simple restoration of status quo ante, democracy in danger, or a politics of smaller identities, is not going to cut it.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



RAMESH SARIN

BREAST CANCER ACCOUNTS for 28.2 per cent of all cancers that affect women — it's the most common cancer for them. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, the five-year survival rate is 66.4 per cent, compared to 90.2 per cent in developed countries like the US, largely because of the lack of access to early diagnosis and care. Although the number of patients continues to increase because of awareness and reporting, evidence-based treatments are curing the disease and prolonging lives.

I cite these figures because cricketer Navtej Singh Sidhu's wife suffered breast cancer and he claims she has recovered with alternative therapies like fasting, going off sugar and dairy and having neem and lemon water. Had cancer cure been possible with these therapies, and there was scientific evidence establishing a direct link, then we would not have seen so many women patients, with their age profile becoming younger. In India, where there is already scepticism about scientific systems of treatment across sections of society, such statements by celebrities do more harm than good.

From chemotherapy and immunotherapy to hormonal and targeted therapies, the five-year cancer survival rate has gone up from 20 per cent to between 70 and 90 per cent, depending on the type and severity. The survival rate of children with blood cancers has gone up from 10 per cent to 50 and 90 per cent, depending on their condition. This has been pos-

## EAT CLEAN, BY ALL MEANS

But claims by celebrities on cures for cancer do more harm than good

Since diet has a metabolic response, it may have some effect on cancer cells. But that's not a cure. Diet can be a complementary therapy. Eating clean not only enhances well-being in cancer patients, it helps in convalescence. Chemotherapy has side effects and intermittent fasting or calorie deficit cannot be recommended for all patients. Cancer science works on a case-by-case basis.

sible because of research stretching back to the 19th century, experiments, clinical trials, course corrections and analysing the efficacy of outcomes over decades. In 1882, William Halsted performed the first radical mastectomy to treat breast cancer. The first chemotherapy was conducted in 1943 and radiation therapy in the 1950s. Between 2016 and 2020, the total investment in cancer research was about \$24.5 billion. All this would not have been possible if the results didn't change people's lives.

Also, certain bare facts require emphasis. Nobody can be declared clinically-free of breast cancer until they have cleared the five to 10-year threshold.

Next come trials, which are meticulous and thorough. When we do randomised scientific studies, we usually compare two sets of patients at the same stage of cancer. One group is subjected to therapies in use while the other group is given standard therapies and something that worked in animal studies. They are then followed up for a minimum of two years. If successful, the trials are extended to include human subjects in larger numbers, across geographies and sometimes across different gene pools. A successful trial is observed again before a drug protocol is even suggested, with intervention at each stage guided by the body of evidence.

A lot of factors come into play in experiments with a cancer cell sample in a petri dish. Even if results hold in animal studies, they of-

ten do not hold with the same efficacy in human trials. So we cannot substitute standard treatments with diet therapies, which have not gone through large randomised trials.

Since diet has a metabolic response, it may have some effect on cancer cells. But that's not a cure. Diet can be a complementary therapy. Eating clean not only enhances well-being in cancer patients, it helps in convalescence. Chemotherapy has side effects and intermittent fasting or calorie deficit cannot be recommended for all patients. Cancer science works on a case-by-case basis. A 40-year-old patient with metastatic cancer will have different therapy needs than someone who is 70-year-old. Therapies cannot be generalised.

Oncologists are not enemies of emerging therapies, provided studies are conducted in an ethical manner, the results are saved over years and decades — not just five months — there is record-keeping by researchers and doctors and the conclusions are published in peer-reviewed journals. There's also ongoing research on supportive therapies. I attended a breast cancer conference in San Antonio, Texas last year, where a large-scale study was presented on exercise reducing relapse by 30 per cent. It is now being figured out how to grade endurance among survivors. Currently, no diet study measures up.

The writer is a surgical oncologist at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi. She specialises in breast cancer



## NOVEMBER 27, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### OPPOSITION MEET

HAVING FAILED to bring about an overall adjustment of seats on a party-to-party basis, the major opposition parties decided to make a last attempt to reduce the possibility of triangular contests in as many constituencies as possible. The Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party leaders from Uttar Pradesh met their counterparts of the Janata Party and the BJP. They agreed to hold bilateral talks on November 28.

### CONGRESS RESHUFFLES

FOLLOWING PRESSURE from influential faction leaders, the Congress (I) leadership

changed its candidates in a large number of constituencies. However, in spite of the last-minute discussions with the contending leaders, the party has not yet been able to complete the list of states. With three names announced for Gujarat, the party leaders are struggling to patch up the differences between warring factions.

### REPORT CORRECT: EC

THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER of Madhya Pradesh has told the Election Commission that The Indian Express report about the pre-poll largesse distributed by the state government to the voters was "factually correct". The MP gov-

ernment announced an extension of the benefits enjoyed by Harijans and Adivasis, to the "backward castes". The Election Commission had taken suo motu action following an Indian Express report on the doling out of gifts to different sections of the population.

### CHAVAN'S SEND-OFF

FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER Y B Chavan's body was flown to Bombay from Delhi by a special Indian Air Force aircraft. The cremation of the 71-year-old veteran Congress leader will take place at his hometown Karad in Satara district. The last rites changed in deference to the wishes of the people of Karad.

# Opinion

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2024

## Royalty worries

There shouldn't be any cap on such payments, but companies must make proper disclosures

**F**OR MANY YEARS now, concerns have been expressed about the quantum of royalties paid by companies to their parents overseas for the use of brands and technology. The amounts being remitted to them, it has been pointed out, are often disproportionate to the financial performance of the local businesses. In other words, the royalty payments are not correlated to the sales and profits of the subsidiary company. A recent study by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) of 233 listed companies, over the FY14-FY23 period, found that in one out of four times, they paid a royalty that exceeds 20% of their net profits. Moreover, the study listed 185 instances of royalty payments even by loss-making companies. While this might appear to be going against the interests of shareholders of the local company, there's no denying that creating a brand and/or developing technology has a cost attached to it for which the parent needs to be compensated fairly.

There can of course be several opinions on what the royalty rate should be. In some cases, the payments do appear outsized. For example, the Sebi study found that there have been more than 100 occasions during this decade when the royalty paid was as much as 40-100% of the net profits. If that seems somewhat overdone, there were 74 instances where the royalty to related parties exceeded 100% of net profits. However, the fact is that imposing a cap, as has been done before, would amount to undue interference. Where the government could probably draw the line is with regard to dividend payouts. The Sebi study revealed that in half the cases, companies paid royalty, but not dividend, or paid more royalty than the dividend distributed to the other shareholders. In fact, there were as many as 315 instances of royalties being paid but no dividend was distributed. That seems patently unfair to the minority shareholders.

Sebi has done well to point out that disclosures by companies relating to royalty payments are often sketchy with adequate explanations for the amount paid out. The Kotak Committee had recommended that better disclosures are called for on the value that a company gains from the use of a brand or technology for which it is remunerating the parent company or the promoters. However, an analysis by the regulator shows that companies often place the royalty payment merely as an item in the statement of transactions with related parties, in the annual report, with no details whatsoever. In fact, there have been instances of companies approaching shareholders for their approval without even specifying a period for which the payments are to be made.

Having taken such blanket approvals for indefinite periods, shareholders are not approached for recurring transactions unless the rates are revised upwards. Also, companies get around the current regulation which demands shareholder approval for royalty required if payment to a related party exceeds the threshold of 5% of consolidated turnover by spreading the amount across several related parties. In other words, they get away with paying a total amount in excess of 5%. Such malpractices are undesirable and the government must ask for better disclosure standards from these companies who often take a moral high ground on corporate governance in public forums. The best way, however, for minority shareholders to deal with such companies would be to vote with one's feet.

AS GOVT MULLS INFRA INCENTIVES, IT HAS TO EXAMINE RISKS FROM VOLTAGE TRANSIENTS & SURGES

## Charging the EV revolution

**I**F THE START of commercial production at Ola's mega-factory in 2021 rewrote the record books for product development and manufacturing execution, and became the first defining moment in India's electric two-wheeler (E2W) revolution, Royal Enfield's launch of its EV motorcycle in Milan earlier this month might well be considered the second. Both underlined the ability of India's E2W industry to stand tall among its global peers.

Reflecting this stature, the E2W industry's growth performance remains robust. Sales numbers are up 32% in the three quarters of CY24, and every quarter among the last 12—with two exceptions, Q2 in CY23 and Q3 in CY24—have been roughly on a par with or well ahead of the previous quarter.

In keeping with the Diwali spirit, monthly sales numbers for October were quite a cracker too, vaulting 89% on a year-on-year basis—from 75,164 to 139,031 units—an 8V penetration for all 2Ws has crossed 5.5%. This, despite the fact that most of the volume growth came from scooters, with motorcycles yet to truly join the party. Ola, at almost 42,000 units, continued on top of the totem pole, with TVS and Bajaj remaining strong performers at the next two positions. The semblance of consolidation in the industry is also expected to become more pronounced as the early starters continue their slide to irrelevance.

The necessary conditions for a virtuous cycle of exponential growth are clearly in place. Industry efforts at localisation and the consequent reconfiguring of product offerings, combined with the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles and production-linked incentive benefits, have created a wider range of price points. The E2W revolution is now within the grasp of a wider, more price-sensitive consumer segment. The committed entry of the legacy players has given EV technology a

stamp of acceptance with a wider range of consumers. And, led by the market reach of the legacy players, mainstream EV technology products are now becoming visible all over the rural hinterland too. With the introduction of mass market motorcycles, the last quarter of CY25 could well witness annualised volumes crossing 5 million. An organised retrofit industry could then provide the perfect inflexion point, and rural India's entire 2W market—powered by free farm electricity—could then become the battering ram that pushes change.

But challenges remain. The first undoubtedly arises from the charging infrastructure. Despite all the work done, it leaves a lot to be desired, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Let me focus on the qualitative aspect.

Anything that relies on an external source of electricity faces a risk from voltage transients and surges. Transients are of a very short duration with higher peak amplitude, and are considered more likely the result of nearby lightning strikes and step changes in grid loading. Surges are generally of a longer duration, with lower peak voltage and/or current amplitude and likely the result of the same phenomena occurring much further away. Both phenomena, particularly the latter—because of step changes in grid loading—are fairly common occurrences in India. However, "clean" the grid is, such hazards will occur, but how often

and with what severity defies modelling. High-voltage transients could create "pin-hole" failures in insulation in integrated circuits that incrementally increase the chance of total failure later on. High-energy transients can cause major insulation failure and sometimes even arcing, both of which could lead to a fire. Surges generally cause equipment failure more from excessive heating and malfunctioning components like MOSFETs, and consequential system failure—anywhere, from headlamps to electronic motor controllers. Transients are also known to potentially cause significant software malfunctions ranging from system lock-up, memory corruption to even erroneous device resets. And all this can happen irrespective of the best quality processes at the component manufacturing level,

at the software testing level, or in the vehicle assembly process. The internationally accepted regulations for surge and transient immunity, IEC 61000-4-5, are a part of those mandated for charging infrastructure in India. Compliance ought to, theoretically, ensure durability and reliability. Yet, a large number of outlets across India are often out of service. How often are they checked for conformance, by who, and how is the information made available to consumers are some obvious questions. Could E2W consumers using charging infrastructure, whether regularly or sporadically, poten-

tially end up taking risks they never bargained for? And those could be anything: lights malfunctioning, vehicles refusing to start, losing power suddenly, or worse, stopping in the middle of the road. Recently, auto journalist blogger Veeresh Malik wrote to me: "On a recent trip to Mysuru.... we had a small misadventure thanks to some defect with a.... fast charging station. The EV went into vehicle protection mode, limited performance, maximum 50 kmph etc, showing airbag errors..."

Even one of these possibilities can cause unacceptable levels of consumer dissatisfaction and disrepute to vehicle manufacturers. Original equipment manufacturers will have to try correlate the observed failure patterns on consumers' vehicles with their charging habits, preferences and locations. And a clear picture emerges on the "clean" power availability at charging points, perhaps they ought to recommend home charging to their consumers. Closer proximity experiences could worsen transient/surge conditions because the higher power handling that typically goes along with closer proximity to the grid appears to afford more immunity to transients and surges.

As the government contemplates new incentives for charging infrastructure players, it has to examine this. Perhaps infra players could be mandated to design hybrid installations that isolate installations using in-line storage systems. Perhaps the government and the EV industry could establish an independent real-time physical quality assurance capability to check installations at random and provide a health certificate? At the risk of sounding alarmist, it is technically possible to infect charging installations with malware that could then find its way to all user vehicles or, worse, crash the nation's power grid. The potential to push targeted malware, through dedicated or independent charging networks, is as real as it is diabolical.

### BVR SUBBU

Auto industry veteran and member of the Board of KPIT Technologies

**Till a clear picture emerges on 'clean' power availability at charging points, perhaps they ought to recommend home charging to their consumers**

## A statutory scaffolding for space pursuits

### DHRUVA KUMAR SINGH

Chief controller of accounts, ministry of law and justice, Supreme Court of India, and ministry of corporate affairs

The proposed Space Activities Bill will play a key role in providing regulatory clarity to India's growing private sector and creating a robust ecosystem

## The Magnificent 7 are starting to look average

**GROWTH PROSPECTS** For the group of companies dubbed the Magnificent 7 are still above average, but they're no longer magnificent. Consensus Wall Street forecasts suggest that, in aggregate, the seven large-capitalisation companies will perform just a whisker better than the "S&P 493" next year, and yet investors continue to pay a premium to own them. That alone suggests it may be time to dial back their weightings in portfolios.

Consider that the group's net income growth is expected to ping pong around 20% from here on out, according to projections compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence. The other members of the S&P 500 Index are expected to see growth climb toward 16% by the end of next year. The issue is that the Mag 7 grouping trades at a median valuation of about 30 times blended forward earnings, while the other large-cap stocks in the S&P 500 Index trade at a median of 19.5 times. How long should we expect investors to overpay for increasingly similar performance?

To a large degree, the next two years will depend on what happens with artificial intelligence and whether the hype around its potential to disrupt the world of business is sustained. Nvidia has become the world's most exciting stock by providing the proverbial picks and shovels for the early days of the AI boom. Apple, Microsoft, Amazon.com, Meta Platforms, and Alphabet have all gotten in on the excitement by investing heavily in bringing the technology to companies and consumers, in many cases sending their capital expenditures directly into Nvidia's coffers. The companies have all become co-dependent and correlated, and their high valuations hinge on the odd that the merry-go-round will keep spinning. (More on old-man-out-Tesla later.)

Some people say it might be slowing down already. While generative AI models continue to dazzle, they're also plagued by mistakes and imperfections, and the marginal improvement for additional dollars and data isn't quite what it used to be. Conceivably, AI may follow the path of the internet and other innovations debased in the Gartner hype cycle: Early successes and big dreams give way to a subsequent period of disillusionment and even some business failures before a more sustainable revolution can ultimately take hold. In the dot-com bubble, for instance, Amazon.com emerged triumphant from the ashes of so many other e-commerce companies.

High expectations may also collide with other threats to the tech and communications behemoths. Alphabet shares tumbled last week after the Department of Justice revealed it would try to make the company sell its Chrome browser. Apple, which has faced its own antitrust scrutiny, is also contending with challenging iPhone sales in China and the threat that President-elect Donald Trump will launch a new trade war that could hobble its supply chain.

Tesla, I will acknowledge, is a trade unto itself that isn't directly related to its Mag 7 peers. Lately, it's been trading not on extraordinary earnings growth but on the promise of robotaxis that don't yet exist in the market and chief executive officer Elon Musk's cosy relationship with Trump (which may just help him clear regulatory hurdles to Tesla's autonomous driving ambitions). At 108 times forward earnings, Tesla is both the riskiest investment in the Mag 7 basket and possibly the only true diversifier. No doubt, these companies all offer a lot to be excited about, too, and many investors will conclude that the upside-surprise potential is too great to miss out on completely.

Indeed, 2024 itself has panned out far better than analysts envisioned some 12 months ago. But it would also be logical for investors to take some profits in those companies, such as Warren Buffett, the investor known as the "Oracle of Omaha", has been doing with his stake in Apple. At present, the companies constitute nearly one-third of the S&P 500 by weighting—and by extension a bloated portion of many Americans' retirement savings. That feels like a bit too much of your future to trust to a group of richly priced companies all leveraged to the same narrative.

INDIA'S FRAMING a national law to provide a comprehensive framework for its expanding space activities. Until now, the country's space activities have primarily been guided by a general set of principles outlined by the United Nations (UN). The most significant of these is the Outer Space Treaty, adopted by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) which was established by the UN General Assembly in 1958. The core principles of the treaty are the peaceful use of outer space, use of space for the common benefit of humanity, and prohibition of extending national sovereignty to space.

The committee developed four treaties as supplements to the treaty: the Rescue Agreement (1968), the Liability Convention (1972), the Registration Convention (1976), and the Moon Agreement (1984). The first three address key aspects of space activities: procedures for the rescue and safe return of astronauts and space objects, guidelines to determine liability for damage caused by space objects (on Earth or in space), and establishing a registry for space objects with provisions for sharing specific details with the UN.

The Moon Agreement, formally known as the Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, sets a framework for the exploration and utilisation of the moon and other celestial bodies. Similar to the Outer Space Treaty, it emphasises that outer space and celestial bodies are the "common heritage of mankind". While 113 countries have ratified the Outer Space Treaty, only 19 nations have ratified the Moon Agreement.

We agree wholeheartedly with the Supreme Court's ruling in favour of the words "secular" and "socialist" remaining in the Preamble of the Constitution. The apex court has found no reason why these words should be expunged from the Preamble that is part of the Constitution and settled it with a certain finality. In the top court's

the Moon Agreement. Major spacefaring nations, such as the US, Russia, and China, have not signed or ratified this agreement—primarily because it prohibits the commercial use of space resources, and emphasises space as a shared resource for all of humanity.

National space laws reveal a similar pattern. According to the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, 44 nations have adopted national space laws to incorporate international principles into their domestic legal frameworks. These nations include major powers such as the US, Germany, France, and the UK, as well as those with emerging space activities, like Kenya, Nigeria, and Peru. Typically, these laws offer a regulatory framework to govern both governmental and commercial space operations.

However, there are instances where national space laws appear to contradict the core principles of the Outer Space Treaty, particularly its emphasis on the peaceful use of space, prohibition of national sovereignty in space, and non-commercialisation of resources. For example, in 2019, France enacted a law establishing a space command focused on developing space defence capabilities. Similarly, the US passed the Commercial Space Act which includes provisions for restricting access to space resources and granting patents related to the resources.

This shift reflects the changing reali-

ties. Today, space exploration is no longer just a matter of national pride; it has evolved into a highly commercial and profit-driven industry. A notable example is US-based company SpaceX, known for ambitious projects like Starship and the Starlink satellite internet service, which hold immense revenue potential. Additionally, numerous start-ups are transforming the global space industry with innovations. The global space sector is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate of approximately 10% over the next decade.

India is now recognised as a major space power. But until now, its space programme has been mainly focused on developing indigenous capabilities, leveraging space technology for development—its communications, weather forecasting, and resource management—and utilising space to benefit people with initiatives like telemedicine and tele-education while maintaining the cost-effectiveness and affordability of its space programme. The commercialisation of space activities has not been a major focus. The five treaties of the UN COPUOS have so far been largely sufficient to meet the needs of India's space programme.

However, in recent years, the Indian government has shifted focus toward developing national space capabilities, particularly by fostering the growth of space start-ups. This has been achieved

through the creation of specific funds for the sector, the introduction of public-private partnership models for space programmes (such as collaborations on launch vehicles), and the setting up of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), a single-window nodal agency to regulate private sector participation. Besides, Space Technology Incubation Centres have been set up to promote innovation.

The Indian Space Policy 2023 outlines the roles of non-governmental entities (NGEs), IN-SPACe, the Indian Space Research Organisation, and the department of space, with the goal of creating a framework to enhance NGE participation, providing a level playing field, and establishing an institutional structure for a thriving ecosystem. It also emphasises space exploration and the goal of human presence in space, in collaboration with domestic and international stakeholders.

Given the anticipated increase in NGE participation, there is a clear need for a statutory framework to regulate space activities. This should address licensing and authorisation, fulfil insurance requirements, protect intellectual property rights, include penalties for unauthorised activities, and ensure all space operations align with national and international interests.

The proposed Bill will play a crucial role in providing regulatory clarity to India's growing private sector and creating a robust ecosystem for space activities.

Views are personal

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Preserving principles

We agree wholeheartedly with the Supreme Court's ruling in favour of the words "secular" and "socialist" remaining in the Preamble of the Constitution. The apex court has found no reason why these words should be expunged from the Preamble that is part of the Constitution and settled it with a certain finality. In the top court's

definition, secularism is "equal respect for all religions". Secularism, a basic feature of the Constitution, is the talisman that keeps our plural society united. The country must stay secular and guard itself against forces out to hasten its retreat from secularism. India must have space for people of all faiths and do without discrimination and differential treatment on the basis of religion. India's continued existence as a secular, socialist republic is in the

interest of the mass of Indian humanity.

—G David Milton, Maruthanadode

#### COP 29: A flop show

Apropos of "Climate injustice" (FE, November 26), COP29 held at Baku was disappointing, to say the least. It would be an understatement to say that it has delivered a deadly blow to international efforts to restrict global warming and put extra pressure on

developing nations already struggling to emerge from the economic slowdown due to ongoing wars in West Asia and Europe. With developed nations shying away from their responsibilities of helping developing nations to fight climate change, the outlook for global climate mitigation is dismal and dark.

—Bal Govind, Noida

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

## 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## It's on We, the People

Constitution's pluralist, progressive, and peaceful idea of India is imperilled, as are institutions entrusted to safeguard it. But there is hope in the battles waged by democracy-loving citizens



SHASHI THAROOR

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS ago, the modern "idea of India" — a phrase first articulated by the mystical Rabindranath Tagore — became a robustly secular and constitutional construct, thanks to the vision and intellect of our founding fathers, notably (in alphabetical order) B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel. We celebrate their accomplishment as Constitution Day, marking the anniversary when the draft of the Constitution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949.

The Preamble to the Constitution itself is the most eloquent enumeration of this vision's foremost aspirations. In its description of the democratic and progressive hallmarks of the Indian Republic, in its conception of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, it resoundingly proclaims that the Constitution will both embody and be the bedrock of the "idea of India".

The role of constitutionalism in shaping the "idea of India" is the dominant strand in the broader story of the evolution and modernisation of Indian society, especially over the last two centuries. Every society has an inter-dependent relation with the legal systems that govern it, which is both complex and, especially in our tumultuous times, endlessly and vociferously contested.

Challenging it today are many dangerous trends — the hollowing out of our democratic institutions, the hijacking of our investigative agencies, the disempowerment of our news media, the pressures on the judiciary and even the legal fraternity, and the blatant communalisation of our politics and public life. All of these represent our constitution makers' worst fears.

Over the past decade, the Constitution and the values it embodies — especially those of liberty, equality, and fraternity, all woven together by secular pluralism — have been threatened. Its most seminal contribution to the "idea of India", that of the primacy of liberty and autonomy, and of the individual citizen being the true custodian of her Republic, has been brutalised. Dissent in particular has been vilified as anti-national, with dissidents charged under draconian anti-terrorism laws, which turn the process into the punishment. This ensures that an undertrial languishes endlessly in prison before — as has occurred in 97 per cent of the cases filed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) — being acquitted for lack of evidence. While we lost both Father-Son Swamy (an infirm, 84-year-old Jesuit priest) and Professor G.N. Saibaba (a wheelchair user with over 90 per cent disability), whose deaths remain a blot on our collective conscience, to the UAPA, young Umar Khalid has spent more than four years in jail thanks to this draconian law.

Ambedkar saw the principles of liberal constitutionalism — the centrality and security of the state, personal liberty and the right to constitutional remedies, non-communal political representation — as cures for the conundrums thrown up by imposing a liberal Constitution upon an illiberal society. Constitutions are, first and foremost, as Ambedkar explicitly stressed, tools to limit and restrain state power. The challenge lies in reconciling the limitations to state power with a popular mandate, thus preventing tempo-



C.R. Sankar

rary majorities — because in a democracy, a majority is always temporary, though governments sometimes forget that — from completely undoing what the Constitution has provided. The founders of the Indian republic worried about democracy becoming an elections-only affair, and of a popular mandate degenerating into majoritarianism. In the Constituent Assembly, the Prime Minister and Home Minister of the time, Nehru and Patel, went to great lengths to limit their own power — a thought simply unimaginable today.

As Ambedkar put it — and as many of us in the Opposition have long been saying — in the rights of Indians cannot "be taken away by any legislature merely because it happens to have a majority". After all, our quest for freedom was not merely a struggle for freedom from colonial subjugation. It embraced "constitutional morality", a commitment to constitutional means, processes and structures, alongside a commitment to free speech, scrutiny of public action and legal limitations on the exercise of power. Only if all citizens embraced this could freedom flourish in India.

Ambedkar warned that it is entirely possible to pervert the Constitution — without changing it — by merely changing the form and functioning of the administration to make it antithetical to the spirit of the Constitution. Ambedkar argued that "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated... Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic." He insisted that the Directive Principles of State Policy were necessary because although the rules of democracy mandate that the people must elect their representatives, who wield power, the Principles reaffirm that "whoever captures power will not be free to do what he likes with it".

Today, our Constitution's pluralist, progressive, and peaceful idea of India faces numerous perils, as do the institutions and watchdogs entrusted with safeguarding it and fending against authoritarian impulses and brute majoritarianism. Over the past decade, concerted efforts have been made to

Over the past five years, democracy- and liberty-loving citizens of India have risen to reclaim our Republic. Rescuing the Constitution of India from the highbrow preserves of courtrooms, legal chambers, and law schools, they have mobilised it and sent it into battle. In the biting cold of December 2019 and early 2020, lakhs of Indians across the country — from youngsters and students to the old yet indomitable women of Shaheen Bagh — poured into the streets in protest against the appalling Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens, which gave legal colour to the two-nation theory. On those freezing nights wrapped in fog, countless Indians of all faiths and castes, speaking numerous languages, held aloft portraits of Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Nehru and chanted the Preamble in unison — as one people.

reduce our Parliament from a vigorous forum of deliberation and dialogue to a notice-board and rubber stamp for the ruling party's agenda. The Supreme Court has seemed to slacken as well, losing the progressive zeal that animated the judgments recognising the Right to Privacy and decriminalising homosexuality; it has done little to hold an overweening executive to account and protect personal liberties, let alone advance them. Add to this the weaponisation of investigation agencies (such as the ED, CBI and Income Tax Department) against political opponents and dissidents, and the battering into submission of the Election Commission, and we have a crippling environment of fear that undermines the rule of the Constitution.

But there is no reason to lose hope. Over the past five years, democracy- and liberty-loving citizens of India have risen to reclaim our Republic. Rescuing the Constitution of India from the highbrow preserves of courtrooms, legal chambers, and law schools, they have mobilised it and sent it into battle. In the biting cold of December 2019 and early 2020, lakhs of Indians across the country — from youngsters and students to the old yet indomitable women of Shaheen Bagh — poured into the streets in protest against the appalling Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizens, which gave legal colour to the two-nation theory. On those freezing nights wrapped in fog, countless Indians of all faiths and castes, speaking numerous languages, held aloft portraits of Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Nehru and chanted the Preamble in unison — as one people. As the electrifying cry of "We, the People of India..." rippled through the darkness, the "idea of India" roared back to life, revitalising our Republic and promising to awaken us into that "Heaven of Freedom" Tagore wrote so inspiringly about.

The Constitution will prevail as long as its spirit survives in the ordinary citizens of India.

The writer is Congress MP for Thiruvananthapuram, Lok Sabha

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Our prime minister (K.P. Sharma Oli) and his party seem incapable of taking criticism and if someone raises a question, they will try to shout down the questioner."

— THE KATHMANDU POST

## An article of faith

The Constitution should not be a subject of politics. Rather, protecting its principles should be the inspiration for politicians



BHUPENDER YADAV

ON NOVEMBER 26, 2024, India marked 75 years of adopting its Constitution and resolving to be led by the principles laid down therein. It is an occasion to remember why we, as a nation, chose to be led by a constitution. A constitution establishes the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the structure of the government, and the relationship between the government and the people. It offers a structure within which all actors must act towards the common goal of building a society based on the principles of social, economic and political justice and equality before law.

Even though the Constitution is often defined as a legal document, it has assumed a life of its own, acting as the soul of the Republic. As a result, this "legal document" is not merely a book that lists a citizen's rights. It is also an invocation to the citizen to fulfill her fundamental duties towards the nation. For us in India, the Constitution is a commitment not to squander the freedom that came at a tragically high cost by constantly striving to build a just, equitable and prosperous society.

For a "book" that is an article of faith for the democratically-spirited people of India to be reduced to a plaything of politics is not just unfortunate but an outright anti-constitutional act. After all, it is not just India's leaders who participated in drafting the Constitution. Over 53,000 citizens sat in the visitors' gallery of the Constituent Assembly over nearly three years and watched the debates held during the drafting of the Constitution.

Even as Congress reportedly waves blank copies of the Constitution to the people of the country, over the years when the party was in power, it introduced over 80 amendments. While it is true that all governments have to amend the Constitution in accordance with the demands of changing times, demographics and aspirations of people, Congress is responsible for trying to tinker with the basic structure of the document, restructuring even the Preamble. It is Congress that suspended the Constitution during the dark days of Emergency. The then Congress government led by the late Indira Gandhi amended the Preamble. The

42nd Amendment provided for curtailment of fundamental rights.

In 1976, Justice H.R. Khanna was made to pay the price for choosing to oppose the suspension of civil liberties. As a five-judge constitution bench heard the *ADM Jabalpur vs Shivkant Shukla* case and ruled that the right to personal liberty can be suspended in the interest of the state, Justice Khanna wrote, "The Constitution and the laws of India do not permit life and liberty to be at the mercy of the absolute power of the Executive... What is at stake is the rule of law."

The government of the day extracted its "revenge" on Justice Khanna by superseding him and appointing his junior colleague at the Supreme Court as the Chief Justice of India in 1977. Justice Khanna resigned soon after. On Constitution Day, we need to remember him for standing up to defend a document Indians revere.

India's Constitution is not just a progressive policy/administrative document, but also one that sets our objectives. Why should a nation develop? What should be the purpose of the executive's actions? What should the objectives of the judiciary's decisions be? As per the principles enshrined in the Constitution, justice, social, economic, and political, as well as liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship for the people of India. And so, while the Constitution on the one hand protects groups and their practices, it ensures individual liberties are firmly guarded too.

The state guarantees protection to groups to practise their faith and ways of life but also ensures those within the group who live differently are free to do so. The Constitution is literally for "one and all".

As B.R. Ambedkar said, the Constitution is not a mere lawyers' document. It is a vehicle of life and its spirit is always the spirit of the age. The age that we live in makes it even more imperative to be reminded of the core values of the Constitution, and that is why in 2015, the Narendra Modi-led government decided to celebrate November 26 and honour the memories of those who made it possible for India to have her own Constitution. It is a day to reaffirm our faith and allegiance to the core values of the document — an article of faith for us.

On Constitution Day, it is important to resolve that the Constitution should not be a subject of politics. If anything, protecting constitutional principles should be an inspiration for politics.

The writer is Union Cabinet Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## MISREADING WOMEN

THIS REFERS TO the article, "How not to read the woman vote" (IE, November 26). It is true that B.J. Mahayuti attributed the stalling victory in Maharashtra to the woman vote largely on account of the cash transfer scheme under Ladki Bahin Yojana. Focusing on this campaign and how it benefited the electoral dividends obfuscate the need for substantive socio-economic transformation. The writer's interaction with women reveals that they are aware that the distribution of largesse comes with a price. What is observed is that people gain a critical grasp of their social reality, which enlightens them to analyse the underlying reasons for oppression. It is disappointing to see both the political alliances let down women by simply seeing them as labarths.

L.R. Murrem, Delhi

## A VISION, ERODED

THIS REFERS TO the article, "The consensus document" (IE, November 26). As India celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Constitution, one finds that the vision of the Constituent Assembly offers many lessons for the present Parliament. The Constituent Assembly embodied democratic engagement, with pluralistic debates in which diverse views were given due respect. The declining sittings in Parliament and rushed legislative processes today attract introspection. The ability of the Assembly to unite divergent ideologies and build a consensus-driven document underscores the need for inspired leadership and mutual respect. This historic marker challenges modern lawmakers to personally feel the ethos of the Assembly. Parliament should encourage dialogue over discord and reimagine governance toward real challenges.

Pranav Shukla, Jaipur

THIS REFERS TO the article, "The consensus document" (IE, November 26). It is remarkable to see the Indian Constitution acting as a guarantor of fundamental rights and the rule of law and federalism. Right after Independence, developed nations believed that the newly born India would fumble in no time. But it was the Constitution, the hard work of its writers and the people in the three branches of the government that ushered progress into the country. What makes the Constitution such a unique document is its ability to maintain balance and to cater to the aspirations of society. It is time to uphold its values and to reiterate the importance of the Constitution.

Rishidev M, Dindigul

## DANGEROUS TREND

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The 40-day cure" (IE, November 26). Navjot Singh Sidhu, the former cricketer turned politician, showing have exercised greater caution before claiming that his ailing wife's cancer was cured through dietary measures. Statements like these, especially from celebrities, carry significant influence, often encouraging others to follow similar paths with potentially grave repercussions. In a country like India, where health literacy varies widely, such claims can easily mislead vulnerable individuals, deterring them from seeking proper medical care. It is essential for public figures to recognise the weight of their words and prioritise responsible communication, particularly when addressing critical health issues. While it is true that a healthy diet can support recovery, serious illnesses must be treated in accordance with established medical guidelines. Misinformation can have fatal consequences.

Vijai Pant, Hampur



MADAN SABNAVIS

## A revival on the cards

Growth is likely to pick up and food inflation will moderate by year-end

EVEN AS INDIA'S economy continues to grow at a healthy pace — an above 7 per cent score is on the cards — of late, there has been some debate on the underlying momentum. This is on account of the reports cards of some companies in the consumer goods space. Their performance is being said to reflect "urban stress". Even if that is taken into account, several economic indicators appear positive. The GDP data will be released later this week.

The purchasing managers index for both services and manufacturing has been in the region of 57-60 for the last three months. Any number above 50 is positive, and the average so far this year is above 60 for the composite index — the highest in the last five years. Alongside, GST collections in the first seven months of the year have topped at Rs 12.74 lakh crore. This is higher than last year's tally of Rs 11.64 lakh crore. Two-wheeler sales have risen by 16 per cent for the first seven months of the year. Passenger car sales had slowed down in September over August but rose by 9 per cent in October when the festival season began.

The lament of some companies on subdued consumption could be attributed to the "shradh" period when believers desist

from buying consumer goods as part of their practice of abstention. This manifested in low sales of automobiles in particular leading to a build-up of inventories. This, however, changed in October with this segment showing an upward momentum.

So while second-quarter growth would be less than 7 per cent at around 6.8-6.9 per cent, there is likely to be a substantial pick up in the second half of the year. A critical factor is the rural economy. Rural demand has been muted in the last couple of years due to a combination of lower farm output and higher inflation. A good kharif crop could address the first part of the problem. The area under cultivation this year is much higher compared to last year, pointing to good harvests for cereals, pulses and oilseeds. The reservoir levels are at around 87 per cent, auguring well for both the rain crop as well as allied activities. Therefore, farm output growth this year should be at a robust 3.5-4 per cent, and this could support demand.

Inflation, however, remains a worrying proposition. At 6.2 per cent, it is being driven by food prices. The positive sign here is that the next crop of onions and tomatoes should be arriving by December. The kharif harvest should lead to an improvement in

supplies of pulses, a major pain point in the past. Therefore, food inflation should moderate by the end of this calendar year with the base effect also kicking in December. While one has to be mindful of the course of inflation, given the October surprise, a moderation should help revive demand.

This year, the investment momentum has been healthy even though the start was slow. The general election caused a slowdown in the central government's capex. States too were affected. While private investment tends to align with government capex, sources of funding, namely, bank credit, debt issuances as well as ECBs, point to a "K" shaped pattern in investment activity.

The demand for funds has come from sectors related to infrastructure activity, including metals, cement, machinery, chemicals and power. The housing sector has been doing well at the premium and middle levels and the momentum has spread to tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Power sector investment is revolving around renewables, which have seen large capacity increases. A backward link has been witnessed between government capex on roads and railways as well as urban development and industries such as steel, cement and machinery which

have gone in for fresh investment. However, when it comes to consumer goods industries, it does appear that the existing capacity is not being used, which has come in the way of new investments.

With the two main engines of consumption and investment looking positive, there is reason to believe that overall growth will remain above 7 per cent this year — the Bank of Baroda's forecast is 7.3-7.4 per cent. This, however, should not lead to complacency given that growth last year was 8.2 per cent. So far, the RBI has maintained its growth forecast at 7.2 per cent. This has given it comfort for continuing with its anti-inflation policy stance. The inflation rate virtually rules out any rate cut in the December policy. While a decision on the rate cut could come in February, depending on how the inflation number turns, global factors cannot be ignored. The victory of Donald Trump does suggest some action on immigration, import tariffs and corporate taxes, all of which can be inflationary.

The MPC is likely to factor this in its deliberations.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views are personal



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# Take tax action for Viksit Bharat in the Union budget for 2025-26

The government could take major steps towards its worthy goal of a tax regime that's simple, predictable and competitive



**CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE**  
is director general, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

**B**alancing fiscal prudence with the need to provide a growth impetus has been a hallmark of our government over past Union budgets. Tax buoyancy has improved, while taxation has been simplified and ease of paying taxes enhanced. With a keen eye on resilience, the 2024-25 budget laid the groundwork for a more robust economy, one that is prepared to withstand varied headwinds on its way towards the national vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' or developed India.

Within the overarching ambit of 'fiscal realism' lies a fine balancing act of the government's expenditure with revenue. While garnering more resources for growth, I am sure the government would further strengthen the taxation regime to enhance simplicity and certainty, offering the country a more competitive regime that further improves the ease of paying taxes. The budget for 2024-25 did a fine job on these. With an overall objective to plan for India@100, it announced various targeted measures on the taxation side (both direct and indirect) to increasingly align revenues with its long-term goal of a developed nation.

Particularly praiseworthy is the government's proposal to undertake a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act of 1961 within the context of reviewing the entire direct and indirect taxation regime. In addition, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) suggests that the government consider setting up an expert committee with industry participation.

Along with simplification, addressing the high level of litigation on taxation is critical to foster greater ease of paying taxes in the country. The forthcoming budget for 2025-26 may take further progress on this aspect. Currently, there is a huge number of appeals filed before the Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals). To address this, the government may announce steps to reduce the pendency of disputed cases by disposing high pitched assessments and high-tax-demand cases on a priority basis. To provide further relief to taxpayers from delays in refunds, TDS credit, etc, the government may consider an indirect interface with the Central Processing Centre that would make it even more efficient and responsive.

The Finance Act, 2023, had provisions to promote timely payments to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including amounts payable to such enterprises within the ambit of Section 43B of the Act. While this amendment was intended to promote timely payments to MSMEs, it probably needs a rethink. We find that a large number of companies in the private sector prefer to make purchases from non-MSME units to avoid disallowance under that section. The government may consider replacing it with a scheme incentivizing those who make timely payments to MSMEs.



ISTOCKPHOTO

On the indirect taxation side, the 2024-25 budget clearly captured the government's sustained endeavour to simplify and rationalize the GST and customs duty structure, with targeted adjustments for sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals and certain precious metals. These efforts may be built upon further in next year's budget.

On the customs front, the budget could focus on further improving trade facilitation, which would foster domestic manufacturing. A strategic roadmap for the rationalization of import tariffs to make India's manufacturing sector globally competitive would help Indian manufacturing. CII proposes a three-tiered tariff structure, with the lowest or nil duty rates for raw materials, followed by intermediate and finished goods. This phased approach will allow domestic manufacturers time to adapt, while enhancing competitiveness. Further, a one-time tax dispute settlement scheme under customs may also be considered for MSMEs.

The government may also consider further reforms in indirect taxation through GST 2.0, with a transition to a three-rate structure that features rate moderation as well. Centralized assessments and audits could be introduced for large taxpaying units with a pan-India presence. The scope of input tax credit may be expanded to cover all business expenses. Also, petroleum products should be covered under GST to enable the seamless flow of input tax credits. This will reduce the impact of a tax cascade on the manufacturing sector.

By further simplifying GST and bringing everything under its input-tax-credit chain, GST 2.0

reforms are likely to boost compliance and increase government revenues.

Admittedly, tax simplification while fostering greater competitiveness is one side of the coin. The other is broadening the tax base for higher resource mobilization. Let statistics put this imperative in the right context: it is estimated that of the 75.5 million individuals who filed income tax returns for assessment year 2023-24, 63% paid zero tax and just 5% of filers paid 73.5% of the overall tax payable, underscoring the need to broaden India's income tax base.

Steps that could be considered include a greater transition from cash to digital transactions, which would create an information trail that can be used to correctly assess the income of individuals and businesses, thereby helping the tax department in detecting evasion. Towards this end, the government could consider incentivizing cooperative banks to issue Virtual Payment Address (VPA) or UPI facilities to their customers, incentivizing business correspondents to onboard customers for UPI, announcing measures to strengthen trust in digital transactions, and mandating the adoption and prioritization of digital transactions by large merchants like governments, utilities and companies in the sectors of transport, telecom and e-commerce, among others.

In the last many budgets, the government has established beyond any doubt that it is aiming for the creation of a tax ecosystem that is simple, predictable and competitive. We are certain that the budget of 2025-26 would be another major step in that direction.

# Trump's US mustn't repeat its profiling of Chinese scientists

Espionage suspicions could lead the US to lose its war for talent



**CATHERINE THORBECKE**  
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering Asia tech

**D**onald Trump's return to the White House is stirring fears that he could reinstate a failed scheme launched during his first term that aimed to crack down on Chinese espionage, but ended up becoming more of a witch-hunt. Doing so would not only be destructive to American innovation, but give China an upper-hand in the tech race.

The China Initiative, launched in 2018, was an extensive national security effort intended to prevent intellectual property theft and the transfer of US technological knowledge to China. It was led by the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation before being dismantled under the Biden administration in 2022. It devolved into an ineffective racial profiling campaign targeting Asian American academics and left a string of wrongful accusations that upended researchers' lives while doing little to stamp out suspected spying.

The president-elect's return brings fresh anxiety that it will be reinstated. A bill advanced in the House earlier this year has been blasted by some lawmakers as an attempt to revive the programme under a different name. Project 2025, the viral conservative policy white paper that has been linked to Trump's agenda, has tried to distance himself from it, expressly calls to "restart the China Initiative." Trump has also surrounded himself with China hawks as he builds his new cabinet and campaigned on an "America First" vision.

But if his goal is putting America first, it would require recognizing that the nation is a land of immigrants, and welcoming the best and brightest from elsewhere gives it a major edge. The China Initiative resulted in espionage, theft or intellectual property charges against just 0.0000934% of Chinese STEM students and researchers at US universities. But the chilling effect of the programme had on science and tech in US academia has been severe.

For more than two decades, China has been the most important supplier of US-based scientists, according to a Stanford analysis. But the number leaving has been steadily increasing. After the China Initiative, departures surged by 75% — two-thirds relocated back to China. If anything, the policy apparently served up a major win for Beijing's innovation ambitions.

It may seem hard to quantify just how much pushing out scientists of Chinese descent could tip the scales. But we could learn from history. The US launched a broad crackdown on suspected Communist sympathizers during the Red Scare era, including Caltech professor Qian Xuesen,



Any ethnic group feeling persecuted could ruin America's success formula. ISTOCKPHOTO

eventually driving him to return to China. He became the "father of the Chinese missile programme." Former Navy Secretary Dan Kimball called it: "The stupidest thing this country ever did." More recently, the contribution of a Chinese-born scientist helped the research that allowed Moderna to develop its covid vaccine in record time. The Stanford analysis found that scientists of Chinese descent who chose to stay in the US are finding it difficult to pursue their research, and roughly half are avoiding federal grant applications.

Other factors would make a revival of the China Initiative especially destructive to America's tech goals. Skilled labour has been repeatedly identified as one of the biggest barriers to US efforts to maintain dominance in advanced sectors such as chip-making. China has been creating more STEM PhDs than the US. Recent economic malaise at home has been driving more Chinese talent abroad, and it would be in the US's best interest to lure them.

At the same time, the risks of Chinese espionage should be taken seriously. Silicon Valley firms are increasingly on alert for intellectual property theft, escalating their vetting of staff and recruits. That is wise, though it should be driven by evidence and not ethnicity. Data also suggests that hacking and cyberattacks are the preferred methods of spying. Rather than pouring vast resources into profiling individuals, the US should double down on investment in cybersecurity.

In July, roughly five years after he was indicted, former University of Kansas professor Franklin Tao had his China Initiative-era conviction reversed. Ahead of his trial in 2021, his wife told *Bloomberg News* that the family came to the US to "pursue the American dream." Instead, she found herself working three jobs to pay for her husband's legal bills. His lawyer later said that the nightmare "virtually bankrupted" the family. Such cases give ammunition to China's propaganda arm as it seeks talent for its high-tech ambitions.

Even the most tough-on-China policymakers should remember that the US can't lose the values it boasts about to counter threats. Resuming attacks on scientists who come to America for research will only harm US innovation and national security interests in the long run. **@BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

# Our legislative frameworks must adapt to the rise of AI

RAHUL MATTHAN



is a partner at Trilegal and the author of 'The Third Way: India's Revolutionary Approach to Data Governance'. His X handle is @matthan.

**L**arge language models (LLMs) work so well because they compress human knowledge. They are trained on massive data-sets and convert the words they scan into tokens. Then, by assigning weights to those tokens, they build vast neural networks that identify the most likely connections between them. Using this system of organizing information, they generate responses to prompts—building them, word by word, to create sentences, paragraphs and even large documents by simply predicting the next most appropriate word.

We used to think that there had to be a limit to the extent to which LLMs could improve. Surely, there was a point beyond which the benefits of increasing the size of a neural network would be marginal at best. However, what we discovered was that there was a power-law relationship between an increase in the number of parameters of a neural network and its performance. The larger the model, the better

it performs across a wide range of tasks, often to the point of surpassing smaller, specialized models even in domains they were not specifically trained for. This is what is referred to as the scaling law, thanks to which artificial intelligence (AI) systems have been able to generate extraordinary outputs that, in many instances, far exceed the capacity of human researchers.

But no matter how good AI is, it can never be perfect. It is, by definition, probabilistic, non-deterministic system. As a result, its responses are not conclusive but just the most statistically likely answer. Moreover, no matter how much effort we put into reducing AI 'hallucinations,' we will never be able to eliminate them entirely. And I don't think we should even try. After all, the reason AI is so magical is because of its fundamentally probabilistic approach to building connections in a neural network. The more we constrain its performance, the more we will forgo the benefits that it currently delivers.

The trouble is that our legislative frameworks are not designed to deal with probabilistic systems like these. They are designed to be binary—to clearly demarcate zones of permissible action, so that anyone who operates outside those zones

can be immediately held liable for those transgressions. This paradigm has served us well for centuries. Much of our daily existence can be described in terms of a series of systematic actions, those that we perform in our factories or in the normal course of our commercial operations. When things are

black-or-white, it is easy to define what is permissible and what is not. All that the person responsible for a given system needs to do in order to avoid being held liable is ensure that it only performs in a manner expressly permitted by law. While this regulatory approach works in the context of deterministic systems, it simply does not make sense in the context of probabilistic systems. Where it is not possible to determine how an AI system will react in response to the prompts it is given, how do we ensure that the system as a whole complies with the binary dictates of traditional legal frameworks?

As discussed above, this is a feature, not a bug. The reason AI is so useful is precisely

because of these unconventional connections. The more AI developers are able to use post-training and system prompts to constrain the outputs generated by AI, the more it will shackle what AI has to offer us. If we want to maximize the benefits that we can extract from AI, we will have to re-imagine the way we think about liability.

We first need to recognize that these systems can and will perform in ways that are contrary to existing laws. For one-off incidents, we need to give developers a pass—to ensure they are not punished for what is essentially a feature of the system. However, if the AI systems consistently generate harmful outputs, we must notify the persons responsible for that system and give them the opportunity to alter the way the system performs. If they fail to do so even after being notified, they should be held responsible for the consequences. This approach ensures that rather than being held liable for every transgression in the binary way

that current law requires, they have some space to manoeuvre while still being obliged to rectify the system if it is fundamentally flawed.

While this is a radically different approach to liability, it is one that is better aligned with the probabilistic nature of AI systems. It balances the need to encourage innovation in the field of AI while also holding persons responsible for these systems liable when systemic failings occur.

There is, however, one category of harms that might call for a different approach. AI systems make available previously inaccessible information and explain it in ways that ensure that even those unskilled in the art can understand it. This means that potentially dangerous information is more easily available to those who may want to misuse it. This is referred to as the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear risks (CBRN risks) of AI and AI could make it much easier for persons with criminal intent to engineer deadly toxins, deploy biological weapons and initiate nuclear attacks. If there is one category of risk that deserves a stricter liability approach, it is this. Happily, this is something that responsible AI developers are deeply cognizant of and are actively working to ensure.

**Probabilistic digital systems complicate guilt assignment but we'll need tight controls against major harms**



## OUR VIEW



## There's a case for heavy taxes on MNC royalties

Royalty payments to MNCs by their local units have been rising—even going above dividend payouts in some cases. India needs shareholder vigilance and fiscal action to curb excesses

Even as revenue growth for companies in India has reduced its pace to a canter, royalty payments sent abroad by several Indian offshoots of multinational companies (MNCs) are galloping ahead. In several cases noted by market regulator Sebi, royalty payments exceed dividends. In fact, the higher the firm's expense on royalty payments, the lower the profit and thus lower the possible dividend outgo from it. In 2023, the Indian government increased the withholding tax on royalty payments and fees for technical services from 10% to 20%. In fact, there is a strong case for raising the normal tax on royalty payments to the applicable corporate-tax rate. On some types of royalty-payment hikes that have no rational basis, the tax rate on the incremental payout could go as high as 100%. To curb excesses in this practice, it is not enough for Indian rules to require that locally listed units of MNCs get shareholder approval for raising royalties. Accountability to equity holders needs to be equitable and sharp, no doubt, but we need fiscal action as well.

All royalty claims are not equal. Those paid for intellectual property (IP) licences are the most legitimate. Patents and other forms of IP have a definite life expectancy; by the time they expire, companies are expected to have fully recouped their investment in them and earned a decent return. While trademarks need renewal, a brand name with special consumer appeal might be what sets a product apart from its competitors. In such cases too, brand strength may justify a royalty. But when it comes to brands that most of us can hardly even recall, let alone identify with or value, the logic weakens. It's hard to see why Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) would've paid its parent

Unilever royalty on its Knorr label slapped onto flour and the like (before Unilever sold off its flour and salt business in 2023), for example. That name of German origin was no match for its own homegrown *atta* brand Annapurna, which it offloaded last year along with Captain Cook salt. On the whole, it is unclear how local MNC units justify their rising royalty bills. It might be argued that royalty payment excesses will self-correct. After all, if any company were to load its product pricing with a liberal slather of royalty, a local competitor that is not so burdened, but has invested in brand credibility, would be able to undercut the royalty-paying player and corner a larger share of the market. This pressure would work only if both play in the same quality bracket, though. A graded tax on royalties, with the rate going up as transfers grow as a percentage of revenues, would not only deter local MNC units from overpaying parents, but also magnify the self-regulatory power of market competition.

What's logged as an expense by the Indian unit of an MNC is not a conventional cost, given that it is a decision in which its power equation with the parent may play a big role. In fact, at a conceptual level, royalty is a return on capital invested. Like profits, or interest payments in the hands of lenders, which are taxed on these as it amounts to income for them. Royalty should be taxed in India on par with any other form of return on capital. Levies on royalty should be seen in the same light as taxation of profits, interpreted as what companies owe the government for governance that enables companies to do business and generate returns on capital. All said, while shareholders do need to take a closer look at royalties, fiscal action could be especially effective.

valuing critical thinking and emphasizing research that addresses global challenges. So one can be pardoned for assuming that in a society and polity as sharply polarized as today's America, these features of its elite institutions would remain unchallenged. But with Donald Trump returning to power the set is set to take oath as the next US president in early 2025 against a pushback from liberal America, the role of the Ivy League is back in political conversation.

For example, in a recent article for the *Atlantic* magazine, a prominent conservative commentator David Brooks argues that while Ivy League schools provide a rigorous academic environment and elite social networks, they also contribute to deepening societal divisions. These institutions, by favouring students from wealthy backgrounds and perpetuating a particular set of social norms and values, have created an insular elite that lacks empathy for broader societal issues. In this view, Ivy League graduates often share a set of assumptions that can be disconnected from the everyday realities of many Americans.

This argument is linked to a wider debate on the reasons behind Trump's continuing salience in US politics. Trump has managed to tap into the sentiment of a large section of

the United States that is feeling unmoored from its domestic context, and as a result disenfranchised, as if their views don't count and their voices don't matter. In particular, he has been extremely effective in speaking to the socioeconomic grievances of those without college degrees who have been revolting against the privileged elites seen to be looking down on them.

A backlash against economic globalization, particularly in the working-class and rust-belt regions of the US, has been a central factor in Trump's political ascent. For all its seeming advantages, globalization also led to significant job losses in industries such as steel, manufacturing and textiles, especially in the American Midwest. As these sectors relocated to countries with cheaper labour and US communities experienced economic stagnation, the working class felt left behind. The benefits of globalization, such as cheaper goods and increased access to international markets, were often

seen as being unevenly distributed, mostly favouring large corporations, financial elites and urban centres, while labour in the US faced stagnant wages and negligible prospects of social mobility. This divide between the winners and losers of globalization has been growing for some time now and Trump's rise has been a manifestation of that split.

Both the Democrat and Republican party elites are viewed as culprits in this regard, pursuing policies that left a large part of the country out of the mainstream of benefits, leading to a sense of dispossession among working classes. This was accentuated by cultural anxieties, particularly around immigration, national identity and the changing demographic profile of the US. As immigration and cultural exchange got a fillip, some Americans—especially in rural and industrial regions—felt that their traditional values were at threat.

Ironically, the Democrats, who have traditionally been America's party of the working

class, are viewed today as a meritocratic elite who not only look down on middle America, but increasingly also lack the vocabulary to have an honest conversation with a large part of their own country.

These trends are not unique to the US. The wider West is facing this challenge and some strands of this debate are also visible in the Indian democratic context.

But it is the growing focus on the role of America's elite higher-education institutions in shaping this divide that is most illuminating. The idea that 'good education' would lead to a better sense of community is so ingrained in our understanding that we often fail to examine what 'good education' is resulting in. In the case of the US, quality education seems to be perpetuating social inequality instead of fostering a more diverse and inclusive intellectual and leadership culture.

As India struggles to give coherence to its higher-education landscape and as our own elites remain mesmerized by the Ivy League, we should carefully absorb lessons from the American experience and keep our focus on a more inclusive approach to higher education, one that broadens access and fosters a greater sense of social responsibility among the highly educated elite.

## MY VIEW | ON THE OTHER HAND

## Financial frauds evolve fast but we can still safeguard ourselves

While technology has transformed how scammers operate, reliable ways exist to dodge their traps



VIVEK KAUL  
is the author of 'Bad Money'.

As someone who primarily writes on money, I'm often approached for advice on resolving financial fraud. Unfortunately, I'm unable to assist, given that once money has left a bank account, it's difficult to get it back.

Before affordable smartphones and widespread internet access became the order of the day, financial fraudsters had to interact with their prospective victims in person, involving assembling people in a hall or visiting their homes to pitch a scheme convincing enough to make individuals part with their hard-earned money.

The classic example has been a Ponzi scheme. The fraudster would promise a very high rate of return to prospective investors. Carried away by greed, these investors would invest. The fraudster would use the money being brought in by newer investors to pay off the earlier ones. Once early investors were paid, they would talk about their huge return, making others envious. This envy would get more money into the scheme and keep it going until the fraudster decided to scoot.

This approach made the acquisition of potential victims expensive. Physical space had to be hired. Employees had to be kept on payrolls to keep the fraud going. Affordable smartphones and cheap internet have lowered the cost of acquiring those who can be defrauded, if not made the operation itself easier.

Consider all the unsolicited phone calls promising quick riches we receive these days. Typically, this involves transferring money to some bank account. Fraudsters can take this initial amount and disappear, or they can keep the fraud going by turning it into a Ponzi scheme by returning some of the investors' money and encouraging them to invest more.

Then there are fraudsters (read financial influencers) who like to sell investment courses that are 'supposed' to help anyone buying the course get rich quickly: a fraud carried out under the garb of selling something useful.

Of course, not everyone who fraudsters call falls for their sweet talk. But some do. And that keeps them going. All it needs is continuous calling from newer numbers. This mode of operation is similar to the classic Nigerian scam where emails promising huge riches were sent out. Most people didn't fall for the scam, but some did.

Now, the sender of those emails had no idea of who the gullible recipients were who would fall for the scam. As Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner write in *Think Like a Freak*: "Gullibility is in this case an unobservable trait." But there was some method to this madness of sending out a huge number of emails. As Levitt and Dubner write: "The scammer wants to find the guy who hasn't heard of the [Nigerian scam]... Anybody who doesn't fall off their chair laughing is exactly who he wants to talk to." The scammers who call and promise investment riches are taking a somewhat similar approach. Though calling up individuals one-by-one is much harder than sending out bulk email messages, it is easier than having to gather people in a room.

Then there is the one-time-password (OTP) fraud, involving a caller calling and asking for an OTP on some pretext. Once the OTP has been shared, money gets transferred out of the bank account of the targeted individual. At the heart of this fraud is the inherent trust on

which modern businesses operate. As Dan Davies writes in *Lying for Money*: "Trust—particularly between complete strangers, with no interactions beside relatively anonymous market transactions—is the basis of the modern industrial economy." This trust leads to many people innocently sharing their OTPs and losing money.

Indeed, the success of these scams has possibly led to two things. First, it may have got more hopefuls into the business, increasing competition and, for lack of a better term, decreasing the kind of money that was being made earlier. Second, widespread media reports have hopefully made more individuals aware of such scams, and thus made them harder to execute.

This has perhaps led to fraudsters becoming more innovative, coming up with newer concepts like parcel scams and digital arrests where they seem to have been helped by the fact that a lot of private individual data is now easily and illegally available in the public domain. This helps fraudsters make threats like a 'digital arrest'—even though there is no such thing under the law—sound more credible, creating what Davies calls a world of illusion and defrauding individuals of their hard-earned money.

So, what's the way out of this? *Caveat emptor*. Or, as Davies puts it, when it comes to a financial fraud, everything can be 'brought to a halt at a very early stage if anyone had taken care to confirm all the facts.'

The simplest solution is to not take calls from unknown numbers. If someone is trying to reach out, they are likely to message. But this suggestion does not seem to work with people of my parents' generation, who are in their seventies and eighties. They grew up in an era of trunk calls, and to many of them, every call seems like someone trying to reach out in an emergency and must thus be answered. The Latin phrase *Mundus vult decepti-ergo decipitur* describes this aptly: 'The world wants to be deceived, let it therefore be deceived.'

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.

JOHN COTTON DANA

## THEIR VIEW

## The rise of Trump poses a paradox of higher education

HARSH V. PANT



is professor of international relations, King's College London, and vice president for studies at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.

This is the time of year when India's best and brightest get busy applying for admission to America's elite higher education institutions. For many in India, getting admission in an Ivy League institution has long been a benchmark of success. The US higher education system has been the envy of the world in more ways than one. Its excellence has played a major role in sustaining America's global leadership by projecting its soft power far and wide, attracting the best of talent to the nation's shores and using it to retain its cutting edge in the realm of ideas and innovation.

Ivy League institutions are hubs for ground-breaking research in diverse sectors, fuelling economic growth, enhancing national security and influencing global policies. In addition, these universities serve as cultural and intellectual ambassadors for the US, shaping global perspectives on democracy, innovation and higher education. They contribute to America's competitive edge by providing rigorous academic training, culti-



## FIRST COLUMN LESSONS IN HUMILITY AND FAITH

Are we ready to confront the truth of our smallness in the grand scheme of existence?



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Have we realised that we are intrinsically small souls? That we only play small roles, yes, of different levels, but always small. I will cite many examples to substantiate this fact in this article. The only big is God, who is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. He controls everything. We shouldn't be surprised by the reality of us being small. What did we expect? There are billions of us and all interdependent.

We cannot exist without the support of others right from our birth. Ravana was puffed up because he thought that he was big, having defeated important entities. But he was made to bite the dust and he accepted that his highly bloated ego was his undoing. Hitler thought that he was big and was going to control the world. What happened? He committed suicide having realised his smallness. Nixon was President of the USA – a large and prosperous nation. He was forced to resign, because of his underhanded activities. Napoleon was similarly humiliated when he was banished from his country to live in Elba – an Italian island, away from his dear country France.

Smallness is only one of our handicaps; ignorance is another. Despite the vast knowledge Ravana possessed, he was ignorant like most of us; he ignored the reality of God. Only the most fortunate like



Sant Tulsidas transcend the barrier of ignorance. What will you call Kansa? He kept on trying to kill the child Krishna without realising that the Lord cannot be killed. Ultimately, Lord Krishna had to kill him. Duryodhana saw so much of Lord Krishna, but somehow it didn't sink in that the Lord was different; He was God. He saw how the Lord protected Draupadi from being disrobed; how Arjuna was protected by bringing back sunlight; and many such instances. His ignorance was quite deep-seated. What will you call persons, who outwardly pretend to be servants of God, but molest unsuspecting children?

Their depth of darkness, which engulfs their consciousness does not let them see that punishment is coming. Only after they are hit with severe punishments they realise that they are quite helpless really. Draupadi realised it and cried for the Lord's help, which the merciful Lord provided. Arjuna knew in his heart that he was enjoying the protection of the Lord. That is how he was able to triumph over very powerful adversaries. In the modern era, famous film stars have committed suicide.

We become very impressed by the fame they enjoy but little do we realise that they are just as helpless as we are. Wealthy people are no better when they are hit with mental trauma as a result of extraordinarily stressful events, which shatter their sense of security, making them feel insecure in this dangerous world we live in. Yes, this world is a place of misery (The Bhagavad-Gita 8.15), as long as one does not take shelter from God. Both external and internal dangers exist. Demonic forces are out there to harm us in order to gain some pecuniary advantage like by stealing from us. Then, one does not know what is in store due to our past sinful acts. The smart thing is to come under the protection of God. So, what do I do? Having done my duty, I try to leave it to my Lord. Believe me, He takes care of me better than I could have imagined. It sounds like a fairy tale, but I am one of millions, who are benefiting in the present and have benefited thus in the past.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

# Realigning India's economic strategy

Achieving the ambitious goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047 demands a decisive overhaul of current economic policies



ATUL SEHGAL



The world is undergoing rapid political changes. With these geopolitical changes underway, it becomes imperative to relook at the current strategy for economic development to meet the declared target of achieving a developed nation status by 2047. It becomes necessary to realign and readjust the policy points with the changing circumstances. Countries become rich by producing and selling globally valuable and value-added products. India's share in global trade has to grow rapidly from the present meagre 1.8 per cent in goods exports and 2.8 per cent in goods imports. In the service sector too, India needs to enhance its share of delivered services upwards from the present 6 per cent. How will this happen? We need to take quantum measures and hard steps without caring for internal political expediency. Global political scenario may affect the choice of strategic steps but it can have, at best, limited effect if we as a nation are determined, focused and forthright.

Nothing can come in the way if we act united and our government performs its actions without fear or favour. The government's backtracking on the Agriculture and Farm Bills of 2019 was an unfortunate incident. Such incidents should not recur. The government buckled under the fake protests by agro market middlemen masquerading as farmers who created a false show of protests to put spokes in the wheel of the Bills and sabotage them. The government, under fear of burgeoning vandalism by anti-national elements to prevent the promulgation of Bills, backed by foreign enemy countries capitulated and rolled back the Bills. This should not have happened. The country paid a heavy price for this as agriculture is still the mainstay of India's economy. If only those important Bills had been passed, we would have witnessed an economic growth rate increase of at least 2 per cent over the existing. Let our government bring back those Bills at the earliest appropriate time to provide a vital boost to our economy. The other important area



THE GOVERNMENT BUCKLED UNDER THE FAKE PROTESTS BY AGRO MARKET MIDDLEMEN MASQUERADING AS FARMERS WHO CREATED A FALSE SHOW OF PROTESTS TO PUT SPOKES IN THE WHEEL OF THE BILLS AND SABOTAGE THEM

that needs the urgent attention of the government is the MSME sector which continues to be stagnant. This sector is the prime driver of employment growth and needs steps to facilitate the establishment of new units and expansion of the existing ones. These steps are—bureaucratic reforms to cut red tape and reduce unnecessary regulatory compliances that engender corruption and impede growth. To boost Indigenous manufacturing and increase the share of manufacturing in the national GDP from 16 per cent (almost stagnant since 2015) to upwards of 20 per cent, rebooting the entire Make in India program is needed. The blueprint of this otherwise visionary plan was, alas, not implemented seriously.

Too much dependence on foreign capital and FDI was never forthcoming and efforts should have been made to utilise domestic capital. The central sector and state sector Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) should have taken the initiative in enhancing domestic manufacturing. Also, Make in India should have emphasised Make by India. Bureaucratic reforms, an increase in domestic manufacturing especially by PSUs by increasing import tariffs and further increasing fiscal concessions are some of the steps needed. Good work has been done in the area of defence and space in this context by encouraging and promoting startups.

This should be extended to other sectors of the economy. Value-added manufacturing in agriculture, food, healthcare and education will go a long way in boosting indigenous manufacturing and even exports. It is quite a pity that in spite of the wonderful success of the BJP government in the cleanup of the Banks, its benefit has not percolated to domestic manufacturing. Why out of the

100 smart cities conceived in 2014, only about 20 have seen the light of the day and that too partially? The establishment of special economic zones and specialised product production zones was suboptimal but its implementation has also got stuck in the legislative and bureaucratic quagmires. Bureaucratic reforms, I reiterate, are an emergent necessity. Large imports from China over the last ten years have indeed prevented the growth of MSMEs in the country. Many pre-existing factories faced closure and many manufacturers turned traders. India's exports to China in 2023-24 were USD 16.65 billion, while imports stood at USD 101.75 billion, leaving a trade deficit of more than USD 85 billion. Efforts were made by the ruling NDA government to contain Chinese imports. But most of the curtailment took place in lower-end consumer goods and less than could be made in import of industrial goods. Irrespective of government policy, if our countrymen had decided to boycott Chinese goods that can be produced in India, we would have made a huge dent in Chinese imports and facilitated the growth of the domestic manufacturing industry. But this did not happen. The land acquisition Amendment Bill was presented in Parliament on 10 March 2015 but could not be passed due to opposition by non-BJP lawmakers in the Rajya Sabha where the ruling NDA lacked a clear majority in numbers. The opposition party MPs called the proposed amendments anti-farmer and anti-poor. The proposed amendments sought to remove requirements for approval from farmers to proceed with land acquisition under five broad categories of projects. Its passage continues to hang fire. It is the foundational base of the Make in India program. When will it be

passed? Political expediency has been truly the bane of our country and the main impediment to our fast-track economic progress. In the above context, it would be appropriate to mention that strongly nationalistic citizens can collectively create conditions conducive to the growth of the domestic industry. The economic resurgence of Germany and Japan post World War 2 are case in point. Though the USA lent economic support to these countries, their citizens were patriotically driven to establish their domestic manufacturing base and the countries developed into major industrial and economic powers in a period of barely two decades following their defeat and total devastation in 1945, the end year of the war. Both these countries lay stress on manufacturing, innovation and technology development. Their emphasis was on production and value-added exports. A similar strategy is needed. India has been the world's major economic power for millennia and in keeping with its inherent potential; it is capable of a long-term economic growth rate of 12 per cent.

For this to happen, the aforesaid steps brook no delay. In the destiny of nations, there are some phases when it becomes necessary to take bold steps in line with progressive principles of economic development rather than get bogged down by over-strategising and political expediency. Our revered political and economic scholar Chanakya had stated that Dharma (righteousness) should take precedence over everything else in governance and even strategy should be aligned with universal divine Dharma. We need to proceed further in our economic journey accordingly.

(The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

## Reaping our demographic dividend: Can skilling be the secret sauce?

With coordinated action, innovative strategies and a commitment to scalable skill development, India can emerge as a global economic and workforce leader

With a staggering 1.44 billion people 68 per cent of them between the ages of 15 and 64, India stands to gain from an immense, globally unmatched, demographic dividend that presents an unprecedented opportunity for economic growth amidst global challenges of declining birth rates and labour shortages. The vast labour force positions India to realise the government's vision of becoming the world's third-largest economy and the skills capital of the world. This, coupled with the global talent supply chains – particularly to countries like India – can significantly enhance our geopolitical standing. East Asia offers compelling evidence of

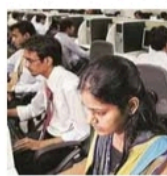


ARUNESH SINGH

reaping the demographic dividend. UNFPA reported that Korea saw its per-capita gross domestic product grow about 2,200 per cent between 1950 and 2008, and Thailand's GDP grew 970 per cent. The pressing question now is whether India can fully capitalise on this demographic dividend, and can the skills ecosystem be the key to unlocking this potential. The

Challenge Effectively leveraging the demographic dividend requires addressing several critical challenges. The primary challenge is the need to create sufficient job opportunities to absorb the increasing number of young people entering the workforce. Another key challenge is to bridge the skills gap – the discrepancy between the skills that job seekers possess and the skills that employers require, thereby creating opportunities for meaningful employment. This must be achieved on a large scale as the country is already home to 103 million youth categorised as NEET (not in education, employment or training) and millions of youth enter working age annually. Crafting Scalable Solutions To leverage India's demograph-

ic dividend effectively, scalable solutions for skill development are imperative. This involves creating an ecosystem – support large-scale skill enhancement initiatives. Firstly, systemic change cannot occur in isolation; therefore, it is vital for government bodies and private companies to collaborate and pool resources, expertise and funding. Therefore, fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs) is essential for expanding skill development initiatives. It is important to align training programs with market demands, focus on outcome-based skilling, leverage technology and design effective, replicable, and adaptable programs. This collaboration can significantly contribute to cre-



ating a more resilient and practical skill development ecosystem. Several initiatives in the realm of skill development highlight the transformative impact of targeted training and strategic partnerships. One such initiative is Project AMBER, a unique public-private partnership (PPP) where each stakeholder – government, training partners, and the pri-

ivate sector (philanthropy) – contributes to the model. This initiative aims to enhance overall employment and retention outcomes by prioritising the quality of training, mentoring, and retention. Such initiatives not only help achieve success at an individual level but also lay the groundwork for broader systemic changes that can redefine the impact of the skilling ecosystem. Secondly, aligning skilling programs with market demand is crucial. Collaborating with businesses provides valuable input on course content which ensures that learners are trained on skill sets that are relevant for the industry. Employer feedback mechanisms enable continuous adjustments to training programs, which are in sync with

industry requirements. This approach addresses the skills gap by equipping learners with relevant skills, helping them adapt effectively to the workplace. Ultimately, this strategy offers a solution to talent scarcity and unemployment by bridging the gap between workforce skills and market demands. To ensure training programs remain dynamic, it's important to integrate data-driven insights to evaluate the progress of the trainees. Thirdly, focusing on outcome-based skilling is essential as it prioritises employment and retention rather than just training. Outcome-based skilling is an approach to training that focuses on achieving specific, measurable outcomes rather than merely completing a set

curriculum or an instructional programme. Finally, with the right use of technology, we can design skill development programmes that are both effective and scalable and create significant impact. Technology can greatly expand the reach and accessibility of these programmes through online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and mobile-friendly resources, even in remote areas. At the same time, standardised models like 'train-the-trainer' programmes ensure that rapid expansion does not come at the cost of quality, maintaining consistency across different regions.

(The writer is CEO, Generation India Foundation with inputs from Souabh Anand; views are personal)

## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

### Minority persecution

Das' arrest highlights Bangladeshi Hindus' plight

**T**HE arrest of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh on Tuesday has once again spotlighted the challenges faced by minorities in the country. Das, ISKCON leader and advocate for minority rights, was arrested on charges of sedition after allegedly disrespecting the Bangladeshi flag—a claim his supporters contest. The arrest, coupled with the denial of bail, has sparked widespread protests, both in Bangladesh and across the border in India. The context of this unrest lies in a troubling pattern of minority persecution. Despite constitutional assurances of equality, Bangladeshi Hindus, who constitute around nine per cent of the population, frequently endure violence, vandalism and social exclusion. Reports of mob attacks on Hindu homes and temples are alarmingly common, especially during political transitions—as has been seen since Sheikh Hasina's ouster—or communal tensions. While the current unrest ostensibly revolves around Das' arrest, it underscores the broader insecurity experienced by minorities in a state where Islam is the official religion.

India's official response to the incident—urging the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus to ensure minority safety and uphold freedom of expression and assembly—reflects its concerns for the region's stability. However, Bangladesh must recognise that addressing these issues is not merely about appeasing international pressure. The long-term solution lies in fostering inclusivity, ensuring swift justice for victims of communal violence and protecting the fundamental rights of its citizens, irrespective of faith.

The onus is on Dhaka to restore trust by heeding the calls of groups like the Sammit Sanatan Jagran Jote, which advocate for special tribunals to expedite justice for victims of persecution. Failing this, the cycle of unrest threatens to escalate, undermining Bangladesh's image as a progressive democracy. Peace and security for all minorities must be a lived reality.

### Female vote bank

Welfare schemes alone not enough

**T**WELVE women have been elected to the 81-member Jharkhand Assembly this time, the highest number since the formation of the state in 2000. The talking point though is how women voters, who outnumbered men by nearly six lakh in the turnout, played a key role in propelling the Hemant Soren-led government to its second consecutive term. The clincher, by all accounts, was the Maiba Samman Yojana, providing a monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to underprivileged women. Months ahead of the polls, a hike to Rs 2,500 was approved from December. If the BJP gained because of its popular Ladi Behna scheme in Madhya Pradesh, in Maharashtra, the Mahayuti coalition's Ladki Bahin Yojana played a pivotal role in its electoral success. It offers Rs 1,500 as monthly direct cash transfer to women heads of households. A pre-election promise was to increase the amount to Rs 2,100. The focus on women as a target voter group is changing the electoral dynamics, but larger questions remain.

A social security net for those who need it the most is essential, whatever the cost involved and irrespective of the misgivings regarding subsidies. The caveat is to not reduce welfare schemes tailored to address women's needs as mere tools of political outreach. An audit of such policy interventions is a must to gauge the impact the schemes are having in lending momentum—financially, in the social realm and in political engagement.

A noticeable change of late has been the bridging of the gender gap in voter turnouts. That said, the arrival of a distinctive women's constituency in Indian politics is still in the works. The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill after a prolonged delay offers hope, but any meaningful outcome requires a sustained commitment to the avowed goals.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1924

### Guru-Ka-Bagh inquiry

THE Guru-Ka-Bagh incidents form a unique chapter in the history of the Akali struggle in Punjab, exhibiting the spirit of self-sacrifice and unflinching determination of the Akalis on the one hand and the excesses of an irresponsible bureaucracy on the other. The forbearance and self-restraint displayed by the Akalis in the face of unprovoked violence by the police and the manner in which they braved day after day the cruel treatment meted out to them by the constabulary are, indeed, without a parallel in the history of recent times. Special importance, therefore, naturally attached to the report of the committee appointed by the All-India Congress Working Committee to inquire into the whole affair. The committee consisted of five distinguished public men of the country, none of whom had anything, directly or indirectly, to do with the Akali agitation of which the incidents which formed the subject matter of the inquiry were an offshoot. Four of the committee members were eminent lawyers, one of them being a former Advocate General of Madras; the fifth was a European. This independent committee examined as many as 110 witnesses and went through a large mass of documents; and after a careful and protracted investigation, it has come to conclusions which are entirely in accord with the views of those who witnessed the gruesome occurrences from day to day. The committee has attached the greatest possible weight to every argument advanced by the government in support of the insensate excesses of its officials, and had made every possible allowance for the exigencies of the situation.

# The rat race is ruining education

Coaching centre-driven strategy is becoming more important than the joy of creative learning



AVIJIT PATHAK  
SOCIOLOGIST

**R**ECENTLY, I read an illuminating piece written by Henry Giroux—one of the finest educationists of our times. While reflecting on the grand victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election, Giroux examined the crisis in education. If education is reduced to a set of 'instrumental skills needed to compete in the global economy' or if it continues to privilege 'standardised tests over critical thinking', as he reminded us, it will lose its radical and emancipatory potential. His complaint is that even the democrats or liberals in America have failed to recognise what education ought to be—'not merely a service or a tool for economic adaptation, but the very foundation of democratic life'.

As the prevalent practice of education seeks to produce 'compliant workers rather than active/informed citizens', argues Giroux, 'Americans find themselves in a world where ignorance is weaponised and truth is under siege'. No wonder he sees with deep anguish the rise of 'a band of white supremacists, neo-Nazis, radical Christian nationalists and cruel band of misogynists and neoliberal fascists' in the US. Moreover, as neoliberal universities tend to prioritise 'profit over democratic values, civic responsibility and critical thought', we see the invasion of 'pedagogical terrorism' that suppresses critical thinking, distorts history, stifles dissent and dehumanises the oppressed.

Indeed, in the age of 'fascist dream-worlds', as Giroux argues



CRISIS: Our children are getting increasingly deprived of the taste of self-reflexive, libertarian education. FILE PHOTO

passionately, 'what is needed is a collective determination to reshape mass consciousness through critical pedagogy'.

It seems that we, too, can draw a couple of lessons from his insights and his plea for a creatively nuanced critical pedagogy. In fact, the rise of Trump is not an isolated phenomenon in the age of right-wing nationalism. Even our own country, despite the ritualisation of periodic elections, is not altogether free from the monologues of 'populist-charismatic' leaders, the tyranny of majoritarianism, the celebration of hyper-masculine nationalism and some kind of Hindu supremacist thinking. In this context, I will make two arguments.

First, in India too, we are witnessing some sort of 'pedagogical terrorism'—particularly, the way our children are getting increasingly deprived of the taste of self-reflexive, libertarian education. Yes, their formative years are primarily spent preparing for standardised tests like JEE, NEET and CUET. As this sort of coaching centre-driven instrumental strategy becomes more important than the joy of creative learning, critical thinking and the aspirations for a just

Students' formative years are primarily spent preparing for standardised tests like JEE, NEET and CUET.

and humane world, it becomes exceedingly difficult for them to celebrate a vision of life beyond careerism, consumerism and economic productivity. It destroys all alternative strivings, kills the power of the imagination and makes them accept that the ultimate destiny of life is to become 'compliant workers' rather than politically awakened, culturally sensitive and active citizens in search of a democratic living.

Second, we are witnessing the systematic decay of our public universities. In recent times, the

organised attack on some of our leading public universities indicates that it is becoming increasingly difficult to retain the spirit of academic freedom, the culture of nuanced debates and conversations and the ethos of cultural pluralism. Is it, therefore, surprising that, according to the 2023 Academic Freedom Index, India is ranked 161st out of 179 countries? Imagine the fate of a university if the authorities get panicky when a professor plans to organise a seminar on the Palestine crisis or the way Israel violated all sorts of international laws, engaged in war crimes, didn't spare even schools, hospitals and residential buildings and killed no less than 43,000 people over the past 13 months!

While the vibrancy of critical thinking is repressed, universities are asked to engage in an absurd game—the strategic act of pleasing the 'ranking agencies' through the production of largely meaningless research papers, seminars and projects. What do you do with a 'top-ranking' university if it loses its soul and conscience, robs education of its transformative potential and produces only a bunch of conformists?

In fact, together with the decline of public universities, we are also seeing the corporatisation of universities. These corporate/neoliberal universities sell education as a 'product' to their rich and affluent 'clients'.

For instance, a fancy private university in India charges more than Rs 12 lakh per year for an undergraduate programme. Even if the university claims that it wants to help students become 'well-rounded individuals who can think critically', the fact is that, barring exceptions, young learners from an elitist/exclusive/corporate university are likely to miss what, as my experience as a faculty member at Jawahar Nehru University suggests, a sensitive student from an inclusive public university experiences. This includes the empathy that an exposure to cultural diversity generates, the art of listening to the tales of caste/class/ethnic/gender violence that some of his/her friends might have experienced and hence the art of resistance against casteism, religious fundamentalism, majoritarianism, patriarchy and gross economic inequality.

I witness a strange paradox. While the 'Poshan Tracker' data for June 2024 reveals that more than 50 per cent of the children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition in India, a branded coaching centre tempts children of the aspiring class to pay 'merely' Rs 1.14,460 for the NEET Vidyapeeth dropper course! The question is whether our schools and universities will only train our children to fit into this unjust system, internalise the logic of social Darwinism and accept uncritically what neoliberal/authoritarian masters in India love to prescribe: a mix of 'economic productivity' and 'Indian values' or the alliance of billionaires and populist/narcissistic leaders (almost like the Trump-Elon Musk nexus). Or, should some of us dare to learn from the likes of Giroux and plead for the libertarian potential of critical pedagogy?

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child. —Maria Montessori

## How Palampur lost its glory

SUDHIRENDAR SHARMA

**I**T was not a big town, but rather a small one—but big enough to stay in my memories. It is worth revisiting those vivid hazy images that reflect the past in detail. Springs emerged at many places; water flowing from streams encircled the town like arteries; bridge pathways connected clusters of houses; small paddie fields punctuated the continuum; and the sprawling tea gardens dotted the terrain. There was an unwritten harmony in the town's landscape.

In the subsequent years, it would go through an unimaginable transformation. Five decades have radically altered the town. Several springs have died and disappeared; bridge pathways have been replaced by concrete passages; waste-laden streams struggle to flow; and tea gardens are few and far between. The small town has expanded its boundaries and it is as big as it could be. There is nothing worthwhile that could be written about its expansion.

This town is Palampur in Himachal Pradesh, situated some 4,000 ft above sea level. It overlooks the mighty Dhauladhar mountains, which aren't snowed throughout the year. Fans and air-conditioners, which were not to be seen in the past, are now common. With so many structures built across the town and the expanded road network packed with fuel-guzzling automobiles, this change is neither dramatic nor unexpected.

Local food security is nobody's concern as not much grows here or is allowed to grow. Packed food in colourful plastic bags is everybody's favourite. The net sown area in the state has shrunk in the last 10 years; this was only to be expected in the backdrop of the erstwhile small paddie fields. Tourists carry their own consumptive requirements and throw away the waste for locals to dispose of.

The decline in the net sown area is glaring. The land 'liberated' from farming has been put to non-farm use. In the last decade, the non-farm use of agricultural land in the state has increased drastically. Votaries of development see things differently—for them, this trend offers new opportunities and challenges.

However, the transformation of such hill towns across the state is a compelling narrative of change and adaptation. Once characterised by pristine natural beauty and self-sustaining communities, these towns have witnessed rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation and shifting lifestyles in the last few decades.

The evolution of Palampur—from a small town to a big one—serves as a poignant example, showcasing how the delicate balance between nature and tradition is being replaced by concrete structures and modern conveniences.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Sambhal incident a wake-up call

Refer to 'Sambhal mayhem': Sambhal is no different from other troubled areas where political and religious leaders need to take on responsibility. The ensuing political blame game has made things worse. The outbreak of violence suggests that there were gaps in the preparedness of the authorities. People in power must stop using such conflicts as props to bolster their political narrative. This is another wake-up call for systemic changes. The Sambhal deaths should stir leaders from all parties to stop putting political gains above national interest.

ANUJA JAIN, JAMMU

#### Foster communal harmony

With reference to 'Sambhal mayhem': the dash between protesters and the police in Sambhal is an unfortunate development. An investigation must be carried out to ascertain whether the police and the members of the survey team were also responsible for mishandling the situation. It is true that such cases are raised in court only to push the political agenda of dividing society. One wonders whether it is the right thing to take up the past to provoke animosity between two major communities. Such practices vitiate the social ecosystem. The administration, judiciary, political and religious leaders are contributing to exacerbating communal disharmony in the country. We must try to foster communal amity, a prerequisite for India's development.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

#### Out-of-the-box initiative by cops

Appropos of 'Guiding the way', keeping in mind the future of young students, the initiative by the Faridkot police to award an unusual punishment is a welcome move. Such out-of-the-box initiatives have never been seen in Punjab. The kids' parents must also be involved in making sure that they do not repeat such mistakes. The police officials on duty must also be appreciated as they maintained their cool despite having the power to handle such offenders with strict measures. However, if such acts get repeated, an exemplary punishment as per law must also be given to ensure a safe and disciplined society.

RAJESH CHANDER BALI, JALANDHAR

#### Adopt friendly approach

Appropos of 'Guiding the way': adopting punitive and retributive steps to make youngsters realise their mistakes would have an adverse impact on their mental health. An affable approach premised on compassion and empathy would bring about the much-needed change in their behaviour. Parents and teachers must guide them properly through innovative measures that would act as a catalyst for their growth and development. To correct and refine them, recreational and creative ways that make their growth inclusive and learning experience exhilarating must be adopted. All stakeholders must work collectively to guide them by imparting the right kind of lessons and make them better citizens.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARWAL

#### Modi might try to help Adani

With reference to 'Adani ripples in the neighbourhood': PM Modi's ties with beleaguered industrialist Gautam Adani pose a tremendous risk to India's economic interests overseas. Kenya cancelled the airport and power transmission deals with the Adani Group after he was indicted by the US. In Bangladesh, the High Court has ordered an inquiry into the government's controversial power purchase agreement with Adani. Our nation's foreign policy cannot be subordinated to the interests of one business conglomerate. People fear that the PM may strike a deal with Trump to help Adani, but that will cost India dear.

CAPT AMAR JEET (RETD), KHARAR

#### Higher stakes for US in Ukraine

Refer to 'Ominous escalation in Russia-Ukraine war': amid the deployment of North Korean troops and the persistent threat of nuclear weapons, the US is getting more involved in the Russia-Ukraine war. Donald Trump has vowed to end the war within 24 hours, in stark contrast to the present US stance of providing the maximum possible aid to Ukraine. The possible outcomes can be the continuation of the long war; a shift in the Western policy forcing Russia back to the pre-2022 demarcation line; or Ukraine's surrender to Russia.

VIBHAV GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

# Why scaling back troops on LAC is risky



GEN DUSHYANT SINGH (RETD)  
DG, CENTRE FOR LAND  
WARFARE STUDIES

INDIA and China appear to be moving swiftly towards the normalisation of relations following the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping on October 23 in Kazan, Russia, held on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit. A key outcome of the talks was the initiation of Coordinated Joint Patrolling along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). India's stance on its relationship with China in recent years has been firmly anchored in the principle of resolving friction points along the LAC as a precondition for any meaningful progress. Experts have long stressed the importance of a structured approach to normalisation, involving de-escalation, disengagement and the eventual de-induction of troops from sensitive border areas. However, given the deep trust deficit between the two Asian powers, any move to revert the troop levels to the pre-2020 conditions poses significant risks for India. Recent weeks have seen a substantial momentum in

multilateral diplomacy, with platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit and the G20 meetings fostering an environment conducive to breakthroughs between the two nations. Agreements reportedly under discussion include the resumption of direct flights, reciprocal accreditation of journalists and improved visa facilities, signalling a potential thaw in bilateral relations. While these developments are welcome, they represent only the low-hanging fruit. Any temptation to scale back troop deployments to the pre-2020 levels must be resisted as such a move could prove disastrous. This caution is rooted in China's history of violating border agreements, including the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954), the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (1993), the Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures (1996), the Protocol for the Implementation of Military Confidence-Building Measures (2005) and the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (2012). Despite 31 rounds of talks under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination framework and 21 Corps Commander-level discussions yielding some progress, these mechanisms have failed to prevent incidents like the 1962 war, the 1967 Nathu La conflict, the 1975 firing incident and the



CAUTION: China has repeatedly violated border agreements with India. PH

more recent confrontations at Sumdorong Chu, Chumar, Depsang, Doklam, Galwan and Yangtse. This history underscores the need for continued vigilance in managing bilateral relations and securing the LAC. **A fragile trust** The critical question for India is how much trust can be placed in Xi Jinping's leadership. Time and again, China has embarrassed India by expanding its claims to previously undisputed areas. For instance, Galwan Valley, once considered uncontroversial, became a flashpoint. Similarly, in Bhutan, China arbitrarily raised the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary as a disputed area to pressure India.

Any haste to normalise relations by withdrawing troops will only encourage China to launch another major incursion (the Big One), further undermining India's position.

Disputes along the LAC are categorised as either contested areas or zones of differing perceptions of the boundary. Beyond territorial issues, China's "grey zone" tactics include cyberattacks—India is the second-most targeted country in Asia after Taiwan—causing losses amounting to billions of dollars. Moreover, China actively interferes in India's neighbourhood, straining relations with Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and, to a lesser extent, Bhutan. Instances like its near-success in turning the Maldives against India, gaining port access in Sri Lanka, and suspected military activity on Myanmar's Coco Islands highlight China's strategic

manoeuvring to contain Indian influence in the Indian Ocean region. In this complex and high-stakes environment, it is difficult to trust China's overtures or confidence-building measures. India must ask: What assurances, if any, has Xi Jinping provided to guarantee that China will not engage in future conflicts? Without credible commitments, any premature de-induction of troops could embolden Beijing to initiate further incursions, forcing India into a settlement on unfavourable terms. **The path forward** At a time when trust between India and China is at its nadir and China holds an upper hand in economic, military, intelligence and technological domains, troop de-induction from the LAC must not be entertained under any circumstances. For the first time since Independence, Chinese troops are deployed outside their peacetime accommodations in the challenging high altitudes of the Great Himalayan ranges. This has created significant challenges for Beijing, including backlash from families due to the one-child policy, high sickness rates among Han Chinese soldiers and the need to recruit local troops better suited to the harsh conditions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Despite efforts at theatricalisation, the Tibetan and Xinjiang military regions remain

distinct, reflecting Beijing's logistical and organisational challenges. India must maintain consistent military and diplomatic pressure to compel China to resolve the border issue on favourable terms. Any haste to normalise relations by withdrawing troops will only encourage China to launch another major incursion (the Big One), further undermining India's position. While economic ties with China—India's largest trading partner—offer short-term benefits, these gains should not come at the cost of national security and military readiness. India's current achievements stem from a balanced application of hard and soft power. It is imperative to continue this approach, leveraging diplomatic and military strengths to buy time for enhancing military capabilities, completing the transition to theatreisation, and ensuring uninterrupted economic growth. These efforts will help India realise the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) by 2047—a nation backed by a robust military, ready to meet any challenge from adversaries, while ensuring the prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens. This would also prevent any major clash between India and China and, thus, will help both Asian giants to achieve their centenary goals peacefully.

# Punjab's road initiative shows the way to safer highways



NAVDEEP SINGH  
TRAFFIC ADVISER,  
GOVT OF PUNJAB

AS RAO  
ADGP (TRAFFIC & ROAD  
SAFETY), PUNJAB

TO tackle road safety issues and the alarming number of road fatalities in the state, one of the major challenges of Punjab, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann held a meeting of the Chief Secretary, Transport Minister, Director General of Police (DGP), ADGP (Traffic) and Traffic Adviser, Punjab, in April, 2023. Around 12 to 13 persons die in mishaps every day. An innovative and determined approach to reduce the accidents was decided upon. The Punjab Road Safety and Traffic Research Centre (PRSTRC) was directed to identify accident-prone routes using a real-time data-driven approach. The PRSTRC mapped 144 critical routes spanning 4,100 km, where at least 60 per cent of the mishaps happened, usually between 6 pm and midnight, when the enforcement was lean. With only 1,800 traffic personnel for over 1.3 crore vehicles, 180 cities and towns and more than 72,000 km of highways, Punjab's 15-year-old highway patrol system,

with its ageing fleet and outdated gadgets, was ill-equipped to handle the rising challenges. Determined to find a speedy solution, the financial and procedural obstacles were cleared by the CM. On August 11, 2023, the Cabinet approved the creation of the Sadak Surakhya Rce (SSRF). Designed for 24/7 patrolling on the identified high-risk routes, the SSRF was set up with 1,600 personnel in its first phase, including 1,255 fresh recruits. They underwent a rigorous six-month training. The SSRF team has an average age of 22, with women constituting 28 per cent of the strength, marking a significant step towards gender equality in law enforcement. Women were earlier excluded from vehicle driving and maintenance training due to outdated norms. The SSRF became the first Punjab Police unit to have 350 women in motor transport training. Incidentally, all of them had volunteered for it. A 12-module course was introduced, covering crash investigation, emergency response, road engineering basics and advanced navigation technology. Conducted at the in-service training centre in Kapurthala, it focused on imparting practical skills. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau reveals that 650 to 700 police and paramilitary personnel



INCLUSIVITY: Women constitute 28 per cent of the total strength of the Sadak Surakhya Force. FILE PHOTO

lose their lives every year while on duty and 80 to 90 per cent of these fatalities are due to road accidents. These numbers underscore the critical need for improved road safety, especially for those enforcing it. To address this issue, uniforms and vehicles were designed for enhanced visibility for night operations. The uniforms feature retroreflective piping and jackets with reflective bands. The vehicles, Toyota Hilux models, selected for their safety standards and off-road capabilities, are also equipped with retroreflective markings and painted in white, red and yellow colours, ensuring maximum visibility in foggy and low-light conditions, com-

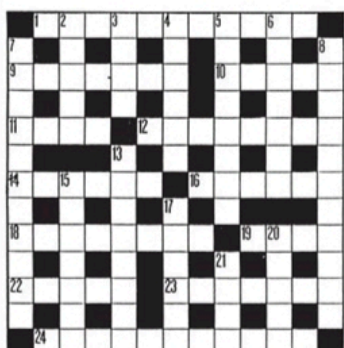
The Sadak Surakhya Force has significantly reduced road fatalities in Punjab by prioritising swift response, real-time, evidence-based policing and high-visibility strategies.

monly experienced during the winter months. The SSRF was officially launched in January this year. Operational since February 1, it has been providing round-the-clock patrolling in all 144 high-risk routes. Each team has four members, including at least one woman, and stationed every 30 km to ensure that accident victims receive medical care within 15 minutes. Strategic halting points, that have been determined by using three years' accident data, ensure optimal coverage and response time. Patrolling routes and schedules (morning, evening, late night and lean hours) are planned using crowd-sourced data from Google Maps and TomTom,

ensuring near-real time response and comprehensive coverage. The second phase will focus on enforcing violations such as speeding, drunk driving, use of mobile phone while driving and non-compliance with helmet and seatbelt laws. The SSRF vehicles are equipped with night-vision speed guns and public address systems to guide the road users. This evidence-based data-driven strategy has shown immediate results. Within eight months, the SSRF has reduced the average emergency response time to just six minutes and 41 seconds, saving numerous lives. Handling over 17,000 accident cases, the SSRF has reduced fatalities on Punjab highways by 20 to 30 per cent. With the socioeconomic cost of a single fatal accident pegged at Rs 1.1 crore, the SSRF's monthly operational cost is less than half the cost of one fatal crash. It is one of the most cost-effective road safety measures. The SSRF has also played an active role in crime prevention, recovery of drugs, arms and stolen goods, intervention in suicide attempts and management of emergencies, like vehicle breakdown and hazardous material spill. To offset its carbon footprint, the SSRF planted 5,000 trees along the routes, promoting greenery and ecological balance, in line with

Punjab's broader vision of sustainable development. Sustained financial and logistical support is required for the SSRF to meet the set targets. Continuous training and motivation of the force are essential to maintain the high standards set for it. The ongoing integration of advanced technologies like AI-based surveillance systems, predictive analytics and advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) offers opportunities for enhancing efficiency. Collaborations with insurance companies, which directly benefit from reduced accidents, could provide additional financial support for the initiative. The Sadak Surakhya Force has revolutionised road safety in Punjab due to political will, scientific planning and dedicated policing. By prioritising intelligence, visibility and swift response, along with real-time, evidence-based policing and high-visibility strategies, the SSRF has significantly reduced road fatalities, setting a benchmark for highway safety in India. The SSRF's success demonstrates how a customised solution, tailored to a state's needs, can drive meaningful change. It has positioned Punjab as a leader in road safety. The SSRF offers a blueprint for safer roads and a brighter future across the nation, marking a new paradigm in road safety.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- The vanguard (7,4)
  - Permanent (7)
  - Ancient Greek philosopher (5)
  - Be apt (4)
  - To regard as (8)
  - Grow less (6)
  - To span (6)
  - Causing obstruction (2,3,3)
  - Unaccompanied (4)
  - Blasphemy (5)
  - Vehicles moving on road (7)
  - Commercially successful books (11)
- DOWN**
- Marriage (5)
  - Filmy (4)
  - Worthless (2,4)
  - Openness to risk (8)
  - Avoiding commitment (7)
  - An outstanding work (11)
  - Brilliant effort (4,2,5)
  - Follower (8)
  - Select circle in society (7)
  - Discontent (6)
  - Express readiness (5)
  - Handle roughly (4)
- Yesterday's solution**
- Across:** 1. Belong, 4. Ignominy, 9. Outlay, 10. Politics, 12. Heal, 13. Gavel, 14. Ache, 17. Highly strung, 20. Cut to the bone, 23. Oust, 24. Fever, 25. Seem, 28. Summit, 29. Impair, 30. Parallel, 31. Snatch.
- Down:** 1. Brouhaha, 2. Lethargy, 3. Neat, 5. Globetrotter, 6. Omit, 7. Idiocy, 8. Yes-men, 11. Raise the ante, 15. Clout, 16. Enter, 18. Tolerant, 19. Besmirch, 21. Toss-up, 22. Usurer, 26. Toil, 27. Omen.

## SU DO KU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

**CALENDAR**

NOVEMBER 27, 2024, WEDNESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Margashirsha Shaka 6
- Margashirsha Purnimasi 12
- Hijri 1446
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 12, up to 6.24 am
- Ayushman Yoga up to 3.13 pm
- Chitra Nakshatra
- Moon enters Libra sign 6:07 pm

## FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	27	10
New Delhi	27	11
Amritsar	24	09
Bathinda	26	09
Jalandhar	24	10
Ludhiana	25	10
Bhrawari	25	10
Hisar	24	09
Sirsa	27	11
Dharamsala	23	10
Manali	17	05
Shimla	17	07
Srinagar	15	01
Jammu	26	11
Kargil	08	-06
Leh	06	-08
Dehradun	25	10
Mussoorie	17	07



## Timely reiteration

Verdict on amendments to Preamble is a reminder of worth of secular values

The Supreme Court of India has done well to rebuff an attempt to question the characterisation of the country as 'secular' and 'socialist' in the amended Preamble to the Constitution. Sections of the right wing have been uneasy for long about the identification of secularism as one of the attributes of India. This opposition has acquired traction among those who see the combination of the state not favouring or opposing any religion and the constitutional protection for minorities as something that renders the polity 'pseudo-secular'. The original assumption of the makers of the Constitution was that the Constitution – with its emphasis on equality before law and equal treatment of all sections, besides the incorporation of the right to profess, practise and propagate any religion and freedom of belief and conscience in the fundamental rights chapter – is inherently secular. In terms of economic policy, Dr B.R. Ambedkar opposed amendments to include the word 'socialist' by arguing that the Constituent Assembly should not tie down future generations to any particular form of economy. Therefore, the words did not form part of the Preamble adopted along with the Constitution in 1949, but were controversially added through the 42nd Amendment enacted during the Emergency. However, that may not be reason enough for the courts to strike down their inclusion based on writ petitions filed in 2020, about 44 years after the amendment.

The Court, in *S.R. Bommai* (1994), ruled that secularism is a basic feature of the Constitution. In another case, it said: "Secularism essentially represents the nation's commitment to treat persons of all faiths equally and without discrimination." Regarding the term 'socialist', it is clear that its presence in the Preamble has not been an impediment to adoption of laws or policies and practices that open up sectors of the economy to open market competition. As the Bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar has pointed out, India has developed its own interpretation of secularism, "wherein the State neither supports any religion nor penalises the profession and practice of any faith". Similarly, the term 'socialist' embodies "the principle of economic and social justice, wherein the State ensures that no citizen is disadvantaged due to economic or social circumstances". The Court has not countenanced the argument that the inclusion of these words came during the Emergency, when Parliament's term was extended, noting that this aspect was debated in Parliament in 1978 when the 44th Amendment Act was considered. As the Constitution completes 75 years of existence, the verdict upholding the inclusion of the terms 'secular' and 'socialist' amounts to a timely reiteration of these fundamental attributes.

## Scot-free

Donald Trump starts second term with a clean slate after major legal reprieve

President-elect Donald Trump has won a major legal reprieve after Special Counsel Jack Smith of the Department of Justice (DOJ) moved to drop the prosecution against him for attempting to overturn the results of the 2020 election – a request granted by the District Judge hearing the case. Mr. Trump, who was in office until 2021, faced criminal charges for encouraging a violent mob to attack the U.S. Capitol on January 6 of that year. Judge Tanya Chutkan said that he has dismissed the election interference charges "without prejudice", which suggests that a future prosecution might be on the cards after Mr. Trump's second term, and when his legal immunity ends. Mr. Smith has also filed motions to drop all federal charges against Mr. Trump that relate to his "misconduct" of classified documents and attempts to obstruct law enforcement officers seeking evidence. Mr. Smith noted that the DOJ "forbids the federal indictment and subsequent criminal prosecution of a sitting President", while adding the decision not to proceed with the indictments and trials was "not based on the merits or strength of the case against the defendant." Two additional cases of criminal indictments are also now in legal limbo. A case on election interference in Georgia has been paused pending an appeals court decision, and in the New York case in which Mr. Trump was convicted on fraud charges linked to paying off an adult film star for her silence over an alleged affair, his conviction has been indefinitely delayed.

Mr. Trump, who was impeached twice on charges relating to his role in the 2021 insurrection and for pressuring Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate President Joe Biden's son Hunter for corruption, has now effectively been given a clean slate for his second term agenda. Mr. Trump's resounding win earlier this month suggests that a majority of voters were not swayed by the ongoing cases and the nearly 100 charges that he faced. Now, armed with the confidence of a significant number of supporters, he has a free hand to shape the domestic and foreign policy paradigms with the help of Republican lawmakers who control both Houses of the U.S. Congress and conservatives who dominate the Supreme Court. The question that more than 74 million Americans who voted for his rival, Vice President and Democrat candidate Kamala Harris, must be wondering about is whether Mr. Trump will proceed further down a divisive path on sensitive issues such as immigration, reproductive rights and the economy, or whether, with less to lose now than ever before, he might strike a more bipartisan note and build bridges with his political opposition for the betterment of all.

Constitution day on November 26, 2024 marked 75 years of the adoption of the Constitution and constitutional governance in independent India. The Constituent Assembly debates show the intellectual engagement of leaders from a spectrum of ideologies, right wing to left wing, in building a single political identity that was accommodative of the interests and rights of multiple cultural groups.

The Constitution-makers accepted the liberal framework, but wanted the state to play a positive role in intervening and reducing inequality due to poor social indicators at the time of Independence. With liberalism, as a political ideology, there was an insistence that there should be freedom for citizens to carry out activities without any state interference. There was the belief that only in a free environment could human potentialities, be they intellectual, moral and physical, be realised. Thus, liberty became the core value of liberalism.

The Indian Constitution makers agreed to create a liberal political state in India. But considering the social and economic inequalities, they felt that a complete withdrawal of the state would perpetuate the existing inequalities and worsen it further. So, it was that the state should be given a positive role to intervene and create conditions for everyone to participate equally in the development process. Thus, affirmative action and reservation policies to treat unequals in an unequal manner to achieve the constitutional vision of equality have become an important aspect of the Indian Constitution.

### An egalitarian outlook

Its vision of equality aims to create an egalitarian society to minimise economic inequalities among the people. Reflecting John Rawls' egalitarian liberalism, including the three important principles of equal basic liberties, equal opportunities and difference, the Constitution aims to create an egalitarian society. The fundamental rights in Part III and the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) in Part IV of the Constitution reflect all the above three principles of egalitarian liberalism. Thus, egalitarian liberalism aims to reduce inequality and not create an absolute equal society. Article 38(2) of DPSP insists that the state shall strive to minimise the inequalities of income and eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities. The constitutional ideological framework lays emphasis on reducing inequalities and creating an egalitarian society based on equal opportunities and facilities through state intervention. Further, Article 39(c) emphasises that the economic system ought not to result in a concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.

The Supreme Court of India has reiterated this principle in many of its judgments till the end of



Venkata Narayanan  
Sethuraman

Associate Professor and Head of the Department of International Studies, Political Science and History at Christ University, Bengaluru

The neoliberal ideological order shadows the constitutional vision of creating an egalitarian social order in India

the 1990s. In *D.S. Nakara & Others vs Union Of India* (1982), the Court said that the basic framework of socialism in the Constitution is to provide a decent standard of life to the working people and social security from cradle to grave, reiterating the role of the welfare state in India. In *Air India Statutory Corporation vs United Labour Union & Ors* (1996), the Court said that the ideological aspects of the Indian Constitution found in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights and DPSP aim to establish an egalitarian social order, protecting social and economic justice and the dignity of individual by providing equality of status and opportunities.

In *Samatha vs State of Andhra Pradesh & Ors* (1997), the Court interpreted that the meaning of the word "socialism" in the Constitution is to reduce inequalities in income and provide equal opportunities and facilities to create an egalitarian social order. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's interpretation of Article 38(b) of the DPSP, in *State Of Karnataka And Anr Etc vs Shri Ranganatha Reddy & Anr. Etc.*, that public and private resources fall within the ambit of community resources, was in line with the constitutional ideology of creating an egalitarian society by strengthening the state's power of redistribution of resources for common good towards reducing inequality.

But recently, the Court overturned this interpretation without locating it within Article 39(c), which empowers the state to intervene and regulate the economic system to prevent the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few towards creating an egalitarian society.

### Economic reforms and inequality

After the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms in India, the constitutional ideology took a back seat and the idea of a welfare state as envisaged in the Constitution has withdrawn its commitments towards creating an egalitarian society. Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty from the Paris School of Economics have documented the rising inequality in India in their work, "Indian Income Inequality, 1922-2015: From British Raj to Billionaire Raj?" (2019).

Their research shows that the top 1% of earners had a share of less than 2% of total income in the 1930s. But after Independence, due to welfare state intervention, based on constitutional ideology, this gap reduced where the top 1% earners had a share of 6% of the total income in the 1980s.

After the implementation of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, there were major structural changes that happened in the Indian economy, which prioritised private capital investment and a slow withdrawal of the welfare interventionist state. The state took the positive role of creating and strengthening markets rather than working towards creating an egalitarian society, as envisaged in the Constitution. As a consequence

of this, the top 1% income has reached 22% of the total income pushing back to an inequality situation worse than that in the pre-independence period. They reiterated this inequality status in their recent research in 2024 emphasising that the top 1% of income and wealth shares have reached 22.6% and 40.1% by 2022-23, which is considered very high.

The "State of Inequality in India Report" (2022), prepared by the Institute for Competitiveness (commissioned by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister), highlighted the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2019-20, which recorded that average monthly wages of ₹25,000 (₹3 lakh an annum) is being earned by the top 10% and the remaining 90% earn less than ₹25,000 a month. This shows extreme inequality and how the majority are being pushed into poverty, violating constitutional ideology.

### An overlap with social inequality

Further, the report titled "Towards Just Justice and Wealth redistribution in India" (2024) by the World Inequality Lab at the Paris School of Economics, has brought in evidence to show how economic inequality and social inequality overlap in India. By 2022-23, 90% of the billionaire wealth was held by the upper castes in India. Scheduled Tribes are not present in billionaire wealth. Other Backward Classes (OBC) have a mere 10% presence and Scheduled Castes have a 2.6% representation in billionaire wealth. The report further emphasises that between 2014 and 2022, the OBC share has reduced from 20% to 10% and upper caste share has increased from 80% to 90% in billionaire wealth. The upper castes are the only group which owns wealth more than its proportion of population, reiterating how social capital and economic advantages are overlapping in India. Further, Oxfam International highlights the rise in the number of billionaires from nine in the year 2000 to 119 in 2023. It further compares income inequality and shows that it will take 941 years for a minimum wage earner to earn what a top corporate executive earns a year in India.

The constitutional vision of creating an egalitarian social order by minimising income inequality and eliminating social inequality is under threat from the neoliberal ideological order. Violating the constitutional ideology, inequality levels are widening, strengthening wealth concentration among the few. Further, social inequality overlaps with economic inequality to give the upper castes a greater advantage in contemporary India. Constitution Day has passed, but there is an opportunity for us to critically evaluate our political and economic practices within the constitutional framework, to assess our achievements and failures, reiterating Babasaheb's words that social and economic inequality will put political democracy in peril.

# An ideal way to treat India's corneal blindness problem

Despite strong support for eye donation in India, with millions, including popular film actors, pledging to donate, an acute shortage of corneas persists. There is a need to perform about 1,00,000 corneal transplants every year, but only 30% of this need is being met. On the demand side, many fellow citizens lead a lifetime of avoidable sight loss, waiting for sight-restoring tissue. The solution on the supply side are the millions dying in Indian hospitals every day who are eligible to donate their tissues – but do not. What if we 'presume consent' and treat them all as cornea donors? News reports note that, indeed, a 'presumed consent' amendment to the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994, is in the works to allow cornea retrieval from all eligible deaths in hospitals.

### The magnitude of the problem

Indian policymakers are seriously considering the 'presumed consent' approach to corneal donations because of the scale of the problem. The cornea is the thin, clear outer layer of the eye. Infection, accidents, or congenital conditions can turn it opaque. Corneal opacities are the second major cause of blindness in India among those who are 50 years and older, and the primary cause in those younger. An estimated 1.2 million people live with corneal opacities in India and about a third can be treated with a corneal transplant. These numbers make India one of the largest populations with corneal blindness in the world. However, most corneal blindness is preventable or treatable. For those eligible for treatment, corneal transplant surgery is an effective intervention. In fact, it is the most frequently performed transplant in the world. Critical to enabling corneal transplants is an 'eye bank', which handles ethically sourced corneas, processes them, and makes them available to eye surgeons. India does not have enough eye banks of the necessary standard, nor does it have



Tejash Balantrapu  
Associate Director – Science, Health Data and Storytelling, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute



Gullapalli N. Rao  
Founder Chair, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute

A 'consent-driven donation' approach is a step that can eliminate avoidable corneal vision loss

enough corneal surgeons. Along with procuring corneas, it is estimated that there is a need for 50 high-functioning eye banks (there are about 12 to 14 today) and 500 active corneal surgeons performing 200 transplants on average every year. With appropriate legislation enabling this approach, the target of 1,00,000 corneal transplants a year can be reached.

### Presumed consent versus required request

'Presumed consent' addresses the problem of cornea scarcity alone. At first glance, it eliminates a lot of red tape: the permissions, the wait for a post-mortem examination, even the effort of convincing the next-of-kin. Unless the deceased has left behind explicit instructions 'not to donate' it is presumed that they are a tissue donor. As corneas need to be retrieved within eight to 10 hours after death, reducing any delay increases the viability of the donated tissue. Universal 'opt-in' should boost the supply of corneas and bring us closer to eliminating corneal blindness in India.

The universal opt-in approach runs the risk of undermining a key enabler of corneal donations: consent. Corneal donation and transplantation are a sensitive partnership between the public, the corneal specialist community, and the policymakers. The public consists of cornea donors who voluntarily donate corneas, and recipients, who value the donation and comply with follow-up care. Corneal specialists facilitate this transaction with their skills. Policymakers support this healthy cycle with appropriate legislation.

Presumed consent distorts this partnership by negating the need for seeking consent from the next of kin. While it might speed up cornea retrieval, there is little evidence that such a law is necessary to solve the problem of cornea scarcity. The countries with the best organ donation rates in the world (Spain, the United States and Portugal) do not operate a 'presumed

consent' system. They have a policy of 'soft' opt-in or a 'Required Request' policy and seek formal consent from families before acquiring corneas – even if all citizens may be deemed as donors. In addition to 'required request', the key to their success is public education and investments across the cornea transplantation pipeline.

### A model that works

India too has a successful model of 'required request' corneal donation: a hospital cornea retrieval programme (HCRP). General hospitals handle a lot of mortality and are thus sites for motivating corneal donations. In an HCRP, a grief counsellor approaches the kin of the deceased and initiates a conversation, gently motivating them to consider a donation. The donation is processed only after receiving explicit consent from the kin. While it is a delicate task, grief counselling has had remarkable success in increasing the availability of corneas for transplantation.

Of the 1,40,000 corneas harvested by the Ramayamma International Eye Bank at the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI) in Hyderabad, in 35 years, over 70% have come from HCRP. This year, the LVPEI marked over 50,000 corneal transplants performed, thanks to this approach. In the States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha, there is no waiting list for corneal transplants, unlike other parts of the country with months-long waiting lists. It has also been found that the 'Required Request' approach encourages cornea donation. It offers some closure to grieving relatives. Donor families often mention the satisfaction in knowing that their loved ones' eyes live on, letting others see. It is therefore possible for India to eliminate avoidable corneal vision loss by investing in a consent-driven donation paradigm, 50 high-functioning eye banks, and by activating 500 corneal surgeons. Let us act now.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Court on the Preamble

The highest court's verdict on the petitions challenging the inclusion of the words 'secular' and 'socialist' in the Preamble to the Constitution is a triumph for all right-thinking citizens of this nation (Front page, "Secular, socialist" to stay in Constitution's Preamble: SC, November 26).

Secularism has been an enduring principle of governance since independence, even if some governments have not fully honoured it. It has served the nation well, safeguarding our pluralistic ethos and fostering harmony. Preserving this ideal is essential to avoiding the upheaval that its

erosion would undoubtedly bring. As for 'socialism', the petitioners appear to have misunderstood its intent, conflating it with the authoritarianism of Stalin's USSR or Mao's China. However, as the Court aptly observed, Indian socialism has always been about ensuring the welfare of the

needy, a compassionate principle that has strengthened the fabric of our democracy. There is nothing in it to fear or oppose. G.G. Menon, Tripunithura, Kerala

Ever since the advent of the Commission for Air Quality Management in National

Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021 and related technical expertise, the solutions suggested have only existed on paper. There has hardly been a paradigm shift in technology adoption, enforcement or farmer mindset. Feeble fines and flying squads are a regrettable excuse for

having an inert tax-payer funded commission. That satellite data is disputed is a major problem. Citizens meanwhile stare into a toxic haze of uncertainty.

Cyril Mathew Thomas, New Delhi

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

## Between hope and hurdles on the high seas

India's recent signing of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement – better known as the High Seas Treaty – has drawn both praise and scepticism from maritime observers. Hailed as a landmark step in ocean governance, the treaty seeks to protect marine ecosystems and promote the sustainable use of resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction. However, despite its laudable intentions to address critical gaps in international maritime regulation, the pact's structural complexities and potential challenges warrant examination.

As the third implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the BBNJ treaty follows earlier accords on deep-sea mining and fisheries management. Its provisions focus on three objectives: conserving marine biodiversity, ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources, and mandating environmental impact assessments for harmful activities. Yet, like many ambitious multilateral agreements, it risks faltering against geopolitical rivalries, jurisdictional overlap, and weak enforcement mechanisms.

### Fraught with challenges

The treaty's ambitious goals are tempered by its lack of a clear implementation roadmap. With only 14 of its 104 signatories having ratified the agreement, it remains far from the required threshold of 60 needed to come into force. Much of the hesitation stems from disputes over maritime territories, particularly in regions such as the South China Sea, where overlapping claims complicate consensus on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Southeast Asian nations remain divided on whether high-seas "national parks" could affect territorial claims or limit economic opportunities for coastal communities that depend on



**Abhijit Singh**  
Head of the Maritime Policy Initiative at ORF, New Delhi

marine resources. Bay of Bengal states echo similar apprehensions about MPAs affecting livelihood and resource access, underscoring the broader regional hesitations surrounding the treaty's implementation. Critics argue that the treaty's emphasis on the "high-seas principle" risks overshadowing the "common heritage of mankind" concept, which prioritizes preservation over access. One of the treaty's most contentious provisions involves marine genetic resources. The treaty obligates nations to share the profits derived from exploiting these resources through a global fund. However, without robust accountability measures, this provision risks being undermined by wealthier nations underreporting their activities. The pact also risks conflicting with regimes like the Convention on Biological Diversity, potentially disadvantaging smaller states and fragmenting enforcement.

Capacity-building and technology transfers present yet another challenge for low and middle-income countries. The treaty calls for equitable partnerships in ocean science, but lacks enforceable mechanisms, leaving less capable nations vulnerable to being sidelined. Asymmetry threatens to perpetuate inequalities in maritime research and governance.

The treaty's focus on the high seas overlooks the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems, where harmful activities in EEZs often cascade into international waters. The 2021 X-Press Pearl disaster off Sri Lanka, which spilled hazardous chemicals into the Indian Ocean, is a stark reminder of how localised incidents can have global repercussions. Similarly, overfishing within the EEZs in West Africa has depleted fish stocks far beyond national jurisdictions, exacerbating marine resource scarcity on the high seas. While the BBNJ Agreement aspires to reshape global ocean

governance, its potential hinges on bridging the gap between ambition and action. Its greatest limitation lies in failing to reconcile high-seas governance with coastal regulations, assuming international waters can be managed in isolation despite the impact of pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction in EEZs.

More troubling is the reluctance of coastal states to assume greater responsibility for activities within their waters. While the treaty mandates environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for planned activities, it remains silent on the damaging harms during oil and gas exploration – that the pact does not cover – and which constitutes an important economic interest of states. This gap, compounded by the disinclination of states to accept an international review of EIAs, exposes the inherent weaknesses in the treaty's enforcement framework, particularly in regions with weak institutional capacity and conflicting domestic and international legal standards.

### Bridging the divide

For the High Seas Treaty to succeed, it must overcome its structural and political limitations. This requires a radical shift in maritime governance – one that integrates high-seas and coastal regulations into a cohesive framework. Coastal states, particularly those in the Global South, need incentives to align their domestic laws with international norms, while wealthier nations must commit to providing technical and financial support to ensure the treaty's benefits are equitably shared.

The treaty's success ultimately hinges on fostering a collective commitment among nations to safeguard the oceans as a shared global resource. Without political consensus, clear strategies, and enforceable mechanisms, the BBNJ risks becoming an ineffective instrument – an outcome the oceans, already under immense stress, cannot afford.

## The return of the Adani solar beam

Adani's indictment, by the U.S., finds resonance in the State's political discourse

### STATE OF PLAY

**T. Ramakrishnan**  
ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Nearly 10 years after (now Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, or DMK's president) M.K. Stalin had kicked up a row over the move by the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) to buy solar power from the Adani Group – Jayalithaa of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) was the Chief Minister then – the Adani affair has come back to haunt Mr. Stalin.

In July 2015, Mr. Stalin, who was in the Opposition and the DMK's treasurer, wanted then Energy Minister Nathan R. Viswanathan to explain the determination of the purchase price of ₹7.01 per unit for solar power from the group, which had quoted ₹6.049 per unit in Madhya Pradesh.

In the run-up to the 2016 Assembly poll too, Mr. Stalin had alleged that there was corruption behind the conglomerate's plan to set up a 648-megawatt solar power plant in Kamudhi, Ramanathapuram district.

The controversy follows the U.S. Department of Justice's criminal indictment of the chairman of the Adani Group Gautam Adani and several of his associates recently. Announced by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York last week, the indictment mentions Tamil Nadu as one of the States whose electricity distribution companies had signed agreements with Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI), a central government enterprise, for Adani-provided solar power. The group is alleged to



have put forth the "promise of bribes" to Indian government officials between July 2021 and February 2022.

**Government's clarification** Hours after the issue erupted on November 21, 2024, the DMK regime, which came to power in May 2021, fielded Electricity Minister V. Senthilbalaji to issue a clarification. He was on record to say that there was "no commercial link" with the group over the last three years, and "no link whatsoever" in any manner with the group.

Explaining that the State government had entered into memoranda of understanding with entities falling under the control of the Union Power Ministry to procure electricity, Mr. Senthilbalaji explained that the State utility's agreement was only with the SECI to purchase electricity for 1,500 MW at ₹2.61 per unit, which was "very low". Mr. Senthilbalaji himself was recently re-inducted in the State Cabinet as Electricity Minister after having been in remand for about 470 days in connection with a money laundering case.

The latest development involving the Adani Group has prompted the Communist Party of India (Marxist), a DMK ally, to demand a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation; it even staged a

demonstration in Chennai in support of its demand. The General Secretary of the CPI, another ally of the DMK, D. Raja, said that the American indictment called in question not only the personal integrity of Mr. Adani and his business empire but also the integrity of Indian watchdogs and the administration under which "such unethical practices" were flourishing.

The AIADMK chief, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, has been quiet even though he could have gone to town with an issue to target his principal adversary, the DMK (and Mr. Stalin), as well as the national party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, with whom he fell out about 15 months ago. Mr. Palaniswami has been consistent in maintaining that there will be no truck with the national party for the 2026 Assembly poll. It was left to Pattabi Mahalingam, founder S. Ramadoss and Naam Tamilar Katchi coordinator Seeman to raise questions over the purported Adani-Stalin meeting in Chennai four months ago. Mr. Seeman, who has been saying that he will go it alone for the 2026 Assembly poll, appears to be on the same page as the AIADMK on one issue – on the "tacit understanding" between the DMK and the BJP.

Backing his Minister's observations on the issue, Mr. Stalin has dismissed the question on the "meeting" with Mr. Adani. He said Dr. Ramadoss did not have "any work to do". He went on to say that as Dr. Ramadoss had been issuing statements one after the other, there was "no necessity" to reply to his query.

With the principal Opposition party appearing to be unwilling to act, the Adani issue may not acquire much strength to target the DMK. It is expected to fizzle out.

## In NPP win, signs of inclusive and collaborative politics

The coalition won more than 50% of the vote share in 16 of the 22 electoral districts in Sri Lanka

### DATA POINT

**T. Ramakrishnan**

The takeaway is clear – in the recent parliamentary poll in Sri Lanka, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP), a coalition comprising civil society groups and trade unions, now has a pan-Sri Lanka appeal. Since the introduction of the Proportional Representation system in 1978, no Sinhala-majority political formation has been able to gain a foothold in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, where ethnic minorities live in large numbers, to the extent that the NPP did this time. Perhaps, this is a development that may take the country, once battered by an ethnic conflict, towards political integration.

The fray in the presidential poll was evenly balanced, with candidates of the NPP and Samagi Janas Balawegaya (SJB) and an independent, Ranil Wickremesinghe, battling it out. In November though, the NPP enjoyed a clear advantage from the beginning as the fragmented SJB did not even put up the semblance of a fight. While many observers predicted that the NPP would be well ahead, it went on to bag an over two-thirds majority. In 2020, the NPP's vote share did not cross the 10% mark in any of the 22 electoral districts. The coalition received the most votes in Hambantota (8.4%) and Matara (7.8%), both from the Northern Province. Overall, the NPP received only 3.8% of the total votes polled (Table 1).

Even in the 2024 presidential poll, when the JVP's chief Anura Kumara Dissanayake emerged as the winner, he did not cross the 50% mark in the first round (excluding preferences). In the presidential poll, the party's vote share was in single digits in the Northern Province (Jaffna and Vanni districts). In only four districts, Galle, Matara and Hambantota, and Gampaha, the vote share exceed-

ed the 50% mark. But, in the 2024 parliamentary polls, the NPP's vote share exceeded 50% in 16 electoral districts.

The NPP's recent victory is much bigger than the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)'s victory in the 2020 Parliamentary poll (Table 2). The NPP's vote share saw a 19.3-percentage point rise (from 42.3% to 61.7%) in the 2024 parliamentary polls, compared with the 2024 presidential polls. Whereas the SLPP's vote share increased only by 6.8 percentage points (52.3% to 59.1%) in the 2020 parliamentary polls compared with the 2019 presidential polls. Moreover, unlike the NPP, the SLPP, four years ago, was in an electoral adjustment with smaller parties in many districts. Interestingly, the SLPP, then, did not put up a candidate in Jaffna, unlike the present ruling formation which contested everywhere now.

Another important factor was the NPP dislodging an established party, the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK), in four out of five districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Table 3 shows the downward trend of the ITAK in the five districts, with a marginally upward movement in Digamadulla (Muslims have a sizeable presence) and Batticaloa (Hindus/Tamils constitute the majority). The NPP's performance in Jaffna in the 2024 parliamentary poll, was stronger than that of the ITAK.

Sections of political experts are of the view that the voters in the North, especially in Jaffna, are coming out of the grip of forces of Tamil nationalism which have been harping on political settle-

### Breaking new ground

The data for the tables were sourced from the Election Commission of Sri Lanka



**The first move:** Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake casts his vote in the country's parliamentary election

**Table 1:** The table shows the performance of the National People's Power (figures in %)

Electoral district	2020 parliamentary poll	2024 presidential poll	2024 parliamentary poll
Colombo	5.7	47.2	68.6
Gampaha	5.0	55.5	72.8
Kalutara	4.8	47.4	66.1
Kandy/ Mahanuwara	2.8	42.3	64.6
Matale	2.6	41.4	66.2
Nuwaraeliya	1.2	22.2	41.6
Galle	4.9	51.5	68.1
Matara	7.8	52.5	69.8
Hambantota	8.4	52.0	66.4
Jaffna	0.2	7.3	24.9
Vanni	0.3	9.9	20.4
Batticaloa	0.1	12.2	19.3
Digamadulla	1.3	25.7	40.3
Trincomalee	1.1	20.8	42.5
Kurunegala	3.7	48.2	69.6
Puttalam	2.6	44.1	63.1
Anuradhapura	4.8	47.4	67.2
Poonnaruwa	2.8	46.1	68.7
Badulla	3.9	34.7	58.6
Monaragala	4.1	41.9	64.3
Ratnapura	2.7	39.3	61.8
Kegalle	2.8	43.4	64.8
Overall	3.8	42.3	61.6

**Table 2:** The table shows the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK)'s performance in the north and east (figures in %)

Electoral district	2020 parliamentary poll	2024 parliamentary poll
Jaffna	31.5	19.5
Vanni	33.6	15.2
Trincomalee	18.6	16.7
Digamadulla	6.5	9.3
Batticaloa	26.7	33.8

Sections of political experts are of the view that voters in the north, especially in Jaffna, are coming out of the grip of the forces of Tamil nationalism, whose theme has been to harp on political settlement at the cost of livelihood issues

**Table 3:** The table shows the performance of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (figures in %)

Electoral district	2019 presidential poll	2020 parliamentary poll
Colombo	53.2	57.0
Gampaha	59.3	65.8
Kalutara	59.5	64.1
Kandy/ Mahanuwara	50.4	58.8
Matale	55.4	65.5
Nuwaraeliya	36.9	54.5
Galle	64.3	70.5
Matara	67.3	73.6
Hambantota	66.2	75.1
Jaffna	6.2	N/A*
Vanni	12.3	20.5
Batticaloa	12.7	11.2
Digamadulla	32.8	32.7
Trincomalee	23.4	32.3
Kurunegala	57.9	66.9
Puttalam	50.8	57.3
Anuradhapura	59.0	68.0
Poonnaruwa	53.0	73.7
Badulla	49.3	62.1
Monaragala	65.3	74.1
Ratnapura	59.9	68.9
Kegalle	55.7	66.3
Overall	52.3	59.1

\*Not applicable. The SLPP did not field a candidate in Jaffna

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

#### The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 27, 1974

### U.S., U.K. Book Publishers 'Suppress Competition'

WASHINGTON, Nov. 26

The U.S. Government has sued 21 major American publishers, accusing them of dividing up world book markets in a conspiracy with British publishers. The British Publishers Association, consisting of nearly all major publishers in the United Kingdom, was named as a co-conspirator but not as a defendant. The suit alleged that the U.S. defendants – including such publishing giants as McGraw-Hill, Macmillan Inc., Harper and Row, Cresset and Dunlap and Random House – had for 30 years worked out exclusive marketing territories throughout the world, eliminating U.S.-British competition in these countries.

When the same book was to be published in both countries, the American houses granted licences to British publishers, giving them exclusive rights for publication, distribution and sales in some 70 countries now or formerly members of the Commonwealth.

The British publishers reciprocated by agreeing not to publish the book in the U.S. and certain other countries, particularly Canada and the Philippines, the suit alleged. The Justice Department charged that the method of slicing up markets to suppress competition among publishers deprived book buyers of the benefits that might flow from such competition. The suit urged the court to issue an injunction barring the defendants and alleged co-conspirators perpetually from restraining competition between American and British publishers. No damages were sought.

The U.S. exports books worth \$250 millions (Rs. 200 crores) each year and imports books worth \$140 million (Rs. 112 crores). The United Kingdom exports more than \$165 millions (Rs. 132 crores) worth of books, the suit said. —Reuter.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 27, 1924

### Cinchona in Bengal.

(Associated Press of India)

CALCUTTA, Nov. 26

The area under Cinchona plantation during last year in Bengal increased to 3,055 acres and further extension of the area is expected next year. Total products from local and Java bark at the Government factory were 58,823 lbs at which 43,264 lbs were quinine sulphate. The policy of the Government of Bengal is to maintain and, if possible, extend the cinchona plantations and at the same time to improve and develop the factory in order to meet the requirements of the Province.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Number of accused in land-for-jobs case against Lalu Prasad**

**30** The CBI filed before a Delhi court the requisite sanctions to prosecute 30 accused in a case related to the alleged land-for-jobs scam involving former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad. The case pertains to Group-D appointments made in the West Central Zone of the Railways during Lalu Prasad's tenure in return for land parcels gifted or transferred by the recruits. PTI

**Suspects arrested in a major cybercrime operation in Africa**

**1,006** Interpol arrested 1,006 suspects in Africa during a two-month operation to tackle cybercrime that left tens of thousands of victims, including some who were trafficked, and produced millions in financial damages. Interpol pinpointed 35,000 victims, with cases linked to \$193 million in losses worldwide. AP

**Norway's estimated fiscal support for Ukraine in 2025**

**\$2.7** In billion. Norway will raise its fiscal support for Ukraine next year to 30 billion crowns (\$2.7 billion) from 27 billion crowns this year, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said. The minority centre-left government had last month proposed allocating just 15 billion crowns to Ukraine in 2025, triggering criticism from opposition parties. REUTERS

**Number of complaints received by India's advertisement council**

**4,016** A report by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) said the self-regulatory body received 4,016 complaints during the first half of which 3,031 were investigated and 98% of them needed some modification. The real estate sector has emerged as the most violative segment during the first half of FY25. PTI

**More than half of the population of Sudan facing acute hunger**

**25** The number of people in millions facing hunger in Sudan. The UN's World Food Programme said its first food trucks in several months had got through to a famine-stricken camp for displaced people in conflict-ravaged Sudan. War has raged since April 2023 and over half the population is facing acute hunger. AFP  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us [facebook.com/thehindu](#) [twitter.com/the\\_hindu](#) [instagram.com/the\\_hindu](#)

## SC ruling on socialism, secularism

What was the original Preamble and how has it evolved? What has been the court's stand earlier and how has it changed? What was the current case about? What bearing will it have on the society?

### EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R

#### The story so far:

A Division Bench of the Supreme Court led by the Chief Justice of India dismissed pleas challenging the inclusion of the words 'socialist' and 'secular' in the Preamble to our Constitution.

#### What is the history of Preamble?

The original Preamble adopted on November 26, 1949, declared India a sovereign, democratic, republic. Our Constituent Assembly consciously avoided the word 'socialist' as they felt that declaring the economic ideal of a country in its Constitution's preamble was not appropriate. People should decide what suits them according to time and age.

Likewise, Indian secularism is different from western secularism. In the latter, the state and religion are strictly separated and the government does not interfere in religious affairs. However, in India, the state enjoys the power to regulate the economic, financial, political and secular aspects associated with religious practice. It can also provide for social welfare and reform in religious practices. Further, various provisions of the Constitution that include right to practise any religion, non-discrimination on the basis of religion in any affairs of the state embodied the 'secular' values of our Constitution. Hence, in the Constituent Assembly, the amendment to introduce the word 'secular' in the Preamble was not accepted.

In *Berubari* case (1960), the Supreme Court opined that the Preamble is not a part of the Constitution and thus not a source of any substantive power. Subsequently, in *Kesavananda Bharati*



**Guiding book:** Indian National Congress (INC) party workers carry a model of the Indian Constitution during in rally on the occasion of Constitution Day celebrations in Kolkata on Tuesday. AFP

case (1973), the Supreme Court reversed its earlier opinion and said that the Preamble is part of the Constitution and that it should be read and interpreted in the light of the vision envisioned in the Preamble. It also held that the Preamble is subject to the amending power of Parliament as any other provision of the Constitution. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976 inserted the words 'Socialist', 'Secular' and 'Integrity' in the Preamble.

#### What was the current case?

The current case was filed by former Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy, advocate Ashwini Upadhyay and others. Mr. Upadhyay and others had opposed the insertion of the words 'socialist' and 'secular' in the Preamble. They argued that these were included during the Emergency and forced the people to follow specific ideologies. They felt that since the date of adoption by the

Constituent Assembly was mentioned in the Preamble, no additional words can be inserted later by Parliament. Mr. Swamy was of the view that subsequent amendments to the Constitution including the 44th Amendment in 1978 during Janata Party rule after emergency had supported and retained these two words. Nevertheless, he was of the view that these words should appear in a separate paragraph below the original Preamble.

#### What did the court rule?

The court dismissed the pleas and held that 'socialism' and 'secularism' are integral to the basic structure of the Constitution. It observed that the Constitution is a 'living document' subject to the amending power of Parliament. This amending power extends to the Preamble as well and the date of adoption mentioned in it does not restrict such power. The court opined that 'socialism'

in the Indian context primarily means a welfare state that provides equality of opportunity and does not prevent the private sector from thriving. Similarly, over time India has developed its own interpretation of 'secularism'. The state neither supports any religion nor penalises the profession and practice of any faith. In essence, the concept of secularism represents one of the facets of right to equality.

#### Why is it important?

The initial years after Independence fostered 'democratic socialism' characterised by centralised planning and many industries being established by the state. The period of 1960s and 70s saw nationalisation of banks and insurance, high tax rates and various regulations. The economy, though declared as mixed economy where public and private enterprises would co-exist, displayed the characteristics of classical socialism with license controls and regulations. Starting from 1991, our economy has evolved from such socialistic pattern to a market-oriented model. The ensuing growth has uplifted vast majority of people from abject poverty in the last three decades. However, there is also growing inequality that needs to be addressed. As the court observed, our socialism continues to address the needs of the poor through schemes such as MGNREGA, subsidised food grains, direct benefit transfers for women and farmers etc. Hence, it is imperative that such socialism continues to guide the actions of the state for the welfare of the needy while private enterprise flourishes resulting in increased employment and strong economic growth. The spirit of our 'unity in diversity' should be equally preserved by upholding the values of secularism.

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

### THE GIST

The original Preamble adopted on November 26, 1949, declared India a sovereign, democratic, republic. Our Constituent Assembly consciously avoided the word 'socialist' as they felt that declaring the economic ideal of a country in its Constitution's preamble was not appropriate.

Indian secularism is different from western secularism. In the latter, the state and religion are strictly separated and the government does not interfere in religious affairs. However, in India, the state enjoys the power to regulate the economic, financial, political and secular aspects associated with religious practice.

The current case was filed by those opposed to the insertion of the words 'socialist' and 'secular' in the Preamble. They argued that these were included during the Emergency and forced the people to follow specific ideologies.

## What is the controversy around the Sambhal mosque?

How did the issue around the 16th Century Jama Masjid in Sambhal break out? Are there common threads with the Gyanvapi and Ayodhya Ramjanmabhoomi disputes?

Ziya Us Salam

#### The story so far

A petition was filed by Hari Shanker Jain and others in the court of the civil judge of the district and sessions court, Sambhal on November 19. The petitioners alleged that the 16th Century Jama Masjid in Sambhal was built at the site of an ancient Hari Har Mandir. The claim was similar to those made in the case of Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and Eidgah Masjid Mathura in Uttar Pradesh and Kamal-Maula Masjid in Dhar in Madhya Pradesh. Mr. Jain is the petitioner in the Varanasi, Mathura and Dhar cases too. The Sambhal mosque is a protected national monument.

#### How were the surveys carried out?

After a hearing on the same day, the civil judge ordered a photographic and videographic survey of the mosque and asked for its report to be presented before

it on November 29. The mosque's *intecamia* committee was not consulted by the court. Following the order, a survey was carried out peacefully in the presence of the Superintendent of Police, members of the mosque committee and Sambhal's district magistrate.

However, a second survey carried out on November 24 led to large scale violence. Conducted in the morning, the survey team was preceded by a local *mahant* (priest), one of the petitioners, and followed by some members chanting *Jai Shri Ram* slogans. A police party accompanied the surveyors. A large number of protestors gathered near the mosque. It soon resulted in stone pelting from the crowd. The police allegedly resorted to opening fire in which five men, including two teenagers, died. The police denied the allegation, arguing it used lathi-charge to control the crowd. The local MLA rubbished the police claims, arguing the dead included unarmed persons who had gone out for

their daily chores. The residents alleged the police ransacked their homes.

#### What is the mosque's history?

Unlike Ayodhya or Varanasi, the Sambhal dispute cropped up only this year. For centuries, people of different communities have lived peacefully here. The Jama Masjid in Sambhal is one of the three mosques built by Mughal Emperor Babur during his reign between 1526 and 1530; the other two being the mosque in Panipat and the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya which was demolished in 1992. The Sambhal mosque was built by Babur's general Mir Hindu Beg around 1528. While most historians attribute this mosque to Babur's general Hindu Beg, some believe the mosque is actually a Tughlaq-era monument.

The Hindu tradition, however, holds that the mosque incorporates parts of an ancient Vishnu temple. They believe the tenth avatar of Vishnu, Kalki, will descend in Sambhal.

### What is the Places of Worship Act?

The Sambhal dispute has once again cast fresh spotlight on the Places of Worship Act 1991 under which the religious character of all places of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, has to be maintained. The only exception was the then ongoing dispute around the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi. The Act was aimed at shutting out the possibilities of any further contestations around places of worship. The Act's Section 3 leaves no room for debate by clearly barring the conversion in full or part of a place of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different religious denomination.

### What are the challenges to the Act?

The petition filed in Sambhal seeks to change the basic character of the place of worship, in contravention of the 1991 Act. The petitioners quote the oral observation of Justice D.Y. Chandrachud who said in 2022 that the "ascertainment of a religious character of a place, as a procedural instrument, may not necessarily fall foul of the provisions" of the Act. Incidentally, four petitions have challenged the Places of Worship Act in the Supreme Court. The courts have admitted petitions seeking to alter the religious character of the places of worship in Varanasi, Mathura, Dhar, and now Sambhal even as the Supreme Court is yet to decide on the challenges to the Places of Worship Act itself.

### THE GIST

Unlike Ayodhya or Varanasi, the Sambhal dispute cropped up only this year. For centuries, people of different communities have lived peacefully here.

The Sambhal dispute has once again cast fresh spotlight on the Places of Worship Act 1991 under which the religious character of all places of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, has to be maintained.

Four petitions have challenged the Places of Worship Act in the Supreme Court. The courts have admitted petitions seeking to alter the religious character of the places of worship in Varanasi, Mathura, Dhar, and now Sambhal even as the Supreme Court is yet to decide on the challenges to the Places of Worship Act itself.

# Norway's apology to Sami and other minority groups for assimilation policies

A century-long process of Norwegianisation of indigenous peoples and migrant groups commenced in the 1850s. These policies finally came to an end in the 1960s, with laws formally repealed or replaced in 1963. Yet, discrimination has continued the groups have been adversely affected

## EXPLAINER

Struthi Darbhamulla

### The story so far:-

Last week, Norway's Parliament, the Storting, issued an unreserved apology for its assimilation policies towards Sami, Kven and Forest Finn peoples. It also laid out a series of resolutions to address the continuing discrimination faced by these communities, *The New York Times* reported.

A century-long process of Norwegianisation of indigenous peoples and migrant groups commenced in the 1850s and did not officially end till the 1960s. It saw the suppression of indigenous languages and traditional culture. Further, Sami children were separated from their parents and sent to boarding schools all across the Sami – 'the land of the Sami' which corresponds with present-day northern Russia, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

### Who are the Samis, Kvens and Forest Finns?

Norway has designated certain groups with 'long-standing attachment to the country' as national minorities, including the Kvens/Norwegian Finns, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and the Romani people. The Sami, meanwhile, are an Indigenous people spread across northern Europe, including Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. This region has been called Lapland; however the terms Lapps/Lapladers are considered derogatory by some Sami. Only about 1,00,000 Sami remain. The largest Sami population is concentrated in Norway – considered the heart of Sami – in areas such as Finnmark county.

Inhabiting this chilly terrain for centuries, the Sami have developed their own culture and unique way of life. Many are reindeer herders, and the Norwegian government has designated reindeer herding as an activity exclusive to the Sami, issuing herding licenses based on ancestral lands.

Sami languages are any of three languages (sometimes considered dialects of one overarching language) belonging to the Finno-Ugric group of the Uralic language family – North Sami, East Sami and South Sami.

Both Kvens and Forest Finns are much smaller groups (than the Sami) which migrated to present-day Norway around 500 years ago.

Kvens are the descendants of migrants from the Torne River Valley, part of present-day Sweden and Finland, who historically practised slash and burn farming, fishing and blacksmithing. The Kven language, a Finnish language closely related to Meänkieli and Finnish, was recognised as an independent language in Norway in April 2005. Forest Finns, meanwhile, are descendants of immigrants from eastern Finland who settled in Sweden in the 1500s, before making their way to Norway in the early 1600s.

### What were the Norwegianisation policies?

Indigenous peoples and minority groups historically faced discrimination from Scandinavian governments, and laws in the second half of the nineteenth century gave this historical prejudice a more solid form in Norway.



Many Samis are reindeer herders, and the Norwegian government has designated reindeer herding as an activity exclusive to the Sami.AP

Norway engaged in a century-long process of "Norwegianisation" and assimilation, which intensified after the nation gained independence in 1905.

Policies to integrate and assimilate these groups by suppressing their native language and culture emerged. These policies used education and religion as a tool to erase local language and culture. Traditional practices such as 'yoiking,' a traditional call of the Samis, were forbidden during this time. Young Sami children were taken away from their parents and forced to live in foster homes and state-run boarding schools in the 1900s. The government demarcated some regions for "suitable populations," where these groups were not allowed to settle. Groups also lost access to grazing land and fishing grounds.

Native cultural beliefs were suppressed by Christian mission churches belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran and Catholic denominations. The Sami were forced to give up their earlier shamanistic rituals.

Social discrimination persisted under the guise of scientific research. Members from these communities were made to undergo anthropological tests by scientists, and their burial grounds were exhumed to study the ethnic characteristics of their predecessors.

These Norwegianisation policies finally came to an end in the 1960s, with laws formally repealed or replaced in 1963.

### What is the Truth and Reconciliation Committee?

Measures at the community and government level were taken up to address the past oppression. Today, the Sami have a university as well as schools teaching the Sami language, and a (mostly symbolic) independently elected Sami Parliament established in 1989, with which the Norwegian parliament has a working relationship. The Education Act of 1969 gave Sami students the right to compulsory and upper-secondary education in their own language, and policies have also sought to integrate the language in school curricula.

Community efforts too have persisted to preserve the unique identity of these groups. For example, Young Forest Finns works to revive the group's culture and also has a museum under development.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was launched in 2018 to investigate the historical injustice and suggest measures for inclusion and revitalisation versus earlier policies of Norwegianisation and assimilation.

The Committee released a 700-page report on June 1, 2023. The current apology and a set of 17 resolutions to address prejudice against these groups stem from this report, which took 35 hours to read aloud in parliament, and was broadcast nationally. Recommendations in the report included the establishment of a centre for reconciliation work, preservation of minority and indigenous languages and language training.

Other Nordic nations too have launched similar commissions, including the Truth Commission for the Sami People in Sweden and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sami People in Finland. Both are expected to present their reports sometime next year.

### What is the current apology?

The unreserved apology was tendered last week to the Sami, Kvens and Forest Finns by the Norwegian parliament following on the heels of last year's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. The move was approved by the Parliament and the apology read out loud on November 11.

All lawmakers except one group – a bloc from the right-wing Progress Party – voted for the resolution. This cited possible conflict among communities as a reason for voting against it. In a debate held in May, the party's leader, Bard Hoksrud, said it was "fundamentally wrong to give special privileges to some groups at the expense of others," adding that they believed that "history should remain history."

In a written response to a question from a journalist, Conservative party member Svein Haberg said, "The assimilation policy that was historically pursued continues to be both the root of personal hardship for the individuals and groups that were subject to this policy, and a source of conflict today."

Silje Karine Muotka, a Sami leader, called it "a day with many emotions," in a

written statement. "Going forward, we expect an active policy of reconciliation....The decision from today ensures long-term follow-up, and it has both financial and legal repercussions. But unfortunately, no settlement is made with ongoing injustice and conflicts over land and water," she wrote.

In 1977, King Harald V apologised to the Sami people, and Sami People's Day has been celebrated since 1993 on February 6 (the first Sami National Congress was held on February 6, 1977 in Trondheim, Norway). However, this is the first instance of a public apology to the Kvens and Forest Finns.

### What are the continuing challenges?

Even after the formal repealing of the laws, prejudice in the nation has continued. The report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that members of these groups have less access to health care in Norway, a country with a robust social security net.

The Sami have had a longstanding dispute with the Norwegian government over their way of life and land use, although some laws exist over the Samis' right to grazing land. A 2007 law sought to limit the size of reindeer herds – ostensibly to prevent overgrazing, a move opposed by some Sami herders.

Indigenous and minority languages, too, remain critically endangered. Bullying, hate speech and harassment has persisted, as have negative stereotypes.

As reported by *The New York Times*, a 2021 survey was conducted as part of an Arctic University of Norway project which studied the efficacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. According to the results of this survey, 60% of Norway residents said they thought most people knew little to nothing about how the assimilation policies affected the Sami. That figure rose to 88% when it came to how the practices affected Forest Finns and Kvens.

The project was led by Eva Josefson, a political scientist at the Arctic University who is Sami herself. She highlighted that the lack of transparency about land rights was a sticking point, saying that there was a "general implementation gap between legal rights and what is actually delivered."



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Know your English

The following is a letter written about 20 years ago by a person who was then doing his M.A. in English. I don't want to make any comment on it, now. I'd like to hear from readers what they think of it. The letter should be brief and to the point.

"Your closeness perhaps you would not set your heart against me, for writing a letter before your indication nor your perusal would be indifferent until it finishes to the end. If such will be case you may find some sincerity in it. I have unexpectedly to repeat one paper (supplementary) I thought it will be held in July but I came to know they held it in September, the month after which we can't get any job. This sudden irruption has discomposed all my plans and life. What should I do? How will I maintain and manage? This have yielded many problems, doubts and illusions, I think. Should I give my examination or not? If not, I believe it can be possible if I get some work, especially literary work to do. I will have not a single idea to do my M.A. throughout my life. Because I have nothing to do with good degree. I have certainly to do something with good work."

I don't want to say much the kind of person I am, for I have revealed fully before you along with my performance. Well so much I can say if you do something for me, I will certainly not let your efforts go uselessly or go to dogs, but I will ascertain them solid and perfect for their maturity, with my performance and with my dedication to work."

Our principal has promised me to help me in my service affair, but I ma so bewildered that I can't understand what to ask for.

I have been often remembering your image with all its dealings, with all my soul and with a glance of infinite depth. I know not why does it do, but it is most touching thing. It seems it forms and delights me. I am not flatterer nor doing I "chamchagiri" because flatterer has flattered from me when I born. Nor again I am caring of service mere, because I had got it all in a small company.

For conveying not my thoughts and for keeping silence up to now by letter to you, I have felt that I have plunged into some deep ocean and now it is my duty to save myself from drowning. Consequently, I am writing this letter."

\*\*\*  
In arguing too, the person own'd his skill,  
For en'n though vanguard'd, he could argue still;  
While words of learned length and thundering sound  
Amazed the gazing rustics rang'd around,  
And still they gaz'd, and still the wonder grew,  
That one small head could carry all he knew.

K. Subrahmanian  
March 8, 1994

## THE DAILY QUIZ

### A quiz on the Chief Ministers of Jharkhand

Vignesh P Venkitesh

#### QUESTION 1

How many persons have served as the Chief Minister of the State?

#### QUESTION 2

Who is the only Chief Minister in the State to complete a term undisrupted?

#### QUESTION 3

Who was the first Chief Minister of the State? Which party did he represent?

#### QUESTION 4

The first Assembly election after the formation of Jharkhand

State was held in 2005. Name the leader who became Chief Minister for just 10 days after this election?

#### QUESTION 5

Who took over as the Chief Minister when Heman Soren stepped down from the post before being arrested in an alleged land-scam case?



Name this leader who became the Chief Minister of the State as an Independent MLA. THE HINDU

### Answers to the previous day's quiz:

1. Angela Bassett played the lead role in a 1993 movie about this rock and roll singer. Name the singer and the movie. **Ans: Tina Turner, What's Love Got To Do With It.** 2. At the time of adoption, the Constitution of India was about 1,45,000 words long, making it the longest national Constitution to ever be adopted. Is the statement true or false? How many Articles did it have? **Ans: True, 395 Articles.** 3. The first French satellite named after a French comic character created by René Goscinny. **Ans: Asterix.** 4. Which children's fantasy book, written by a mathematician, has the characters March Hare, Bill the Lizard, Cheshire Cat? What is the name of the author? **Ans: Alice in Wonderland and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.** 5. Charles Schulz, who passed away on this day, is the creator of comic characters like Charlie Brown and Snoopy. Name the comic strip that gained wide appeal. **Ans: Peanuts.** 6. Visual Question. **Ans: Casablanca**

### Early Birds

Tamal Biswas, Dodo Jayaditya, Parimal Das, Arun Kumar Singh, Piyali Tuli

## Word of the day

### Recourse:

turning to someone or something for help or protection

**Synonyms:** refuge, resort

**Usage:** The dispute was settled without recourse to law.

**Pronunciation:** https://bit.ly/recoursenew

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /rɪˈkɔːs/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'

## SCIENCE

# Six decades since Thumba launch, slew of private entities prepare for flight

The Departments of Space and of Biotechnology have signed agreements to conduct biological experiments on the forthcoming Bharatiya Antariksh Station; while researchers will be able to conduct experiments on other missions as well, the agreement pertains to experiments onboard the station

Pradeep Mohandas

November 21 was 61 years since the birth of the Indian space programme. On this date in 1963, scientists launched a Nike-Apache sounding rocket from Thumba in Kerala. These rockets helped the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) master the solid propellant technology powering India's launch vehicles today. Around the same time as this anniversary, India launched its first satellite onboard a SpaceX rocket even as multiple Indian private sector entities geared up for launches of their own.

## Launches of merit

NewSpace India, Ltd. launched the 4,700-kg GSAT-N2/GSAT-20 satellite onboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Florida. N2 wasn't launched onboard an Indian launch vehicle because its weight exceeded the payload capacity of the country's most powerful rocket, the LVM-3, which can place satellites weighing up to four tonnes in the geostationary transfer orbit (GTO). INSAT-4D was the last such satellite launched from Florida, in 1990.

GSAT-N2 is a Ka-band high throughput communication satellite built by ISRO to enhance broadband services in underserved areas, including the northeast, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep. It will also support services like in-flight internet connectivity and the Smart Cities Mission.

The satellite was placed in a GTO with a perigee of 250 km, an apogee of 59,730 km, and at a 27.5° inclination. From here, the satellite will use its thrusters to move to a geostationary orbit at 63° E longitude over the next few days.

Next, ISRO is preparing to launch its PSLV-C59 mission bearing the European Proba-3 mission. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) will fly in its extended length configuration (XL), which was last used to launch Aditya-L1 in September 2023.

The twin Proba spacecraft to study the Sun arrived in Chennai on November 6 and will be integrated with the launch vehicle. Liftoff is currently scheduled for 4 p.m. IST on December 4.

India's astronaut-designate Shubhanshu Shukla, who is set to fly to the International Space Station in 2025, is undergoing training at the European Space Agency's European Astronaut Centre. This part of the training is to familiarise astronauts-to-be with the European modules of the space station.

## From the private sector

Four Indian private companies are preparing to launch their payloads/satellites into orbit.



A Nike-Apache two-stage rocket on its launcher at Thumba, Kerala. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

## India recently launched its first satellite onboard a SpaceX rocket even as multiple Indian private sector entities geared up for launches of their own

Catalyx Space's SR-0 satellite launched onboard the third developmental flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle mission re-entered the earth's atmosphere on November 3. The company announced the satellite had achieved all its objectives in its three-month lifespan.

AAKA Space Studio launched India's first Space Analog Mission in Leh, Ladakh, in collaboration with the ISRO Human Spaceflight Centre, IIT-Bombay, and the University of Ladakh. The site was chosen for its similarity to surfaces on the moon and Mars.

One person from AAKA Space Studio will stay in the habitat in Leh for 21 days to test habitat sustainability, life-support systems, and the human experience of isolation.

SatSure is working with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology for "automated image feature extraction models for building footprints, roof type, roads, and water bodies among other classes for more than two lakh villages". This is the Indian government's largest programme to map rural property. Drones under the government's 'Svamvita' programme will capture images of 3-5 cm resolution and SatSure will use its machine-learning tools

developed for satellite data to extract and classify the relevant features.

## Space science updates

India celebrated its full membership of the Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO), an international effort to build the world's most advanced radio telescope in Australia and South Africa. India will contribute cash as well as advanced electronics and engineering for telescope components in exchange for scientific data collected by the telescope.

The first scientific result from the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph onboard the Aditya-L1 spacecraft was published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

A team led by researchers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, used data from the coronagraph to accurately predict the time of a coronal mass ejection on July 16. Coronal mass ejections affect satellites in orbit, electricity grids on the ground, and radio communications when they blow past the planet.

Finally, the Departments of Space and of Biotechnology have signed agreements to conduct biological experiments on the forthcoming Bharatiya Antariksh Station. While researchers will be able to conduct experiments on other missions (including the uncrewed Gaganyaan flights), the agreement pertains to experiments onboard the Indian space station. (Pradeep Mohandas is a technical writer and space enthusiast in Pune. pradeep.mohandas@gmail.com)

## THE GIST

▼ NewSpace India Ltd. launched the 4,700-kg GSAT-N2/GSAT-20 satellite onboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Florida

▼ Pixxel, which is Indian-American, unveiled 'Fireflies', its six hyperspectral satellites expected to be launched early next year

▼ PierSight Space will also fly a mission on a PSLV POEM called 'Varuna', which will demonstrate a deployable reflectarray antenna

▼ HEX20 will fly its 'Nila' satellite onboard SpaceX's Transporter 13 mission in February 2025

## BIG SHOT



**Taking stocks:** A man looks at the flooded Inca Llojeta area in the aftermath of landslides caused by intense rain and illegal earth movements, in La Paz, Bolivia on Sunday. At least 26 people have been injured and more than 40 houses damaged by the flood. Some 300 military personnel were deployed to help evacuate residents. REUTERS

## QUESTION CORNER

### The answer is blowin' in the wind

**Q: Why do flags flutter in the wind?**  
**A:** The fluttering of flags is a dynamic phenomenon involving three forces.

The first one is a constant pulling force due to the rope used to tie the flag to a pole. The second force on the flag is due to gravity, which acts downwards. The third force is responsible for fluttering is the wind. This force is not constant, both in magnitude and direction. It can be greater or lesser than the other forces. The interesting wavelike motion of a flag (made of cloth) results when the wind speed goes above and comes below (in other words, oscillates about) a critical value of the force equal to the flag's weight. As the force due to the wind speed exceeds the weight, the flag tends to fly, and when it is lower, the flag sags. Thus the rapid changes in wind speed around the flag results in fluttering.



The wavelike motion of a flag results when the wind speed oscillates about a critical value of the force equal to the flag's weight. FILE PHOTO

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