

THE ASIAN AGE

29 AUGUST 2024

No politics please, focus on making hospitals safe

The rape and brutal murder of a post-graduate resident doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata should have shaken the conscience of the nation and paved the way towards ending several unjust practices prevailing in the healthcare sector, but it looks more and more unlikely that this will be the case as electoral politics over the mishap has taken centre stage in West Bengal. The only hope for any reform thus remains in the determined and timely intervention of the Supreme Court of India.

The 12-hour West Bengal bandh called by the BJP on Wednesday and the violence that preceded it on Tuesday were clearly the result of attempts by it to gain political mileage out of the horrendous tragedy that has the community of healthcare professionals on the streets in protest. It is the job of the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is investigating the rape and murder, to bring the people directly responsible for it to justice while it is the joint endeavour of the Union and state governments to usher in systemic changes. While it is perfectly legitimate for the media to hit the streets demanding early action, the BJP rushing there under some banner or the other is nothing but politicking of the worst kind. Now that the police and the protesters have clashed with those on both sides receiving injuries, the party has smelt an opportunity. The bandh call had no other rationale.

Now that the politicians are busy playing their favourite game, it is incumbent upon the Supreme Court, and the task force it formed, to stay the course and firmly introduce necessary changes. The task force which met on Tuesday has decided to widen the consultation process before coming up with a set of recommendations that it will eventually make to the apex court. It should lose no time fulfilling this task in order to make the workplace of the healthcare professionals humane, healthy and safe. The healthcare community, too, has a responsibility to help the task force come up with ideas that are sustainable and affordable. The loss of a precious life should not go in vain.

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Hard to deny bail to Kavitha

The relief granted to Telangana politician K. Kavitha through bail in corruption and money laundering cases linked to an alleged Delhi scam upholds the principle that bail is the rule and jail is the exception.

The process cannot be like punishment without trial, which is what many Opposition politicians, including the incarcerated Delhi chief minister, have suffered. Judging the merits of the cases against them, filed by Central Investigating agencies like the Enforcement Directorate and the CBI, is a different matter, though the handling of the cases has routinely drawn caustic comments from judges.

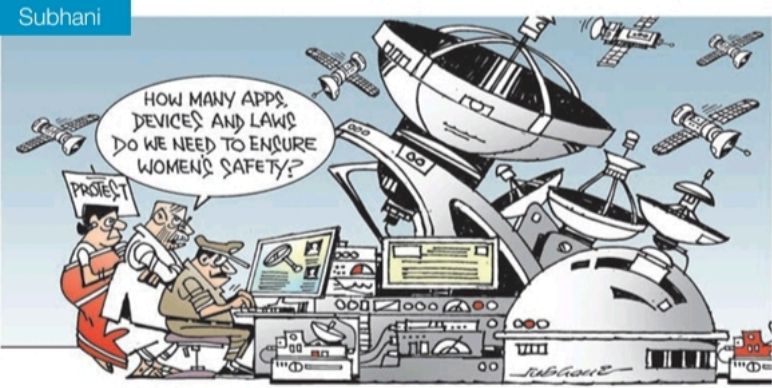
It has been established in Kavitha's case as well as that of an aide of a hand-picked politician similarly charged under PMLA that bail must be granted in cases being dealt with even under such stringent laws. It stands to reason that all those in jail must be released on bail until their innocence or guilt is established in court even if the judicial process is what may take a very long time for cases to be concluded and judgments delivered.

The matter of establishing proof in such cases in which large sums of money change hands in possible instances of quid pro quo, can be attempted only if the beans of the conspiracy are spilled by someone in the inner ring. It is, of course, open to question what credibility approvers will have since they must incriminate themselves to come over to the side of the law.

Given the slipshod methodology of investigating agencies in the matter of pursuing graft among politicians in public life and the more proficient lawyers that those accused can command, it is not surprising that one or three prominent personalities have been proved guilty in 77 years of Independent India. Many may have been accused of scams, including in disproportionate assets cases, but they have invariably walked free.

THE ASIAN AGE

Subhani



Will Bengal introspect, or let politics go on as usual?



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

If it shows nothing else, the uproar over the night of a shockingly brutal rape and murder in Calcutta, sorry, Kolkata, as renamed by West Bengal's aggressively nationalistic chief minister, demonstrates that the city is far from dying, as Rajiv Gandhi had once thought. If death does indeed loom ahead, it is because all those senses that men believe make them superior to animals are withering away. West Bengal's capital doesn't need any BJP machinations to destroy it. The greed, violence and cruelty of its own inhabitants is doing that very well, thank you.

In his first perspective contribution to the story of a man, a massive 579-page memoir, *My Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921-1982*, Niral D. Chaudhuri compared Calcutta Corporation, a cesspool of corruption and inefficiency where he once worked, with Independent India. "I anticipated that transfer of political power to Indians would make the Indian people victims of an insidious exploitation unparalleled even in the long history of their sufferings," he wrote.

"I became opposed to the idea, and said to myself in the words of the cliché that India in that event would become Calcutta Corporation writ large".

If anything, it's actually worse. Not even the degraded municipality can be guilty of the '40 rape reported daily, four every hour and one every 15 minutes' that is the national record, according to Abhishek Banerjee, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew and animated heir, and deputy minister who granted the ruling Trinamool Congress party's national general secretary. So far as they are known, the agonising facts are briefly stated. A 31-year-old female post-graduate trainee doctor was raped and murdered in the seminar hall of Kolkata's

R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital on the night of August 9. Exhausted by a 36-hour working shift and study session without a break, she had fallen asleep on a platform in the seminar room. Interns and fellow trainees discovered her corpse, semi-nude and with injuries. There the next morning. Her laptop, notebook and mobile phone lay beside her. Before the Calcutta high court handed over the investigation to the CBI, it commented acidly on delays in reporting facts, on contrary statements made to the authorities as well as to the victim's father, and

R.G. KAR HOSPITAL HORROR

on what looks like suppression of evidence. Founded in 1886 and known until Independence as the Carmichael Medical College after a British colonial grandee, the hospital in question was closely associated with Dr Bidhan Chandra Roy, an eminent physician who was West Bengal's chief minister from 1948 until he died in 1962. In recent years, however, the R.G. Kar Hospital — like much else of our colonial inheritance — has acquired a far from savoury reputation.

Hygiene and cleanliness are of little concern. Nursing sisters are poorly trained. There are suspicions about money, kickbacks and equipment purchases.

Washrooms and safe drinking water are hard to come by. Thanks to intense overcrowding and the government's belief that it's bad PR to turn people away, patients sprawl on the floor awaiting defecation calls that further spread disease in a supposed place of healing. "If a room has 30 beds", a newly arrived doctor opined, "you'll find at least 10 cats there!" Of far greater concern are persistent rumours of the highest college officials selling

Despite chief minister Mamata Banerjee's verbal bravado, Kolkata has degenerated into a dilapidated slum because West Bengal's creative impulse and ability have perished

unclaimed bodies and trafficking in biomedical waste.

The demand for hospital beds and college seats being so high and supply so limited, disadvantages are brushed aside. Those who need jobs or treatment cannot afford to be fussy in today's India that is Bharat. The Independent Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy estimates unemployment at 9.2 per cent, to say nothing of under-employment and widespread con-

cealed unemployment. Over 44 per cent of Indians in the 20-24 age group are without jobs, says Dr Amit Mitra, former secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, now special adviser on finance to West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee. His grim verdict is that "430 million Indians are not working or have given up looking for jobs".

While hard facts about the rape-murder may be scarce, I am astonished at the wealth of salacious detail in the local media, especially about a man called Sanjay Roy, a civic volunteer accused of extortion, corruption and intimidating women but never brought to book, who is now facing trial for the crime. We learn that Roy, who was politically influential on the police welfare board, wore a Kolkata Police T-shirt, rode a bike with a police sticker, and rested in the police barracks. Some reports mention a recent psychiatric profile indicating that he was addicted to pornography; the police found a large amount of it in his mobile, his "animal-like instincts" and showed no remorse for the crime.

CCTV footage showed Roy entering the hospital in the

afternoon of August 9 wearing jeans and a T-shirt, carrying a helmet that looks remarkably like the police's uniform helmets, and again at around 4 am next morning. Some reports claim that he was intoxicated and asked a random woman for her nude photograph. Others say that he had visited a red-light district. India is ostensibly puritanical but despite Buddha and Gandhi, neither non-violent nor asexual. We read of dalits being gang-raped, of girls being lured into the fields, and a four-year-old boy being sodomised and killed.

Chaudhuri mentions a politician accused of attempting to rape a woman who had gone to see him for a job. He knew the accused man "and could hardly believe it of him", but the woman's disturbed, almost hysterical, condition could not be ignored. Such incidents are so common and so normalised that Chaudhuri to "regard" government of the people, the people, and for the people" as the greater, and British rule as the lesser, of the two".

That seems an extreme position to take. Niral Chaudhuri, whom I knew well, was not someone to sugarcoat what he saw as the truth. What would his reaction be, I wonder, to the upsurge in Kolkata and its tragic cause? He would probably have said that a race that can no longer achieve greatness diverts its energies into sordid or trivial channels. Despite Mamata Banerjee's verbal bravado, Kolkata has degenerated into a dilapidated slum because West Bengal's creative impulse and ability have perished. As for the Centre, it squanders time and effort on frivolities like swadeshi convocation gowns because the serious business of governance — providing food, education and employment and teaching people the difference between good and bad, right and wrong — is beyond its conception or capability.

The August 9 horror exposed Kolkata's death throes, the ensuing politicisation confirmed that the stench of putrefaction extends beyond the cadaver.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

PENSION WOES

Please consider Employees' Pension Scheme-1995 (EPS-95) pensioners' woes. They are getting a very nominal pension. Other problems pushed down the EPS-95 senior citizens' problems and these went unnoticed. The finance minister's Budget proposals must be people-centric. A hike in minimum pension will help the lower strata among the retired EPFO senior pensioners. This is the time to look at the issue sympathetically and provide a minimum pension of ₹7,500 plus dearness allowance.

Suresh Venkatadri

Thirumala

LENDING INTERFACE

THE RBI is set to launch the Unified Lending Interface (ULI), a platform designed to provide "frictionless credit" to borrowers, especially in small and rural sectors, by streamlining digital information flow, including land records, to expedite credit appraisal and reduce processing times. Drawing parallels with the UPI, ULI aims to transform the lending landscape by enabling smooth, consent-based information exchange, minimising technical integrations, and ensuring quicker credit delivery, thereby supporting financial inclusion and growth of small businesses and rural enterprises.

Amarjeet Kumar

Haziribagh

UNHAPPY WOMEN

THE RECENT shocking murder of a young female doctor in a leading Kolkata medical college reaffirms the saddening fact that women in India are becoming the most vulnerable section as far as their safety and security are concerned. Fearfully enough the growing trend of sexually explicit behaviour by the present generation is causing much of the difference between good and bad, right and wrong — is beyond its conception or capability.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Railway Board puts freeze on promotions as engineers rage

As if the Railways didn't have enough problems following a spate of deadly accidents and mishaps, the railway ministry has hit the pause button on filling top positions, including chairman/member, Railway Board, and general managers. The decision apparently stems from growing discontent among officers who entered the service through the Indian Engineering Services (IES).

Sources have informed DKN that recently the ministry issued a notification inviting eligible officers from the 1989 and 1990 batches to apply for these top posts within the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS). But a few days later, that notification was suddenly withdrawn.

So, what's causing this backtrack? The main issue seems to be the resentment brewing among IES officers. They're frustrated that only a handful from their cadre are considered eligible for these coveted positions. In contrast, most of those qualifying for the top posts are from the civil services examination (CSE) stream.

The Indian Railways has traditionally recruited officers through three main channels — CSE, IES, and the Special Class Railway Apprentice (SCRA). These officers then join various departments like traffic, electrical, mechanical, civil, personnel, accounts, and stores, each of which operates independently from top to bottom, headed by a member of the Railway Board.

To address internal friction, the Union government introduced the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS), a unified service meant to streamline operations and promote a cohesive vision. However, since direct recruitment through IES and SCRA was halted, and with delays in placing recruits to UPSC, no new direct recruits have joined Railways in a working post since 2019. The first IRMS batch is still awaiting postings.

The delay in empanelment was only added to the confusion, especially since officers who joined via CSE have advanced quickly, leaving their IES counterparts trailing.

AS POLLS LOOM, MAHARASHTRA APPOINTS L.S. CHAHAL TO KEY ROLE

The Maharashtra government has just made a significant move, appointing L.S. Chahal, a 1989 batch IAS officer, as the additional chief secretary of the home department. Mr Chahal, who has been working closely with the chief minister as the additional secretary to the CM's secretary, also served as Mumbai's municipal commissioner.

This appointment is raising eyebrows, especially as it comes amid mounting criticism of the home department's handling of recent atrocities against young girls in Badlapur. It seems the government is under pressure to show that it's taking things seriously.

Earlier, Sujata Samik had the role of home secretary before her promotion to chief secretary in June. Even after her promotion, she continued to oversee the home department alongside her new responsibilities. With Samik moving up, several names were floated for the now-vacant additional chief secretary position. Sources say that chief minister Eknath Shinde threw his weight behind Mr Chahal, who has been acting as an advisor on other ideas. There was talk of appointing V. Radha from the general administration department, but her 1984 batch status made some worry about her seniority as well.

In the end, the need for dedicated leadership in the home department seems to have tipped the scales in favour of Chahal. The view is, if the government has not acted now, the Election Commission might have stepped in once the code of conduct kicked in.

Chahal is expected to retire in 2026, and there's already speculation that he might be next in line for the chief secretary position after Samik, with elections looming, one must wonder — is this appointment a bold move or just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic?

IS PM PRE-EMPTING RAHUL GANDHI?

Has Prime Minister Narendra Modi outmanoeuvred Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi by

addressing one of his criticisms before it gained traction? The latest bureaucratic reshuffle certainly suggests so.

By appointing Nagaraju Maddurra as secretary of the department of financial services, Mr Modi seems to have taken note of Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks in Parliament. Mr Gandhi pointed out the absence of SC and ST officers during the *baahwa* ceremony, a traditional event that marks the beginning of the Budget process. Maddurra, a Tripura cadre IAS officer from the reserved category, is now likely to be present at the next ceremony. This move appears to be a direct response to Mr Gandhi's criticism, ensuring that the issue he raised is no longer valid.

This appointment is part of a broader reshuffle, marking the first major bureaucratic changes in Modi's third term. Along with Maddurra, new secretaries have been appointed to key departments, including expenditure, banking, corporate affairs, and defence.

While it's unclear if this move will resonate with the public or deflate Rahul Gandhi's momentum, it certainly adds an interesting twist to the ongoing political narrative.

Love them, hate them, ignore them at national level, the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com

WAKE-UP CALL
President Droupadi Murmu

Enough is enough. No civilised society can allow daughters and sisters to be subjected to such atrocities

Imbalances in farm credit

The big question is whether policymakers can redress the growing disparities in disbursements

ALTHOUGH FARM CREDIT by commercial, cooperative, and regional rural banks has registered double-digit growth and surpassed targets during the last decade, there is concern over growing regional imbalances in disbursements. Credit flows are also skewed towards crop production without pushing infrastructure creation that is vital for boosting agricultural growth. There are also apprehensions that a part of these credit flows are being diverted to non-agricultural activities. For such reasons, indications are that the farm credit target for FY25 is likely to be fixed at a relatively lower level than ₹24.84 trillion achieved in FY24. To redress the more important problem of regional imbalances, Ramesh Chand, member of NitiAayog, told FE that a criterion must be established for allocating farm credit to state governments based on their respective farm outputs — such as 20% of the crop value or 40% of input value including wages — to ensure that short-term crop loans are not concentrated only in a few states in the country.

Chand's suggestions deserve attention although it is far from clear how they can be implemented by the government. After all, this is not an era of planning and market forces increasingly determine credit allocation even to a priority sector like agriculture. NitiAayog's advice is only indicative and not binding unlike the erstwhile Planning Commission that could decisively influence allocations on the basis of specific criteria. For perspective, southern states — Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala — garnered half of the credit disbursements in FY24 although they accounted for only 17% of the gross cropped area. In sharp contrast, the vanguard agrarian states in the north — Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh — absorbed only 15% of credit flows despite having 20% of the gross cropped area. The South's advantage stems from higher bank penetration and better credit absorption capacity besides farmers opting for more commercial crops.

Although the government cannot force the commercial, cooperative, and regional rural banks to ensure a more regionally balanced flow of farm credit, there are steps that can certainly be taken to improve the credit culture, especially in the eastern and northeastern regions, by providing collateral in terms of social guarantee or specialised funds and insurance products. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development is working with banks in this regard. There is also the lack of land records, especially for sharecroppers and tenant farmers. State governments must update these land records in a time-bound manner to improve credit off-take. Other targeted interventions include ensuring that small and marginal farmers — who account for 89.4% of farm households owning less than 2 hectares of land — have more access to credit for growing fruits and vegetables, fisheries, poultry, dairy, etc. to boost their incomes manifold. These activities get only 11% of farm credit although they account for a substantial share of gross value added.

The upshot is that while the double-digit growth of farm credit is impressive, this achievement is clouded by widening regional imbalances. Instead of setting a lower credit target for FY25, policy must ensure that timely and affordable credit is used more for infrastructure and checking any diversion to non-agricultural activities. This will indeed be a force multiplier for higher agricultural growth, which is expected to rebound to its earlier trajectory of 5% — registered during the seven years before last fiscal — in FY25.

Telegram's approach to content faces reckoning

THE RECENT ARREST of Telegram founder and chief executive officer Pavel Durov at Le Bourget airport near Paris has sent shockwaves through the tech world. Euro Musk called on France to "free Pavel" to avert a threat to democracy. Paul Graham, the co-founder of leading Silicon Valley accelerator Y Combinator, suggested it would hurt the country's chances of being "a major start-up hub." Yet while some are citing a French-led assault on free speech and innovation, the reality is more nuanced. Durov's detention is not a shocking act of government overreach but the culmination of years of tension between his lax approach to oversight and growing concern about Telegram's role in enabling criminal activity. The charges are extensive and serious, covering Telegram's complicity in the distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), drug trafficking, and money laundering. While the likes of Meta Platforms Inc., TikTok, and Alphabet Inc's YouTube have much sterner bases on such activities, Durov's arrest should also be taken as a sign that the "no consequences" era for social media is fading as governments push to make companies more accountable for what happens on their apps.

Telegram is one of the world's biggest social media platforms with an estimated 900 million monthly users, many of whom follow popular channels that broadcast content to thousands of people. It's also unique in its approach to overseeing all that activity: it doesn't. While its peers invest heavily in content moderation and cooperate with law enforcement, Telegram has a minimal intervention policy that has contributed to its low operational costs. Durov once told the *Financial Times* that each Telegram user cost the company just 70 cents a year to support.

His platform has been linked to the spread of conspiracy theory groups, CSAM, and terrorism, with ISIS having reportedly used the app as a communication hub for nearly a decade. Such groups don't just use the app for alleged secrecy, but for its "anything goes" approach to moderation. During the recent UK riots, calls to violence proliferated on the platform even though they broke the app's rules. One such post was only taken down after it contacted the app about it. Despite all this, Telegram has proudly maintained a stance of non-cooperation. In its FAQs the company states "to this day, we have disclosed 0 bytes of user data to third parties, including governments".

Now, in response to the arrest, Telegram has said it's "absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for abuse of that platform. Telegram abides by EU laws, including the Digital Services Act — its moderation is within industry standards and constantly improving".

But it's far from "absurd" for a company to be held accountable for criminal activity on its platform. Cryptography experts have long pointed out that Telegram is not fully end-to-end encrypted. Most chats on the app use client-server encryption, meaning Telegram could access message contents if it chose to (and much of the content on the platform is on public channels anyway). Telegram's "Secret Chats" feature offers end-to-end encryption, but that's not the default and it isn't always used for regular communication. In essence, Telegram has created an illusion of total privacy while retaining the technical means to monitor content — a capability it chooses not to use. France's move against Durov marks a reckoning for that choice, and the involvement of specialised units highlight the gravity of his app's alleged offences. Musk and other critics may argue that his arrest threatens free speech, but Telegram's hands-off approach to much of the activity on its platform doesn't grant it freedom from consequences. The digital world requires as much governance as the physical one, and when a platform becomes a tool for widespread criminal activity, turning a blind eye isn't a defence of liberty but a dereliction of duty.

One lesson for the industry is that social media giants can no longer expect to keep operating in a regulatory vacuum. Europe is on track to take a harsher line on harms that occur on social media with laws like the Digital Services Act and Britain's Online Safety Act coming into force in the next year or so. The charges brought by the French prosecutors aren't connected to the new EU law, but they are part of a broader shift in aggression. Leading tech players aren't as untouchable as they thought they were.



PARMY OLSON
Bloomberg

DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

ENDORSEMENTS HAVE ENERGISED PARTY BASE WITH HOPES OF SWAYING UNDECIDED VOTERS

An inflection point in US polls

THE DEMOCRATIC Convention (DNC) unfolded in Chicago over four days last week, marking a defining moment in the 2024 US presidential campaign. This year's DNC saw a groundswell of voter enthusiasm and the historic nomination of Kamala Harris as the Democratic presidential candidate. The party's old guard, including the Clintons and the Obamas, threw their full support behind Harris, setting the stage for a unified front. In stark contrast, the Republican National Convention (RNC) held in Milwaukee in mid-July was notable for the absence of its traditional leadership, highlighting the growing division within the GOP between pre- and post-Trump factions. This division has reshuffled the Republican voter base, complicating Donald Trump's path to a potential comeback.



Respectively vice-president for studies and foreign policy & fellow, Americas, ORF, Delhi

For the Democratic Party, the DNC was a critical inflection point. Party delegates rallied behind Harris, who, if elected, would be the first woman of Black and South Asian descent to serve as president. High-profile endorsements, including a strong show of support from President Biden, former presidents, first ladies, and influential party leaders like Josh Shapiro, Pete Buttigieg, Gretchen Whitmer, and JB Pritzker bolstered Harris' candidacy. This wave of endorsements, coupled with appearances by celebrities, has energised the Democratic base and ignited hopes of swaying undecided voters.

Post-DNC polling indicates that Harris has gained a slight lead over Trump, with some surveys showing a 3-4 point advantage. However, the race remains tight in battleground states like Arizona, where Trump still holds a narrow lead within the margin of error. In the broader Sun Belt region — encompassing Arizona, Nevada, Georgia, and North Carolina — the candidates are neck and neck, each holding slight leads in two states.

A new way forward
Harris has positioned herself as the candidate of change, rallying behind the slogan "A New Way Forward." Despite the Democratic Party being the incumbent, Harris has marketed herself as a fresh force, breaking historical barriers and promising renewed energy for the White House. Her campaign's ability to raise \$82 million in the week of the DNC and nearly \$550 million in the last month has set a record, defying expectations given Harris' previous track record as Vice President and her earlier presidential run in 2020.

While the DNC has clearly energised the party, Democratic strategists are cautiously optimistic, wary of a potential "polling bounce" that might fade as media attention shifts. This is reminiscent of Trump's brief surge following the assassination attempt against him, which temporarily boosted his numbers against Biden. The real test for Harris will be whether her post-DNC momentum can be sustained through to the election.

Debates
The outcome of the 2024 election will likely hinge on a few key swing states — Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. While Harris has made slight gains in these states post-DNC, Trump remains competitive, trailing by only a few points. As the race goes down to the wire, the battle for delegates will be crucial, as the popular vote margins remain tight. Trump's addition of two former Democrats in his transition team, Robert F. Kennedy Jr and Tulsi Gabbard — the former joining forces with Trump by giving up his presidential run as an independent — could be a key decision to swing Republican votes.

With just over 70 days left until the election, one of the closest races in recent history could still swing in either direction. The coming weeks will test both candidates' abilities to shape voter perceptions on critical policy issues. Already, economic policy debates, particularly on taxes and tariffs, have taken centre stage. Trump, leveraging his legacy of tax cuts from his first term, has hinted at further reductions should he win, while Harris has countered with a "tax-the-rich" approach, spotlighting Trump's own wealth. Both, however, agree on "no tax on tips", vying

for the favour of middle-class voters. The issue of tariffs represents a major shift in US economic policy thinking. Since Trump's first term, the broad bipartisan consensus on free trade has been challenged, influenced by the pandemic and growing concerns over China's economic rise and use of unfair trade practices. Harris, while differing from Trump's aggressive tariff stance, has not completely dismissed the idea of protectionist measures, suggesting that her administration might take a more guarded approach to trade than past Democratic presidents.

As the campaign intensifies, key issues like immigration, healthcare, and foreign policy remain flashpoints. Protests outside the DNC by pro-Palestinian groups underscored the challenges Harris faces in navigating the complex international order and American leadership. These and other critical topics will likely dominate the first presidential debate between Harris and Trump, set to take place in Philadelphia on September 10. However this time, Trump's quintessential tactic of attacking his opponent based on style, political leaning, and even appearance may not work against Harris. In fact, it could benefit her.

In a sign of how close the contest is, the two leaders are sparring over the logistics of the debate with the Harris campaign asking for the microphones to be muted when it is their other person's turn to speak. For the Harris campaign, this would be one way of showing the "real" Donald Trump to the rest of the world. It is hoping that Trump's tendency to interrupt and be ill-tempered through the course of the debate will bring out the contrast between the two leaders more starkly. This is a sign of how high the stakes are both sides in a contest that is likely to go down the wire.

Chairing a climate transition agenda



SHEFALI GORADIA
VIRAL THAKKAR
Respective chairpersons & partner and sustainability and climate leader, Deloitte South Asia

disruption and competing business challenges, 57% Indian CXOs ranked "climate change" as a "top three priority," ahead of "economic outlook," which is significantly higher compared with the ranking from global executives.

As brand custodians, chairs can shape the board agenda to align short-term goals with long-term sustainability vision. Sustainability focus, with an eye on long-term strategy
Chairs are guiding their organisations through climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience, indicating a shift in the core objectives of corporate governance, with sustainability becoming a strategic priority. They are also leading their boards in integrating climate considerations into business strategies and cultivating a culture that values environmental responsibility.

By securing executive sponsorship and buy-ins, leaders are aligning individual goals with organisational ones to make climate change an operational imperative for the organisation. Capital allocation is another critical area where the chairs are making a significant impact. By integrating climate risk mitigation and adaptation into investment decisions, they reshape financial planning to align it with sustainable practices. Focusing on robust environmental, social, and governance metrics and high-quality disclosures, they can effectively communicate their sustain-

ability efforts to investors, building trust and attracting capital from those prioritising accountability and transparency. This approach enhances the company's reputation and contributes to long-term profitability and resilience. Beyond governance and capital allocation, chairs are reimagining long-term business models to prioritise sustainability. This approach includes corporate alliances and public-private collaborations, expanding sustainability efforts beyond traditional boundaries.

Our research reveals that 81% Indian CXOs reported increased sustainability investments from the previous year

Staying ahead of regulatory environment
As governance evolves, board members are enhancing climate expertise by establishing climate action committees and empowering executives to navigate a dynamic regulatory environment and drive sustainability initiatives. Chairs are reinforcing the importance of climate action at the executive level, making it a critical component of corporate operations.

Appointing chief sustainability officers indicates the growing importance of dedicated leadership for climate-related initiatives. This role provides a clear charter to champion sustainability principles. Chairs are advocating distinguishing the sustainability charter from corporate social responsibility, recognising that sustainability and climate issues directly impact business operations and investor confidence.

Applying climate lens on the chair's role

To provide a climate transition framework for the chair of the future, we have delineated emerging facets of the chair's role, focusing on vision, culture, trust, guardianship, and crisis management. Vision provokes inspire boards to embrace comprehensive climate risk and resilience integration, setting a business case and vision for sustainability. Culture and talent cultivators ensure that employees are aligned with the company's sustainability objectives. Trust torchbearers build stakeholder trust through sustainable practices and transparent communication, establishing credibility and nurturing long-term relationships with investors, customers, and the broader community. Guardians oversee compliance, ensuring that climate commitments are met. As a crisis compass, they focus on resilience and adaptability, navigating crisis with a climate and sustainability lens.

These roles help chairs foster organisations that thrive amid the climate crisis and respond well to stakeholders' needs. By embracing these roles, they can steer their organisations towards long-term viability and resilience to address pressing global challenges.

In conclusion, the climate crisis is driving transformation in boardrooms, addressing the urgent need for climate action and positioning companies for long-term success. By maintaining focus, staying updated on regulatory changes, equipping board members to address climate challenges, and using unique global insights, chairs can lead their organisations toward a sustainable and profitable future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Catering to unmet credit demand

Apropos of "Democratising lending" (FE, August 28), the Unified Payments Interface has seen unprecedented growth and a strong response from the people. So it is not surprising to learn that the Unified Lending Interface (ULI) will be launched along the same line to cater to unmet credit demand in the market. Though many fintechs are using digital and

paperless mode for lending, there is still a huge segment of customers in the micro, small and medium enterprise space who would benefit from ULI. Since the ULI platform will consolidate data from various sources such as e-KYC, Aadhaar, PAN validation, and land records it could be a seamless exercise for both lenders and borrowers. There would be no threat to data privacy as it would be consent-based lending. —Bal Govind, Noida

Moderate tax policy

Apropos of "Revisit tax, expenditure policies" (FE, August 28), indeed increasing tax on capital gains and just trimming the direct tax slabs left tax payers. They want noteworthy tax rate cut, including capital gains and intermittent tax sops, for increased consumption and subsequent demand boost. At the same time, the expenditure on several social welfare plans causes fiscal slippages. The

leakage of funds between spending and reaching the beneficiary is huge and defeats the core purpose. The government should work out a moderate direct tax policy and rationalise expenditures, both on economic and social welfare plans. Limited, moderate slabs in the goods and services tax will increase compliance and tax revenue. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Lingering trauma: A nurse with child victims of communal violence in Amritsar, during the Partition in 1947. Their mother was stabbed to death in the riots. GETTY IMAGES

Revealing the untold: translated stories of Partition, written by women

The works of women writers like Geetanjali Shree, Ismat Chughtai, Krishna Sobti and Qurratulain Hyder contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Partition history. It provides a female perspective in a genre where discussions have largely been dominated by male writers

K.S. Swati

Translation works that had long lurked in the shadows, eagerly awaiting exposure, finally received their global recognition in 2022. That year, Geetanjali Shree's *Ret Samadhi*, translated from Hindi by Daisy Rockwell as *Tomb of Sand*, won the International Booker Prize. Now gaining wide readership, Shree's 1998 Hindi work *Hamara Shahar Us Baras*, translated by Rockwell as *Our City That Year*, is set to be released on August 30, bringing into the limelight the importance of women's translated books, especially those on Partition literature.

Unlike borders that can be shifted by a stroke of a pen, human identities are deeply rooted; a new homeland cannot replace a lifetime of belonging. The horrors of Partition – 14.5 million people displaced, brutal violence inflicted on women, men, and children, countless women abducted, and myriad other atrocities – have been extensively documented and discussed. However, history has often overlooked the other side of the coin: the experiences of women caught in this crossfire. Confined within their homes against their wishes while men fought wars, their sacrifices and silence have largely gone unnoticed. Yet, a few unwavering women dared to write about the loss of identity, the pangs of nostalgia, the quest for a new sense of self in a shattered world, and the longing to return to their homeland.

Through these translations, we gain

insight into the lives of women who, constrained by societal norms and confined spaces, bore the emotional and practical consequences of the Partition.

Fear and nostalgia
In Ismat Chughtai's *Jadui* (1972), translated as *Roots* by M. Asaduddin and included in the short story collection *Lifting the Veil* published in 2001, Chughtai explores the fear of what the future holds and the unwillingness to let go of the past, as it is tied to one's identity. In this short story, the narrator's mother refuses to go to the new country while the rest of the family decides to leave. Having spent her entire life in a house where every nook and cranny is filled with memories – of her marriage, bearing children, burying an umbilical cord in the courtyard, and finally witnessing her husband's last breath – how could she make a new country her identity? If her homeland no longer recognised her, how would the new country, she pondered.

In Khadija Mastur's *Aangan*, published in 1962 and translated into English in 2018 by Rockwell as *Women's Courtyard*, we witness the claustrophobic lives of women confined within the four walls of their homes.

It discusses how while men step out to fight for justice, it is the women who bear the emotional and financial burdens of their decisions. The protagonist's mother sacrifices her desire in order to protect her children and maintain family stability despite financial woes. The protagonist, who dreams of pursuing higher education, is instead forced to handle

domestic chores against her wishes.

The courtyard becomes both a literal and symbolic prison, illustrating the narrow roles imposed on women and how their autonomy is constrained by societal structures.

Trapped identities
In a patriarchal society, women are seen as symbols of family honour. Therefore, any act of violence against them is seen as a sign of disgrace to the family, as is elucidated in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950), a novella translated from Punjabi by Khushwant Singh as *Skeleton* in 2002. The protagonist is kidnapped by a man on the eve of her wedding night as he wanted to take revenge on her family. When she manages to escape from his clutches, her family refuses to accept her. Disgraced, disheartened and displaced, she has no option but to return to her husband. With her name changed, she struggles to accept her new identity and longs for identity, family and home. The novella reveals that the status of women is a product of the political and social manipulations of the time.

In Krishna Sobti's *Gujarat Pakistan Se Gujarat Hindustan Tak* translated from Hindi by Rockwell as *Gujarat Here, Gujarat There*, the protagonist, Krishna, wrestles with questions of identity in the aftermath of displacement. The Partition compels her to redefine herself as she navigates a transformed socio-political landscape. It underscores the dual burden of confronting both societal norms and the trauma of displacement. In the want of carving her own niche, the

protagonist applies for a job in the princely state of Sirohi. However, she faces prejudice as a refugee and is often subjected to sexist comments from her previous employer. Yet, she remains deterred. Once she gets the job of becoming a governess to the child maharaja, hope for a new identity emerges but the future remains bleak. The title symbolises the fractured identities of those affected by Partition, with 'Gujarat' representing both a place of belonging and a lost homeland.

The world of the protagonist changed at the stroke of midnight in Qurratulain Hyder's *Mere Bhi Sanamkhone* in Urdu, translated as *My Temples, Too* by Hyder and published in 2004. In a war-torn country, which the protagonist once envisioned was finally a just and orderly country, was marred with not just violence but also shattered her hopes, dreams and her world.

This inner turmoil drives her to a state of emotional and existential crisis, as she struggles to reconcile the shattered world around her with the hopes and dreams of her youth. The chaos of Partition forces her to confront the loss of her cultural and social world, leaving her with a profound sense of alienation and disillusionment.

Through the stories of these women, the translated works contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Partition history. It provides a female perspective in a genre where discussions have largely been dominated by male writers focusing only on the horror and crime inflicted on women.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"This is where you have gone wrong. Instead of calculating... What's the matter? You don't feel all right?"
"No. Can I use your lavatory?"
"Sure. Go straight; it is the second door on the right."
"Feeling better?"
"Yes. Thank you."
"Don't ask your host or hostess to show you the lavatory or latrine."
"What should I say?"
"Can I use your bathroom, please? Can I use your toilet please? These are polite expressions."
"What's wrong with 'lavatory'?"
"Nothing wrong except that it is not good manners to use it in company. There was a time when it was a respectable word. We are all embarrassed to talk about bodily functions. We don't refer to them directly. We use euphemisms."
"What's a euphemism?"
"A euphemism is a 'mild or vague expression substituted for one thought to be too harsh or direct.' It is a substitute for an expression that may offend or suggest something unpleasant. People go to ridiculous lengths to avoid saying what they consider to be unpleasant. Your host will be greatly shocked and offended if you ask him where you could urinate. 'Bathroom,' 'toilet,' are euphemisms. These are the ones that are generally used. There are many more."
"So euphemisms are expressions that are used to describe bodily functions."
"No. They are not restricted to bodily functions. For example, you don't want to say bluntly 'He died.' You soften the blow by saying 'He passed away.' In our culture, we tend to say 'He reached the Lotus feet of the Lord.' Governments and advertisers also use euphemisms. The following are some: garbage man – sanitary engineer; undertaker – funeral director; wire-tapping – electronic surveillance; bombing raids – protective retaliation; War department – Defence department; poor countries – developing countries; taxes – revenue enhancements; invasions – incursions; toilet for men – Gents; toilet for women – Ladies; a meeting in conflict – encounter."
"I'll read out to you an interesting letter written by a passenger on July 2, 1909 to the White District Transportation Superintendent of Sahibganj Station then in Bengal. In those days, there was no toilet facility on trains. 'Privy' was the word that was used once for 'toilet.'"
"Dear Sir,
I am arrive by passenger train at Ahmedpore station and my belly is too much swelling with jackfruit. I am therefore went to privy. Just as I am doing the nuisance, the guard making whistle blow for train to go off and I am running with lotah in one hand and dhote in the next when I am fall over and expose all my shoddings to man, female women on platform. I am get leaved at Ahmedpore station. This too much bad. If passenger go make dung, that damn guard no wait train five minutes for him. I am therefore pray your honour to make big fine in that guard for public sake. Other I am making big reports to papers.
Yours faithful servant,
Sd. Okhul Ch. Sen"
Published in *The Hindu* on March 16, 1993.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Test your knowledge on the history of the Paralympics that got underway on August 28

V.V. Ramanan

- QUESTION 1**
What was the predecessor of the Paralympics held in 1948 called and in which year and where were the first Paralympic Games held?
- QUESTION 2**
Name the only sports in the Paralympic programme that does not have an Olympic counterpart.
- QUESTION 3**
What unique distinction does the Hungarian fencer Pal Szekeres have?
- QUESTION 4**
According to the International Paralympic Committee, who is the most decorated Paralympian of all time with 46 medals, including 32 gold, nine silver, and five bronze

- QUESTION 5**
Since which edition have the Olympic and Paralympic Games been held in the same city and at the same venues?
- QUESTION 6**
What is *Agitos* (Latin for 'I Move') in the context of the Paralympic Games?
- QUESTION 7**
What is special about some category of medalists in para athletics, para triathlon, and para cycling?
- QUESTION 8**
Apart from para swimming, which are the two other disciplines that are open to athletes with an intellectual disability?



Visual question: Identify this first Indian Paralympic gold medalist receiving the Padma Shri and in which event did he achieve success in 1972? PTI

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. The purpose of the March on Washington. **Ans: The purpose of the march was to advocate for the civil and economic rights of African Americans.**
2. African Americans were freed from slavery under this amendment of the U.S. Constitution. **Ans: Thirteenth Amendment**
3. This author was prevented from speaking at the March because his comments would be too inflammatory. **Ans: James Baldwin**
4. The march is credited with helping to pass this landmark civil rights and labour law in the United States. **Ans: The Civil Rights Act of 1964**
5. Folk singer Joan Baez led a crowd of 3,000 in singing this song during the march. **Ans: 'We Shall Overcome'**
Visual: Identify this speaker and name his speech. **Ans: Martin Luther King Jr, 'I Have a Dream'**
Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Tarnal Biswas| Sunil Kannada| Yasir Manoor| Pranab Biswas

Word of the day

Menial:
used in relation to unskilled work

Synonyms: humble, lowly

Usage: The government has been criticised for forcing jobseekers to do menial unpaid work.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/menialpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈmiːni.əl/

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

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of D-voters in Assam, according to the CM

1.2 in lakh. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said nearly 1.2 lakh people had been identified as 'D' (dubious or doubtful) voters of which 41,583 have been declared as foreigners. The concept of 'D' voters was introduced in Assam in 1997. PHOTO: PTI

GQG Partners increases its stake in GMR airports

5.17 in per cent. GQG Partners hiked its stake in GMR Airports Infrastructure by snapping up additional shares worth over ₹433 crore through open market transactions. GQG Partners is also a key investor in the Adani Group. PHOTO: PTI

The number of industrial cities the government will set up

12 The government approved 12 new industrial cities in 10 States with an estimated investment of ₹28,602 crore. Some of these industrial areas include Rajpura-Patala (Punjab), Digbi (Maharashtra), Palakkad (Kerala), Agra, Prayagraj (U.P.) and Gaya in Bihar. PHOTO: PTI

The increase in UPI transaction volume in India by FY29

439 in billion. The total transaction volume on UPI is expected to increase to 439 billion by 2028-29 from about 131 billion in the last financial year and account for 91% of overall retail digital payments, as per a PwC India Report. PHOTO: PTI

Amount to be given for hydropower projects in northeast

4,136 in ₹ crore. The Union Cabinet approved equity support to northeast States for developing hydropower projects, totalling 15,000 MW capacity over the next eight years. PHOTO: PTI

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On Ukraine's surprise incursion into Kursk

The attack caught Moscow off-guard and raised questions of an intelligence failure. According to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the aim of the operation is to "create a buffer zone" that would prevent further attacks from Russia across the border

WORLD INSIGHT

Maneesh.T

In the early hours of August 6, the regional government of Kursk, a federal subject of Russia that borders Ukraine to the west, sent an alarm on its Telegram channel asking residents to run for shelter from incoming missile attacks. Hours later, the channel posted images of dilapidated residential buildings, with a message from Alexey Smirnov, the Acting Governor of the region, "Tonight, the city of Sudzha was shelled from the Ukrainian side. Several residential buildings were severely damaged." Ukraine had launched a surprise incursion into Russia's southwestern province of Kursk, in the first ground invasion of the country or the erstwhile Soviet Union since World War II.

Though the Russian Ministry of Defence was quick to claim that it had repelled several raids by Ukrainian forces, equipped with almost a battalion's worth of tanks and armoured vehicles, geolocated footage by the Washington DC-based Institute of Study of War (ISW) showed otherwise. In its August 7 update, the ISW said that the armoured vehicles had advanced to positions about 10 kilometres from the international border with Sumy of Ukraine. Russia's line of fortification was clearly breached.

The implication of the attack

The attack, executed with great operational security, caught Moscow off-guard and raised questions of an intelligence failure. On August 7, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Kyiv of a "large-scale provocation" even as the Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov tried to downplay the situation by stating that it was "largely under control".

The Ukrainian forces continued their rapid advancement into Kursk in the subsequent days, seizing villages and capturing conscripts as they pushed forward. On August 16, they destroyed two bridges across the Seim. Another was struck on August 19.

As of August 19, according to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, his forces were in control of 92 settlements in Kursk and 1,250 square kilometres of Russian territory. Mr. Smirnov, apprising Mr. Putin of the situation on August 22, said that 1,33,190 people have been evacuated from these territories.

For Ukraine, the prolonged war, which has now dragged on for two-and-a-half years, took a turn for the worse in May this year as Russian forces began an offensive in Kharkiv — its second-largest city. Already losing ground in the east, where Moscow has continued its aggression since the beginning of the war, Kyiv now saw the battle lines stretching and was clearly on the back foot. The August 6 offensive was, in a way, its last attempt to alter battle dynamics.

The rationale

Strategically, the surprise incursion serves several purposes for Kyiv. It could be seen as a diversion tactic employed to force Russia to shift its forces from the ongoing offensive in the east or Kharkiv. The geographical significance of planning the attack on Kursk is also to be noted, as a ground invasion there would disrupt the movement of the Russian forces to Kharkiv, which is southeast of Sumy.

According to Mr. Zelenskyy, however, the aim of the operation was to "create a buffer zone" that would prevent further attacks from Russia across the border. As quoted by the ISW, Mr. Zelenskyy stated



Gaining ground: Ukrainian servicemen ride a military vehicle, near the Russian border in the Sumy region, Ukraine on August 10. REUTERS

A limited advance

As of August 19, according to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, his forces were in control of 92 settlements in Kursk and 1,250 square kilometres of Russian territory



that Russian forces had conducted almost 2,100 artillery strikes from Kursk against Sumy since June 1.

If Kyiv manages to hold on to the buffer zone it has created through the territorial advancement made into Kursk, it may also act as leverage in the eventuality of any future negotiations with Moscow. This is of much more significance, especially at a time when the U.S., Kyiv's biggest arms supplier, is going to the polls in November. Washington had put its security assistance to Kyiv on the back burner for months, as Congress was divided on the issue with the Republicans opposing further aid to Ukraine. In June, U.S. President Joe Biden even issued a

public apology to Mr. Zelenskyy for the months-long hold-up.

Republican nominee and former U.S. President Donald Trump, on the other hand, pledged in July to end the war by negotiating a deal with Kyiv and Moscow. Mr. Trump has always postured himself as someone who could end the war quickly, even though he has not made it clear how he intends to achieve it. His running mate J.D. Vance, meanwhile, is among the group of Republicans who advocate for dropping military aid to Kyiv. With Mr. Biden out of the presidential race and Mr. Trump's victory not out of the picture, Kyiv knows that assistance from the U.S. may no longer be guaranteed

post-November. Germany, Europe's main supplier of aid to Kyiv, has also recently announced that it would cut down on the assistance in 2025. With several such uncertainties looming, Kyiv has been forced to make hay while the sun shines.

Whether or not the offensive ends up being a strategic success, Kyiv, by bringing the war directly to Russian territory, has announced to the world that Moscow's theatre of war is not impregnable. It has made a statement before its arms suppliers and the rest of the world that Moscow has its vulnerabilities, akin to what the Prigozhin mutiny or Wagner Group rebellion exposed last year.

The Russian response

After initial efforts to play down the Kursk offensive, Moscow's response to the situation has not been a direct one. Rather than redeploying its troops from the east to put a halt to the incursion in Kursk, it has stepped on the pedal in areas where it already had momentum and was making advancements.

Since the Kursk incursion, Moscow has made significant gains in its bid to siege the town of Pokrovsk, an important logistics hub that connects Kyiv's frontlines in the east. In fact, it has claimed that it has already captured the town of Niu-York, another important logistics hub which is just 40 miles away from Pokrovsk. The fall of Pokrovsk, if it happens, could be a further boost to Moscow's attempts to take full control of the Donetsk region, which it had declared annexed in 2022. For Putin, this would help in offsetting the nationalist backlash and counterbalance the losses in Kursk. The Russian military command has also beefed up the defence in Kursk by redeploying some forces from Kharkiv.

What lies ahead?

While Kyiv has shifted the war's narrative through the surprise incursion, it remains to be seen what it will gain from the move in the long term. Whether a situation of diplomatic brinkmanship will give it an advantage in negotiations or whether Russia's counteroffensive will shift the balance again is unknown at this point.

THE GIST

Ukraine had launched a surprise incursion into Russia's southwestern province of Kursk, in the first ground invasion of the country or the erstwhile Soviet Union since World War II.

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Kyiv of a "large-scale provocation" even as the Chief of the General Staff Army General Valery Gerasimov tried to downplay the situation by stating that it was "largely under control".

While Kyiv has shifted the war's narrative through the surprise incursion, it remains to be seen what it will gain from the move in the long term.

Editorial



War and peace

India is not well-placed to broker a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine

Just days after his visit to Kyiv, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's telephonic conversations with U.S. President Joseph Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin have raised hopes that New Delhi is ready to take the plunge and attempt peacemaking in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Mr. Modi's travel to the UN in September, where he will meet U.S. and European leaders and possibly Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again, and another visit to Russia in October for the BRICS summit, have fuelled those hopes. However, those who are boosting speculation of an Indian role may benefit from a careful consideration of the circumstances, and India's position thus far. Since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, India has remained distant from the outcomes of what External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had once called "Europe's war" and any peace process that does not involve bringing Russia and Ukraine to the table for talks. It had even dissociated itself from the Swiss peace summit. While Mr. Modi has consistently said that India is "on the side of peace" alone, New Delhi has been seen to be partial to Moscow, given its historical ties and military and energy dependencies. It will need to recast itself in a more unbiased image. Meanwhile, the war continues without pause, indicating the belief in both parties of there still being military gains to be made. That Russia launched deadly attacks on Ukraine just before the Modi Moscow visit in July, and Ukraine carried out operations into Russia's Kursk Oblast just before his visit to Kyiv last week, demonstrate the dangerous power play and messaging Mr. Zelenskyy and Mr. Putin can indulge in, regardless of their guests' sensitivities.

With such entrenched positions, New Delhi must proceed with care if it indeed seeks to join the ranks of others wanting involvement in conflict resolution. Successful efforts have been few, and have required focused agendas — the Black Sea Grain Initiative; the IAEA effort, on nuclear safety at the Zaporizhzhia power plant; and the latest exchange of Russian and Ukrainian prisoners. India must also articulate its own principles for a ceasefire compromise and lasting peace. The Modi government may well benefit from studying India's own history: In the 1950s, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, at the instance of Vienna, mediated with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev on troops withdrawal from the north-east zone of Austria post-war, in return for promises of Austrian neutrality. An Indian peace initiative will be further complicated by the proposals Ukraine and Russia have themselves put forth: Mr. Zelenskyy insists on a full military withdrawal from Ukraine by Russia first, and Mr. Putin has called for Ukrainian forces to withdraw from regions now occupied by Russia, and for Kyiv to formally give up any efforts to join NATO.

Focus on trial

Agencies should shed fixation on keeping people in jail

The Supreme Court order granting bail to Bharat Rashtia Samithi leader K. Kavitha does more than grant relief to a jailed politician; it brings under focus the ill-motivated tactic of using the judicial process and the power of arrest as a tool to hound political opponents. The charge that the Delhi government's liquor policy was formulated in exchange for crores of rupees to grant a favourable deal to a certain lobby is quite serious, warranting a thorough investigation and fair prosecution. However, the focus of the Centre and its agencies seems to be entirely on keeping some political figures imprisoned in the run-up to the trial. In oral observations, a Bench of Justices B.R. Gavi and K.V. Viswanathan has questioned the fairness of the investigation, especially because the agency has cited some of those apparently involved as witnesses, while seeking pardon to some arrested suspects so that they could testify as approvers. After a spell during which the courts were reticent to disregard the vehement objections by the prosecution to the grant of bail, the judiciary has now begun to see through the attempt to use the bail-denying features of the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act (PMLA) to keep adversaries in prison for long. The Court had earlier granted bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal (still in jail in a CBI case on the same allegations) and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia.

Ms. Kavitha has been accused of arranging the alleged deal between the Delhi government and a 'south lobby'. It is notable that the political leaders have all been implicated by witnesses who themselves appear to be involved in the case and accused who have turned approvers. The Bench has questioned the Delhi High Court's failure to give her the benefit of a proviso to Section 45 of the PMLA, which allows grant of bail to women, merely on the ground that she was educated and not a "vulnerable" woman. The mere fact that the investigation by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate is over was enough to grant bail. Instead of vehemently objecting to bail, and spending their time filing lengthy replies to a spate of bail petitions in various courts, prosecutors should concentrate on building a water-tight case. They should now focus on opening the trial and concluding it within a reasonable time-frame. The agencies concerned should remember that headlines that cite fabulous sums of money allegedly paid as bribes and thousand page charge sheets can impress only a few. Trial courts would surely prefer concrete evidence and reliable testimony backed by relevant documents.

The recent developments in Bangladesh, and the earlier events in Sri Lanka and Pakistan as well as the recent electoral outcome of the general election in India, clearly suggest a silent democratic backlash in South Asia. While there have been different historical trajectories in postcolonial democracies, we will make sense of this backlash by comparing the Indian case with that of Pakistan.

Comparisons of the Indian and Pakistani political systems in the post-colonial years have concentrated primarily on reasons why democracy endured in India while Pakistan transgressed into authoritarianism, despite both having a similar colonial legacy. Many scholars have detailed the reasons contributing to democracy in India compared to Pakistan. These range from the presence of a mass-based political party system in India versus an organisationally weak Muslim League to the dominance of particular social classes constituting the Congress (middle classes) and the Muslim League (the landed aristocracy).

While the value of such works is evident and advances our understanding of the political trajectories of India and Pakistan, the traditional comparison has undermined attempts at understanding the democratic space in Pakistan in the same vein that it has obfuscated analysis of an authoritarian tendency in the Indian political system despite its democratic credentials. We expand on what we understand and imply by this particular reasoning and argue that India and Pakistan are in the midst of a silent democratic backlash, where social forces are seeking to reclaim democratic space.

Accountable democracy to an overreach?

India was typified as a case of exceptionalism with a functional democracy, a history of free and fair elections and the well-accepted operative idea of the separation of powers. Barring the aberration of the imposition of the Emergency in 1975, India remained an accountable democracy. Constitutional vision and the anti-colonial legacy did well in the Indian case to maintain the dominance of civil rule over military rule. Krishna Menon, who served as the Defence Minister (1957-62) in Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet, played his part in undermining the armed forces, whether out of a larger vision of maintaining the supremacy of civilian rule or merely out of being 'meanest and pettiest' towards his generals, as



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The political trajectories of India and Pakistan apart, social forces are seeking to reclaim their democratic space

Jairam Ramesh notes in his recent biography of Krishna Menon. India never faced the threat of military dictatorship.

However, the rise of Narendra Modi in 2014 changed all that. India played the catch-up game in moving briskly towards an authoritarian model of governance based on executive overreach. It was, perhaps, for the first time that the Indian democratic exercise not only took a presidential form but also campaigned for an Opposition-free democracy with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s campaign for a 'Congress-mukt Bharat'. The current dispensation has been politicising issues related to security and the armed forces. Universities in India are sought to be converted into havens of religiosity and symbolism of armed forces to counter the democratic protest politics of students and youth.

In Pakistan

On the other hand, started out as a lost cause with the bureaucracy and the military pulverising the political process and steering it in the direction of authoritarianism. Despite the deep-seated authoritarianism at the elite level, all military dictatorships, from 1958, saw their demise through large-scale protests underlying the distaste of the masses with military rule. In one case, mass protests ushered in Pakistan's first general election, the onset of military oppression in its eastern wing and the disintegration of the state in 1971 — the exact opposite of what the military intended. The intention to control and dominate the political system collapsed again under the weight of a lawyers' movement and a public loss of legitimacy as General Musharraf's rule alienated the masses and the political elites alike. Since 2008, Pakistan has had four general elections and a relative transitioning to democracy, however, typified by a strong push-back against this transition by the military. During this time, Pakistan's politics has witnessed a political elite consensus to continue on the democratic path (as witnessed in the Charter of Democracy and also the 18th Amendment). But the last two elections (2018 and 2024) signify a worrying trend on the part of the political elites to seek consensus with the military to not only outbid but, more importantly, decimate and wipe out political opponents.

The result, however, for the political elites undertaking tactical alliances with the military for political survival and the military itself has been the contrary. What Pakistan has witnessed

since 2008 is a further deepening and widening of the citizenry's advocacy for democracy, and a developing contradiction between the political class and military over who has the right to rule. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government and the military embarked on a 'one-page' mantra only to see the Pakistan Muslim League (N), or the PML-N, taking out public rallies criticising the government, but, more crucially, the military for its political engineering.

After the successful vote of no-confidence against its government, the PTI filled the PML-N's shoes by targeting the military for its dismissal which deeply resonated with the public. The result: the PTI emerged as the largest vote-getter and political party in Parliament in the general election despite the entire state machinery working to the contrary. What one learns is that an alliance with the military provides political elites a short-term route to power but only at increased reputational costs as a more politically and socially aware citizenry questions this alliance as well as the military's political engineering.

The general election in India witnessed a democratic push-back against the BJP's authoritarian politics. In Pakistan, the military-party nexus has come under the scanner with public protests and the legitimacy of the elections being questioned by the public. Though, one must hasten to add that in India, the middle classes yearned for dictatorship during certain historical moments such as the Emergency in 1975. They have felt that dictatorship would be more efficient in managing India's diversity and the social chaos that comes with it. Historically, the Pakistani middle class has also displayed a conservative political attitude favouring military rule as opposed to a chaotic democratic politics. A younger generation though has become increasingly critical of the military's ingress in politics.

In perspective

A comparative analysis of the Indian and Pakistani historical experience tells us that as democracies are experiencing backsliding there are newer methods being devised by the citizenry, including the use of digitalised spaces, to produce a democratic backlash. In both India and Pakistan, they have spoken through electoral outcomes leading to a stable political transition in India. One has to watch what form it will take in Pakistan.

Sharpening India's anti-tuberculosis fight

The omnipresence of tuberculosis (TB) in the pages of history and literature is testimony to how the disease has plagued generations across the world and continues to be a major problem even today. India bears over a quarter of the global TB burden. Political will in India has helped drive a great deal of progress in the fight against the disease. For example, in 2023, addressing the big challenge of 'missed' TB cases, 25.1 lakh patients were diagnosed in India as having TB, highlighting strengthened case finding efforts. However, as we work toward the goal of TB elimination — the Prime Minister has urged citizens to work towards TB elimination — we must look to innovate and deploy proven technologies and tools at our disposal.

Regimens and issues

The first long-hanging threat that I believe must be investigated in urgently is new shorter regimens for drug-resistant TB. It has been encouraging to learn that India will soon introduce the World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended shorter regimen for drug-resistant TB. The current regimens on offer are long and arduous, requiring patients to consume nearly 12 to 14 tablets every day if they are on the shorter nine to 11-month regimen, or four to five tablets every day if they have been put on the 18 to 24 month longer regimen. The treatment is physically and psychologically draining and has severe side effects, such as loss of hearing, and even psychosis.

Moreover, a problem with such an extended treatment regimen that requires regular visits to a TB clinic for nearly two years is loss of



Dr. Randeep Guleria

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With the availability of game-changing new treatments, India must recast its TB-elimination programmes

employment, driving many families into poverty.

In 2022, WHO recommended the shorter, safer and more effective regimens called BPaL/M for all drug-resistant TB patients, and there is a lot of recent data that show this regimen to be more effective with better compliance. With only three to four tablets every day, patients can complete their treatment within six months, with minimal side effects. The success rates of this regimen are also reported to be higher — 89% as compared to the 68% treatment success rate reported in the country in the 2023 India TB Report. Given its efficacy, close to 80 countries around the world have already procured the BPaL/M regimen and about 20 of the highest burden countries are already rolling it out.

Research indicates that savings from implementing this regimen will be between 40% to 90% of the cost of current treatment regimens, and that an immediate transition to BPaL/M could result in an annual saving of approximately ₹740 million (or approximately ₹6,180 crore) for health systems globally. This is a more effective and safer solution to treat drug-resistant TB and we must work on expediting access to this regimen to all eligible patients across the country.

Making the best use of new treatments

The next question is this. How do we go about diagnosing more people with TB so that they can benefit from these game-changing new treatments? The answer lies in making sure that we are screening and testing quickly and efficiently to reduce delays in accurate diagnosis. For this, a proactive approach is essential. It is time we modernised and used health datasets,

which include GIS mapping, to identify vulnerable populations such as those with comorbidities for example, malnutrition, diabetes and HIV), former COVID-19 patients, and at-risk communities in slums, prisons, or those who are homeless. Targeted multi-disease focused screening drives can then be conducted to detect TB cases early, even among those without typical symptoms.

In fact, recent evidence highlights that a significant number of people with pulmonary (i.e., lung) TB may not exhibit recognisable symptoms such as cough, fever, weight loss, or night sweats. The National TB Prevalence Survey (2019-21) highlights the importance of chest X-rays, which detected 42.6% of cases that would have otherwise been missed. Leveraging advancements in technology, portable X-ray machines equipped with AI-driven tools can significantly reduce diagnostic delays, especially in remote and under-resourced areas.

Further, there is a critical need to expand the use of rapid molecular tests over less sensitive microscopy methods for faster detection and drug resistance profiling. This shift is crucial in promptly identifying TB cases and determining appropriate treatment options. In short, by proactively identifying at-risk populations and investing in and leveraging advanced/innovative diagnostic technologies, we can improve TB detection rates, reduce delays, and enhance treatment outcomes.

As we look to eliminate tuberculosis and make our country TB-free, prioritising these essential areas will be critical as these will be an investment in a healthier future for all of us.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bail to BRS leader Kavitha

The Supreme Court of India's scathing criticism of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which it made while granting bail to the Bharat Rashtia Samithi leader K. Kavitha in the Delhi liquor policy scam ("SC grants bail to Kavitha, questions fairness of probe", August 28), should come as a huge embarrassment to both the central agencies.

They have been chastised for quite some time for being a political instrument of the government to target key Opposition political figures. The top court has also faulted the Delhi High Court's refusal to grant her bail.

The agencies now face a significant loss of credibility in the case, where despite an 'extensive investigation',

they seem to have failed to find any exculpatory evidence against the main accused.

The Court's observations spell hope that the targeting of the Opposition and dissenting voices will end soon.

Kamali Laddha, Bengaluru

The grant of bail by the Court has clearly exposed the absence of diligence by the ED and the CBI in a high-profile case involving political bigwigs.

The Court's observations should be viewed with all seriousness by the central government which should now restore the credibility of these apex investigating agencies at the earliest.

At the same time, the failure to punish political leaders, because of loopholes and

anomalies in the investigation, only results in unbridled corruption. Autonomy to the ED and the CBI is a prerequisite to curbing corruption. Good governance can only evolve with honest politicians at the helm of affairs.

M.V. Nagavender Rao, Hyderabad

Ministry and ayurveda

The AYUSH Ministry seems to think that promoting ayurveda is essentially about promoting the commercial prospects of ayurvedic products. Its errors of omission and commission emanate from this misconception.

Authentic ayurvedic practice seeks to make the public as self-reliant as is safely possible; it is humble in its outlook and relies on drugs and measures that

are inexpensive. Therefore, commerce ought not to be seen as a reliable parameter in gauging the popularity of ayurveda. Instead of functioning as a trade-promoter for ayurvedic products, the AYUSH Ministry would do well to focus on enhancing the evidence-based quality of traditional medical systems. Its track record in doing this has been dismal.

Dr. G.L. Krishna, Bengaluru

U.S. visit, investments

The decision by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to visit the United States in order to

attract investments into Tamil Nadu (August 28) does have some merit. The State has value on account of its demography, state of democracy and demand. However, some points need to be stressed. Industrial estates can be a boon in development. But when an area is identified for an estate, 10% of the land area must be set aside for public purposes. No wet lands may be utilised for any industrial purpose.

A.J. Rangarajan, Chennai

Damaged smart bikes

The Greater Chennai

Corrections & Clarifications

The expansion of BCCI is Board of Control for Cricket in India and not Board of Cricket for Cricket in India, as mentioned in a report, "Jay Shah set to become youngest ICC chairperson" (Sport page, August 28, 2024).

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Corporation launched the availability of eco-friendly smart bikes, but many of them are now lying idle in parking lots that are no longer functional.

Regular users have reported that many bikes are damaged, with rusty wheel-chains, low air pressure, and dysfunctional pedals. In the Tondiarpet zone, for example, nearly 10 bikes are parked on the road. The smart bike app showed only four cycles to be available. There are similar issues in locations such as Nungambakkam, Egmore, Nehru Park, and St. Thomas Mount stations.

Priyadarshini S., Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name of the name with initials.

Establishing a carbon market

In her Budget speech, the Finance Minister signalled that polluting industries, such as iron, steel, and aluminium, will have to conform to emission targets. "A road map for moving the 'hard to abate' industries from energy efficiency targets to emission targets will be formulated. Appropriate regulations for transition of these industries from the current 'Perform, Achieve, and Trade' (PAT) mode to the 'Indian Carbon Market' mode will be put in place," she said.

PAT versus emissions trading
The Bureau of Energy Efficiency defines PAT as a "regulatory instrument to reduce specific energy consumption in energy-intensive industries, with an associated market-based mechanism to enhance the cost effectiveness through certification of excess energy saving which can be traded." PAT is about meeting energy efficiency standards, which means for producing a certain output, there is an attempt to use no more than a prescribed amount of energy. So, a firm that produces more steel than another can use more fuel, but can still be more energy efficient. There is no restriction on the absolute energy used. Meeting these standards generates credits or certificates for successful firms, which they can trade.

In contrast, emissions trading, often known as cap and trade, is a market-based approach to controlling pollution by providing economic incentives for achieving reductions in the emissions of pollutants. Polluters are given emission caps. This is not based on relative standards such as energy-efficiency requirements, but on absolute standards, which are emission ceilings.

The Finance Minister's announcement underlines the fact that even from the perspective of a developing country such as India, climate change is not about equity concerns alone, but also about



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searching for viable options to move away from excessive dependence on fossil fuel.

In the last 15 years, India has been trying to decarbonise various sectors to meet its multiple development prerogatives, including poverty alleviation and providing its population access to affordable and reliable energy. India joined the Clean Development Mechanism, one of the Kyoto Protocol's 'flexibility mechanisms' allowing industrialised countries to undertake climate mitigation projects in developing countries through which they could earn certified emission reduction units which could be traded and used by them to meet their emission reduction targets. By 2011, India became the largest supplier of Certified Emission Reduction Units in the world after China. In pursuance of its National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (one of the eight missions comprising the National Action Plan on Climate Change), India launched PAT in 2012.

India needs iron and steel for industrialisation, especially given the massive housing demand in urban centres with a rising population. Emissions from iron and steel production are big contributors to climate change. In the context of a Net Zero Emissions scenario by 2050, the International Energy Agency (IEA) says in a policy brief that the signs of the announced iron and steel projects meeting net zero emissions is very low.

Carbon market mode

In the international legal system, substantive obligations on climate change mitigation can be described as due diligence obligations or obligations of conduct. This means that states are obligated to exercise their best possible efforts to mitigate climate change. An example of a due diligence obligation is the nationally determined contributions (NDCs), at the heart of the Paris Agreement 2015.

It is legitimate that India re-arranges or improves upon its existing PAT scheme or devises its own version of carbon market mode within the boundaries of its NDCs. India's NDC consists of eight targets, two of which relate to the energy sector. The first is to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP by 45% below the 2005 levels by 2030. The second is to achieve about 50% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources by 2030, subject to international finance and technology transfer.

Since India does not have binding greenhouse gases reduction targets compared to a baseline year in pursuance of its NDCs, it is likely that it will have its own version of the carbon market, different from the European Union Emissions Trading System (ETS). India has not taken a formal stand on ETS and has refused mandatory emission cuts. At this stage, ETS will be in conflict with India's development priorities.

The 2021 draft blueprint presented by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency envisages two mechanisms: in the first phase, a voluntary market supported by a domestic project-based offset scheme (carbon offset mechanism); and in the second, a compliance market with mandatory participation for regulated entities (carbon credits trading mechanism). As per the IEA policy brief, "it will include updating emissions measurement methodologies to support the launch of a domestic carbon credits trading scheme from 2026, which will include the iron and steel sector, alongside other industry sectors such as petrochemicals, chemicals, and aluminium".

India's search for an appropriate policy tool towards establishing a carbon market of its choice shows that climate change debates cannot be built around equity alone; they also need to be located in the broader context of socioeconomic priorities.

Governor vs government in Karnataka

The State is having to deal with such a conflict after more than a decade

STATE OF PLAY

K.V. Aditya Bhardwaj
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Karnataka

The Congress-led government in Karnataka and Raj Bhavan, presently occupied by Thaa Chand Gehlot, a former minister in the Narendra Modi-led Union government, have been on a collision course for more than a month.

The public spat began with the Governor issuing a show-cause notice to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah over a private complaint alleging corruption in the allocation of 14 alternate sites by the Mysore Urban Development Corporation (MUDA) to his wife in lieu of 3.16 acres of land she owned which MUDA developed, reportedly without acquiring it. He eventually gave sanction for prosecution in the case.

Since then, the State government, the Congress, and a host of civil society and caste organisations, considered "anti-BJP", have decried the actions as "the BJP's efforts to destabilise an Opposition government", calling the Governor a "puppet" of the Union government. The BJP has criticised the protests against the Governor and even petitioned the State police to book those who issue "derogatory statements" against him under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

The State government has also been trying to project the Governor as partisan. On August 22, the State Cabinet recommended to the Governor to take a "quick decision" on requests for sanction for prosecution against four NDA leaders: three former BJP ministers and JD(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy, who is Union

Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel. Of the four, Lokayukta Police have sought sanction for prosecution against Mr. Kumaraswamy and mining baron G. Janardhan Reddy and a preliminary inquiry against Shashikala Jolle and Muruges Niran. At least two of these requests have been pending at Raj Bhavan for more than a year.

Several ministers have sought to contrast this delay with how the Governor served a show-cause notice to the Chief Minister promptly on July 26, just hours after a complaint alleging corruption in MUDA was lodged against him by an activist. On August 1, the Cabinet advised the Governor to withdraw the notice, which also highlighted this contrast. Mr. Siddaramaiah's petition before the Karnataka High Court challenging sanction for prosecution also argues that the move "reflects a clear bias and extraneous influence. This selective treatment and the apparent political motivations behind the Governor's actions are indicative of legal mala fides." Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has announced a "Raj Bhavan Chalo" march on August 31, demanding that the Governor give sanction for prosecution against the NDA leaders too.

The State government has also pointed out that the Governor has sent back 11 Bills seeking clarification since Ja-

nuary. Six of these were sent back in August alone, after the tug of war between the State government and Raj Bhavan escalated. Former Congress legislators issued a joint statement in which they called the Governor's decisions "politically motivated" and said that he was "acting like an Opposition leader". Mr. Shivakumar asked, "If the Governor takes decisions based on what suits the BJP, why do we need governments in a democracy?"

Mr. Gehlot has remained resolutely silent and has not responded to any of these allegations till date.

This is not the first time that the State government and Raj Bhavan are in conflict in Karnataka. A similar situation played out in 2011 when then Governor, Hansraj Bhardwaj, a former minister in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, had sanctioned prosecution against the then Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa of the BJP in land de-notification cases in January that year. Mr. Yediyurappa was arrested in the Rachenahalli denotification case in October 2011 by the Lokayukta Police. In the intervening period, he resigned as Chief Minister after a Lokayukta report on illegal mining indicted him. However, in 2015, the High Court of Karnataka quashed Mr. Bhardwaj's decision to sanction prosecution, providing relief to the former Chief Minister. Following this, all the FIRs against Mr. Yediyurappa were quashed.

Mr. Siddaramaiah has repeatedly tried to emphasise that unlike in the case of Mr. Yediyurappa, neither he nor his party were in power when the 14 sites in question were allotted to his wife by MUDA and that he was not linked to the sanctioning process.

India is getting complacent in its fight against polio: data

Coverage levels are poorest in the north-east, where the latest case of vaccine-derived polio was detected

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan
R. Amanda Miriam Fernandez

Data from the National Family Health Surveys show that the pace of administration of the polio vaccine has slowed down in India. Coverage of the last dose remains relatively poor. Coverage levels are poorest in the north-east, where the latest case of vaccine-derived polio was detected in a two-year-old child in Tikrikilla village in the West Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Notably, coverage was lowest among the poorest households where the education levels of the female head of the family were not advanced.

While the last case of wild poliovirus in India was recorded in 2011, rare cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus continue to be reported. Though the government has clarified that the latest case is vaccine-derived, it is unclear whether it is a case of iVDPV (immunodeficiency-related vaccine-derived poliovirus), affecting just that one child, or circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV), which can impact the entire community.

The World Health Organization has said, "The problem is not with the vaccine itself, but with low vaccination coverage. If a population is fully immunised, they will be protected against both vaccine-derived and wild polioviruses... Circulating VDPVs occur in places where routine or supplementary immunisation activities are poorly conducted."

Chart 1 shows the share of children (12-23 months) who received various doses of specific vaccines by the appropriate age in 2019-21. Coverage of the last dose of the polio vaccine was lowest among the four select vaccine types - polio, DPT (Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis), Hepatitis B, and Pentavalent (protects against five diseases) - administered in India. While coverage of the first three doses of the

polio vaccine was comparable to others, coverage of the last dose lagged behind the rest.

This has not always been the case. Coverage of the last dose of the polio vaccine was much higher than coverage of the last dose of the Hepatitis-B vaccine in 1992-93, 1998-99, and 2005-06, and higher than that of the Hepatitis-B vaccine in 2015-16. However, in 2019-21, coverage of the last doses of the DPT and Hepatitis-B vaccines surpassed that of the polio vaccine. This hints at the possibility that India has become complacent in its fight against polio, possibly after it was declared polio-free (in 2014).

Chart 2 shows the share of Indian children (12-23 months) who received the last dose of specific vaccines by the appropriate age across years. Table 3 shows the share of children (12-23 months) who received the last dose of the polio vaccine in 2019-21, based on their household's background characteristics. There is no notable variation in coverage based on gender, residence, and caste. However, the education level of the mother played a vital part - coverage increased as her education levels increased. The wealth of a household also played a significant part - coverage among the poorest households lagged behind the others. There was no difference in coverage between the middle class and the rich. Coverage was also low among Muslim households.

Map 4 shows the State-wise share of children (12-23 months) who received the last dose of the polio vaccine in 2019-21. Coverage lagged behind in the north-eastern States and in Uttar Pradesh. Odisha, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh recorded over 90% of coverage for the last dose, while Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh recorded less than 75% coverage.

Inputs from Muhammad Ubaidullah A.L. and Mohamed Althamish N.A. are intermingled with The Hindu Data Team

It is time to increase vaccine coverage

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Family Health Survey editions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Chart 1: % of children (12-23 months) who received various doses of specific vaccines by the appropriate age in 2019-21

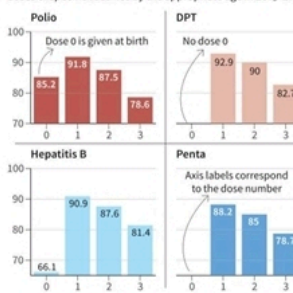
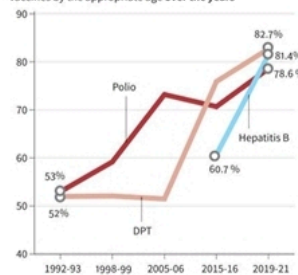


Table 3: The share (%) of children (12-23 months) who received the last dose of the polio vaccine in 2019-21, based on their household's background characteristics

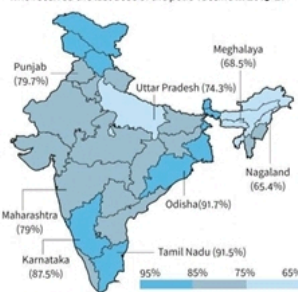
Parameter	%	Parameter	%
Sex		Religion	
Male	80.8%	Hindu	81.3%
Female	80%	Muslim	75.8%
Birth order		Christian	81.2%
1	82.5%	Sikh	82.5%
2-3	80.2%	Buddhist	81.6%
4-5	75.6%	Jain	87.1%
6 or more	67.9%	Caste	
Residence		SC	80.5%
Urban	79.2%	ST	80.4%
Rural	80.9%	OBC	81%
Mother's schooling		Other	79.7%
0	73%	Wealth quintile	
<5 years	80%	Poorest 20%	75.8%
5-7 years	80%	Second	79.6%
8-9 years	81.4%	Middle	83.1%
10-11 years	84.4%	Fourth	83%
>11 years	83%	Richest 20%	82.3%



Chart 2: The share (%) of Indian children (12-23 months) who received the last dose of specific vaccines by the appropriate age over the years



Map 4: The State-wise share (%) of children (12-23 months) who received the last dose of the polio vaccine in 2019-21



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 29, 1974

Articles worth Rs. 30 lakhs seized in Bombay IT raid

Bombay, Aug. 29: Gold bricks, silver bars, diamonds, jewellery and silver utensils, demand drafts and hundis valued at more than Rs. 30 lakhs were seized by Income Tax officials yesterday from the residence and business premises of a widow and her son here.

One of the gold bricks bore the markings of the Bank of England. On learning of the raids the woman air dashed here from Madras. On a tip off from their counterparts the Income Tax authorities recovered from her as she alighted, demand drafts and hundis valued at Rs. 70,000. Incriminating documents were also seized from her residence.

This was described as the biggest search made in Bombay.

The authorities said a simultaneous action was taken in Madras where the firm had a branch following which the business-woman had left Madras carrying hundis, demand draft and a bunch of keys.

They said one gold brick alone with markings of Bank of England weighed 14 kg. Then there were five gold bars each weighing three kg. and bearing Reserve Bank markings. Gold coins of Indian and foreign markings weighed about seven kg., the authorities said. There are several small gold chips.

Income Tax authorities said that the gold brick and bars were found in a concealed cavity of the wall of a safe which could not be opened easily. Expert locksmiths were summoned to break it open.

It is stated that the woman had filed wealth returns giving the value of jewellery and ornaments in her possession at only Rs. one lakh, against well over Rs. 30 lakhs recovered from her premises in the raids.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 29, 1924

Bombay Governor's tour

Bombay, Aug. 28: H.E. the Governor of Bombay and Lady Wilson arrived in Bijapur this morning on an official visit and were accorded a public reception. During the morning His Excellency visited the world-famed monuments of Gel Gumbeh Ibrahim Rosa and Maliki Maidan after which the Malik Sandal Masjid was inspected. His Excellency held an investiture and granted Sanads to Khan Saheb Umar Buran and Rao Saheb M.B. Desai.

Wanted: a strategy to turn climate research into disaster management

Climate research's goals were once research papers and PhDs, but now it must meet people's needs by bringing science to society: govts. and disaster management agencies are depending on it, and sector-specific extension agents are necessary to bridge the research and administrative enterprises

Raghu Murtugudde

India is increasingly aware of the multiple location-specific natural hazards it is facing, each with a rapidly evolving risk landscape. These risks are a combination of weather events, vulnerabilities of the local population, and their exposure. Risks are best managed and mitigated with well-planned responses. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) deserves the kudos it receives for its response to disasters and its help reducing their mortality and damage. But it also contends with many knowledge gaps and barriers in improving its operations to meet India's need to be weather-ready and climate-resilient.

Never cease to surprise

Most regions of India know by now to expect weather extremes in all seasons, including heatwaves, wildfires, heavy rains, landslides, droughts, and cyclones. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) tries to keep pace by improving its forecasts of all weather hazards, even if they tend to not be as local (in scale) as required to plan disaster responses. Skills can always improve.

Academic institutions and government research facilities play an important role in advancing process and predictive understanding, and improving predictions. They also continue to develop and implement novel approaches to downscaling global, coarse-resolution forecasts to hyperlocal scales for specific sectors.

Climate change manifests locally as cooler and warmer temperature trends over northern-central and peninsular India, respectively. But this hardly means we are spared from heatwaves. Similarly, rainfall extremes now occur not only during the monsoon season of June to September but also during the pre- and post-monsoons. Land that is weakly supported suffers more landslides as a result. Wildfires have also been reported to be on the rise.

Exacerbated to weather extremes

Vulnerability isn't entirely natural. Thanks to India's population and economic growth, people are moving into more unsafe regions and establishing informal housing on unstable slopes and flood-prone areas. The more exotic of these places have invited more tourists, as a result of which the state sets up more infrastructure in these locales and encourages other economic activities, such as replacing forest cover with cash crops and plantations.

The recent landslides in Wayanad put such a dangerous mix of factors on full display.

Taken together, vulnerability is a combination of poverty and high population density with poor infrastructure in some places and wealth and unsafe development in others. Insurance coverage and/or policies could also be creating a moral hazard by incentivising people to increase their exposure to climate risks.

Ineffective translation

India continues to invest heavily in climate research, forecasts, and climate services. Climate services translate forecasts into support for decision-making in agriculture, water and energy resources, healthcare, transportation, and other sectors. But the uptake of this information has been remarkably low because it is either not as location- or sector-specific as it needs to be or there aren't enough people with the



A road damaged by a landslide triggered by heavy rain at Balugan in Shimla on August 21. Most regions of India now expect weather extremes in all seasons.PTI

right skills to use it.

Academia and many private ventures continue to push the limits of translating the IMD's forecasts into hyperlocal scales and to improve the skills to deliver value-added products for users. Even when specific products are generated at the scales and skill-levels required, operationalising them or providing them in a timely and routine manner remains a major hurdle. Two examples illustrate this problem.

(i) Irrigation advisories: Weather forecasts frequently are translated to farm-scale information to manage irrigation from days 1 to 5 and water arrangement information for up to 14 days. Experts combine farmers' inputs on their irrigation practices with data of soil properties, crop types, water requirements, and crop stress so that rainfall forecasts can inform decisions about whether there is sufficient water for irrigation and what the schedule should be.

The author was a part of one such decision-support tool developed for grape farmers in Nashik district.

The co-development of this solution with farmers showed that in both kharif and rabi seasons, up to 30% of water can be saved without any loss in crop yield.

Now, large-scale operationalisation is required: farmers need to use this tool to document the usefulness and usability of irrigation advisories over a few years, so that the tool can be improved. This is planned in the form of an app where farmers can access data and provide continuous feedback to the researchers. The researchers can use this feedback to update the tool for other regions and other crops.

But engaging farmers in large numbers and developing the app requires the involvement of local governments, NGOs,

and farmers organisations or cooperatives. One can see this as the purview of extension agencies that – if they exist – could translate research into daily, weekly, and seasonal agricultural operations.

Yet such bodies don't exist nor are we educating/training people to staff them. We also lack the funding structures required to set up research-to-operation programmes. At the same time there is an unmet need to support poorer farmers with the soil moisture and crop data they need to plan irrigation. Without these systems and skills, any plan to double farmers' incomes or ensure a minimum income for them will be impossible.

(ii) Urban flood predictions: We need to downscale predictions of heavy rainfall for the street-level in cities for flood control. At present, municipalities are achieving this with inputs from municipal sensors and data from its weather stations.

However, the ideal situation looks like the following: flood managers will have to evaluate forecasts for a few seasons to ensure a downscaled forecast is actionable, and subsequently plan the allocation and operation of drainage pumps, traffic control units, bus/train routes, school closures, etc.

In this example, the flood managers need to be trusted employees of a government, an NGO or a private entity that tracks forecasts and their systematic biases as well

as human actions that exacerbate water-logging.

Again, neither an academic setup nor the structure of urban governments allows us to translate downscaled forecasts to urban flood management and flood risk mitigation completely.

From research to operations

Climate research is currently too siloed for it to inform operations within a reasonable timeframe. Its goals were once research papers and PhDs, but now it needs to meet people's needs by bringing science to society. Governments and disaster management agencies are depending on it. We clearly need sector-specific extension agents as described above to bridge the research and the administrative enterprises. These agents will serve as links to co-develop effective solutions to make India weather-ready.

In fact, weather-readiness and climate-resilience have to be hyperlocal since the nation will only be as ready and resilient as the weakest link. This requires sustained financing of the research-to-operations systems required at each location and in each sector.

We also need to pay serious attention to capacity-building, i.e. to train sector-specific extension agents who can communicate in local languages and manage the effects of cultural idiosyncrasies on disaster management and risk mitigation. If this seems like an onerous task, remember that it's also necessary – to ensure India's development is sustainable and confers safety and security for all, including from the effects of climate change.

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



Around 23.33% of products contained cellulose microbeads. PRAVEEN KUMAR HATHIVANAN/UNSPASH

'High amount of microplastics in Indian personal care products'

Priyali Prakash

Personal care products (PCP) like face wash and shower gels in India contain a significant amount of harmful microplastics, new research has revealed.

According to a study published in the *Emerging Contaminants* journal and led by Riya K. Alex, a third-year PhD Scholar at the Cochin University of Science and Technology, polyethylene (PE) is the dominant polymer in microplastic emissions from PCPs.

Microplastics are plastic particles are under 5 mm in size; microbeads have a diameter under 5 mm in diameter.

The researchers analysed 45 samples of PCP in face washes, face scrubs, shower gels, and body scrubs available in

The study noted that labels like 'organic', 'natural', and 'eco-friendly' constitute a form of 'greenwashing'

India and manufactured in 2022. The study focused on products marketed as "eco-friendly", "natural" or "organic" to scrutinise the legitimacy of these claims.

Around 23.33% of products contained cellulose microbeads and their biodegradability was unclear. Most microbeads were coloured white while green were the rarest. According to the researchers, white microbeads are more easily concealed in PCP. These orb-like particles are used as exfoliating agents and to enhance the delivery of active ingredients in the PCP. They are made of PE, polypropylene or of polyester. PE was present in the highest concentration in more than half the microbeads.

In 30 grams of each kind of product, researchers found 0.26 g, 0.9 g, 1.24 g, and 1.74 g of microbeads in face washes, face scrubs, body scrubs, and shower gels, respectively. The average sizes of microbeads in the samples under study were 640.74 micrometre, 452.45 micrometre, 556.66 micrometre and 606.30 micrometre for face washes, face scrubs, body scrubs, and shower gels, respectively.

The research also found polycaprolactone, a type of bioplastic, in two of the tested samples. Polycaprolactone is becoming more popular in pharmaceuticals as a carrier of drugs and for its anti-ageing and antibacterial constituents, but scientists it also know malformations aquatic biota.

The researchers' paper also noted that labels like "organic", "natural", and "eco-friendly" thus constitute a form of greenwashing and sold brands rely on consumers to not scan the ingredient lists in detail. They also said the blend of natural ingredients and plastics in the same product challenges steps to identify the presence of plastic.

The U.S., the U.K., Canada, France, and New Zealand have banned the production and sale of products with microbeads but it remains an ambiguous issue in India.

A recent study by Toxics Link, an environmental research and advocacy NGO, found 6.71 to 89.15 pieces of microplastics per kilogramme of dry weight of salt and sugar, sized 0.1-5 mm. Microplastics have also been found in the human brain, blood, lungs, colon, placenta, testicles, and stool.

The study paper advocated for better policies to control microplastic pollution in India and suggested coffee, apricots, walnut, kiwi seeds, and soluble cellulose beads could replace microbeads in PCPs.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

A brief history of crew capsules

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

The world's first human spaceflight, with cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, happened onboard the Vostok 1 crew capsule. Crucial to the Soviet Union's support for this vehicle was K's demand – which the space programme met – that Vostok 1 be able to function as a spacecraft as well as a spy satellite. Name K.

QUESTION 2

John Glenn was the first U.S. citizen to get into earth orbit. Name the first U.S. individual on a suborbital flight, onboard the country's Mercury space capsule programme (which preceded Apollo).

QUESTION 3

Name the Russian crew capsule whose first and tenth flights resulted in the world's first in-flight and in-space human deaths in 1967 and 1971, respectively. The latter remains the only instance of humans dying in space.

QUESTION 4

Name the project the Chinese space programme approved in 1992 that developed human spaceflight technology. After an uncrewed test flight in 1999, the project was renamed Shenzhou.

QUESTION 5

In 1990, Iran said it would pursue human spaceflight with the USSR's support, but then the latter dissolved. The project was apparently revived in the 2010s before being paused again in 2017, until in December last year when Iran launched animals to space in a test capsule. What is the name of this capsule?



Visual question: Name the crew craft (red) bolted to the top of this rocket. A Danish company built this rocket-craft combo in a bid to achieve the world's first suborbital spaceflight performed by amateurs. PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Answers to August 27 quiz:

1. Type of light reflection that results in glossy finish – Ans: **Diffuse**
2. Purpose of velvet panels rooted in their build – Ans: **Reduce echoes**
3. Action in moisture-wicking clothes that draws sweat away – Ans: **Capillary**
4. Material Stephanie Kwolek discovered in 1965 – Ans: **Kevlar**
5. Relative orientation of cellulose molecules in cotton fibre – Ans: **Parallel**

First contact
Anmol Agrawal | Seema Das | K.N. Viswanathan

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

8 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
AGEING IS AN EXTRAORDINARY PROCESS
WHERE YOU BECOME THE PERSON YOU ALWAYS
SHOULD HAVE BEEN. — DAVID BOWIE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A new governance matrix

Its main driver is not the presence of coalition partners, but the BJP's own weaknesses



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE SETBACK THAT the BJP received in the last general election raises an interesting question. What kind of governance matrix has emerged in the wake of the election results? It was widely expected that the government would have to take the coalition partners on board. This, in and of itself, would not necessarily be a bad thing if it makes for more consensual governance and provides checks and balances. The coalition partners would extract their pound of flesh on a narrow range of issues that mattered to them. But the business of governing can go on. What has emerged, however, is a much deeper crisis. A government barely a few weeks into a new term is acting and behaving as if it is a lame duck government on its last legs. This does not mean that the government will fall. Quite the contrary. But what it does mean is that India will face a protracted governance vacuum.

So what are the elements of the new governance matrix? The most important element is the collapsing authority of the prime minister. The election results have dented his authority seriously. The crescendo of acclaim, the aura of invincibility that he was used to, was punctured. But the graph of his authority is descending even faster than the election results would lead one to believe.

This, in part, is because, at least domestically, the prime minister is giving a sense of being in a total funk — unable to diagnose the reasons for his defeat, and unable to chart a new course. He is on the back-foot in Parliament, not just because the Opposition is stronger and Parliament is more representative. The ability to control has gone. By all accounts, for the first time in his political career, the ability to instil popular sentiment has disappeared and he seems like a broken record, living on the power of his past slogans that have outlived their freshness and usefulness. The imprimatur of conviction has gone.

There is more internal dissonance within the party. The BJP has made u-turns in the past. But now the sense that they are not doing minimal political homework before bringing proposals is growing. In short, the challenge is not just coalition partners. It is the increasing weakness of the PM. He may well bounce back. But for the moment, despite appearances to the contrary, there is a sense of vac-

uum at the top. He is saddled with his own weaknesses and inner demons, not the constraints of coalition partners or any potential challenges.

The second element of the governance matrix is that the government will increasingly take recourse to a grammar of anarchy. The BJP's diagnosis of its own defeat is still conspiratorial, as if, despite having the full might of the state machinery behind it, it was cheated by, amongst other things, foreign powers. When even as talented an administrator as Shriya Singh Chaudhary says "Harna virodhi" — its mein yeh sach hai ki videshi taakatein bhi shail hain — yeh harna desh mein kaisey bhi BJP is sarkar na rabe. "In BJP circles, this crescendo has increased after Sheikh Hasina's downfall in Bangladesh. The point is not the plausibility of this diagnosis, but what it reveals about how the BJP continues to regard the opposition to it.

The BJP's record on respecting institutions is abysmal. But it is increasingly going to stay on course to use its institutional power to precipitate conflict. There are two signs of this. First, in the states where the BJP is not in power, it will continue to have an investment in using its institutional power to precipitate confrontation. Given the long history of the BJP's dealings with Delhi government, it is no surprise, but it is still shocking to a sense of propriety that a sitting Lieutenant Governor should write an op-ed against his own elected government. It suggests that the BJP has institutionally learnt nothing, and is still determined to deny the Opposition its due place in governance.

In West Bengal, the R G Kar case has given the pretext not just for legitimate protest — it can potentially be used to lay the groundwork for making Bengal less governable. More damagingly, the one thing the election results have not dented is the BJP's appetite for communalism. The use of bulldozers and vigilante justice in a communally charged manner continues apace. The setback in the elections has, ironically, led to a greater investment in the Hindutva project. For one thing, the RSS wants to rescue the Hindutva project from its identification with Modi. For another thing, the BJP is at a dead-end. Its record on governance was dented by the last election.

What India needs most is what might be called the radicalism of routine governance. Its besetting weakness is not the absence of big ideas or reforms. In many ways, the Indian state is now more capable. But the basic humdrum, almost invisible, task of governing like reforming police, improving schools, fixing sewage, managing the environment, changing bureaucratic cultures, regulatory clarity, is something that eludes most governments. Even the brightest and most promising schemes revert to a mean after a while.

The absence hinders India's growth potential, and mission mode schemes cannot compensate for its absence. But routine governance does not provide a basis for mass mobilisation or electoral coalitions. So, you are left with just two instruments — welfare populism and ethnic mobilisation. The BJP will opt for both. But again, the compulsion will not come from the coalition partners. It will come from the BJP's own weaknesses.

The main driver of the new governance matrix is not the presence of coalition partners. It is that the BJP is now characterised by a combination of a prime minister who seems increasingly out of sorts, a governing style that is deepening institutional confrontation, and a civil society rhetoric that is still invested in political communalism. These three elements make the BJP weaker as a governing force even more than the numbers imply. But these three elements are operating in an environment that is offering more resistance.

A more competitive electoral arena was likely to open up some space for independent institutions. On constitutional values, the judiciary is still doing its unprincipled stance of what one lawyer described as "one step forward, two steps sideways and three steps backward jurisprudence." It is still not a reliable friend of liberty. But at least on matters of bail, the sense of government's control over the judiciary has abated somewhat. With an emboldened Opposition now also itching for social confrontation, India's governance matrix is going to enter uncharted territory.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

THE CM FOR SOME

Assam Chief Minister's partisanship does not behove his high office. Centre needs to remind him of his duties, responsibilities

PART OF the oath of the Chief Minister's office is an assurance of fairness and impartiality in the discharge of duties — "... that I will do right to all manner of people in accordance with the Constitution and the law without fear or favour, affection or ill-will." It is a section that evidently escaped Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's notice. In the state Assembly on Tuesday, CM Sarma said that he will "take sides, this is my ideology". And that "... Myia Muslim people will insist on taking all of Assam. We will not let you take". Sarma was responding to adjournment motions by Opposition MLAs on the security situation in Upper Assam's Sivasagar, where, following an incident of gang rape of a minor in Nagaon allegedly by Bengali Muslim youths, ethnic tensions have exacerbated, with threats made to those labelled as "Bangladeshi" to leave the region. At a moment such as this, the CM should call for communal harmony, and work towards it. Instead, Sarma's statements could encourage divisiveness and deepen faultlines in the state.

The incident in Nagaon deserves condemnation and the law must take its course. But the othering of a whole community, especially in a state historically plagued by vexed questions of identity, is disturbing. Bengali Muslims, pejoratively referred to as "Myias", have been beleaguered by xenophobic attacks. Part of the problem is a narrow politics that takes a zero-sum view of the state's diversity and paints them as locked in constant competition and conflict with indigenous people, who largely live in Upper Assam, on matters of jobs and resources, culture and language. A sizeable section can trace their roots to Bangladesh, and many settled in the riverine Brahmaputra valley or Lower Assam. Many Bengali Muslims had migrated from erstwhile East Bengal during British rule and later, after the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War — the cut-off year set by the Assam Accord of 1985, which followed a six-year-long Assam Andolan against "illegal" immigrants to the state. Since his induction in the BJP, Sarma has consistently tapped into simmering insecurities and weaponised them. From painting a spectre of Assam becoming a Muslim-majority state by 2041 to bizarre allegations of fertiliser and flood "jihad", the CM's politics has been marked by a kind of communal dog-whistling that goes against norms of political and constitutional morality.

Soon after he won a third term to office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had underlined that the "Constitution is our guiding light." The Assam CM appears not to have heard or heeded the PM's message. It is essential that the Centre reminds Sarma of his duty and responsibility to address and respond to all, not some, people of his state.

RED AND GREY

Single seniors in Shanghai and elsewhere are showing that love is a vital and necessary force at any age

IN SHANGHAI, The city with the most number of elderly people in a country that has the world's largest ageing population, love at twilight is a glimmer of hope. Lonely hearts of a certain vintage are hanging out in the city's largest park and in the care of a global furniture chain to nurture their social lives and to find romance and companionship. The "fever of first love", as Daphne du Maurier wrote in *Rebecca*, cannot happen twice but, as the single seniors of Shanghai show, it doesn't need to. When age has sanded down its sharp edges and vapourised the sharp top notes so that the mellow base notes can kick in, love remains just as vital — and necessary — a force.

Consider the global context: According to the United Nations World Social Report 2023, population ageing is an irreversible trend — with the number of people aged 65 and above projected to rise from 761 million in 2021 to 1.6 billion in 2050. The question of how to care for a ballooning population of senior citizens has been pondered on by governments in some parts of the world, notably Europe, China and Japan, for a few years now. Yet, the question of love and companionship for the elderly — an essential component of well-being — receives little attention, thanks primarily to the entrenched belief that romance is a youthful preoccupation.

The sexagenarians (and older citizens) of Shanghai and other parts of the world who are actively seeking out love on dating apps, social clubs and elsewhere are challenging such shallow assumptions. In India, too, there is a growing number of older citizens using specialised matchmaking services and dating apps, with one app reporting a 30 per cent spike in users aged 50 and above since 2020. Love, songwriters over the decades have stated over and over again, can't wait. It shouldn't have to.



AMEETA MULLA WATTAL

CAREGIVERS HAVE AN intrinsic role in keeping any society healthy. They are often seen through the lens of traditional gender roles and are expected to be nurturing, patient, and self-sacrificing. These stereotypes can lead to a lack of respect for professional boundaries and a higher likelihood of violence.

The increase in violence against female caregivers — teachers, nurses, social workers, doctors — can be attributed to a complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and systemic factors. Deep-rooted misogyny and sexism in society contribute to this: Female caregivers may be targeted simply because they are women in positions of authority. Many of them work without adequate support systems which makes them more vulnerable to aggression from patients, students and colleagues.

From Rajni Bala, a teacher shot dead in Kashmir, to a trainee doctor in Kolkata who was raped and murdered, it is apparent that caregivers have become a target. But the nature of violence itself is changing in India. The last 10 years have seen crimes against women and children become more frequent and brutal. This is a comment on the value systems of our country, our education practices, or the attitudes of the people in power? Is this the result of a culture where there are no holds barred on books and movies that glorify toxic masculinity? Where actions come before thought; where immediate gratification, physical or sensual, is the order of the day;

BREAKING A HARMFUL PATTERN

To address violence against vulnerable, communities and schools have to step up

IN GOOD FAITH

where pornography is readily available at the click of a button? If this is how we want to paint our future, communities and societies alike are facing a dark reality.

The perpetrators of these crimes would have been born into a family, attended school, connected with siblings, played games, had friends, may have been married, held a job and done all the things that people do. When, then, were the seeds of violence and deviant sexual behaviour sown?

The belief that anyone implicated for sexual assault has led a dysfunctional life, has a history of mental illness and substance abuse, has been exposed to violent and hypersexualised environments, and lacks empathy and social skills is a stereotype.

Casting individuals into good or bad backgrounds is not the answer. Many who have engaged in criminal offences come from affluent backgrounds and many who have faced violence have managed to overcome their challenges.

The question is: What is the anatomy of a person who preys upon individuals weaker than them? How do we address it? A child's development from ages three to 16 is marked by a significant growth in cognitive, emotional, social and physical domains. If we have to bring about a change, a revolution has to be brought into communities, families and schools, not only in urban, privileged India but in slums and villages too. These spaces too require gender sensitisation:

Challenging harmful stereotypes, teaching children and communities members to manage emotions, resolve conflicts peacefully and communicate effectively.

Local community leaders and religious figures have to advocate for peace and respect. Community watch programmes should be established along with helplines and reporting mechanisms for victims of violence. What is the role of our religious belief systems, sports culture, family structure, schools and colleges, the economy? In other words, how do we do things differently, how can we shape practices and change the socialisation of boys and definition of manhood?

We need people with power to prioritise these issues. Political statements are soon forgotten. Along with sensitivity training, we need leadership training. We need to break our silence and stand with women and children. Our inner world defines what we do with our lives and our value systems. Parents, educators and society itself need to be broadcasters, pulsing out meaningful messages. If we do this together, we will create in children the ability to think with empathy and compassion and explore complex realities that will help them become the conscientious adults of tomorrow.

The writer is chairperson an executive director, Education, Innovations and Training, DLF Schools and Scholarship Programmes

AUGUST 29, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

SIKH CONVENTION

THE FIVE SIKH high priests declared that they would go ahead with their decision to hold the world Sikh convention at Amritsar on September 2, despite denial of permission by the authorities. The convention has been called to discuss Sikh affairs with particular emphasis on the Army action at the Golden Temple complex and subsequent events.

FM TO OPPOSITION

OPPOSITION LEADERS in the Rajya Sabha were no wiser from Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee's remarks when they referred to

news reports in *The Indian Express* on the Congress-Ps thoughts on a presidential form of government. The PM said he did not understand how their decision to hold an amendment to the Constitution could occur through "some private conversation".

CONGRESS (I) DINNER

WHILE A GROUP of Congress (I) MPs was planning a second dinner meeting, this time at a bigger scale, to discuss the suggestion to switch over to a presidential form of government, an addressee was issued to the party MPs not to proceed further. According to informed sources, the dinner hosted by the Punjab

Congress (I) MP; Sat Paul Mittal, to about 50 party MPs has served its purpose.

NAM ON WEST ASIA

THE NON-ALIGNED NATIONS are expected to call for an international conference on Lebanese and Palestinian issues under the auspices of the United Nations at the forthcoming session of the general assembly. The President of Yugoslavia, Vseslav Dzuravovic indicated in Delhi. After his talks with the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Yugoslav President said a proposal for an international conference would be discussed at the non-aligned coordinating bureau meeting.



Himachal Bill raises women's marriage age; what happens next?

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM & SAURABH PARASHAR
NEW DELHI, SHIMLA, AUGUST 28

THE HIMACHAL PRADESH Assembly on Tuesday passed a Bill to raise the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2024, was passed by voice vote. The Bill amended the Prohibition of Child Marriage (PCM) Act, which was passed by Parliament in 2006.

What amendments has the Bill introduced to the PCM Act? How will the Bill's amendments to a central law come into force?

Why did the Himachal Pradesh Assembly pass the Bill?

While presenting the Bill in the Assembly on Tuesday, Health, Social Justice, and Empowerment Minister Dhani Ram Shandil said it was necessary to raise the minimum age of marriage for women to provide op-

portunities to them.

"Some girls still marry at a young age, which hinders their education and ability to progress in life. Additionally, many women are unable to achieve success in their careers due to early marriage," he said.

The minister also highlighted that early marriage and motherhood often severely impact the health of women. According to the Statement of Objects and Reasons provided with the Bill, "The early marriages...act as a hindrance not only in the progress of their (women's) career but also in their physical development."

What amendments has the Bill introduced to the PCM Act?

As it stands, Section 2(a) of the PCM Act defines a "child" as someone "who, if male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age". The Himachal Bill eliminates this distinction on the basis of age between "males" and "females". It defines a "child" as

"a male or female who has not completed twenty-one years of age".

The Bill also amends Section 2(b) of the PCM Act, which defines "child marriage" as "a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child". The Bill has added a clause giving it overriding effect over "any thing contrary or inconsistent therewith contained in any other law...including any custom or usage or practice governing the parties".

This means that the new marriage age for women will apply to everyone in Himachal Pradesh regardless of what any other law may state, or even if the religious or cultural practices of the individuals getting married allow legal minors to get married. The Bill introduces Section 18A to the PCM Act, which gives the same overriding effect to the entire central law and its provisions.

The Bill increases the time-period for filing a petition to annul a marriage. Under Section 3 of the PCM Act, the "contracting

party who was a child at the time of the marriage" can file a petition to annul the marriage within two years of attaining majority (before they turn 20 for women, and 23 for men). The Bill increases this period to five years, allowing both women and men to file petitions to annul the marriage before they turn 23 years old (the minimum age for marriage at 21 years is higher than the age of majority at 18 years).

How will the Bill's amendments to the PCM Act come into force?

The Concurrent List - or List III under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India - contains a list of subjects that both the central and state governments can pass laws on. Entry 5 of the Concurrent List comprises a number of subjects including "[m]arriage and divorce; infants and minors; all matters in respect of which parties in judicial proceedings were immediately before the commencement of this Constitution subject to

their personal law". This allows both the Centre and states to enact laws to address child marriage.

Typically, under Article 200 of the Constitution, a Bill passed by a state Assembly will be handed over to the Governor of that state for her assent. The Governor can then declare that she assents to the Bill (making it a law), return the Bill for reconsideration, or "reserve" it for consideration by the President. The President can then declare that she assents or withholds assent to the Bill, or direct the Governor to send it back for reconsideration.

However, the Bill passed by Himachal Pradesh amends the PCM Act by introducing a different marriage age for women, making it inconsistent with the Act passed by Parliament. Under Article 254(1) of the Constitution, if the state legislature enacts a law dealing with a subject in the Concurrent List and that law is "repugnant" - inconsistent or contradictory - with a central law, then the repugnant portion of the state law will be "void".

The exception to this is provided under Article 254(2). If the Bill in question is repugnant to an earlier or existing law made by Parliament, the Bill must be reserved for the President's consideration and needs to receive her assent as per Article 201. Only then can the repugnant provision in the state law be valid. So, for the Himachal Pradesh Bill to come into force, Governor Shri Pratap Shukla must reserve the Bill for President Droupadi Murmu's consideration, who must then decide to give her assent to the Bill.

This process was seen in action in the case of Uttarakhand's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, which provided common provisions for subjects such as marriage, divorce, etc. for everyone residing in the state.

These subjects were previously governed by personal laws (enacted by Parliament) and the customs of residents depending on their religious or cultural identity. The Bill passed by the state Assembly in February became law only after President Murmu gave her assent to it in March.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

HOW ISRO DESIGNED HUMANOID SKULL WHICH WILL BE USED IN GAGANYAAN

ANJALI MARAR
BENGALURU, AUGUST 28

THE INDIAN Space Research Organisation's (ISRO's) uncrewed Gaganyaan mission in 2025 will carry the female humanoid Vyomitra (literally "space friend"). The design for Vyomitra's skull, fashioned by ISRO's Inertial Systems Unit in the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, was finalised recently.

What are humanoids?

Humanoids (or half-humanoids) are robotic systems designed to resemble humans - Vyomitra comes with movable arms, a torso, a face, and a neck - and function autonomously in space.

In general, robotic systems are used to assist astronauts in performing repetitive and/or dangerous tasks in space, like cleaning of solar panels or fixing faulty equipment located outside the spacecraft. This protects astronauts, and allows them to work on the scientific mission at hand.

Why will ISRO send a humanoid to space next year?

Next year's mission is primarily designed to be a technology demonstration of the Vyomitra. It will see the half-humanoid use its robotic arms to perform operations at the crew console, visually monitor various systems inside the crew module, and communicate with the Earth-based mission control team.

ISRO will evaluate the performance of the robot's technology to measure the likely impacts of space travel on human beings, ahead of India's first crewed mis-

sion planned for later in 2025.

How did ISRO design the humanoid skull for Vyomitra?

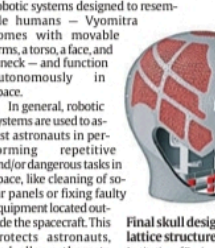
The recently-designed Vyomitra skull will house the key components of the robot. It has been made using an aluminium alloy (AlSi10Mg) known for its high flexibility, light weight, heat resistance, and mechanical properties. This alloy is commonly used for making automotive engines and aerospace components.

Crucially, the skull has been designed to be incredibly sturdy, capable of withstanding some extreme vibrational loads that are experienced during a rocket launch. The high strength of the aluminium alloy offers a yield strength of more than 220 MegaPascals (1 MPa = 1 million pascals). Yield strength refers to the maximum stress that can be applied to a material before it begins to deform permanently.

The humanoid skull model has dimensions of 200mm x 200mm, and weighs only 800 grams.

AlSi10Mg is also amenable to the Additive Manufacturing (or AM) technique. This is how the humanoid skull was created. AM enables easy induction of lattice structures, as incorporated in the humanoid skull design. Importantly, it helps in significant reduction of the overall weight of the final product. Unlike conventional manufacturing techniques, AM follows a process in which a desired part or product is created in a layered manner, a commonly deployed mechanism in 3D printing.

Sturdy yet flexible, lightweight materials are often used to build payloads for space missions. This is because heavier the payload, more the fuel required to reach space, and larger the rocket needed.



Final skull design with lattice structures. Journal of Institution of Engineers, India

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 28

AS THE Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) completed 10 years on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the "momentous" achievement of the scheme that has been "paramount in boosting financial inclusion and giving dignity to crores of people, especially women, youth, and the marginalised communities".

The PMJDY was launched on August 28, 2014 as a national mission for financial inclusion. Over the last decade, 53.13 crore Jan Dhan accounts have been opened, with 29.56 crore women beneficiaries, more than the population of the European Union, and almost the same as the population of the United States respectively, the government said.

I-Day announcement

The PMJDY was one of the early initiatives of the Modi government. The Prime Minister announced the scheme in his first Independence Day address on August 15, 2014.

"I have come here with a pledge to launch a scheme on this festival of freedom. It will be called Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana," Modi said from the ramparts of the Red Fort.

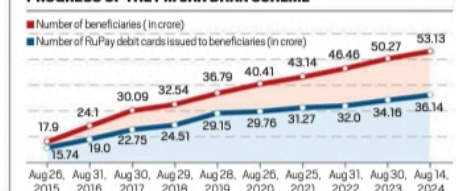
"I wish to connect the poorest citizens of the country with the facility of bank accounts through this yojana. This yojana will open the window...An account holder under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana will be given a debit card. An insurance of one lakh rupees will be guaranteed with that debit card for each poor family..." he said.

Features of the scheme

The scheme was launched on August 28. Banks organised 77,892 camps around the country, and opened about 18 crore accounts. Guinness World Records recognised the achievement: "The most bank accounts opened in 1 week as part of a financial inclusion campaign is 18,096,130 and was achieved by Department of Financial Services, Government of India from 23 to 29 August 2014."

The launch of PMJDY provided an unprecedented boost to the government's campaign for financial inclusion, at a scale never seen before. Earlier governments too, had taken initiatives for financial inclusion - for instance, the previous UPA government began a scheme of no-frills bank accounts for people who did not have an account - but they had failed to gain traction.

PROGRESS OF THE PM JAN DHAN SCHEME



DEPOSITS IN JAN DHAN ACCOUNTS (IN RS CR)

Aug 26, 2015	22,900.68
Aug 31, 2016	42,094.24
Aug 30, 2017	65,799.46
Aug 29, 2018	82,039.35
Aug 28, 2019	1,02,415.43
Aug 26, 2020	1,30,088.02
Aug 25, 2021	1,45,214.94
Aug 31, 2022	1,72,506.76
Aug 30, 2023	2,02,915.95
Aug 14, 2024	2,31,235.97

Source: Govt of India

The foremost objective of the PMJDY

was to open a Basic Savings Bank Account for unbanked individuals. There was no requirement to maintain any minimum balance in PMJDY accounts, and these accounts earned interest on deposits like regular accounts.

PMJDY account-holders were given RuPay debit cards.

An accident insurance cover of Rs 1 lakh was available with RuPay cards issued to PMJDY account holders. The cover was enhanced to Rs 2 lakh for new PMJDY accounts opened after August 28, 2018.

Eligible PMJDY account holders can avail overdraft (OD) facility up to Rs 10,000.

PMJDY accounts are also eligible for Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT). Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), Atal Pension Yojana (APY), and the Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Bank (MUDRA) scheme.



PM Narendra Modi and then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at the launch of Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana in New Delhi on August 28, 2014. Anil Sharma/Express Archive

Progress of the scheme

As of August 14, 2024, the number of PMJDY accounts stands at 53.13 crore - including 35.37 crore accounts in rural and semi-urban areas, and 17.76 crore accounts in urban areas - and total deposits at Rs 2,31,235.97 crore. More than half the PMJDY accounts (29.56 crore) are in the names of women. Total 36.14 crore RuPay debit cards have been issued to PMJDY account holders. (See charts)

The largest share of PMJDY accounts with public sector banks (41.42 crore accounts until August 14), followed by Regional Rural Banks (9.89 crore accounts), private sector banks (1.64 crore), and Rural Cooperative banks (0.19 crore).

A statewide analysis of PMJDY accounts shows the most accounts have been opened in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state (9.45 crore), and the fewest in Lakshadweep (only 9,256 accounts). There are 15 states apart from UP with more than 1 crore PMJDY

bank accounts: Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Assam, Odisha, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Haryana.

Impact of the scheme

The scheme, which is one of the components of the JAM trinity of PMJDY, Aadhaar, and mobile, has had a transformative impact on the financial and banking sectors of the economy.

First, the opening of more than half a billion bank accounts has fuelled demand for banking services, encouraging commercial banks to expand their infrastructure in recent years.

The number of branches of scheduled commercial banks in the country has increased by 46 per cent to 1,54,983 in 2023 from 1,05,992 in 2013. Of the total 1.54 lakh branches, 35 per cent are in rural areas, 28 per cent in semi-urban areas, 18 per cent in urban areas, and 19 per cent in metropolitan areas.

The number of ATMs has increased by 30 per cent from 1,66,894 at the end of June 2014 to 2,16,914 in 2024. The number of Points of Sale (POS) has increased from 10,88 lakh to 89.67 lakh during the last 10 years.

Second, the rollout of payment solutions such as UPI - launched two years after the PMJDY - has eased and increased banking transactions.

The Reserve Bank of India, in its Report on Currency and Finance released on June 29, 2024, noted, "India's financial inclusion initiatives received a fillip when PMJDY was launched in 2014. The digital technological revolution widened the usability of bank accounts from a traditional deposit or credit account to a payment intermediary. As per the World Bank's Findex database, 78 per cent of Indian adults (population with 15 years or more of age) had a bank account in 2021, as compared to 53 per cent in 2014."

Third, PMJDY accounts have become the bedrock of the government's DBT architecture. While this has ensured faster delivery of benefits to the poor, the JAM trinity has played a crucial role in improving efficiency by weeding out ineligible or false beneficiaries.

In fact, DBT and other governance reforms resulted in a gain of Rs 3.48 lakh crore in the implementation of government schemes including MG-NREGS and PM-Kisan until March 2023, according to data from the RBI's Report on Currency and Finance.

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Bangladesh lifts ban on Jamaat: short history of organisation Hasina tried to crush

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 28

BANGLADESH'S INTERIM government on Wednesday lifted the ban on the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, paving the way for its return to active politics.

The Sheikh Hasina government had cracked down on the Jamaat for being a "militant and terrorist" organisation, and hanged or imprisoned many of its top leaders for "war crimes" committed during the 1971 Liberation War. The Jamaat was barred from contesting elections in 2013 on the ground that its charter violated Bangladesh's constitution by "opposing secularism".

Largest Islamic party

On its website, the Jamaat says it wants to "safeguard the independence, territorial sovereignty and Islamic values of Bangladesh", and "implement the Islamic code of life... with a view to turning

Bangladesh into an Islamic welfare state...".

Bangladesh's "largest Islamic party" traces its roots to the Jamaat-e-Islami established in Lahore in 1941 by Islamic theologian Abul Ala Maududi. Its aim was to promote Islamic values in India, and eventually establish an unified Islamic state in the subcontinent.

The Partition - which the Jamaat actively opposed - dashed its original plans. After 1947, the organisation split on country lines. In India, the Jamaat was largely relegated to political irrelevance, but its influence grew in both wings of Pakistan.

Role in Liberation War

After the Partition, Pakistan struggled to hold together its geographically separated and culturally dissimilar East and West. Soon, the Bengali-speaking people in the East rebelled against the dominance of the Urdu-speaking West Pakistani elite, and started to demand first greater autonomy, and eventually a separate country.

Jamaat, with its goal of keeping Muslims

together, opposed the partition of Pakistan, and stood firmly with the (West) Pakistani establishment. It provided leadership and manpower to paramilitary organisations and committees established by the Pakistan Army to crush the freedom struggle.

These included the Al Shams and Al Badr armed groups, which were recruited from the Jamaat's student wing, and the East Pakistan Central Peace Committee, also known as the Shanti Committee.

These "razakars" (collaborators), along with the Pakistan Army (largely made up of West Pakistani recruits) carried out innumerable atrocities and human rights violations during the Liberation War, including the targeted killing of Bengali intellectuals, torture, abductions, rapes, and attacks on the minority Hindus.

Some 3 million people are estimated to have been killed during the nine-month Liberation War, more than 200,000 women were raped, and about 10 million were forced to flee East Pakistan.

Activities in Bangladesh

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman banned all religious organisations from participating in politics. Many Jamaat leaders, including Ghulam Azam, fled the country to escape prosecution for their role during the war. The Jamaat was effectively wiped out of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh passed the International Crimes Tribunal Act in 1973 "to provide for the detention, prosecution and punishment of persons for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other crimes under the international law".

But it would be decades before anyone would be actually prosecuted. Mujib was assassinated in 1975, and Bangladesh then

witnessed a series of coups and military rule under various individuals. The Awami League remained out of power until 1996, and the Jamaat returned during this time.

Ziaur Rahman, one of the individuals behind Mujib's assassination and the 1975 coup, would eventually lift the prohibition on religious parties from entering politics, and his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) would ally with the revived Jamaat. His wife Khaleida Zia, who later became prime minister herself (1991-96, 2001-06), continued the alliance.

Crackdown by Hasina

The Jamaat had been rehabilitated during the Khleda years, but its role during the Liberation War was not forgotten. After coming to power in late 2008, Hasina announced that she would use the 1973 Act to prosecute war criminals. This Act would be amended in 2009, and its ambit expanded. A tribunal, an investigation agency, and a prosecution team to try war criminals was announced in 2010.

On February 5, 2013, Abdul Quader Mollah, who was a member of the Al Badr militia in 1971, was convicted of killing 344 civilians along with other war crimes, and sentenced to life in prison. Following massive protests against the "lenient" punishment, the Bangladesh Supreme Court handed Mollah the death sentence. He was executed on December 12, 2013.

Others followed suit: Mohammad Kamarruzzaman in April 2015, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed in November 2015, and Motiur Rahman Nizami in March 2016. Numerous others were imprisoned. Ghulam Azam, who had been repatriated during Khleda's first term, was given 90 years in prison, where he died in 2014.

The arrests and executions drew widespread international condemnation. Hasina's critics alleged that the war crimes crackdown was a pretext to physically remove the opposition. The Jamaat too, maintains this position, and denies any role in the atrocities of 1971.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The elephant is the room

What we don't talk about when we talk about rape: The power asymmetries that silence women, the masculine language of law



PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI

WHAT IS IT that we talk about when we talk about rape? Cast your mind to any of the incidents over the last few months, years, decades — to Delhi 2012, Kathua 2018, Hathras 2020, Kolkata 2024 — and a pattern emerges. We speak of the horrors of violation — the laceration counts, the violence of the injuries, the degree of brutalisation. There is a reconstruction of the woman's, girl's, child's last few hours before ignominy — the calls she made, the meal she had, the conversation with a family member or a friend — drawn out with lurid, cinematic flair. There is also, should it not be lost in the frequency of its occurrence, mourning for lost promise. And outrage, perhaps, if the dead or the dehumanised is lucky enough — ironically — to belong to a certain class, caste or society. Or, if it breaches the threshold of tired acceptance of the routinisation of such incidents. In that instant, it transforms into a consumerist spectacle, a form of voyeurism that picks and chooses who deserves our moral outrage.

There's a poem by Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet Kay Ryan that could speak for all the things we don't talk about when we speak of sexual violence: "The room is/ almost all elephant/ Almost none of it isn't. Pretty much/ solid elephant." So there's no room to talk about it. "What is this elephant, then, the one that fills up the room, making conversation difficult? Women will tell you that it is the culture of patriarchy that makes perpetrators and enablers of men; that teaches them, women, their place in society, that writes anger and anguish into their stories. The National Crime Records Bureau's 2022 report puts the number of reported rapes at around 31,000. Statistics about sexual violence is always unconvincing but even then, the numbers fail to cover the breadth of harassment that forms the experience of every woman — the acid taste of fear in dark lanes, the frequent looking over one's shoulders, the preceptions of sharing cab routes with family, friend or partner at night; the self-censorship to deflect undue attention, the desperation that one has been "lucky" rather than the headlines that still fail to keep them safe. And this is only speaking for the urban, professional, middle class. Other, worse horrors, lurk for women who fall outside the privileges of this scaffolding.

There is a form of voluntary delusion that makes men who are part of the problem and women who excuse them perform mental calisthenics to ascribe cause and effect to sexual violence. These are the people who believe that women can avoid harassment if only they are less provocative, more submissive, less transgressive of the limits to their freedom. That it is "not all men" but only a handful who exist outside of one's circles of familiarity. That it is on the woman to do better for her own safety. It is the kind of logic that looks at sexual violence as an inconvenience, a *shiksha ghosha* — made-up story. Remember the initial scepticism from the



CR Sankumar

state government that met Suzanne Jordan, the 2012 sexual assault survivor in Kolkata's Park Street. Or, Mulayam Singh Yadav's opposition to capital punishment for rape in 2014 because men will be men — bristling with a kind of fragile machismo that finds it difficult to control itself.

This patriarchal discourse permeates all sections of society, typecasting women into adjunct tropes of mother, sister, wife or daughter. A woman is never just enough on her own. There has to be a mould that she fits into, to merit courtesy, to be deserving of respect. In Leslee Udwin's documentary *India's Daughter* (2015), for instance, shot in the aftermath of the December 2012 gang rape and banned in India on release, one of the perpetrators interviewed says, "A decent girl won't roam around at night. A girl is more responsible for rape than a boy..."

In another form, this kind of belief transforms into the idea of the "ideal victim" — the one whose infraction matters more, is worthy of moral outrage and agitation. This is why a doctor's rape and murder after a 36-hour duty becomes a flashpoint, while the rape and murder of a nurse in Uttarakhand goes unremarked. The first calls for justice that is *quid pro quo*, violence for violence, death penalty for brutal depravity. The second recedes from public memory without effort.

In the aftermath of the R G Kar rape and murder, the West Bengal Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister asking for stricter rape laws, including capital punishment, faster-tracked courts for speedy trials. TMC's general secretary Abhishek Banerjee has spoken of dealing with perpetrators "either through encounter or by hanging". While timely prosecution of sexual

There is a form of voluntary delusion that makes men who are part of the problem and women who excuse them perform mental calisthenics to ascribe cause and effect to sexual violence. These are the people who believe that women can avoid harassment if only they are less provocative, more submissive, less transgressive of the limits to their freedom. That it is "not all men" but only a handful who exist outside of one's circles of familiarity. That it is on the woman to do better for her own safety.

offences is essential, after the December 2012 case, a watershed moment for gender justice in India, the Justice Verma Committee Report had argued that the death penalty's potential as a deterrent was "a myth", a regressive idea of retroactive justice. Women's rights activists contend that it only serves as a populist knee-jerk reaction that ignores the larger implications of such violence. Irrespective, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita has introduced it in rape laws.

The Verma Committee report had also emphasised the need to introspect on the overarching patriarchy that pins women down at every step, beginning with the family and extending up to the state. It brought in crucial police reforms and expansions to the definition of rape. But some of its other recommendations, especially a review of the immunity granted by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act to soldiers accused of rape in conflict areas, and the criminalisation of marital rape, continue to be ignored, pointing at larger abdications of state and society.

What do we speak of when we speak of rape? Not the power asymmetry that the Hema Committee Report details in the Malayalam film industry, that teaches women of professional opportunities, that silences them into compliance, that sits at the heart of all sexual violence. Not the fact that the language of legal recourse against gendered crimes is essentially masculine and majoritarian, that holds the woman to account even when it is arguing for her. For all the gains this *Me Too* movement, the deadweight of making the crucifixion "solid elephant". There is little room to talk about it.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"What's concerning here is the police's culture of accusing the opposition. Before August 5, it was BNP-Jamaat men, now it is AL men. This is... undermining the spirit of the anti-discrimination movement that led the mass uprising [and] eroding public confidence in police." — THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Who failed the aam aadmi?

In Delhi, the Lieutenant Governor stands in the way of the functioning of an elected government



SAURABH BHARDWAJ

IT WAS AMUSING to read Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena's criticism ("Nightmare for aam aadmi", IE, August 29) of governance in the national capital given that his singular achievement over the past two years has been to stall and disrupt many reforms and initiatives of the elected government.

During British rule, provincial governors were agents of the crown. The necessity of continuing with the post was debated extensively in the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly decided to retain the position but changed the governor's role from the British era. It was also debated if the governor should be appointed by the president or if elections should be conducted for the post. Fearing the latter would create a parallel state leadership, the Constituent Assembly chose appointment by the president. The framers of our Constitution were clear on the governor's role. B R Ambedkar referred to the governor's position as "ornamental", and said that "he has no functions which he can discharge by himself".

When Delhi got an elected government in 1992, the L-G was tasked with directly administering the functions related to land (through the DDA or Delhi Development Authority) and law and order (through the Delhi Police) under the Centre's guidance. For all other functions, the L-G was to act on the advice of the elected government. This arrangement worked well until 2015 when the AAP government came to office with a historic mandate, which the BJP was unable to digest. Over the past decade, the BJP has weaponised the L-G's office in Delhi much like it has used the governor's office in Opposition-ruled states to stall the functioning of the elected governments.

The past two years have seen a complete breakdown in the constitutional role of the L-G's office. In Delhi, in the past, retired bureaucrats, IPS officers and ex-servicemen were appointed as Delhi L-G. A non-ex-officer was appointed L-G in May 2022 and it is no secret as to whose "aid and advice" he is taking. Over the past two years, the L-G has worked with a single goal — derail many works of the elected government and upturn the democratic mandate in Delhi. The interference ranges from appointing hostile bureaucrats in key positions to blocking funds for the Delhi Jal Board and Farsitey Scheme.

At the same time, the core responsibilities of the L-G's office have been neglected. As per 2022 NCRB data, Delhi registered over 1,800 crimes per 1 lakh residents, the highest in the country. Delhi was also ranked as the "most unsafe metro for women in the country" with three rape incidents reported every day. The city registered the highest crimes against children and senior citizens. There are increasing reports of thefts in the capital. Meanwhile,

the performance of the Delhi Police continues to deteriorate with charge-sheets filed in only 30 per cent of all cases, among the lowest in the country. The number of PCR vans has not increased in spite of repeated demands from people. In case of the horrific rape on New Year's eve last year, the victim reportedly called the PCR van for an hour but none turned up.

The second core function of the L-G's office relates to the DDA. The L-G has shed crocodile tears for 40 per cent of Delhi's population living in unauthorised colonies and slums. He should know that these settlements exist because of the DDA's failure to create adequate affordable housing in the capital for the past several decades. The DDA has also failed to create adequate commercial space for businesses in Delhi, forcing many to look for options in NCR. Nothing can be a bigger mark of the failure of the DDA than the fact that it has an inventory of more than 40,000 unsold flats, with an estimated value of Rs 18,000 crore. The DDA's Master Plan 2041 has been delayed by over two years forcing the Supreme Court to note, "An utter mess has been made in the city".

No incident gives a better picture of the willful disregard for constitutional norms, laws and Supreme Court decisions as the alleged illegal felling of trees in the ridge area earlier this year. The full facts of the matter are now in the public domain. Reportedly, the L-G ordered the felling of the trees to build a road. Never mind that the law requires the permission of a tree officer and the approval of the SC to cut even one tree of Delhi ridge. This action, too, attracted a sharp rebuke by the SC.

Even as the current Delhi L-G's term has been marked by one disaster after another, and despite his multiple attempts to stall works of the AAP government, we have continued to persevere and improve the everyday lives of people in the city. Delhi offers the best public education in the country and government schools continue to outperform private schools. Delhi's mohalla clinics continue to provide free treatment, tests and medicines to over 2 crore patients each year. Delhi is the only state to provide free and 24x7 electricity below 200 units to all residents. Delhi provides free water supply to over 70 per cent of its residents and has added over 7,000 km of pipelines in the last nine years. Delhi has added nearly 2,000 electric buses over the past four years, making it the third largest fleet in the world after China and Chile. By increasing its green cover, shifting the thermal plants, Delhi has managed to bring down pollution by 25 per cent in the past decade.

As Delhi and the rest of the country strive towards the path of progress, it is time we get rid of the office of L-G and governor, which are nothing but vestiges of the colonial era and have today become agents of the ruling party of the Centre. Until we do so, they will continue to function as agents of disruption and stifle the voice of the people and democracy itself.

The writer is Minister, Vigilance, Services, Health, Water, Industries, Urban Development, Irrigation and Flood Control, Government of NCT of Delhi



YASHOVARDHAN AZAD

A CLUTCH OF recent Supreme Court judgments has established that the principle "bail is the rule, and jail is the exception" shall apply to special laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) or the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA). In the case of BRS leader K Kavitha too, the court observed on Tuesday, "Undertaking custody should not turn into a punishment".

Earlier, a Delhi Court pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for using the stringent sections of PMLA to summon private doctors and record their statements. It said, "Strong leaders, laws and agencies generally come back to bite the very citizens they vow to protect." Another court in Mumbai remanded the ED of its constitutional obligation to ensure expeditious trial. The court granted bail to two accused, incarcerated since October 2020. Of course, the SC has held that money laundering is a serious crime, which promotes other offences. However, a slew of judgments by PMLA courts on the ED's functioning require serious review.

In 1998, India signed the UN Declaration at the Special Session on "Countering the World's Crime" and on the "Need to Combat Money Laundering". But little did one know that the issue would precipitate a political maelstrom 25 years later. The ED stands amidst a sharply divided polity and is often seen as biased against the Opposition. The Supreme Court is due to review some sections of the PMLA later this year, especially in the context of its verdict in *Madan Lal Choudhary* (2022), which upheld the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the PMLA. It justified the non-disclosure of the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) on the grounds that it is an internal document and disclosing the details in it can adversely impact the investigation.

A punishing process

SC verdict in K Kavitha case is welcome. Now, it should review PMLA

To be fair to the ED, the PMLA has been framed in consonance with the directives of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental organisation formed to combat money laundering and terror financing. Most countries have laws similar to India. It is, however, known the world over that tough laws have no direct correlation with falling crime. Yet, amendments to PMLA give seemingly unbridled powers to the ED. In 2012, the definition of money laundering was broadened to include concealment, acquisition, possession, and use of proceeds of crime as criminal activities. In 2015, the definition of proceeds of crime was extended to assets in India if the act of laundering was conducted abroad. The 2018 amendment revised the twin conditions for bail under Section 45, making it incumbent upon a court to satisfy itself that a crime was committed or the accused was unlikely to flee. But the coup de grace was delivered by the 2019 amendment that gave the ED almost unbridled powers of summons, arrests, raids and attachment of property. Money laundering also became a standalone offence, rather than a "connected schedule" offence. It authorised the search and seizure of property and persons on the basis of a simple warrant

by an appropriate authority without the registration of an FIR or a charge sheet.

Have the changes in law made a difference to ED's performance? In terms of the number of cases registered and assets attached, the ED in the NDA regime beats the UPA years hollow. The return of confiscated assets worth Rs 15,000 crore to public sector banks is a great achievement. Against 1,797 cases in 2005-14, 5,155 cases were registered in 2014-23. In the same period, the value of assets attached went up from Rs 5,086 crore to Rs 12.1 lakh crore. But only 25 cases have gone through the court processes; 24 of them resulted in a conviction.

While these numbers may bring cheer to the ED and government, a plethora of issues raise concern. Is PMLA a draconian piece of legislation or is it that the ED does not provide a level-playing field? Politicians have been implicated in only 3 per cent of the ED cases, but more than 90 per cent are from the Opposition. Those who have shifted from the Opposition to the ruling side find their cases being put in cold storage.

But PMLA is not all about politicians. It's more about the other 97 per cent accused — some in jail for long periods because of the extremely stringent bail conditions and inordinately long judicial trial. In 21 years, only 25 cases have been decided by the court — one reason being the various means deployed by rich offenders to delay trials. Another issue is whether the ED has the capacity to run so many investigations simultaneously. The agency has a sanctioned

strength of 2,067. It has requested the government to triple its strength and establish offices in every state capital. Over 11,000 cases of foreign exchange violations were initiated in the past three years alone. How does the agency prioritise? Does it go sequentially or by the alleged pick-and-choose method whereby some old cases are put in cold storage on usual considerations?

Liberalisation and the expansion of economy has led to an increase in white-collar crimes but at the world's largest democracy use an Act with stringent provisions to curb them? These include arrest without ECIR, the statement of the accused before the ED being inadmissible, the burden of proof resting on the accused and no magisterial oversight. The potential of misuse of these draconian provisions by any ruling dispensation is large.

PMLA was framed under FATF directives, but it cannot go against the spirit of the Constitution. The ED needs to ensure that for legitimate relief enshrined in the PMLA, the accused do not have to approach the courts. The SC is due to review the harsh provisions of the Act later this year. If the Court does not provide relief, it will fall upon the people to pressure their representatives in the Parliament to amend the Act in the interest of democracy.

The writer is a former central information commissioner and a retired IPS officer who served as secretary, security, and special director, Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

J&K ELECTIONS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Back to politics" (IE, August 28). The National Conference-Congress alliance has forged a friendly alliance while NC reiterates its agenda to restore Article 370. Leaders of NC are known to give diverse statements depending upon whether they are in Kashmir Valley or south of Banihal. Congress may have to convince NC to deliver statements keeping in mind the election in mind to avoid embarrassment. All parties should make sure that the election process is peaceful. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh are sensitive and strategic areas where a peaceful democratic process should prevail leading to a progressive government as an example to all states.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Back to politics" (IE, August 28). The upcoming Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, the first since the abrogation of Article 370, are set to be highly contentious. With the political landscape more fragmented than ever, the region seems poised for a fractured verdict. The course has expanded to include a concerned race, with numerous parties and independent candidates vying for influence in a volatile environment. The complexity of the electoral landscape is further deepened by the potential entry of former separatist leaders as independ-

ent candidates. This shift in the Valley's political dynamics could see these figures gaining electoral legitimacy, further complicating the race. Since the 1996 Assembly elections, no single party has been able to secure a majority in J&K, resulting in a series of coalition governments. The results of this election too could lead to protracted negotiations and fragile coalitions.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

A BIASED VIEW
THIS REFERS TO the article, "Nightmare for aam aadmi" (IE, August 28). The Delhi LG's views on the government appear very prejudiced. He listed every conceivable municipal and infrastructure issue that most densely populated metropolises face, but he could not find a single positive action taken by the government, which has twice received a landslide mandate from the electorate. He has labelled the city's healthcare system a sham, though it has been lauded and emulated by other states. Is Delhi the only city to suffer deaths and destruction as a result of this year's tsunami monsoon? Isn't it a gross oversight of the LG's demonstrated that corporates increasingly prefer to be located in other cities on outskirts? He regrets the lack of piped gas in many Delhi villages when even many metros do not have it.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru



OUR VIEW



Hold Ayurvedic therapy to the scrutiny of truth

India's Supreme Court has upheld a ban on misleading therapeutic claims. As Ayurvedic product launches face tighter regulation, we should at least keep their ad spiels in check

The outbreak of covid in 2020 sparked a global war against a deadly new virus. Away from the spotlight, it also triggered a grand domestic battle between advocates of allopathy and Ayurveda. The trigger was Patanjali Ayurved's quick launch of Coronil, a purported 'cure for corona' that drew public attention to dodgy claims and protests from allopathic doctors. A war of words erupted over various other therapies. In 2022, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) sought to put Patanjali and its founder Ramdev, a famous yoga guru, in the legal dock for running a smear campaign against allopathy. The Supreme Court extracted a public apology from them, and on Tuesday, the bench hearing the case ordered IMA chief R.V. Asokan to widely publish a note of contrition over his criticism of the court for asking allopaths to curb their own ethical failings. Both sides have now been pulled up and given an earful by the judiciary. The court's action of policy significance, however, was the stay imposed on a July notification issued by the Ayush ministry that would—in effect—have lifted India's ban on misleading advertisements of Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani drugs. By foiling that attempt, India's apex court has upheld the cause of public health.

On 27 August, the top court held that Rule 170 of India's Drugs and Cosmetic Rules, 1945, which prohibits ads that may mislead people on the therapeutic value of medicines under those systems, shall "remain on statute books." In August 2023, acting on the advice of a panel, the Ayush ministry had sent out a letter to all states and Union territories asking them not to implement the ban. In response, the Supreme Court asked for that letter to be withdrawn,

which the ministry did—but only to issue a formal notice last month that "omitted" Rule 170. This led the bench to squarely reinstate it, while asking the ministry to explain the omission. What the ministry has to say is awaited, but the rationale of the rule in question need not arouse a needless controversy. Its purpose is clear. As a basic policy, India must allow and honour traditional systems of medicine. Patients and caregivers need the liberty of choice. But we must accept the fallout of a key difference between allopathy and Ayurveda. While allopathic drugs undergo rigorous clinical tests of safety and efficacy before they're approved for use, Ayurvedic formulations are subject to softer regulation aimed at ensuring they follow classical texts and are safe, even though their makers could conduct trials of their own to show how useful they are. Today, modern pills with proven track records on specific uses dominate the popular notion of 'medicine' to such an extent that their 'halo effect' rubs off on all other products sold as medicinal, including herbal remedies that lack trial data on efficacy. Since the distinction is not easy to discern, many people in need of healthcare might simply go by what packages and ad spiels say. Hence, unless we can screen traditional offerings for reliability, with trials kept transparent for others to check and corroborate results, we need measures in place to shield people from curative overhype. In other words, a strict advertising code for Ayurveda is a must.

When the Ayush ministry was set up in late 2014, doctors had hoped it would put Ayurvedic products to scientific tests and filter out dubious stuff on sale, not just act as an agency for their promotion. Today, the least it can do is not let lax oversight of market practices get in the way of better health for all.

THEIR VIEW

Central bank rate cuts: Ask why instead of when and how much

It's better to grasp what drives monetary policy than obsess over the timing and extent of a pivot



SACHCHIDANAND SHUKLA
is group chief economist at
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The focus of market players and borrowers has turned towards monetary policy in the US, particularly the two questions of when and by how much will its central bank, the Federal Reserve, cut the US Fed funds rate. Anticipation of imminent cuts rose after the Jackson Hole bubble of central bankers and economists, an occasion that market participants across the world were watching for cues. "The time has come for policy to adjust," Fed chair Jerome Powell said in his speech, adding that "the direction of travel is clear, and the timing and pace of rate cuts will depend on incoming data, the evolving outlook and the balance of risks."

Futures markets are now pricing in a 100% chance of at least a quarter percentage point (25 basis points, i.e.) rate cut by the US Fed in September, and have raised the odds of a potential 50-basis-points cut to about one-in-three. However, it is more important for borrowers and markets to focus on the question of 'why,' rather than 'how much' and 'when.' A clearer understanding of the underlying reasons can help understand the evolution of the America rate cycle better.

So, why would a central bank or the Fed cut rates?

The first question to ask is: Is the central bank confident of having won

the battle against inflation? Powell expressed confidence that there was "good reason" to believe US inflation could fall further without damaging the economy and that the Federal Reserve can still sustainably meet its 2% goal. That would warrant a shift to neutral-rate territory, which was estimated at 2.55%. Although the risks around inflation have become more balanced, the band of uncertainty is uncomfortably high and the Fed is still not at a juncture where it can emphatically claim to have quelled inflation for good. In that case, a measured rate cut of 25 basis points is more likely.

The second question is: Going forward, is the central bank fearful that the economy is at the risk of faltering? Recessions don't always come with a flashing red signal. A wait-and-see approach can be damaging because recession risks can spring up on policymakers and by then it may be too late to act. If this indeed is a big concern, then another round of weak jobs data in the US could tip the odds in favour of a 50 basis points cut and potentially result in quicker and deeper easing in this cycle.

The third point is about consistency. The reason rates were raised aggressively by the Fed, starting 2022, is that inflation kept rising. Hence, shouldn't rates fall in sync with a deceleration in inflation? A gauge that the central bank prefers to track inflation most recently showed the rate at 2.5%, down from 3.2% a year ago and well off its peak above 7% in June 2022. If central bank reactions to inflation are inconsistent, it will confuse stakeholders and also hurt its credibility.

Lastly, are there political reasons for rate cuts? It would be remiss not to mention politics, the elephant in the room, given the US presidential election scheduled this November. Many expect the outcome to have a heavy influence on the path of Fed policy, not just now, but also through the course of 2025. It could put the spotlight on government debt levels and fiscal proflig-

gacy and also reawaken concerns around protectionism and trade tariffs, given that the easing of supply-chain bottlenecks has been instrumental in helping to bring down inflation from its post-covid highs.

All of this brings us to the question of what would the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) do? Governor Shaktikanta Das has so far been hawkish and emphasised the need to ensure that inflation progressively aligns with India's 4% target.

The Indian central bank's assessment is that growth is strong and headline inflation has moderated unevenly from its peak. It remains wary of the elevated food price momentum and expects inflation to rise in the third quarter as favourable base effects taper off. RBI surveys expect a pickup in retail prices in the second half of this year and also hint at household inflation expectations having gone up. All that is in the backdrop of strong gross domestic product (GDP) growth momentum.

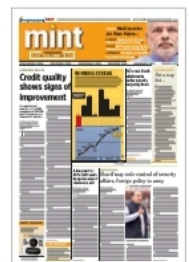
However, what if India's underlying growth momentum starts to wane? Global growth is moderating, as we can make out from GDP data and industrial output, as well as Purchasing Managers Index readings and commodity prices. In India, RBI has lowered its GDP forecast for the first quarter, albeit by only some 10 basis points, after a slew of successive upward revisions.

Asset markets are currently pricing in just one RBI rate cut during the course of fiscal year 2024-25.

The central bank has been evaluating policy trade-offs carefully. However, a sharper-than-expected softening in the domestic growth trajectory, weakening of consumer confidence, the rising cost of persisting with high real rates for longer and a decisive turn by the US Fed could and should nudge the Reserve Bank of India towards a pivot on its stance and eventual rate action—and why not?

These are the author's personal views.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

It is advertising and the logic of consumerism that governs the depiction of reality in the mass media.

CHRISTOPHER LASCH

MY VIEW | WORLD APART

A South Asian bug has bitten Southeast Asian nations

RAHUL JACOB



is a Mint columnist and a former Financial Times foreign correspondent.

Indonesia last week was rocked by large demonstrations attended by tens of thousands in several cities against a move in parliament aimed at relaxing electoral laws. The amendment, abetted in the face of the protests, would have allowed President Jokowi's 29-year-old son, Kaesang Pangarep, to contest regional elections in central Java. Late on Sunday, the country's election commission issued new rules that uphold the convention that candidates for such elections should be 30 or older. Indonesia's two-term limit means that President Jokowi must step down this October, but his eldest son will be vice-president in the incoming administration, which makes the attempt to manipulate age limits for his third son to contest polls even more baffling.

Earlier this month, in Thailand, meanwhile, Paetongtarn Shinawatra became prime minister just three days after she turned 38. Her election as the leader of the Pheu Thai party her father Thaksin Shinawatra founded was precipitated by a consti-

tutional court dismissal of her predecessor, Srettha Thavisin, for the impropriety of appointing a cabinet minister convicted of corruption. The court has shown time and again that it does what is expedient for Thailand's conservative establishment, notably its military elite that runs political parties of its own. The decision to dismiss Srettha came on the heels of a court decision to disband Move Forward, a party that won the most seats in the last parliamentary election in 2023. It is widely believed the party was kept out for its proposal to reform Thailand's *lese majeste* laws, introduce competition laws to rein in Thailand's oligopolies and curb the power of the military.

Nepotism in politics, long the norm in South Asia, is making a dramatic comeback in Southeast Asia's large countries. The most phoenix-like ascension is that of Bongbong Marcos, elected president of the Philippines a couple of years ago, who arose from the rubble of protests in the 1980s that led to the exile of his father Ferdinand Marcos on allegations that he had siphoned off billions of dollars as president.

The biggest surprise, however, is the reckless urgency of President Jokowi's desire to put his sons in prominent positions before he steps down this year. The legacy of

a presidency that has had many successes—such as keeping a lid on religious tensions and curbing military—has been tarnished. Seeking to secure political power as a family inheritance has hurt his reputation. Ironically, it was partly built on Jokowi wrestling power away from Megawati Sukarnoputri, Indonesia's first president, in large part because the country warned to the humility of the former furniture business-owner and mayor of a small town. Remarkably, Jokowi then insisted that none of his family members could compete for projects in the city. During that time, he developed a reputation for being a pragmatist who made unheralded visits to neighbourhoods and markets to hear from citizens themselves, a practice he continued occasionally as president.

This reputation helped Jokowi achieve national prominence when he was elected governor of Jakarta in 2012. But in seeking to extend his influence after he steps down, Jokowi has overplayed his hand. In 2023,

the constitutional court conveniently lowered the age limit for candidates seeking to be president to 35 from 40. This paved the way for Jokowi's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, 36, to be a vice-presidential candidate on what became the winning ticket that will see Prabowo Subianto take over as president later this year.

That success may have led Jokowi to get more ambitious.

The pity is Jokowi had made significant progress managing the economy, in part by appointing Sri Muliyil, a former World Bank vice-president, as finance minister. As the end of his presidency approaches, inflation was 2.13% in July and has mostly been below 3%, levels that would make Indonesians envious. Domestic and foreign direct investment hit \$90 billion last year, up 17.5%.

Bangkok may seem modern to a visitor, but its politics are anything but. A Thai prohibition on discussing the royal family in public is an anachronism, as is the military's inability to exit politics. Tourism aside, the

economy is in the doldrums and in urgent need of fresh ideas that Move Forward, which won the most seats in the 2023 election, was well placed to push. Its then leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, has a joint degree in public administration and business from Harvard and MIT. Just as the government was being formed in July last year, the election commission disqualified Pita on the grounds that the party's plans to reform *lese majeste* laws was somehow an attempt to overturn the country's "democratic regime with the king as head of state." Without fresh leadership, Thailand's industrial base will hollow out, largely because its generals have allowed China to muscle in with direct investments and massive exports.

Observers will point out that this is not that different from the US, where former president Donald Trump appointed his son-in-law Jared Kushner special envoy to the Middle East. After the aptly named Abraham Accords between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE in 2020, Kushner was asked why he had not concentrated on the Israeli-Palestinian issue instead. "Those issues aren't as complicated as people have been made out to be," he said. Such a breathtaking sense of entitlement, reflected also in Jokowi's moves, is an indictment of nepotism.

Indonesia and Thailand are the latest to witness nepotism at the top that puts their success stories at risk



MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

MINT CURATOR

How smart an investor are you? It may be time for a reality check

It may be natural to ascribe success to one's skills and failure to bad luck but investing demands clarity on gains and losses



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If you are an average investor in the Indian stock market, I am sure you must be feeling pretty smart just now. After all, in the past year, the Nifty 50 is up around 30%, the NSE 500 40% and the Smallcap Index a whopping 60% plus. I am sure you have stories of how you looked at financials, management, etc, and identified this stock a year or two ago which is now up three or five times. You are likely very pleased at having finally learnt this stock market game.

Now let us go back some 20 months to the beginning of 2023. Would you have felt as smart then? To recap, in 2022, the Nifty returned 4%, about half the typical fixed deposit rate; the Smallcap index was down, and if you had invested in Nasdaq exchange traded funds (ETFs) and other funds launched with much fanfare in 2021, you would be staring at a 40% loss. Same if you had bought crypto assets or non-fungible tokens (NFTs) in the 2021 boom.

But then, you would say the 2022 disruptions were because of the US Federal Reserve raising interest rates, Russia invading Ukraine, the spike thereafter in commodity prices, supply disruptions and a thousand other reasons.

And God forbid, had you invested in small-caps during the 2017-18 boom, by the end of 2019, you would have been cursing stock operators, shady managements and the like because the Smallcap Index was down 65%, with many stocks down by 80-90%.

Do you see the pattern? We attribute outcomes to ourselves, but only if they're successful! As a thumb rule, we attribute successes to our skills and failures to risks and factors beyond our control.

And this goes far beyond investing. When we land a job, we believe that we have been hired for our talent, qualifications, past achievements and great interview performance. But if we do not get the job offer, it is because the interviewer was prejudiced or there was some other hanky-panky afoot. That is how the human mind works.

In investing, self-attribution means that if I pick a stock and it goes up, it's because I'm a genius. But if the stock doesn't do well, then it's because of external factors—like the central bank, economy, politicians, bad company management, stock operators, or maybe even a natural calamity. There are always plenty of villains to blame. Always, success is because of my skill and the failure is because of some risk that could not be foreseen.

Most games in life, with the probable sole exception of chess, are games of luck plus skill. Investing is no different. However, investors weight the two differently, depending on how well they have done recently.

Thus, if you have done very well over the past



year and are asked what proportion of your investment performance you attribute to skill, you are likely to give a much higher percentage than you would if your portfolio had not done well, in which case the luck or risk factor would have been rated higher.

Why does this bias exist? As with most cognitive biases, it exists because it had a role in human evolution. This one allows you to protect your self-esteem. By attributing positive events to yourself, you get a boost in confidence. By blaming outside forces for failures, you are more likely to persevere even after a failure—whether it was a failed hunt or the inability to land a job.

Anything that boosts your confidence and self-esteem should be good, right? Only if you are in school! In the stock market, it can be a disaster. When you attribute every success to great analysis and skill and every failure to bad luck, the result is over-confidence. Which in turn leads to taking on an inappropriate degree of financial risk, trading too aggressively, increasing the probability of poor outcomes, over-trading, etc. It can also result in concentrated portfolios because you're so convinced of the brilliance of your analysis.

All of these things are to be avoided. Equally important, not taking responsibility for your errors means that mistakes in thinking, frameworks, ways

of analysis and so on will continue unchecked because you refuse to admit that there was anything wrong with your decision-making process in the first place. Thus, you're doomed to repeat your mistakes over and over again.

Remember the quote, "Don't confuse brains with a bull market." When profits pour in during a bull run, it is all too easy to congratulate yourself and your outstanding analytical skills. And forget that most of your gains are due to the luck of being in a certain market at the right time.

This happens not just with lay investors, but even professional fund managers, who arguably have even greater incentives to do this in order to justify their fees.

Always remember that in both successes and failures, there is luck and there is skill. Your mind should not trick you into thinking that everything that does well was due to your skill and everything else was a case of "Poor me! I could not have foreseen that. Bad luck."

In investing, your decisions are always made with many unknown factors and hence there is always an element of luck. We remember bad luck or risk, but forget about the element of luck in good outcomes, unless we consciously look for it.

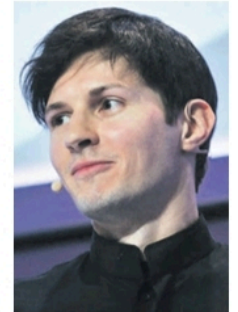
Our mind is great at playing tricks on us. But that's a topic for another column altogether.

Telegram's anything-goes air finally faces a legal reckoning

Durov's detention is a result of its ultra-lax approach to oversight



PARMY OLSON
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering technology.



The recent arrest of Telegram founder and Chief Executive Officer Pavel Durov near Paris has sent shockwaves through the tech world. Elon Musk called on France to "free Pavel" to avert a threat to democracy; Paul Graham, the co-founder of leading Silicon Valley accelerator Y Combinator, suggested it would hurt the country's chances of being "a major startup hub." Yet, while some are citing a French-led assault on free speech and innovation, the reality is more nuanced.

Durov's detention is not a shocking act of government overreach, but the culmination of years of tension between his ultra-lax approach to oversight and growing concern about Telegram's role in enabling criminal activity. The charges are extensive and serious, covering Telegram's complicity in the distribution of child sexual-abuse material (CSAM), drug trafficking and money laundering. While the likes of Meta Platforms, TikTok and Alphabet's YouTube have much stricter bans on such activities, Durov's arrest should be taken as a sign that the "no consequences" era for social media is fading as governments push to make companies more accountable for what happens on their apps.

Telegram is one of the world's biggest social media platforms, with an estimated 900 million monthly users, many of whom follow popular channels that broadcast content to thousands of people. It's also unique in its approach to overseeing all that activity: It doesn't. While its peers invest heavily in content moderation and cooperate with law enforcement, Telegram has a minimal-intervention policy that has contributed to its low operational costs. Durov once told the *Financial Times* that each Telegram user cost the company just 70 cents a year to support.

His platform has been linked to the spread of conspiracy theory groups, CSAM and terrorism, with ISIS having reportedly used the app as a communication hub for nearly a decade. Such groups don't just use the app for alleged secrecy, but for its "anything goes" approach to moderation. During the recent UK riots, calls to violence proliferated on the platform even though they broke the app's rules. One such post was only taken down after I contacted the app about it. Despite all this, Telegram has proudly maintained a stance of non-cooperation. In its FAQs, the company states "to this day, we have disclosed 0 bytes of user data to third parties, including governments." Now, in response to the arrest, Telegram has said it's "absurd to claim that a platform or its owner are responsible for

it is a sign that the 'no consequences' era of social media is fast fading. **BLOOMBERG**

abuse of that platform. Telegram abides by EU laws, including the Digital Services Act—its moderation is within industry standards and constantly improving."

But it's far from 'absurd' for a company to be held accountable for criminal activity on its platform. Telegram is in this position because of its choice to avoid content moderation—and not because of an encroaching effort by a government to conduct surveillance on its supposedly secret chats. Cryptography experts have long pointed out that Telegram is not fully end-to-end encrypted. Most chats on the app use client-server encryption, meaning Telegram could access message contents if it chose to (and much of the content on the platform is on public channels anyway). The company's 'Secret Chats' feature does offer end-to-end encryption, but that's not the default and it isn't always used for regular communication. In essence, Telegram has created an illusion of total privacy while retaining the technical means to monitor content—a capability it chooses not to use. France's move against Durov marks a reckoning for that choice, and the involvement of specialized units such as the Centre for the Fight against Cybercrime (CSN) and Anti-Fraud National Office (ONAF) highlight the gravity of his app's alleged offenses.

Musk and other critics may argue that his arrest threatens free speech, but Telegram's hands-off approach to much of the activity on its platform doesn't grant it freedom from consequences. The digital world requires as much governance as the physical one, and when a platform becomes a tool for widespread criminal activity, turning a blind eye isn't a defence of liberty, but a dereliction of duty.

One lesson the tech industry can glean from this week's developments is that social media giants can no longer expect to keep operating in a regulatory vacuum. Europe is on track to take a harsher line on harms that occur on social media with laws like the Digital Services Act and Britain's Online Safety Act coming into force in the next year or so. The charges brought by the French prosecutors aren't connected to the new EU law, but they are part of a broader shift in aggression. Tech's leading players are not as untouchable as they thought they were. **BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

Fakeness among NGOs isn't all that difficult to identify

ANURAG BEHAR



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

A friend from an NGO urged me to name the NGOs that were high on fakeness. Many others expressed similar sentiments after reading my last two columns on how funders have made the world of NGOs more fake and flakey. All put most of the onus of these trends on funders, not on the NGOs—big or small—that are pushed along the dimensions of fakeness and flakiness by individual funders and the dangerous momentum in this sector.

But they were scratching about a certain set of NGOs that are tapping these funder-led trends to position themselves as self-appointed guardians and guides (SAGs) of India's social sector. Not only are they cornering a disproportionate share of the available funding for themselves, they also influence who else gets how much money. In some cases, they have become intermediaries. Funders give them money and they in turn decide which NGOs to fund. This is called 'on-granting'. Equally if not more damaging is their influence on what is seen

by funders and often also the wider public as good or bad work. For sure, all SAGs are not big, nor have all big NGOs become SAGs. Nor is all 'on-granting' bad. SAGs are both big and small. Some do on-granting and some don't. Some of them work across the country and some dominate certain regions.

Instead of taking names, let's consider the five kinds of fakeness of these NGOs-turned-SAGs, including those aspiring to SAG-hood. The first two kinds of fakeness are deeply inter-related: the fakeness of scale and the fakeness of depth. Often, this is about projecting the scale of your work as large, or as large as possible, through metrics and narratives which let you side-step the matter of the depth and intensity of that work.

There are myriad examples of this. Here is one. Some of these NGOs will claim that they work in multiple states, while all they do is work with some state-level body or department to set up so-called project management units, which are usually nothing more than 'executive assistant' support to senior officers. "Working in five states" tends to convey that they work across entire state systems, while that is far from the truth. And how they will have a glib description of many of them are "catalysing systemic change."

Another common example is a claim like

"we work in 10,000 schools," while all they have done is distributed some books in those 10,000 schools, and perhaps conducted a one-hour online seminar on how to use those books. Some of these SAGs have invented a far more clever and convincing approach. They will work at depth and with

great intensity at a genuinely manageable small scale. And then, some small element or 'method' of that work will be disseminated at a much larger scale. This lets them claim false credit for a larger-scale operation, often citing the same mantra of 'systemic change.'

All of this is a play between the depth and intensity of work on one hand, and the scale at which the work happens, finessed by the words chosen to project this work appropriately. Let us note that fakeness is not the same thing as crookedness. "We dug 20 open wells," when they dug five, is crookedness. "Our programme worked with 200 panchayats to develop open wells," when all they did was distribute some litera-

ture among panchayats is fakeness.

The third kind of fakeness is a word often used with a tinge of unconscious hubris: 'impact.' Combining overstatement of scale and depth leads to large claims about effects. SAGs usually have seemingly good data to back these claims because they are familiar with what exactly will be convincing. There is no way for funders to validate such claims at any level of meaningful detail. Genuine NGOs that give an honest assessment of the effects of similar work are pooh-poohed for not being 'strategic' or 'ambitious' or 'smart enough.'

Faking immersion in ground-level reality and being 'of the people' is the fourth kind of fakeness. For effective work, the centrality of truly understanding what is going on in this country in all its nooks and corners, along with the why and how of it, is universally acknowledged. Which is why being in the heat and dust and grime of the country is a true virtue. SAGs and their leaders, though, have made a fine art of conveying that they

are immersed deeply in 'real India,' while actually being in the comfort and safety of energy in networking with funders and bigwigs at conference circuits and in the corridors of power. Their language and attire are carefully constructed to orchestrate perceptions. Many of them have a series of gripping anecdotes from the ground for funders, who are all too ready to believe them.

The fifth kind of fakeness is that of purpose and commitment. Most of these SAGs started with good intentions, usually with real commitment and genuine purpose. But over time, in the reality of their actions, both their purpose and commitment have become somewhat fake, substituted by a hunger for visibility and power. Many of them are unaware of this corrosion at the core, much like the denouement of tragedies in the Mahabharata.

I have little hope that these SAGs can reform themselves to become simple good NGOs. There is a symbiotic relationship between the almost-wifful gullibility of NGO funders and the obliging fakeness of SAGs. Funders need to step out of it and not keep sliding down this slope tethered to SAGs. All other NGOs, the ones that haven't taken this tragic trajectory, need to guard against following the fake and flakey.

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

—Ramnath Goenka

USE HEMA REPORT TO CORRECT COURSE, NOT WITCH-HUNT

THE storm unleashed by the Hema Committee report is getting stronger by the day. Emboldened by the report's release, several women are speaking up against sexual assault and harassment they have faced. The revelations by Bengal actor Sreelekha Mitra and Malayalam actor Revathy Sampath led to the resignation of two industry heavyweights—Kerala Chalachitra Academy chairman Ranjith and Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) general secretary T Siddique. All other AMMA office bearers, including superstar Mohanlal, have also resigned. Meanwhile, more voices within the industry are demanding a fair probe into all the allegations in the report, signifying its deeper impact on the film industry's collective psyche.

The report is a great starting point for course correction. Malayalam cinema can never be the same again—it can only be a more equal and decent workplace for both men and women. At the same time, the attempt by certain sections to paint the entire industry in darker shades is also not a useful approach. As actor Parvathy Thiruvothu rightly said, it is unfair to criticise the entire industry because of the report that is only trying to address the malaise. "We are good inside, which is why we are fixing it," she said.

The industry has already embarked on a path of change. More predators in Bollywood would undoubtedly be exposed. At the same time, it should not be turned into a witch-hunt. Leveling baseless allegations against industry members and settling personal vendettas using the current climate that favours opening up must not be encouraged. Hundreds of people depend on the film industry for their livelihood. All these course corrections should only result in making it a better place to work, and not end up destroying it. If taken in the right spirit, the Hema Committee report certainly has the potential to achieve its purpose of improving workplace cultures. But that will be served only if everyone focuses on the real issues rather than sensationalising the subject. It must be turned into an opportunity to create a better work atmosphere for everyone in the industry. Other film industries, too, can take a leaf out of the report and try to fix their own set of problems. It can be a turning point for all concerned, provided the intentions are correct.

BENGALURU MUST IMPROVE ITS WASTE MANAGEMENT

SIGNS of helplessness in managing Bengaluru's rapid growth are becoming more conspicuous. One of the most glaring are the mistakes in disposing of the 6,000 tonnes of garbage generated daily. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has seemingly given up on finding ways to effectively manage the waste. Senior BBMP officials have asked citizens to manage their own waste—a troubling development further compromising effective disposal. This seriously questions the inspiring statement, "Government's work is god's work", inscribed on the ramparts of the Vidhana Soudha, the nerve-centre of the Karnataka government.

Experts lament that the BBMP has no control over its contractors, who are accused of holding the city to ransom and working like a mafia. Bengalureans are mandated to segregate waste at home before handing it over to garbage collectors. But the contractors mix it to increase weight and get hefty cheques from the BBMP, which pays them on the weight of garbage lifted. Besides, a majority of BBMP *pourakarmikas* or sanitation workers are on contract and are often paid late by the contractors, leading to frequent protests.

So garbage disposal in what is perceived as the most global city in India has become a sham. The city has just one landfill and a sprinkling of waste processing units that are either unauthorised, dysfunctional for technical reasons, or affected by citizens' protests against having them in their vicinity. Bengaluru may have been adjudged the most liveable city in 2024 with a score of 66.70 on the ministry of housing and urban affairs' Ease of Living Index that assesses Indian cities on the quality of life and efficiency of urban development initiatives. But it needs to go a long way to make it actually liveable.

There are other systemic issues at play. There have been no civic elections in the city since September 2020, mainly due to ward denotification and reservation, issues that are in the courts. The BBMP is governed by an administrator who directly reports to the state government. But much can still be done. The urgent need is to ensure strict surveillance of contractors to keep the waste segregated, increase the number of authorised waste processing units and ensure the proper use of landfills. The IT City of India has no other options but to streamline its waste disposal system and protect its reputation.

QUICK TAKE

BEWARE IDENTITY THIEVES

THE Delhi police have registered a complaint against a man who posed as the chief justice of India and sought cab fare from another individual. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court is hearing the bail plea of a man charged with impersonating former a Patna High Court chief justice in 2022 and making the court's registrar buy him gift cards. The cases come months after a 42-year-old was arrested for duping two people by impersonating a Delhi crime branch inspector. These high-profile impersonations come in an age when identity theft has become pervasive. As part of cyber safety campaigns, it's imperative to train all generations against the menace of identity theft.

ARE our stars really the stuff that dreams are made of? Was the love peddled to millions of cine lovers built on the humiliation of many women who struggled alongside men to build this palace of illusions? Was the magic of cinema just a sham that covered the megalomania of men who used the economy of cinema to traffic in patriarchal dividends? Do the raptures of agony and ecstasy engendered by cinema that touch our cores make us complicit in the oppressively feudal artistic economies?

Among the many film industries in India, Malayalam cinema is considered a cut apart for its progressive politics and innovativeness around plot and style. But its ramparts were razed through a single stroke, as Justice Hema Committee's report filed the epochal voices of a handful of women who questioned the misogynist foundations of this grand castle of deception.

Triggered by the inhuman assault on a female actor in a moving car in broad daylight in 2018 and the subsequent resistance by the Women in Cinema Collective, the Kerala government appointed a three-member committee in 2017 under Justice Hema to study the workplace issues experienced by women in the Malayalam film industry. Yet, the very same government sat on the report for four and a half years, citing technicalities and fear of violating the confidentiality of the people who testified. It took many information requests and public outrage for the government to finally make a heavily redacted document available for public perusal, where the nature and extent of redactions have drawn further flak.

In many places, the report speaks of the pall of silence and the culture of fear that exist in different cine unions, like that of dancers and junior artists, which prevented them from testifying openly before the committee. The fear of losing their meagre employment possibilities, of unauthorised bans and other forms of harassment were enough to silence those whose livelihoods depended on their precarious existence in a male-dominated industry.

One can safely surmise from the report that criminal fiefdoms are thriving with in entertainment industries in the world's largest democracy. What the report lays bare to the civil society, which will probably find resonance in other film industries in India, is that behind the star-studded screen that most Indians are so invested in lies a dystopian world of gender oppression, sexual discrimination, harassment, violence and abuse. Prostitution, sextortion and pimping go under the pseudonyms of 'compromise' and 'adjustment'. There are dangerous beasts lurking in the dark underbelly of cinema.

Where do they draw their seemingly unquestionable power from? What prompts the unholy nexus between politicians and cinema barons that helps regularise the systemic character of the banality of evil? How can oligarchic republics of mafia-dom operate so freely within the country? Can any democratically-elected government wash its hands of its responsibility to women by invoking legal justice while turning a myopic eye towards social justice?

In a state where film criticism is often based on hearsay, innuendoes and misogynist inferences, the report takes up women's labour, oppression, resistance and agency from the level of gossip, placing it on a terrain that could afford it legal scrutiny and public accountability. That said, *suo motu* judicial enquiries might not be practical, given that even the actor in the infamous assault case, in spite of all the public furore, had to face further trauma when a recording of her assault was leaked from judicial custody. How can the confidentiality of victims' testimonies be ensured under the present circumstances?

What is the guarantee, given the report of deep-seated cultures of fear instigated through trade unions, that the women's livelihoods would be protected from harm? In a digital era, what makes it so difficult to ensure that film sets have complaint committees comprising mem-

Rather than just focusing on sensational cases involving actors, the Hema Committee report should be used to improve the lot of all women working in the film industry

STAR-GAZING IN A DEEP STATE OF FEAR

MEENA T PILLAI

Professor & Head, Institute of English, Director, Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Kerala, and author of *Effective Feminisms in Digital India*



SHRUTI RAO

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bers from outside the industry; to which an oppressed woman can turn to for support or redress? The report itself states that such complaint committees might be useless because they are bound to be filled with nominees of power lobbies. This comment has a larger valence in Kerala, where complaint committees are often filled with women who are the handmaidens of patriarchy, defeating the very purpose of gender-just laws.

The unholy nexus between entertainment and politics, irrespective of party affiliations, creates nefarious 'fanboy' networks of hegemonic masculinity within which circulate money and other transactions, creating a system that is difficult to dismantle. This is the patriarchal deep state within which ordinary women technicians, choreographers, dancers and make-up artists—not just women actors—function under conditions of precarity. They are denied basic workplace amenities and equal wages, with abuse and violence being made so commonplace as to be common-sensical.

Instead of being considered an attack on powerful institutions or individuals, the report should be seen as an opportunity to influence policies. There are many policy decisions a proactive government could take in light of the report without being carried away by the media sensationalisation of the abuse faced by female actors alone. Instead, the focus should be on the 15-odd other serious issues pointed out in the report that take stock of women's labour, dignity and human rights. It could initiate steps to ensure that men and women, particularly in the lowest rungs of the work order, be given equal wages for equal work. Women suffer heavily in low-paid, insecure and often-unsafe jobs in the industry. The government could take steps to guarantee dignity of labour and decent wages, safe working environments, and provide social protections like healthcare and maternity benefits.

Cinema cannot continue to function as a discriminatory cabot that thrives on women's labour, but enjoys exclusive rights over the degradation, exploitation, objectification and commodification of their bodies. It is time the state took stock of the cross-universalisation of patriarchy in the industry, which forms a conduit for the dictates of power lobbies and for the fear they instigate and the surveillance they enable down to individuals, creating more aggressively feudal men and more silenced women. Unless there are more 'feminist' to upset the appellate of machodism, it does not augur well for Kerala.

(Views are personal)

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY TO FIGHT A GLOBAL CRISIS

BHUWAN RIBHU

Child rights activist, lawyer and author of *When Children Have Children: Tipping Point to End Child Marriage*

tion, and recruited into dangerous environments, to being forced into crime, trafficked children suffer unimaginable abuse and trauma while traffickers exploit them.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the annual global profits from forced labour and sexual exploitation is an estimated \$238 billion—a 37 per cent rise since 2014. Break it down and the report, *Profits and Poverty: The economics of forced labour*, estimates that traffickers

The disparity doesn't end with financial challenges alone. USAID's 2024 Trafficking In Persons Report highlights that there are an estimated 27.6 million victims of human trafficking worldwide, including men, women and children. Meanwhile, there were 18,774 prosecutions and just over 7,000 convictions for trafficking globally in the past year. This discrepancy is huge. This global crisis is filled with the stifled screams of millions of children and is demanding an immediate and unified response. This gap is our collective moral failure.

Another crucial aspect of this fight is establishing standardised procedures for the investigation and repatriation of trafficking victims. Uniform protocols ensure that investigations are thorough, transparent and effective, regardless of jurisdiction. Standardised procedures for repatriation guarantee victims receive the necessary support and care to safely return and reintegrate into their home cities, states and countries, ensuring their rights and dignity are upheld throughout the process. Moreover, given the vast scope of child trafficking, implementing these standardised procedures becomes even more imperative.

We need to harness every resource, innovate relentlessly and commit to a future where trafficking is not just tackled but eradicated. A borderless crime requires a borderless response. We need to create a global framework of action where data and information is shared, victims are identified, rescued, and repatriated with urgency; the proceeds of crime are traced and attached; criminals are prosecuted and convicted in a time-bound framework; and the two cardinal principles of 'Look beneath the surface' and 'Follow the money' are followed. This necessitates the establishment of a global task force and a comprehensive database to enhance coordination and efficiency. Additionally, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive legal framework in all countries, including India, to ensure consistent and effective measures against trafficking.

This is our shared responsibility. As traffickers are driven to profits, humanity needs to be collectively driven to justice. (Views are personal)

and criminals are generating close to \$100,000 per victim. Meanwhile, the total global expenditure on combating human trafficking is difficult to quantify precisely, but runs into billions of dollars when considering the combined efforts of governments, international organisations and NGOs.

However, despite significant investments, resources are often insufficient for the scale of the problem. Many anti-trafficking organisations operate with limited funding and face challenges in sustaining long-term efforts. The disparity between the profitability of trafficking and the resources available to fight it highlights the need for increased funding, international cooperation and innovative strategies.

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However, despite significant investments

Thinking straight, not laterally, the way forward



ASHOK LAVASA
FORMER ELECTION
COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

HERE are many ways to kill a good idea; implementing it shoddily is the simplest.

The manner in which the recruitment of 45 officers of the Joint Secretary/Director level laterally was requisitioned and withdrawn suddenly is a good example. The withdrawal was surprising on three counts. One, lateral induction had been resorted to in the past, including by this government without getting mired in debilitating controversies. Second, as the Opposition fired its precision-guided 'reservation' missile, some ministers launched a counterattack, not aware of the swift, embarrassing retreat being planned. Third, a government known to be tough buckled under a smoking gun. The irony was that ministers who should have known better were brandishing their swords even as the retreat was being sounded.

Before coming to the issues involved in the non-political endeavour of lateral recruitment, one cannot help but pity the language of the 'instrument of surrender'.

which could have been a straightforward official communication instead of a demagogic letter from the minister giving the impression that his ministry made a mistake, which the Prime Minister (who is in charge of the ministry) stepped in to correct. He even traduced the Opposition for overlooking the principle of 'social justice' it advocated while making lateral recruitment when in power.

Much has been written about previous governments inducting experts from the market into the bureaucratic system, the recommendations of the Administrative Reform Commission and the Group of Secretaries, the examination of the proposal by the Department of Personnel from various angles, and the peaceful induction earlier. This was not the first attempt by the government, and hopefully it will not be the last, to draft outside talent to shore up its skill set.

It would be unfair to endorse lateral entry or dismiss it without understanding the context and the motivation for such a move. Let us look at some fundamental issues.

The Government of India (GOI) runs the affairs of the Central Government and other national-level bodies by recruiting officers to services such as income tax, Railways and Posts through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), following the reservation policy. It also takes on deputation All India Services



ROW: The government tried to institutionalise the selection of eminent experts through the UPSC. FILE PHOTO

(AIS) officers borne on state cadres recruited through the same process. The GOI has no cadre of AIS officers; the states maintain a deputation reserve as part of their sanctioned cadre strength. The GOI draws upon this reserve to fill positions at different levels in the ministries and other apex organisations through an empanelment process for joint secretaries and above.

Many GOI ministries have their specialised services to deal with their allotted subjects, as in the case of agriculture, commerce, civil and coast accounts, etc. In addition, the government has fruitfully drawn upon the expertise of outside talent occasionally without being bound by its reservation policy. While earlier governments selected eminent experts through an informal system, this government tried to institutionalise the selection through the UPSC.

It is one thing to give a professional view and quite another to be responsible for navigating through the system, especially if one is unfamiliar with the ropes.

Also, there has never been an attempt at such large-scale lateral induction.

It would be interesting to understand how effectively is the expertise of the existing specialised cadres utilised by the government, especially when professional advice conflicts with short-term objectives of the government or the political interests of the ruling party.

If the government wishes a sprinkling of external experts in the bureaucratic system and treat it as quasi deputation, it must identify ministries needing such 'market borrowing' and simultaneously rationalise and redraw existing cadres. Further, it should be clear whether such induction is routine recruitment or contextual. In case it is contextual and need-based, experts could be hired as consultants who can give their opinion and make recommendations freely without being

burdened with bureaucratic decision-making. It is one thing to give a professional view and quite another to be responsible for navigating through the system, especially if one is unfamiliar with the ropes and the eddies. Of course, being in the system, their advice could be either tempered or hindered by practical considerations. It would be useful to evaluate the contribution of the lateral entrants thus far in injecting 'fresh' ideas and approaches they were expected to bring and to assess whether the system utilised their expertise when it countered political judgment or allowed it to dissipate in the bureaucratic sea without making waves. Even if useful, sadly they have to leave after their contract or deputation ends.

The Indian Administrative Service is accused of being a 'generalist' service lacking in specialised knowledge of any discipline, a concern repeated without any serious attempt at reforming its character. In 2004, I had written to the then Cabinet Secretary, suggesting that the existing system of empanelment be revamped. The proposed system envisaged the departments of GOI divided into broad sectoral groups such as rural development, economic administration, social services and energy. AIS officers can be asked to opt for two or three sectors after completing 10 years of service, which entitles them to be considered as joint secretaries.

Based on an examination, the UPSC can determine the suitability of the officers to be allocated to a specialised sector cadre. Selected officers can then serve the GOI in the area they have qualified for till retirement, acquiring experience in a special area of governance. Those officers that do not opt for serving the Centre continue to work in their original cadres. This system will not create a separate class of 'empanelled' officers serving the Centre for a limited period and returning to their cadres for 'cooling off'. It will also remove allegations of subjectivity in the current empanelment process and hopefully identify officers with special aptitude and governance experience.

It is at this stage of creating sectoral streams of officers that the government could consider inducing lateral entrants, depending on the shortfall of selected officers, the special needs of a ministry or for a unique priority area for the government.

To my mind, the government should keep a window for lateral entry and open it selectively for delivering a certain project or handling a specific assignment. However, a door for lateral entrants should remain open as part of building specialist cadres, as suggested above. Otherwise, the survival of outsiders in the inhospitable terrain of the civil services could be as difficult as for the chieftains to roam free in the unfamiliar environs of the United Nations Park.

Farmers need assured prices to withstand market shocks



DEVINDER SHARMA
FOOD & AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST

IT is called the pension reform. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) ensures dignity and financial security for government employees. "We are proud of the hard work of all government employees who contribute significantly to national progress," he said.

In reality, the UPS—which assures a pension equivalent to 50 per cent of the last drawn salary—is an acknowledgment that the earlier market-linked New Pension Scheme had not worked for government employees. To assure a 'defined benefit' for government employees, the Union Cabinet tweaked the pension scheme to ensure that the retirees do not have to face the tyranny of the markets.

While the PM has also applauded the country's farmers on a number of occasions and has often admired the resilience demonstrated by the farming community, there have been no takers for their long-pending demand for guaranteed prices. If

markets have failed for retired employees, let me make it clear that markets have also failed for farmers. If employees need an assured pension, farmers also need an assured price.

Nowhere in the world have markets ensured a higher income for farmers. In the major economies, either the subsidy fills the income gap (China has emerged at the top in providing agricultural subsidies) or agriculture is conveniently left at the mercy of market forces, like in India. The result, as some studies have shown, is not only that Indian farmers are at the bottom of the pyramid but also that they have been incurring losses year after year for nearly 25 years now.

The only plausible way to pull the farmers out of perpetual poverty is by ensuring a legally binding framework for guaranteeing farm prices. Regardless, the NDA government has sworn in an affidavit before the Supreme Court some years back that a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) would distort the markets. Strangely, when it comes to farmers, policymakers raise the bogey of assured prices distorting markets. For employees, everyone is fine with an assured pension; the fear of distorting markets suddenly disappears.

While headline economists



INDIFFERENCE: The recent crash in tomato prices underlines a painful annual trend that the nation doesn't feel concerned about. PH

believe that a legal MSP will jack up consumer prices and thereby distort markets, in reality, it will squeeze corporate profits, and hence the outcry. Strangely, the same breed of free-market economists remain quiet when corporates in America go in for 'price gouging'—jacking up prices to rip off the consumers. This actually is price distortion. Already, 38 states, including California, Florida and New York, have brought in laws that prohibit the practice. For instance, the state of New York went against companies that had hiked the prices of hand sanitisers by 400 per cent during the pandemic. And yet, many market economists have called such checks on visible market dis-

The only plausible way to pull the farmers out of perpetual poverty is by ensuring a legally binding framework for guaranteeing farm prices.

tortions a return to Soviet-style price controls.

The bias in favour of markets crops up when farmers have to be provided with economic security, but not when corporates jack up prices to extract their pound of flesh. This double speak on market distortion is coming in the way of providing farmers with a living income. As I have said before, markets will automatically adjust to the assured prices for farmers. It is only the ideology that is coming in the way.

US Vice-President Kamala Harris has called for a ban on corporate price gouging, which alone is responsible for a 33 per cent increase in the prices of food and grocery items since the pandemic. Republicans have called her

position on 'communist'. Whatever the right wing may say, there is no denying, as some economists have acknowledged, that a ban on price gouging is good economics as well as good politics. Harris has promised action against companies that are keeping food prices artificially high.

Returning to the employees' pension, it is interesting to see the Department of Expenditure make an all-out effort to justify the decision, terming it 'fiscally prudent' and claiming that "it will be preventing fiscal hardship to future generations of citizens." Certainly, there is no one against an assured pension for employees. But if the employees can be assured of social security, there is no reason why economic security cannot be assured for farmers. They also contribute significantly to the national progress, and it is because of their relentless hard work that the country has food security.

When Kamlesh Patidar, a farmer from Madhya Pradesh's Mandla district, re-ploughed his standing soybean crop on 10 acres, he did not realise that it would trigger a chain reaction. Just few days after a video of the incident went viral, reports of several anguished farmers uprooting the crop poured in. The crash in soybean prices—and that too, a month and a

half before the harvesting season—has negated another economic belief that suggests farmers should hold on to harvest till the time they can realise a better price. Patidar had saved his last year's harvest in the hope of getting a higher price later. But even that did not work.

While the ruling soybean prices have dropped to a level that existed 12 years back, the destruction of farm livelihoods leaves hundreds of thousands of soybean farmers seething with anger. The prices, which are much lower than the MSP, are not even enough to cover the production costs. I wonder when we will have an assured price policy for farmers that will prevent fiscal hardship for not only future generations of farmers but also the present one.

Soon thereafter, reports about tomato prices crashing by 60 per cent to a low of Rs 300 per crate of 25 kg poured in. And then came news reports about basmati prices falling by 28 per cent to Rs 2,500 per quintal. It is not something unique happening this year; it has emerged as a painful annual trend that the nation does not feel concerned about.

Providing a legally guaranteed MSP to farmers who have marketable surplus and providing direct income support to marginal farmers is the big reform that agriculture awaits.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Inspire (6)
4 Artist's workroom (6)
9 Falshood (7)
10 Current preference (5)
11 Cause of misfortune (5)
12 Tightly grouped (7)
13 Not to be taken seriously (3,3,5)
18 By-product (4-3)
20 Meet the needs of (5)
22 A select class (5)
23 Undue self-importance (7)
24 Soundness of mind (6)
25 Mean (6)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Riggish, 5 Cocca, 8 Unintentional, 9 Dig in, 10 Vulture, 11 Wooden, 12 Orient, 15 Scamper, 17 Bogus, 19 Foot in the door, 20 Legal, 21 Odyssey.

Down: 1 Round, 2 Going for a song, 3 Intense, 4 Geneva, 5 Chill, 6 Consumer goods, 7 Ailment, 11 Wistful, 13 Robbery, 14 Grotto, 16 Phial, 18 Surly.

SU DO KU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 29, 2024, THURSDAY

■ Shaka Samvat 1946
■ Bhadrapad Shaka 7
■ Bhadrapad Purnimite 14
■ Hajar 1446
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 11, up to 1.38 am
■ Siddhi Yoga up to 6.17 pm
■ Aardra Nakshatra up to 4.40 pm
■ Moon in Gemini sign

FORECAST

DATE: THURSDAY 29 AUG

WIND: 15-40 KMS

TEMP: 25-30 C

CITY MAX MIN

Chandigarh 34 25

New Delhi 34 23

Amrnagar 33 25

Bathinda 33 24

Jalandhar 34 25

Ludhiana 35 26

Bhivani 34 26

Hisar 34 24

Sirsa 34 26

Dharamsala 29 18

Manali 24 16

Srinagar 24 16

Shimla 24 16

Srinagar 22 16

Jammu 29 23

Kargil 34 14

Leh 28 15

Dehradun 33 26

Mussoorie 22 18

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Ahead of the curve

HP raises girls' marriage age before Central verdict

HIMACHAL Pradesh's move to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 years through the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill 2024 has sparked a debate, particularly given the ongoing national discussions on this issue. With the Central Government's Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill still under review by a parliamentary panel, HP's law raises questions about the implications of pre-empting the panel's findings. The panel, tasked with examining the Central Bill that also raised the girls' age for marriage to 21, is deliberating on the matter. Its report is expected to address various concerns, including cultural sensitivities, socioeconomic factors and the potential impact on women's rights and personal freedoms. The HP decision to act independently is both progressive and precipitous.

On one hand, the state's proactive stance highlights its commitment to gender equality and empowerment of young women. By aligning the marriage age of women with that of men, the law aims to provide them equal opportunities for education and personal development, free from the pressures of early marriage. However, this move also risks creating legal and social discrepancies if the parliamentary panel's report suggests a different approach or additional safeguards. The national legislation, once enacted, would supersede state laws, potentially leading to confusion and the need for amendments. The timing of HP's law undermines the broader consultative process that the parliamentary panel is engaged in, which seeks to balance diverse perspectives and ensure that the law is inclusive and well-considered.

While the HP law is a bold step, it underscores the importance of awaiting a comprehensive, nationally consistent approach that takes into account the complexities of implementing such a significant change across India's varied social landscape.

'Donkey route' again

International crackdown a must to curb menace

FOUR Samana-based youths have made a fervent appeal to every Punjabi: Never take the illegal route to the West. It's a bitter case of once bitten, twice shy. They are lucky to have survived the notorious and perilous 'donkey route' — they were robbed, deprived of food for days and made to trek barefoot. An unscrupulous travel agent who had assured them of a work visa to the US is to blame for their ordeal. Their families sold land and mortgaged jewellery to raise around Rs 35 lakh each. But they were stranded in Spain for weeks and had to pay Rs 25 lakh to another agent to finally make it to the US.

It's a familiar story that keeps playing itself out again and again despite all the news reports about desperate migrants pushing their luck too far. There are two key questions: Is such a passage to America worth risking one's life and savings? And what are India and other countries doing to bust the thriving racket? This international ring cannot be wiped out without a well-coordinated transcontinental operation. The ring of human smugglers has operators everywhere — from Asia to Europe and Central America — and each of them extracts his or her pound of flesh on the way.

The routine arrests after every such incident are just not enough to tackle the menace. Why agents will lie low for a while and then reappear to ply their nefarious trade. Those who try to go abroad illegally are also at fault. A vigorous public awareness campaign is a must to warn aspiring migrants about the perils of bypassing official channels. Movies like *Azijo Mexico* *Challitje* and *Dunki* have done their bit; the onus is on various stakeholders to fight this battle together.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 1924

Lord Olivier's despatch

IT is the weakness of an irresponsible Government that where the question is one of pacifying the people or applying the healing balm to their lacerated heart, it is never prompt in its action. If ever there was a matter in which the promptest action was required on the part of the responsible authority, it was the attitude of the presiding judge in the O'Dwyer-Nair case, more particularly his summing up to the jury and the mischievous obiter dicta in which he allowed himself freely to indulge. And yet no action whatever was taken either by His Majesty's Government or the Government of India at the time and, indeed, for nearly a month and a half. The case came to a close on the 5th of June. The widest publicity was given to the judge's remarks, both in England and India. All leading newspapers in India as well as Liberal and Labour newspapers in England condemned the remarks with the utmost strength and emphasis. Yet it was only on July 17 that it occurred to Secretary of State Lord Olivier to write and send the despatch dissociating His Majesty's Government from the judge's remarks, while the Government of India's own views on the matters dealt with in the despatch are yet to be formulated. This dilatory procedure in a matter vitally affecting the peace and contentment of the people, at a time when a Labour Government is in power in England, shows, not for the first time, that so far as India is concerned, there is not much to choose between the most progressive and the most reactionary Government in England.

50 years of India's steady outperformance

The country has become the third-largest contributor to global growth



IT may not have seemed so at the time, but 50 years ago India reached a turning point. There was an economic crisis and political turmoil. The decisive action a year later was the imposition of Emergency rule by Indira Gandhi. But that was overturned in less than two years. What proved more long-lasting was something barely noticed at the time: A new direction in economic policy, away from Mrs Gandhi's overtly Leftist phase. There followed in due course an end to India's long-term underperformance as an economy, and over time the birth of a new 'India story'.

Until the mid-1970s, India had been growing more slowly than the world economy. The transition in the second half of the 1970s followed some 15 years of crises in the form of wars, failed harvests and even famine, a traumatic rupee devaluation and two oil shocks. Many of these events had contributed to a loss of national self-belief after the early optimism under Jawaharlal Nehru. But once the economy stabilised, what followed was a half century of steady outperformance. Growth outpaced both low-income and middle-income countries, as well as the world economy. The country consequently has an international heft today that it never enjoyed before. Yet, it has not been a 'shining' record, because of continuing poor socioeconomic metrics and rising inequality.

Prior to the transition, India's share of the global



ON COURSE: The next five years could see India add more to its GDP, in absolute numbers, than it has done in the last 10, except

economy had been on the decline — from 2.7 per cent in 1960 to 1.9 per cent in 1975 before the decline slowed, stabilised and eventually improved. Even in 2013, India's share of the world GDP was slightly smaller than in 1960. Now, in 2024, it is 3.5 per cent of the global GDP. And since the economy is growing at twice the global average, India is the third-largest contributor to global growth.

Per capita income similarly improved. From 8.4 per cent of the global average in 1960, India's per capita income dipped to 6.4 per cent in 1974. The numbers improved to 13.5 per cent in 2011, and further to 18.1 per cent in 2023. That is a near-trebling over five decades. Yet people in most countries enjoy a much better standard of living. Indeed, there are hardly any countries outside of Africa and in India's own South Asian neighbourhood where per capita incomes are lower. A long road lies ahead.

What transforms the India story is the size of its population. Per capita income is modest, but when multiplied 1,400 million times it makes the Indian economy the fifth largest. Already, India is the second-largest market for mobile phones and motorcy-

cles/scooters, and the third- or fourth-largest for aviation and cars. Growth in these product and service markets has been underpinned by a burgeoning middle class. Businesses catering to it have generated great wealth for investors, leading to the rise of dollar-billionaires (at 200, the world's third-largest tally), while the stock market ranks fourth by market capitalisation.

Up to the mid-1970s, close to half the population lived below a bare-bones poverty line. Today, less than 10 per cent of the people are officially poor.

International mention of India is now more likely to refer to it as a rising power rather than as a country of poor people. Yet, India continues to feature as only a 'medium development' country in its human development, while countries like Vietnam have attained 'high development' status. India is unlikely to make it to the 'high development' category for another decade or more — beyond which lies the 'very high development' category comprising the developed economies, to which the country aspires.

Even here, though, the numbers are improving. The mean years of schooling have improved from 4.4 years in 2010 to 6.57 years now. India also has more than the WHO-prescribed ratio of a doctor per 1,000 population, and life expectancy has finally crossed the 70 threshold.

Higher incomes find reflection in a more varied and richer diet. Milk consumption has multiplied 10-fold. So has fish consumption, while the consumption of eggs has increased more than 20-fold. Add to this the rapid growth of horticulture — fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, household savings as a share of the income have gone up 70 per cent, even as average incomes have multi-

plied six-fold in real terms. More important than all these may be a change in mindset. India in the mid-1970s was still committed to socialist rhetoric. Apart from large-scale nationalisation of several industries, there was also price and production control on everything, from paper to steel, and sugar to cement, even bathing soaps and cars! The inevitable result was shortages and black markets. State governments routinely sided with trade unions in industrial disputes. But things have changed. Indian politics is now more populist than socialist, the Communist parties are in the ICU, and governments want to change labour laws to facilitate business. Tax rates have become reasonable. Indians have become enthusiastic share-market capitalists. In 1974, the biggest public issue of shares totalled all of Rs 12 crore (about Rs 350 crore in today's money). In comparison, in the last couple of years, several companies have done public issues of Rs 15,000-21,000 crore (LIC, Adani, Vodafone, etc.). As recently as a decade ago, mutual fund companies managed sums equal to less than an eighth of bank deposits; that share has doubled to more than a quarter. The next five years could see India add more to its GDP, in absolute numbers, than it has done in the last 10.

And yet, there is no story in India without a counter-story. The production of consumer durables has not increased at all compared to seven years earlier, and has gone up by an annual average of just 2.8 per cent for non-durables. Clearly, consumers are financially stressed, especially in the lower rungs of the income ladder — probably reflecting the lack of enough work on good wages. Only when that changes will the economy be able to get to the 7-plus per cent rate that once marked out the truly high-growth economies.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A nation is enriched by the economic prosperity of its people. —Adam Smith

The babus in police uniform

SATISH KUMAR SHARMA

IN 1987, I joined Gujarat as an IPS probationer and called on the state DGP. He asked me why I had left my job of an SBI officer to become a cop at a substantial salary cut. I avoided mentioning the real motives — power and glamour — and said I did not want to do a desk job all my life. He retorted sarcastically: 'And what do you think we are here? We are also babus and I am the burra babu of the Gujarat Police!' Apparently, he hated the excessive paperwork that had crept into police procedures; even he had not been able to do anything about this because the government and the courts wanted it that way. Perhaps it was a legacy of the Bombay state, of which Gujarat was a part before it became a separate state in 1960. However, while the DGP himself rued it, other officers took pride in the length of reports and the thickness of the bundles of investigation papers they produced.

One document was talked about with awe in those days. It was a near book-length affidavit of the Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad, which he had filed before the commission of inquiry looking into the communal riots of 1985. In the affidavit, he had traced the history of communal riots in Gujarat since the Mughal period. It is another matter that his academic knowledge had been of little help in controlling the violence.

As I settled in the job, I found that most documents — FIRs, statements of witnesses, *punchnamas* and all kinds of reports — tended to be unusually lengthy. I tried to impress upon my staff that a statement before the police had little evidentiary value and the more details it had the greater material it supplied to the defence counsel to contradict the witness and demolish his credibility. But I did not succeed much. Needless to say, not many officers read the lengthy documents and much of the voluminous record was created only for the records.

I was serving as an ASP in a rural subdivision when the General Election of 1989 was announced. One day, I received a wireless message running into several pages from the Inspector General (Law and Order). It had been circulated down to the police station level and required officers to visit all villages in their jurisdiction to ensure that there were no issues or disputes that could threaten the peaceful conduct of the election. In the message, the IG had reproduced an entire chapter of instructions from the Gujarat Police Manual (GPM) and sought officers' compliance with it.

Later, when I met the IG, I made him recall his lengthy radio message and suggested politely that instead of reproducing the entire chapter of the GPM, he could have just quoted the chapter number and sought compliance. His reply was, 'In my 25 years of service, I had not read that chapter. When my reader police inspector drew my attention to it and I read it, I realised that there may be other officers like me. I reproduced the entire chapter in my message so that officers would at least go through it.'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Common man a victim of apathy

With reference to the editorial 'Bail, but still in jail', courts often drag their feet in the grant of bail. The struggles faced by prominent politicians like Manish Sisodia and Arvind Kejriwal in receiving bail speak volumes about the sorry state of affairs. If even well-connected leaders represented by erudite lawyers find it hard to receive relief from court, what about the underdentials who belong to underprivileged sections of society? An overhaul of the procedure for the grant of bail and furnishing bonds is in order to ensure that the common man does not continue to suffer because of judicial apathy.

RAVINDER JAIN, LUDHIANA

Bail sans relief

Refer to 'Bail, but still in jail'; it is unfortunate that a large number of underdentials are not allowed to walk out of jail despite being granted bail. Quite often, underdentials belonging to poor families or underprivileged sections bear the brunt of the excessive conditions that are imposed following the grant of bail. It has been rightly pointed out in the editorial that awarding a prisoner bail and then imposing too many conditions is like taking away with the left hand what is given by the right hand. Bail is the rule and denial an exception, as the Supreme Court has reiterated in several judgments. There is an urgent need to simplify the conditions of furnishing bonds and sureties.

SHAKTI SINGH, KARNAL

Lack of accountability to blame

Apologists of the editorial 'Rusty promises', the ruling dispensation has failed to check the evil of corruption. Graft has permeated every level of governance, right from the municipality level to the top. And unfortunately, it is the common man that has to suffer. The collapse of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue in Maharashtra and the leaking roof of the new Parliament building in New Delhi are a matter of shame. A lack of accountability is to blame for the poor quality of construction work. Racketeering, nepotism and red tape sadly plague the administrative system in our country. It is time for the powers that be to overhaul the process of roping in contractors for public projects and rein in corrupt practices.

VINAY KUMAR MALHOTRA, AMBALA CANTT

Kangana's irresponsible words

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut's remarks on the farmers' protests are an insult to tillers across the nation. This is further proof of the BJP's anti-farmer stance. Notably, it is not even the first time that the actress-turned-politician has made a provocative statement. Earlier, she had described the protesting farmers as Khalistanis. It is not enough for the BJP to simply distance itself from her irresponsible utterances. The party's top brass must pull up Kangana for her hateful and divisive comments. As a lawmaker, she must do better. Not only has the BJP-led Central Government failed to fulfil the demands of the farmers, but it has also rubbed salt in their wounds by letting their leaders denigrate the farming community.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE, FARIDABAD

Modi's diplomacy

PM Narendra Modi's recent visit to Ukraine is a masterstroke in diplomatic balance, underscoring India's commitment to global peace. Despite India's deep-rooted ties with Russia, Modi's outreach to Kyiv demonstrates New Delhi's strategic autonomy. India refuses to be cornered into taking sides. The move signals to the West that India stands firm on its sovereignty. By engaging both Moscow and Kyiv, Modi also highlights New Delhi's readiness to serve as a mediator in the conflict. This diplomatic manoeuvre not only strengthens India's global standing but also opens new avenues in global trade.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

Bandhs disrupt life

The BJP's call for a Bengal bandh over the horrific Kolkata rape-murder is legitimate. The case has understandably sparked a massive outrage and led to protests across the nation. But it is imperative for our leaders to understand that a bandh throws life out of gear. Such steps take large bites out of the earnings of countless daily wageers. Besides, it also disrupts essential services. A robust legal reform and a change of mindset in society can help bring down the number of heinous crimes. Protesters must push for systemic changes without adding to the woes of the common man.

NITIKA BANSAL, ZIRAKPUR

thehindubusinessline.

THURSDAY • AUGUST 29, 2024

Reforming coal markets

A national coal exchange can make a difference

The setting up of a national coal exchange, according to recent report on this newspaper, is a major priority for the government. There are several reasons why India needs one. The demand for coal is rapidly exceeding what has been stitched up through long-term fuel supply agreements (FSA), and from the power sector in particular.



The power sector accounts for about 90 per cent of the coal demand. While more than 70 per cent of this demand (about 550 million tonnes) is met through FSAs with Coal India Ltd in particular, this leaves the public sector behemoth with about 250 million tonnes to spare, which can be efficiently allocated to independent power producers and non-coal users such as steel. Commercial mines account for over 120 million tonnes. So, at least 35 per cent of India's domestic coal output (about one billion tonnes now), besides imports of over 200 million tonnes, awaits better price discovery through a coal exchange mechanism.

As the document issued in November 2020 to appoint a consultant for the exchange points out, six types of coal auctions and linkages are already operational. A 'national coal index' arrives at a floor price for the sale of coal after periodic assessment of production and import data, on the basis of which the government collects a minimum revenue share. Yet, the coal supplies, particularly their quality, are plagued by lack of transparency. There is no convincing system to check for calorific value. On the demand side, the power sector's requirements have been on the rise in summer, as well as in the post-monsoon period of September and October when the temperature rises and the stocks are at a low due to a dip in output in monsoon months.

The demand for spot coal will rise in the coming years as FSA quantities fall short. Another factor is at work to raise the significance of exchange traded coal — the rising share of renewables in the energy mix. As a result of this factor, long term FSAs may, and indeed should, be phased out for smaller periods. If the existing coal index sets a floor price, the exchange could potentially arrive at some sort of a ceiling price. Efficient pricing will result in correct transmission of downstream costs to the electricity and industrial sectors. To achieve this however, the proposed national coal exchange needs a truly independent regulator — especially in a market where one entity accounts for 80 per cent of the domestic output.

Contracts, deliveries and payments must proceed in an orderly way, with penalties kicking in if the contract is not adhered to. All trade information should be openly available on the exchange platform (there should be just one independent exchange), be it the kinds of instruments on offer, the terms of contract and the quality and quantity of coal traded. An independent agency should ascertain coal quality. India has the regulatory experience to implement such reforms, even as coal production and trade are mired in complexity.

FROM THE VIEWROOM.

All the Prime Minister's Men

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

What's the significance of 1968, 1972, 1977 and 1988? These are the respective years in which Jitendra Nath Das, P. V. Narasimha Murthy, S. Jaishankar and T. N. Sanyal joined their respective services.

Each of them has the total confidence of the Prime Minister but Somanathan, who will take over as Cabinet Secretary on September 1, is far junior to them. He belongs to the 1987 batch of the IAS and might want to say 'sir' to them. Doval, Mishra and Jaishankar also have Cabinet rank.

Anyone who knows about government service will understand what that means: it places the Cabinet Secretary — who heads the civil services and supervises the administrative arms of the government, as well as the national security wing — in a very unenviable position. Today he is the junior most in age, rank and status amongst a group of former civil servants, rather than politicians. This is the opposite of what the classical Westminster type of model envisages. In that

model the Cabinet Secretary is the *capo di tutti capi*, or captain of captains who also serves the Cabinet. He or she therefore inspires real awe. Not in India, not any more anyway.

The Indian Cabinet Secretary lost out as soon as a Prime Minister's secretariat was created in July 1964 by Lal Bahadur Shastri and a Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister was appointed. The creation of the post of National Security Adviser by the Vajpayee government in 1998 further reduced the Cabinet Secretary's importance.

What we have had since the mid-1960s is a hybrid between the American and the British types of governance. Or, as they say in Punjab, *'aadha tectar, aadha batay'* (half partridge, half quail).

Government watchers will find the process of interaction between these functionaries very interesting despite the fact the 'allocation of business' will pave the way for clarity. The Cabinet Secretary now depends on the influence he or she has on the Prime Minister. Somanathan, by all accounts, is not lacking in that respect.



HARSIMRAN SANDHU

As India strives to become a \$5-trillion economy in the near future, an often overlooked yet powerful force is reshaping its financial landscape: the rise of private credit. Traditionally, India's credit market has been dominated by banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

However, private credit — non-bank lending facilitated by specialised credit funds — is emerging as a vital catalyst for growth. Unlike traditional bank loans, which come with rigid terms, private credit offers customised solutions tailored to borrowers' specific needs. This flexibility is particularly crucial for sectors like infrastructure and real estate, where large-scale, long-term funding is essential but not always available through conventional channels.

However, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has expressed concerns about the rapid growth of private credit, warning that the increasing interconnectedness between banks and non-banks could pose systemic risks. Let's map the evolution of private credit and its challenges.

PRIVATE CREDIT AND FLEXIBILITY Private credit refers to non-bank lending where funds are provided by private institutions rather than traditional banks.

This type of credit typically involves direct lending to companies, allowing for more tailored and flexible financing solutions.

This adaptability makes private credit especially attractive to mid-sized companies and capital-intensive sectors like infrastructure, real estate, and manufacturing — industries that require substantial investment, often beyond the reach of conventional funding sources.

In India, private credit investments are structured under Category II of the Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) regulations. These funds offer a variety of financing solutions, from providing credit to distressed debt, special situations, and venture debt.

SURGE IN PVT CREDIT

In the first half of 2023 alone, private credit investments surged to \$5.1 billion across 63 deals, with an average deal size of \$80 million. This represents a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28 per cent since 2018.

A significant driver of this growth is the underdevelopment of India's corporate bond market, particularly for lower-rated bonds. This gap has pushed businesses to seek alternatives, making

Pros and cons of high private credit growth

RISK AND RETURN. An underdeveloped corporate bond market, particularly for lower-rated bonds, has spurred this segment. A credit downturn could pose problems



private credit a crucial source of funding, particularly for firms that would otherwise struggle to secure financing in the traditional bond market.

MANAGING RISKS

One of the key strategies that private credit funds use to manage risk and reduce defaults is the implementation of tight covenants. Covenants are conditions in loan agreements that require borrowers to meet specific financial metrics and operational milestones. These conditions serve as early warning systems, allowing lenders to identify potential issues before they escalate into defaults.

Tight covenants typically include requirements such as maintaining minimum cash reserves, adhering to specific debt-to-equity ratios, and achieving revenue targets. This proactive approach protects the lender's capital and helps borrowers stay on track financially.

HNIS AND PVT CREDIT

High-net-worth individuals (HNIs) are increasingly turning to private credit, driven by changes in debt taxation and a

need for better returns. Investing in AAA or AA bonds in India typically yields spreads of 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent over government bonds.

However, when moving down the credit spectrum, the differential — or spread — over government bonds can increase dramatically, ranging from 4 per cent to as much as 8 per cent.

Recent changes have made the tax burden on debt mutual funds more pronounced, reducing post-tax returns and prompting HNIs to seek alternatives. Private credit funds offer a compelling solution, typically providing higher yields than traditional debt funds.

INDIA IN THE GLOBAL MARKET

The size of the private credit market at the start of 2024 was approximately \$1.5 trillion, compared to approximately \$1 trillion in 2020, and is estimated to grow to \$2.8 trillion by 2028.

In 2024, India's private credit AUM stood at around \$15 billion, but this is expected to soar to between \$60 and \$70 billion by 2028.

This rapid growth underscores the increasing importance of private credit in India and signals its potential to become a global powerhouse in this sector. This growth is driven by strong economic fundamentals, a burgeoning middle class, and an insatiable demand for infrastructure development.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

Despite its bright prospects, the private credit market in India is not without challenges. The regulatory environment,

though improving, still presents significant hurdles. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), a critical tool for resolving distressed assets, has seen its average resolution times balloon to over 700 days — well above the stipulated period.

These delays undermine investor confidence and make the private market less appealing, particularly for those interested in distressed debt and special situations.

RBI in its latest financial stability report propagated risks in private credit markets can occur through several key dimensions: (i) riskier borrowers compared to traditional lending, potentially leading to significant losses; (ii) systemic risks for investors, especially insurance companies and pension funds, due to large capital losses; (iii) increasing complexity in private credit structures, with multiple layers of leverage; (iv) heightened liquidity risks from the growing retail presence and increased redemption rights; and (v) greater interconnectedness with other financial system segments.

Banks, insurers, and pension funds are expanding their involvement in private credit, with private equity firms also increasing stakes in life insurance companies.

However, data gaps hinder effective monitoring, and private credit's resilience remains untested in a credit downturn, posing the risk of sharp losses and a potential loss of confidence in the asset class.

The writer is Professor of Finance — IMT Ghaziabad

Clarity on application of old and new criminal laws

Benefit conferred by substantive law (right to less punishment under IPC) remains intact. Procedural law is another matter

Kapil Arora
Pravir Misra

From July 1, 2024, the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC) and Indian Evidence Act, 1872 have been replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA), respectively.

Expectedly, a few questions have emerged on the applicability and overlap of the erstwhile and new criminal law regimes. Can the procedure prescribed under BNSS apply in respect of trial of offences committed under IPC? What determines the applicability of BNS/IPC — the date of offence or date of registration of FIR? What happens to proceedings which were pending as on July 1, 2024 (i.e. the date on which the new criminal laws came into force); do they continue under IPC or BNSS?

These are but a few questions that are puzzling lay persons and seasoned lawyers alike. However, judgments of various High Courts have begun to straighten knots of confusion — as illustrated by a recent judgment dated

August 6 of the Allahabad High Court in *Deepu and Ors v State of Uttar Pradesh and Ors*. The issue raised therein was that BNS, not IPC, should apply as the FIR was registered on July 3, 2024 under BNSS.

In deciding the issue, the High Court provided considerable clarity on the interplay between IPC, CrPC, BNS and BNSS.

SUBSTANTIVE VS PROCEDURAL

At its root, the applicability of the erstwhile or new criminal laws is determined by what parts are "substantive law" and what is "procedural law". Benefits conferred by substantive law (for eg. right to a lesser punishment under IPC) can be claimed as a vested right and cannot be undone simply on repeal of the substantive law.

This principle is also found in Section 358 of the BNS, which repeals IPC but also saves "any right, privilege, obligation or liability acquired, accrued or incurred under the Code so repealed". Pertinently, this is also in keeping with Article 20 of the Constitution, which holds that criminal liability cannot be retrospective nor exceed the one in force on the date of the offence. Hence, the BNS could not apply to an offence



LAW. The old versus new (ISTOCKPHOTO)

which was committed prior to BNS coming into force i.e. July 1, 2024.

It is also important to note that the procedure concerning the substantive right (for eg. the court/forum where an appeal can be filed) cannot be claimed as a vested right. In fact, Section 531 of the BNSS which repeals the CrPC, saves any "appeal, application, trial, inquiry or investigation" which is pending under CrPC as on July 1, 2024 — only till its conclusion. Any subsequent appeal/revision/proceeding etc, after

July 1, 2024 can only be under BNSS and not CrPC.

Hence, the question of applicability of IPC or BNS relates to the date of the offence. It is the 'law in force' on the date which is relevant and not the date of registration of FIR. Thus, the IPC will continue to apply to any offence committed on or before June 30, 2024 and BNS will apply to any offence committed on or after July 1, 2024.

As regards the procedure, if the FIR is registered on or after July 1, 2024, the investigation, trial etc. will be governed by BNSS and not CrPC — irrespective of whether the offence is committed under IPC or BNS. However, any appeal, application etc, which is pending under CrPC as on July 1, 2024 will continue, only till its conclusion, under CrPC. Any subsequent step, appeal revision etc. will be under BNSS.

While we usher in a new criminal law regime, pending proceedings ought not to be violently upended. Similarly, the tether to the old criminal laws should not needlessly linger. The interpretation by the courts strikes a good balance in this regard.

Arora is Partner and Misra, Senior Associate, Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas

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Fed moves

Following the hint from US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell about the possibility of rate cut, equity markets had surged world over, including India's Nifty and Sensex.

While the Fed rate actions usually set off a chain reaction, it remains to be seen if the RBI will follow suit, as its policy actions are usually determined by domestic factors. Though the lower rates in advanced economies like the US will help increase capital flows into markets like India, investors need to exercise caution as the valuations of Indian equities are stretched.

M Jeyaram

Shalavandan (Tamil Nadu)

New AMFI rules welcome

The new AMFI rules welcome to curb front running at AMCs' (August 28), coming in the aftermath of unsavoury reports of front running at fund houses, based on detailed confabulations among various stakeholders and authorities is welcome.

That the authorities are alive to the need for vigilance at all levels is appreciable. The phased manner of implementation of the new norms will surely give time and space to review and revise, if need be, any measures.

Jose Abraham

Kottayam

Bengal on boil

Agrippos of the news 'Yolkita rally turns violent as protestors and police clash' (August 28) highlights uncontrolled Bengal. Public outrage was waiting for outlet to express anger over the young doctor's horrific rape and murder.

The Chief Minister had herself marched on streets in this episode fully knowing beforehand that the entire nation, not just Bengal is beyond boiling point. Mamata Banerjee has lost public support and particularly youth across the country is furious.

The previous Sandeshkhali rape cases involving TMC leaders, the violent Assembly, Lok Sabha and even panchayat elections, lack of development, ignored North eastern part of Bengal, all sum up the public wrath with ferocity. Mamata Banerjee's government is fast losing its credibility.

Vinod Johri

New Delhi

Advantage shareholders

Approprios 'Right suggestions' (August 28), a rights issue benefits existing shareholders, as they get shares at a discounted price and retain their voting rights. It is also the quickest method of raising additional capital

and honouring the loyalty of the existing shareholders towards the company and not the equity beta of the company.

But the undue delay in processing the rights application is a stumbling block, so companies now are keen on making allotment to qualified institutions to raise funds. But in the larger interest of the shareholders, procedural delays must be avoided and flexible norms must be adopted in rights issues. Facilitating promoters to renounce their rights in favour of strategic investors in rights issue will ease the rights issue further.

NR Nagarajan

Sivakasi

Makeover for ration shops

Jan Poshan Kendras can work with micro-planning

Kushankur Dey
Jay Kumar Thakur

The Centre recently launched a pilot project to transform 60 Fair Price Shops (FPS) in four States into Jan Poshan Kendras (JPKs) or nutrition hubs. Per the definition of JPKs, FPS must stock at least 50 per cent of products or commodities under the nutrition category, and the remaining products can be household items.

While JPKs aim to reduce hunger and malnutrition, the selection criteria and modus operandi of JPKs remain unclear.

RATION SHOPS SELECTION First, ration shops are a critical midstream actor in the food security ecosystem as they perform storage, sales and distribution of essential commodities.

So, transparency and operational efficiency are important criteria of FPS selection for Jan Poshan Kendras. These include area and beneficiaries' coverage, sales of essential commodities and transaction receipt given to beneficiaries, proper weight measures and stock declaration, zero leakage or diversion of PDS foodgrains to the open market.

Second, FPS's creditworthiness and repayment ability can assess their working capital or trade credit access from the SIDBI, considering FPS's working days, monthly sales of essential commodities (turnover), and incomes and expenses.

Third, the ownership structure also influences the selection for JPKs. The lion's share of FPS is held by individuals (58 per cent), followed by others (18 per cent) and cooperative societies (16 per cent) (see Table).

The ownership structure affects transparency in ration shop operations, including commodity-wise records, list of beneficiaries, availability of stock register and register of sales. Cooperative societies and women-run SHGs may be selected to rolling out the JPKs project for their collective decision-making in governance and management.

Fourth, FPS's digital infrastructure and geo-referencing influence FPS selection for JPKs. There are 5.20 lakhs FPS in 771 districts, of which 2.27 lakhs are GIS mapped, and 4.88 lakhs are equipped with ePOS (electronic point of sales). Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and

The ownership structure of Fair Price Shops

FPS ownership	Number
Proprietorship	2,54,968
Cooperatives	82,995
Panchayat-driven	9,684
Women SHGs (society)	26,312
Others	91,168
Total	5,05,817

Source: NPS portal, August 28, 2024

Maharashtra have the maximum number of active ePOS-enabled FPS. So, the concentration of JPKs could be more in these three States followed by States/UTs lagging in the nutrition security index.

FPS turned JPKs must stock PDS and non-PDS food items to improve their incomes, while profit realisation comes from price markups on sales volumes of non-PDS commodities. So, formalising the food supply chain from sourcing to distribution is vital for FPS's makeover to JPKs.

The National Institute of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development should help the selected FPS strengthen the supply chain management, while Small Industries Development Bank of India can provide short- and long-run credit requirements to select JPKs.

Delivery commitments, liquidity needs, and transaction costs affect FPS's operational efficiency and profitability. So, the (state) government can increase commissions to FPS for selling PDS commodities and reduce the turnaround time from invoice generation to billing.

Third, the (state) government can empanel some vendors to supply vitamins and minerals pre-mixture and bio-fortified food items to select FPS.

Fourth, quality checks of nutritive items must adhere to the quality manual handbook. NABL-accredited labs must perform assaying of FPS stocks at regular intervals.

The digital quality management system should be in place and interoperable with the Mera Ration 2.0 app.

Fifth, ONORC's portability must help migrant workers and formal sector employees buy their ration and household items from JPKs.

To sum up, the frequency of purchases by PDS and non-PDS beneficiaries determines the fortune of this ambitious project.

Dey is a faculty member, and Jay is a doctoral scholar at IIM Lucknow. Views expressed are personal.

Regulating AI is a challenge

GAMUT OF ISSUES. India does not have a legislative framework to regulate AI. The Digital India Bill may include this aspect



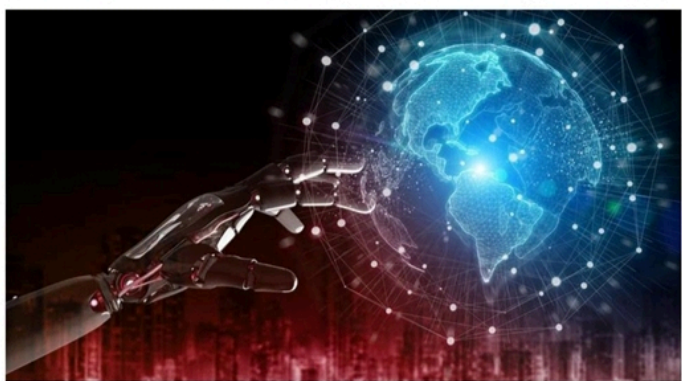
SATISH CHANDRA

One thing is clear, the rising need for a soft law or finding a middle-path to regulating Artificial Intelligence (AI) is beyond AI itself. In India, all eyes are now on the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). When MeitY amended its advisory on the use of AI and Generative AI technologies in March 2024, it shifted the onus of keeping it safe and above board on the companies using AI and the digital platforms. The rule requiring the government's prior permission before deploying such technologies, mandated in December 2023, was removed.

And in early August, MeitY said that the government will legislate on AI if necessary, to ensure it does not cause harm. These are signs of a government trying to keep up and respond to a sector that is evolving rapidly and also promises to be a job creator. Clearly, the government does not want to shake the sector that promises to create jobs, before it has taken off. At the same time, it needs to ensure it remains safe. For instance, according to a report by Nasscom on the State of Data Science & AI Skills in India, the demand for AI and data science professionals has risen from 4.20 lakh professionals (as of August 2022) to over one million in 2024.

Detailed and codified rules and regulations for use of AI technologies will be needed soon, with the additional challenge to ensure these do not become obsolete quickly. Any regulatory framework on AI will need to ensure ethical use, transparency, privacy protection, risk mitigation around bias (incorrect or misleading data), security and discrimination. To add to the complication, AI as a technology affects almost all sectors of the economy and even life, and therefore regulation may evolve from any of these areas.

India, at present, does not have a legislative framework to expressly regulate AI. While the government may include this in the much-awaited Digital India Bill which would replace the IT Act 2000, no one is sure how it will shape up. To its credit, the MeitY has been



MULTIPLE APPROACHES. There seems to be no one-size-fits-all approach to regulate the digital landscape GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

proactive as it expects the AI revolution in India to be bigger than the IT revolution and hopes to make India a global AI superpower. It has issued advisories and guidelines to promote responsible AI development. But are these enough to govern India's growing digital landscape?

Considering the far-reaching impact AI is expected to have, urgent action will be key. There should be widespread consultation, not just with the industry but all segments of society, especially students, teachers, legal luminaries and consumer bodies, who will have little say on how AI will operate but will be affected by the developments all the same. That said, India has tried to be in step with the rest of the world. As the lead chair of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) for 2024,

Globally, countries have adopted varied approaches to AI regulation. The US has taken a balanced approach, with a focus on both innovation and safety

India hosted the GPAI Summit in December 2023. All 29 member-countries adopted the GPAI 'declaration' to work towards safe and trustworthy AI, prevent misinformation, unemployment, lack of transparency and fairness, and protection of intellectual property, among others.

VARIOUS STEPS TAKEN

A few years back, various initial steps were taken in this domain, including the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommendations issued in July 2023 for responsible adoption of AI within the telecom sector. The Indian Council of Medical Research published guidelines, while the government also established the National Digital Technology Forum to facilitate the integration of technology, including AI, with teaching. In fact, the Reserve Bank of India and Bureau of Indian Standards are also working on framing rules and standards for AI and Machine Learning technologies.

Even as Indian authorities dabble with multiple ways to regulate the digital landscape, there seems to be no one-size-fits-all approach. Globally, countries have adopted varied

approaches to AI regulation. The US has taken a balanced approach, with a focus on both innovation and safety, with the administration issuing executive orders to manage AI risks, protect privacy, and advance equity. On the other hand, the EU — with the introduction of the AI Act — has taken a more comprehensive approach to regulating AI. China's AI regulations are stringent, which include ethics guidelines and data protection laws.

Back home, IndiaAI was MeitY's umbrella programme to drive convergence across multiple national-level initiatives to catalyse the AI innovation ecosystem. The first edition of IndiaAI report, released in October 2023, states that AI is expected to add \$967 billion to the Indian economy by 2035. As the government lays emphasis on skill-based training and facilitating learning to boost the digital landscape, a conducive regulatory framework is imperative to ensure orderly growth of the industry, where the AI-led tools are governed through checks and balances

The writer is a former Judge of the Allahabad High Court, and former Director (Additional Law Officer) with the Law Commission of India

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 29, 2004

Govt favours consolidation in banks: Chidambaram

The Government is in favour of consolidation in the Indian banking industry and is of the view that it will enable banks to achieve 'world-class' status, according to the Finance Minister, Mr P Chidambaram. "Consolidation alone will give banks the muscle, size and scale to act like worldclass banks," he said.

ONGC may set up trust for transportation fuels retailing

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is considering setting up of a trust to operate its retailing operations for transportation fuels. In the trust, ONGC plans to hold 50 per cent, with the rest being held by individuals and company employees. The oil and gas exploration major sees this as a solution to overcome the hurdle posed by the Petroleum Ministry.

Dhunerji plans to remove Lodhas

The removing of Lodha & Co of Mr Rajendra Singh Lodha as the statutory auditor of some listed companies is extending beyond the ambit of Birla units. The Kolkata-based Dhunerji Group is considering replacing Lodha & Co as the statutory auditors for its two companies, Dhunerji Tea & Industries Ltd and South Asian Petrochem Ltd, with Lovelock & Lewes.

Getting men to shoulder the responsibility of birth control

Sathya Sara

As the birth control pill enters the 65th year of its existence, it may find itself being gifted an unexpected partner — Male Contraceptive Pill. For decades women have borne the burden of birth control.

To their share has been the burden of recurrent spending on oral contraception, the possible hormonal side effects; or alternatively, the wearing of an IUD causing possible discomfort. In rare cases, or going through an abortion in case of lack of contraception or contraceptive failure.

Even when the male has taken responsibility for contraception, the fear of an unwanted pregnancy never really vanishes, given the high failure rate of 16 per cent, in condom use. And vasectomy, though much more a simplified procedure now than earlier, remains the informed, irreversible choice of a few.

NEW RESEARCH

However, advances in the results of the controlled tests that are being carried out in America where the Male Pill has

been conceived (pun intended) are indicative of a time when women can breathe easier and stop worrying about ways to avoid getting pregnant.

The non-hormonal Male Pill aims at temporarily reducing or halting the production of sperm; and, according to pre-clinical trials, "the researchers are not seeing the kind of mood swings and depression that women can experience with birth control pills."

So far so good. But there's more good news to share all around.

Also at research and trial stage is a gel that acts as a contraceptive for male use.

Simpler than the Pill, it consists of a gel that can be rubbed into the man's shoulders every morning, and results in stopping the production of sperm in the testes. The formulation is a result of work that has been underway since 2005 at the National Institutes of Health in America, under the Contraceptive Development Programme.

In a presentation made by Dr. Diana Blythe, chief of the Contraceptive Development Programme, at the annual meeting of the Endocrine Society held



CONTRACEPTION. The male factor of nonconception

in Boston in June, she added that the results of recent tests conducted on 300 couples indicated to the researchers that, "they think they have got it right."

MAGIC GEL?

Advantages of the gel include the fact that it is easy to adapt it as part of the daily routine, as a step to be added after

brushing the teeth or showering.

More important: missing a day or two is not as risky as when a woman misses her daily Pill, as once sperm production is fully stopped, it takes a few weeks to restart.

Also heartening is the fact that many men who were part of the test went back to become fathers, proving the gel is fully reversible.

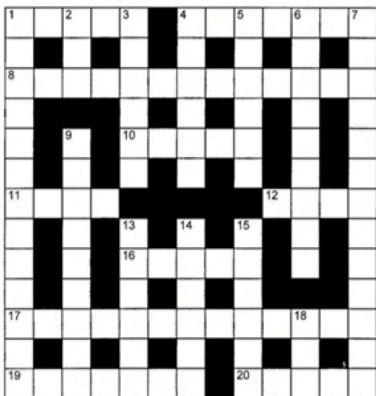
The request from some male subjects to continue with the gel for a second span of time, proves that the chances of acceptance are high.

However, one must wait still for this project to get the required approvals and become a marketable reality. Hopefully, the idea can trigger research in our own country and bring safer and dependable results.

Getting the Indian male to literally shoulder the responsibility of birth control will be the next vital step. The happy 'side effect' that was noted in the trials of the gel that using it increased libido, might be a persuasive aspect in that effort.

The writer is a Consulting Editor with Penguin India

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2514



EASY

ACROSS

- Prospect, view (5)
- Medical examination (5-2)
- One studying for first degree (13)
- Track of hunted animal (5)
- Snatches; pinches (4)
- Poke with stick (4)
- List of contents (5)
- A bringing back to life (13)
- Final stages in playing chess (7)
- Fragrant herb (5)

DOWN

- Piece of gymnasium equipment (8-5)
- Sorrowful (3)
- Apprehend by legal authority (6)
- Root vegetable (6)
- Bear, put up with (6)
- Worn out, exhausted (9)
- Outweighing quantity, influence (13)
- Treated with tyrannical cruelty (9)
- Unwholesome exhalation (6)
- Inform, recommend (6)
- Still existing (6)
- Very cold (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2513

ACROSS 1. Paper 4. Transom 8. Permanent 9. Pod 10. Reflect 12. Bloc 14. Starter 17. Hour 18. Drastic 20. Urm 21. Prosecute 23. Expense 24. Treat
DOWN 1. Paper the house 2. Tariff 3. Regents 4. Tie 5. Asti 6. Supply 7. Medicine chest 11. Tired 13. Decadent 15. Turnup 16. Attune 19. Spin 22. Owe

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- The view of value added tax is different (5)
- Medical once-over for physical education? Chuck it! (5-2)
- Uni student gives rude guard a net to throw (13)
- Animal track to the South is of indifferent quality (5)
- Pinches drinks of spirits (4)
- Push stick at one coming back from village in S Africa (4)
- First finger to put at back of book? (5)
- Revival of curse: it is not a different form (13)
- Final moves at chess gained me the one fewer alternative (7)
- It sounds like the hour for it to be flavoursome (5)

DOWN

- Gym equipment, or things value is worked out for (8-5)
- Unhappy to have said one was left out (3)
- Pinch one right in a period of relaxation (6)
- Encouragement for donkey or cart it smashes up (6)
- Last it out with the East under difficulties (6)
- Tired out, Drake twisted neck like this (9)
- It outweighs homework on creed, an adjustment being needed (13)
- Kept under by the newspapers in dope riot (9)
- Foul air Mother aims to dispel (6)
- Give court different ideas about first victim (6)
- Is still existing as navigation instrument with top removed (6)
- Very chilly starts in central Yukon (3)