



## Demand flux

Growth dynamics may falter with  
waning urban consumption

India's resounding 8.2% GDP growth in 2023-24 came with two worrying portents. The farm sector lost momentum due to an unhelpful monsoon, and private consumption spends rose at less than half the economy's pace. In fact, the 4% growth in private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) was the weakest since 2002-03, if one excludes 2020-21, when COVID-19 first hit the world. Of course, some of this stemmed from the farm sector's rain woes that weighed down rural demand, while economists flagged a K-shaped consumption pattern of higher-end goods and services seeing greater off-take than the rest. A normal monsoon this year, it was hoped, would help the farm sector and rural demand rebound, and shore up overall consumption to levels that spur growth as well as hasten an uptick in industrial capacity utilisation rates to thresholds that compel private investors to ramp up. This much-awaited outcome is vital for the virtuous cycle of more investments leading to more jobs and higher consumption to kick in.

Growth numbers for the first quarter suggested this story was playing out, with the PFCE rising at a seven-quarter high of 7.4%, outpacing the 6.8% GDP uptick. Rural demand signals such as two-wheeler sales also perked up. India Ratings reckons that real rural wage growth turned positive in July and is expected to stay positive, aided by cooling inflation. This bodes well for consumption. However, a twist in this tale may be imminent, with urban demand beginning to show some fatigue. Last Tuesday, S&P Global Ratings, which expects India to grow 6.8% this year (lower than the 7.2% rise pinned in by the Reserve Bank of India), said high interest rates are tempering urban demand. The RBI's consumer confidence survey for July shows a turn in the tide, with current and future confidence levels of urban buyers dropping. The Finance Ministry has taken note too, pointing to a dip in passenger vehicle sales through April to August as a barometer of stuttering urban demand. The trend warrants monitoring, it said, while expressing hope that festive fervour could trigger a course reversal. With wallets crimped by persistently high food inflation (that also clouds rate cut hopes), the ability of urban Indians to create room for discretionary spends through the festive season and beyond would be critical for growth as well as the virtuous private investment cycle. With global oil prices turning benign, the Centre must consider passing through the reduced costs to consumers, and cut levies embedded into retail fuel prices. A substantial fuel price cut, as opposed to the token two rupees of relief per litre unveiled this March, can support demand in the economy.

## Mad doctrine

Any threat of use of nuclear weapons  
must be viewed seriously

Russian President Vladimir Putin's revision of Russia's nuclear doctrine announced last week is a worrying increase in the war rhetoric surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It would once have been considered unthinkable for permanent members of the UN Security Council to behave in this manner. His announcement was that in the event of a conventional attack on Russia by any country that is supported by a nuclear power, Russia would consider that a "joint attack" and presumably, deal with the threat accordingly. He added that Russia could use nuclear weapons in response to a conventional attack posing a "critical threat to [its] sovereignty", a threat that was repeated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the UN General Assembly meet over the weekend, when he said the idea of defeating Russia on the battlefield is "senseless" and a "suicidal escapade" given that Moscow has nuclear weapons. Clearly, the context of Mr. Putin's nuclear doctrine revision and the comments is Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to the United States, where he attempted to present a new "victory plan" for Ukraine. Mr. Zelenskyy wants the permission of the U.S. and other western countries to use missiles and other heavy weaponry procured from them for attacks deep inside Russia. Thus far, the weaponry, including Storm Shadow and ATACMS missiles, can only be used for Ukraine's defence, although western capitals turned a blind eye when Ukrainian forces invaded the Russian Oblast of Kursk in August with tanks and weaponry, allowing Mr. Zelenskyy to rack up a symbolic win and possibly some leverage in future negotiations for peace. However, much of the euphoria in Kyiv has since dissipated with Russia hitting back anew, sending in troops to Kursk, and also opening a new front around Ukraine's Pokrovsk, and western countries remaining loathe to enter the theatre of war. To that end, U.S. President Joseph Biden has now announced nearly \$8 billion in additional military aid for Ukraine, but made no reference to the demand for its utilisation inside Russia.

It remains to be seen whether Mr. Putin will be assuaged, or if concerns about the war reaching a "nuclear threshold" will grow from this point on, and it is hoped countries, including India, that have committed to finding a path to dialogue and peace, redouble their efforts to prevent such a catastrophe. New Delhi has said that it "conveyed messages" to Moscow when safety concerns grew over the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant. Prime Minister Narendra Modi may be called on to do the same when he visits Russia in October for the BRICS summit. As the world grapples with the spectre of escalation in West Asia, the last thing it needs is a reversion to chilling cold war scenarios in Eurasia, of mutually assured destruction.

Setting all family-based traditions of political domination to a side, the election of the 'relatively unknown' 55-year-old Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) of the JVP (People's Liberation Front)-led NPP (National People's Power), as Sri Lanka's President comes as a true serendipitous surprise. He is that – relatively unknown – in more senses than one. Though 'around' for decades in Sri Lanka politics as a Marxist politician schooled in the radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), and a cabinet Minister (2004-05) in Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's coalition government, AKD has swum below the radars of most Lanka-watchers. But he is 'relatively unknown' also in the important sense (important all over South Asia but particularly so in Sri Lanka) of being 'unknown as a relative' or kin descended from a political family.

Of all early analyses that I have come across of AKD's dramatic victory, the most insightful is from an acute observer of Lankan affairs from the perch of Tamil Lanka but not a 'standard political columnist', Sivanandini Duraiswamy. The Jaffna-based litterateur who is, whether or not in a formal sense, a sociologist, sums up the scene in a note that is a nugget of fact and comment: "The mandate if any was against what Mao Ze Dong termed 'the decadence of the state, the sufferings of humanity and the darkness of society'. It was in reaction to International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity and the extravagant recklessness of the Colombo elite. It represented a paradigm shift where a monolingual outsider who belonged to a party that rose in revolt twice in 1971 and in 1987-89 [resulting in the deaths of 80,000 Sinhalese youth] is now at the helm. Further, AKD is not from the dominant Sinhalese Govigama caste from which all 15 Heads of Government, except one, belonged to in our 75-year post-independence history. That is itself a significant achievement. He is likeable, self-made and charismatic."

Having given AKD his rightful due, she goes on to explain some of the intricacies of the AKD phenomenon. Chief among these, in my re-telling of those with my added observations, are the following:

### The vote and challenges

AKD's dramatic win must be seen with the hard realities he must face. Foremost of these is plainly political: 42% of the electorate has voted for him, 58% voted for others in a scattered way but



Gopalkrishna Gandhi

a former High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka

The election result in Sri Lanka must be viewed by India as faith in the self-renewing power of the democratic voice

decisively against him. This large non-AKD if not anti-AKD majority comprises the huge chunk of Sinhala majority voters who voted in 'old UNP' style for the two former 'UNP'ers of the second-in-the-race, Sajith Premadasa, son of the late Prime Minister R. Premadasa and Ranil Wickremesinghe, taken together. This AKD-negative chunk includes also, almost the entirety of the Tamil electorate in the nation's 10 non-Sinhala majority districts in the north, east and the central highlands.

This means that AKD has to not just consolidate his own Left-inclined and Left-supporting Sinhala support base but seek support from non-Left Sinhala and Tamil Lanka as well. If AKD is to form a stable government he has to do so with his own JVP and NPP MPs and others. The most logical and, in Sri Lanka, the tried-and-tested way of doing this would be through the coalition pact. Or through 'outside support' – ever tenuous.

The next biggest challenge is financial. AKD has to meld his rare of past ideological positions with the hard reality of Sri Lanka's dependence on IMF funding. How he will be able to convince his support base – his 'bread and butter' – about the inevitability of the self-denying austerity regimen that comes as the price for IMF funding, remains to be seen. If Ranil Wickremesinghe was judged and judged out in under two years, AKD will have a tighter calendar to work within. If Sri Lanka's polity is a minefield, its political economy is an all-but dry lake. Early reports suggest that AKD will negotiate, not scrap, the Rajapaksa government's convergences with the IMF. If AKD holds deliberations with the outgoing President's economic team, that could lead to calibrated increments in decision making. Ranil Wickremesinghe may have made political judgements, especially in his more-than-generous handling of the Rajapaksa order. But his grasp of economic affairs is not a resource to be lightly disregarded.

The third and from India's point of view, a very serious challenge to AKD's Leftward mindscape is the ideological voltage which will be directed to it from China. Even if one were to disregard the speculation about China having played a financial role in AKD's election campaign, one cannot be over-cautious about Beijing's reflexive leverage over any government in Colombo. Within touching adjacency to India, the emerald isle shares with its immediate neighbour all the frictions proximity brings. Sri Lanka's distant but deep oceanic heave with China is without the

frictions that proximity brings. If IMF funding spells uneasy austerities in the short term, Chinese support cannot but script risky promissory notes in the long term.

### Renewal of the democratic voice

AKD cannot do better than remember a defining question that the great Lankan Marxist asked of those pressing for 'Sinhala only' politics in Parliament in 1956. "Do you want two languages and one nation, or one language and two nations?" On how AKD navigates the language and religious fissures of his country depends on the veracity and validity of his leadership. In this the experience of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in proposing federal and devolution principles to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and other Tamil political formations can be instructive for him. Let me say, with welcome admiration, that I found this statement of AKD's at his inauguration nothing less than redemptive: "Democracy helped me win. Some voted for me, and others didn't. But my pledge is to work hard to win the trust of those who didn't vote for me as well."

In her note dated September 24, 2024, Sivanandini Duraiswamy gives the optically gratifying and synoptically telling news that "(AKD) took a needed first step. He visited a Hindu Temple in Kandy today to receive a rapturous welcome." Bravo, is what I would say to that, bravo AKD.

An outstanding former Indian diplomat, Ramu Damodaran, recently drew my attention to a new play, 'Counting and Cracking' by Lankan playwright S. Shaktidharan which is said to be currently 'dazzling' New York audiences. Anand Giridharadas, founder editor of The Ink online journal, has interviewed Shaktidharan, where he says: "I think the best way to strengthen democracy after realizing how fragile it is – rather than being terrified by that – is to listen deeply to the truths of people who are different to us and to find ways to agree to disagree."

Scepticism in the shape of hard-knocked realism marks India's general attitude to its neighbours. But at this point of time, India needs to view the AKD phenomenon with faith in the self-renewing power of the democratic voice. The internal gravitas of the AKD-led government will necessarily have to be ideological, its external outreach will need to be empirical. But its link with India, which has internal and external dimensions will have to be what they have always been and will always be: umbilical.

# Common Practice Standards must have India outlook

India's vast potential in the agroforestry sector is a unique opportunity to integrate with carbon finance projects through Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation (ARR) initiatives. There is a possibility to expand the area under agroforestry from the current 28.4 million hectares to 53 million hectares by 2050. Agroforestry accounts for 8.65% of India's total land area and contributes 19.3% of the country's carbon stocks. Thus, agroforestry plays a significant role in environmental sustainability and economic development.

Recent research suggests that if adequate policies, financial support, and incentives are implemented, the sector could contribute an additional carbon sink of over 2.5 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent by 2030.

### 'Common Practice' in Carbon Standards

In the realm of carbon finance, "common practice" is a key criterion used to assess whether a project is additional – meaning, it goes beyond what is typically done in a given region. For ARR projects, this involves determining whether similar activities are commonly practised without the financial incentives provided by carbon credits. According to carbon standards such as Verra's Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) or the Gold Standard, if an activity is deemed "common practice", it may not qualify for carbon credits, as it is not seen as contributing additional environmental benefits beyond the norm.

However, the current definition of common practice in global carbon standards often reflects the realities of large-scale agricultural practices found in regions such as Latin America, Africa, or the United States, where landholdings are extensive and contiguous. In contrast, India is characterised by small and fragmented landholdings. Recent data indicate that 86.1% of Indian farmers are small and marginal, with landholdings of less than two hectares. These farmers often engage in agroforestry in a non-systematic, scattered manner, planting trees alongside crops or on small patches of fallow land.

While beneficial, these practices may not meet



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International carbon finance platforms must revise their standards to better align with the realities of Indian agriculture

the additional criteria set by current carbon standards because they are perceived as "common" within the Indian context. This presents a significant challenge, as it effectively excludes a large number of Indian farmers from participating in ARR carbon finance projects, thereby denying them the opportunity to earn additional income from carbon credits.

### Need for India-centric approaches

Given India's unique agricultural landscape, there is an urgent need to redefine and consider the common practice criterion to better reflect the specific challenges and opportunities within the Indian agroforestry sector. An India-centric approach would recognise that even small, incremental changes in land management practices such as adopting more systematic agroforestry techniques or utilising carbon finance to maintain tree cover can be transformative.

Revising and consideration of the common practice standards to accommodate the fragmented, small-holder model prevalent in India would unlock the vast potential for carbon sequestration. This would enable a greater number of farmers to participate in carbon finance projects, providing them with additional income streams while contributing to India's climate goals. Further, by acknowledging the fragmented nature of Indian agriculture, carbon credit platforms could design incentives that encourage systematic agroforestry, thereby enhancing both environmental sustainability and rural livelihoods.

Agroforestry, when integrated with ARR initiatives, offers a viable solution to the various challenges faced by India's agricultural sector. By promoting alternative livelihoods and providing additional income streams for farmers, these projects can help address issues such as low productivity, dependence on monsoons, and environmental degradation. The carbon finance provided by ARR projects enables a more systematic and sustained approach to agroforestry, which would otherwise be difficult to achieve given the financial pressures and

market constraints faced by many Indian farmers. For farmers grappling with unpredictable weather patterns and fluctuating crop yields, participating in ARR projects presents a pathway to income diversification. By integrating trees into their agricultural landscapes or restoring degraded forest areas on their land, farmers can tap into additional revenue streams through carbon sequestration. Beyond economic gains, ARR projects deliver crucial environmental benefits, such as enhancing soil fertility, improving water retention, and mitigating erosion, thereby bolstering agricultural productivity and ensuring long-term sustainability.

### Help small and marginal farmers

Research institutes such as The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) have already demonstrated the potential of ARR projects in India, spearheading 19 projects across seven States, benefiting over 56,600 farmers. However, for such initiatives to scale up, it is imperative that international carbon finance platforms revise their standards to better align with the realities of Indian agriculture.

As India looks to expand its agroforestry sector and leverage the benefits of carbon finance it is crucial that international standards evolve to reflect the specific conditions of the Indian subcontinent. Revising the "Common Practice" guidelines to be more inclusive of Indian agroforestry practices will enable millions of small and marginal farmers to participate in ARR projects. This would not only drive sustainable development but also provide a much-needed boost to the incomes of millions of rural households, ultimately contributing to the overall economic and environmental resilience of the country.

It is imperative that carbon credit platforms such as Verra and Gold Standard recognise the need for India-centric standards. Only then can the full potential of agroforestry and ARR initiatives be realised, paving the way for a greener, more sustainable, and economically prosperous future for India's farmers.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A word of advice

Pakistan has made its speeches in the United Nations take the form of a ritualistic spewing of venom against India, even as it continues to practise its undeclared state policy of abetting cross-border terrorism to create disturbances in Jammu and Kashmir and across the rest of India (Page 1, September 29). Instead of spending its energies on nurturing terrorism on its soil and

fulminating against India at international fora, it should concentrate its energies on setting right its economy, which is in a shambles. Pakistan must realise the futility of nurturing cross-border terrorism, so that a peaceful and conducive atmosphere prevails for the citizens of the country. It is also a shame that India will also suffer because of its support to terrorism in South Asia. **Kosaraju Chandramouli, Hyderabad**

### Son rise

It is amusing that many politicians who hail from political families in India swear by the Constitution and pose as the champions of democracy while unabashedly promoting dynastic politics. ("Udhayanidhi" is Deputy CM; Senthilalaji back in Cabinet" September 29). Strangely, the public takes such hypocrisy for granted. Is there an unconscious yearning for kings and

maharajas in the Indian psyche?

**Manohar Alembath, Kannur, Kerala**

### Antibiotics use

The inappropriate use of antibiotics and the over-the-counter sale of antibiotics has led to increased antimicrobial resistance ("Science" page, "Can Kerala's policy to limit antibiotics misuse reduce AMR?", September 29).

Antimicrobial resistance is one of the top public health and global threats, putting many of the gains of modern medicine at risk. Kerala became the first State to ban over-the-counter sale of antibiotics without a prescription, but much needs to be done in terms of regulation and the antibiotic policy to prevent the deaths due to AMR.

**Dr. Thomas Palocaren, Vellore, Tamil Nadu**

### Mark of an era

In the passing of 108-year-old Pappammal on September 27, India has lost a pioneer in the field of agriculture. The centenarian Tamil Nadu-based farmer's life was a testament to the power of passion in agriculture, and it is unimaginable that a woman could toil in this tough and unpredictable field every day at that ripe age. **R. Sivakumar, Chennai**



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Number of complaints to NRI cell regarding domestic violence**

**481** The government's NRI cell, which handles cases related to NRI marriages of women both in India and abroad, received 481 complaints from women in 2022, on issues ranging from domestic violence, confiscation of passports etc.

**The death toll from the Nepal floods and landslides**

**148** Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority said 148 people had been killed across the country with another 59 still missing. At least 36 of those killed were aboard three vehicles and were buried alive.

**Amount earmarked for infra upgrades for Kumbh Mela**

**993** in ₹ crore. The Railway Ministry has been working on making elaborate arrangements for the Kumbh Mela and has plans to run 992 special trains for the mega religious congregation to be held in Prayagraj in January.

**The number of Ukrainian drones shot down by Russia**

**125** The shooting down of drones sparked a wildfire and set an apartment block alight in one of the largest barrages seen over Russian skies since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Sixteen civilians were injured.

**The death toll in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023**

**41,595** The toll includes nine deaths in the last 24 hours, as per the ministry, which said that 96,251 people have been wounded in Gaza since the war began.

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# Why are law students at RGNUL protesting?

Is this the first such students' protest at the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law? What are the various allegations against the Vice-Chancellor Professor Jai Shankar Singh? Where do talks between the administration and students stand?

## EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

### The story so far:

Student-led protests have marred activity at the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL) after Vice-Chancellor (VC) Professor Jai Shankar Singh allegedly entered the girls' hostel without prior notice, violating their privacy. Students regard this incident as the last straw in a series of grievances that, in their view, have caused the VC to lose "their mandate" — leading to an indefinite sit-in protest that began on September 22, 2024. Their demands include strengthened campus security, the establishment of a students' association for improved representation, and the implementation of comprehensive academic reforms.

### What happened?

Denying the allegations, Mr. Singh told *The Hindu* that his visit to the first-year female students' rooms was "at their invitation." He claimed that an influx of female students this academic year had led to overcrowding in the girls' hostel, with first-year students being placed in double-occupancy rooms. "These are baseless accusations. I visited the first-year students' rooms only after they repeatedly complained about the shortage of space. I was accompanied by the chief warden and a female security guard," he said.

Refuting Mr. Singh's claim, a fourth-year female student told *The Hindu* that Mr. Singh failed to give either the students or the hostel warden any prior notice of his visit. "According to hostel regulations, access to the girls' hostel is restricted for male members of the university, and even parents are denied entry unless explicitly authorised. This unannounced visit constitutes a grave breach of our privacy, especially since this is our personal space," she said.

Students further claimed that the chief warden and a female security guard only arrived to accompany Mr. Singh only after being summoned by the students. "The VC didn't just visit the first-year students; he also entered the rooms of third-year students. If his intention was solely to address the space issues affecting first-year students, why did he feel the need to enter the rooms of third-year students, who reside in an entirely separate block?" a third-year female student questioned.

However, this is purportedly not the first instance of inappropriate behaviour exhibited by Mr. Singh.

Several students, speaking on the condition of anonymity, alleged that since his appointment in March, he has made sexist and insensitive remarks on multiple occasions. A written representation submitted by the students to the Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court — who also serves as the ex-officio Chancellor of the University — attributes numerous instances of moral policing to the VC.

"Ladki ho, domestic violence ya marriage jaisa Act uthao aur aaram se ghar par course karo. Kyu itna complicated aur naya topic leli ho (You are a girl, pick a law like domestic violence or marriage and stay back at home and pursue the course. Why do you opt for new and complicated topics)," Mr. Singh allegedly told some female students, as per the representation accessed by *The Hindu*. Additionally, he reportedly questioned the attire of some female students on one occasion.



In rage: A group of students protesting at the Rajiv Gandhi National University in Patiala, Punjab on September 29. SUNDAR SHARMA

### Are dialogues underway?

Negotiations between the protesting students and the University administration have repeatedly failed to reach a consensus. Moreover, three faculty members of the nine-member committee constituted to facilitate discussions with the students have resigned without explanation.

Several students reported to *The Hindu* that they have been protesting in sweltering heat and adverse weather conditions, with some even losing consciousness and requiring medical attention. "We tried to arrange for tents, but the university administration intervened and directed suppliers not to honour our requests," claimed a third-year student.

Students also claimed that the administration contacted their parents to stifle the protests, warning them that their children could face expulsion if they continued to agitate. Mr. Singh, however, denied the allegations and told *The Hindu*, "No calls were made. These are just lies and false accusations."

### Are there other grievances?

This is not the first student-led protest that RGNUL has witnessed. In 2019, approximately 400 students agreed to end a five-day indefinite sit-in only after the administration committed to revoking the suspension of six students who had advocated for improved hostel food, enhanced library access for women, and the removal of discriminatory curfew restrictions in the girls' hostel. "Our

seniors had protested for the establishment of an official students' association nearly four years ago, yet no progress has been made on that front. It is incredibly difficult to voice our grievances without an official representative body," a fourth-year student said.

Female students have also voiced concerns regarding inadequate security measures. "Since the university is located on the outskirts of Patiala, the road in front of the campus remains deserted. We have repeatedly urged the administration to install street lights, CCTV cameras, and set up a police outpost near the main gate. But our grievances have been dismissed citing a lack of requisite funds," a student told *The Hindu*.

In recent times, NLUs — once hailed as "islands of excellence" by former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh — have witnessed a wave of student protests fuelled by a range of factors such as exorbitant fees, inadequate infrastructure, and administrative apathy. According to Prof. (Dr.) Faizan Mustafa, noted academic and VC of Chanakya National Law University (CNLU), Patna, NLUs witness significantly fewer student protests compared to other universities. "Students in NLUs generally exhibit far greater restraint and refrain from engaging in any form of violence. They exercise their right to protest peacefully without arms. I do not see any problem with it," he told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Mustafa further opined that students, as primary stakeholders, should play an active role in administrative

decision-making. "When it comes to conflict resolution, I believe the responsibility lies with the head of the institution to take the initiative.

Throughout my 15-year tenure as the VC of various NLUs, I have never subscribed to the 'control model' of university administration. Involving students meaningfully in administrative decisions fosters trust between them and the administration. Ultimately, universities are better run from classrooms than from the VC's office," he added.

### What happens next?

Raj Lali Gill, the Chairperson of the Punjab State Women Commission, has written to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi recommending the "immediate removal" of Mr. Singh "to restore a safe and respectful environment on the university campus." The recommendation follows her visit to the university, where she met with protesting students and instructed the administration to form a "neutral committee" with student representatives to engage in dialogue.

Additionally, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has reportedly taken cognisance of the students' grievances and assured them of prompt action. Despite Dr. Naresh Vats, the Officiating Registrar of the varsity, announcing that classes would resume on September 27, 2024, students have so far unanimously boycotted them. The University was earlier shut down on account of the ongoing protests.

## THE GIST

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## SCIENCE

# Not just nothing, dark matter quests close in on dire 'neutrino fog'

Scientists have placed the tightest restrictions yet on the identity of the particles that make up dark matter. It was a null result: it didn't say what the particle's identity was but suggested which identities the particle couldn't have. It prompted a sense of resignation. Similar experiments have been turning up empty-handed for decades

Nirmal Raj

**I**n August 28, two members of an experiment at conferences in Chicago and São Paulo had an announcement to make.

They were representing about 200 of their colleagues involved in the design, building, and operation of the LUX-ZEPLIN (LZ) experiment located 1.5km below the earth's surface at the Sanford Underground Research Facility in South Dakota, U.S. Their news: their band of scientists had placed the tightest restrictions yet on the identity of the particles that made up dark matter.

It was a null result: it didn't say what the particle's identity was but suggested which identities the particle couldn't have. And it didn't prompt disappointment from the physics community. Instead, it prompted resignation.

Experiments similar to LZ — such as XENON-nT in Italy, PandaX-4T in China, and dozens of others around the world — have been turning up empty-handed for decades now despite heroic efforts.

## Dark matter and its handshake

Dark matter is the invisible stuff making up most of the mass in the universe, responsible for giving the cosmos its current looks. Stars, gas, and planets contribute only 15% to the universe's mass.

The simplest contender for the make-up of dark matter is a previously unknown type of particle that doesn't interact with photons and lives — i.e., without disintegrating, unlike most particles — for at least the age of the universe, about 14 billion years.

This raises a question: does dark matter ever touch us? More precisely, can atomic nuclei and electrons scatter dark matter particles when they come close?

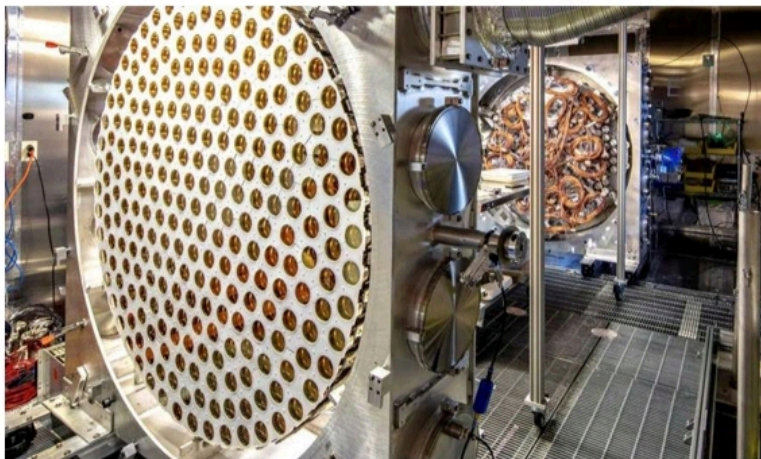
Several theories of dark matter indeed predict this handshake between the visible and invisible. The issue is how we can detect it.

## A sail to catch the wind

In 1985, physicists Mark Goodman and Ed Witten proposed a new strategy that has since mushroomed into an entire sub-field of experimental physics. (This is the same Witten of string theory fame.)

Thus the most theoretical of physicists has spawned an industry of experiments, proving the artificiality of divisions within physics. It is ironic that if dark matter is discovered in an underground laboratory, Witten will be awarded the Nobel Prize for something he has spent the least time on.)

We are all familiar with the pancake shape of the Milky Way galaxy. This disk



An array of photomultiplier tubes assembled for the LUX-ZEPLIN experiment. LZ DARK MATTER EXPERIMENT, LZ.BILL.GOV

of stars is embedded in a ball of dark matter about 100,000 lightyears across. In the Solar System, every teaspoon of space contains about two protons' weight of dark particles. These particles blow as a wind into us from all directions at one-thousandth the speed of light.

Goodman's and Witten's (GW) idea was to catch this wind in a "sail" — a chunk of metal placed deep underground to shield against other radiation from space. If a nucleus in the metal were seen to recoil spontaneously, it must be the invisible bump of dark matter.

In Ernest Rutherford's gold foil experiment, his team shone a well-understood beam at a mysterious target. GW's idea was the reverse: an enigmatic beam on a familiar target. The goal of the experiment is to measure two quantities: the unknown mass of the dark particle and the unknown rate at which atomic nuclei scatter dark matter particles. Physicists track this rate using a variable called the cross-section.

Consider the passage of light in a vacuum. In glass, and in a piece of rock. In the first case, a photon travels unimpeded; in the second, it travels a good distance before being scattered by an atom; and in the third, it is immediately stopped. We then say, for these three cases respectively, that the scattering cross-section is zero, small, and enormous.

Transparency needn't apply to light alone: any medium can be quantifiably

**Scientists are actively pursuing other avenues of research, too. One is to detect dark particles that are lighter than atomic nuclei, for these would scatter feebly off the target nucleus**

transparent or opaque to any particle type. GW's proposal would have measured the cross section for dark matter to scatter on nuclei down to  $10^{-34}$  cm<sup>2</sup>, already a staggeringly tiny quantity. It would imply that dark matter would have to traverse 10 billion km of rock before being stopped.

## 'The neutrino fog'

These mousetraps for dark matter have since come a long way. Where GW proposed the use of a kilogramme of metal for a day, today scientists expose tonnes of liquid xenon and argon to the dark-matter wind for years. The advantage of going bigger and running longer is that one can catch dark matter that is ghostlier, i.e., with a smaller cross section. As a result, we can now say with a straight face that we have ruled out dark matter-nucleus cross sections of  $10^{-4}$  cm<sup>2</sup>; a million times smaller than the GW limit. This is just the announcement LZ made in August.

Could we go on making our detectors bigger and probe arbitrarily smaller cross sections? Not quite. Future detectors that will weigh tens to hundreds of tonnes will

also register much more noise from the scatters of other ghostly particles, especially neutrinos forged in the Sun's interior and in the earth's atmosphere. In fact, PandaX-4T and XENONnT are already reporting this issue. The resignation following LZ's announcement is partly for this reason: scientists had hoped to reveal dark matter's identity before facing this "neutrino fog." Telling dark matter and neutrino signals apart in future searches is a challenge that drives a great deal of research.

## Every last drop

Scientists are actively pursuing other avenues of research, too. One is to detect dark particles that are lighter than atomic nuclei, for these would scatter feebly off the target nucleus.

Picture a bug hitting a truck, which would hardly move the vehicle. The goal is to develop technology to perceive the slightest of energy transfers, which involves building detectors using special materials that are currently restricted to the realm of condensed matter physics.

Thus the hunt for dark matter, like that of the Caledonian bear, unites many talents. That is not surprising: the effort to decipher the natural world has always drawn every last drop of human ingenuity.

(Nirmal Raj is an assistant professor of theoretical physics at the Centre for High Energy Physics in the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. [nraj@isc.ac.in](mailto:nraj@isc.ac.in))

## THE GIST

Dark matter is the invisible stuff making up most of the mass in the universe, responsible for giving the cosmos its current looks. Stars, gas, and planets contribute only 15% to the universe's mass

The simplest contender for the make-up of dark matter is a previously unknown type of particle that doesn't interact with photons and lives for at least the age of the universe, about 14 billion years

The researchers' plan is to catch the dark matter in a "sail" — a detector placed deep underground to shield against other radiation from space. If a nucleus in the detector were seen to recoil, it must be the invisible bump of dark matter

The goal is to measure the unknown mass of the dark particle and the unknown rate at which atomic nuclei scatter dark matter particles. Physicists track this rate using a variable called the cross-section

## BIG SHOT



A river that overflowed its banks after the passage of Tropical Storm John in Chilpancingo, Mexico, on Friday. The head of Mexico's national meteorological service, Alejandra Mendez, said John had soaked Guerrero with more than 95 cm of rain since September 23, while Otis, a Category 5 hurricane, had brought 35 cm of rain. REUTERS

## WHAT IS IT?

# Pollen: a mammoth killer?

Vasudevan Mukunth

Pollen is an important substance many plants use to reproduce. It is a gametophyte, a multicellular organism of sorts that delivers the male gamete of a seed-producing plant to the stigma of another such plant.

Each pollen particle consists of reproductive and non-reproductive cells. When the pollen lands on a compatible plant, the non-reproductive cells produce the pollen tube while the reproductive cells multiply to produce the nuclei of sperm cells. The sperm travels through the tube to the base of the pistil, starting the process that eventually produces fruits filled with seeds. When many pollen particles are collected together, they resemble a powder. A natural polymer called sporopollenin surrounds the pollen cells to protect them during their journey through the air and from inclement elements.

Many people are allergic to pollen — this pollen usually comes from anemophilous plants (including birch and hickory); an allergic reaction from grass pollen is called hay fever. The study of pollen is called palynology. A study published in the September 2024 issue of *Earth History* and



Pollen may have played a part in the extinction of mammoths. The emergence of plants towards the end of the last ice age could have disrupted their sense of smell. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Biodiversity reported that pollen may have played a part in pushing the mammoths to extinction. Based on genetic analyses, they said the emergence of plants towards the end of the last ice age could have disrupted the megafauna's sense of smell and signalling pathways based on their olfactory system, including locating their group-mates and food sources. However, independent researchers have asked for more proof of the idea before they say it can be accepted.

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# E. EXPLAINED

## EXPLAINED SPACE

### HOW MARS' ATMOSPHERE WENT MISSING: NEW STUDY OFFERS CLUES

MARS TODAY is a cold and barren desert, but this was not always the case. Increasingly, new evidence suggests that water flowed on the Martian surface once upon a time. This means that a thick atmosphere would have had to envelope the planet, to keep this water from freezing.

Then, some 3.5 billion years ago, the water dried up as the carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere dramatically thinned. Just why this happened is the central question for scientists seeking to understand the history of the Red Planet. A new study published in the journal *Science Advances* on September 24 might have some answers to this question.

Geologists Joshua Murray and Oliver Jagoutz from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology suggest that the water trickled through certain rock types on the Martian surface, and set off a slow chain of reactions that progressively drew carbon dioxide out of the planet's atmosphere and converted it into methane. Methane is a form of carbon that can theoretically be stored for aeons on the Red Planet's clay surface.

#### Trapped in folds

The two geologists formulated this theory based on their research on Earth. In 2023, they were working on a type of clay material known as smectite, which is known to be a highly effective carbon trap. Grains of smectite each comprise a number of folds, within which carbon can sit for billions of years. The MIT researchers found that if left exposed to the atmosphere on Earth, smectite can draw and store atmospheric carbon dioxide over millions of years, enough to cool down the planet.

Soon after this finding, Jagoutz hap-

pened to look at a magnified map of the Martian surface, and found the same smectite clay he was studying. Except, he was not sure how it got there. On Earth, smectite is a product of tectonic activity, but it is well-established that Mars does not see such activity.

#### Role of water

The two scientists thus began to research alternative ways in which smectite could have formed. The answer to this question lies in how Martian water reacted with olivine, a ferrous rock known to be abundant on the planet's surface. Using available data on the existence of olivine and the presence of water, as the existence of a thick CO<sub>2</sub>-heavy atmosphere, the scientists came up with a computer model to simulate how the three would react with each other, over a billion years.

They found that in this vast time frame, oxygen atoms in water would slowly have bound to the iron in the olivine (this is also what gives the planet its red colour), freeing the hydrogen which would then have combined with the carbon dioxide to form methane. Over time, the reaction with water would lead the olivine to turn into smectite which, in turn, absorbed the methane.

This knowledge has utility beyond scientists and researchers. With humanity looking to send missions, and perhaps eventually colonise the Red Planet, methane trapped in the Martian surface can potentially be an invaluable resource.

"This methane may even be used as an energy source on Mars in the future," the researchers suggest.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

### HOW SCIENTISTS USED STEM CELLS TO 'REVERSE' DIABETES FOR FIRST TIME

A 25-YEAR-OLD woman with type 1 diabetes — an autoimmune disease that destroys the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas, called islets — began to produce her own insulin in less than three months after a transplant of reprogrammed stem cells, according to a new study.

This is the first successful treatment for the disease using stem cells, which can be used to grow any tissue in the body and can be cultured indefinitely in the laboratory. Researchers hope that the treatment will help patients avoid the need for immunosuppressants.

The study, which was led by scientists based in China, was published in the journal *Cell* last week. For the treatment, the researchers extracted cells from three people with type 1 diabetes and reverted them into a pluripotent state, meaning the cells were turned into blank slates with no predetermined

program. This was done so that these cells could be moulded into any cell type in the body.

The researchers then used the chemically induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells to generate 3D clusters of islets. Subsequently, they injected the equivalent of roughly 1.5 million islets into the woman's abdominal muscles. Two-and-a-half months later, the woman was producing enough insulin to live without needing top-ups, and she has sustained that level of production for more than a year.

The results are intriguing, but they need to be replicated in more people, says Jay Skyler, an endocrinologist at the University of Miami, Florida, who studies type 1 diabetes. Skyler also wants to see that the woman's cells continue to produce insulin for up to five years, before considering her "cured".

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## A rice variety to curb farm fires

Pusa-2090 yields nearly as much as Pusa-44, the first choice of farmers. But it can be harvested by early to mid-October, eliminating the need for stubble burning before the sowing of wheat



HARISH DAMODARAN

HARPREET SINGH has been cultivating Pusa-44 paddy since 2000, if not earlier. "Why not, when it yields 35-36 quintals of grain per acre, and in some of my land, even 40 quintals?" the 39-year-old from Bourhai Kalan village in Punjab's Malerkotla district said. Bred by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) at New Delhi, and released for large-scale cultivation in 1993, Pusa-44 takes 155-160 days to grow, from the time of sowing its seeds in nurseries to harvesting the grain.

The high yields — more than the 30-32 quintals per acre that is its nearest competitor, the Punjab Agricultural University's PR-126, gives over 123-125 days — is Pusa-44's main attraction for farmers. Although taking 30-35 days more to mature, the extra 4-5 quintals yield is worth Rs 9,280-11,600 (per acre) at the Centre's minimum support price of Rs 2,320 per quintal for 'Grade A' paddy.

#### Pusa-44's environmental cost

But there is a cost to the high yields. The Pusa-44 paddy, transplanted in mid-June after nursery-sowing a month before, can be harvested only towards end-October. This leaves little time for field preparation to sow the winter wheat crop, which should ideally be done before mid-November. Most farmers, then, resort to burning the straw and stubble that remains after harvesting using combines.

The narrow turnaround window between paddy harvesting and the optimal sowing of wheat is at the root of farm fires in Punjab and Haryana — and the severe air pollution it contributes to in much of northern India — from late-October to mid-November.

The problem is more with the cultivation of Pusa-44, which covered an estimated 14.8% of Punjab's total non-basmati paddy area in 2023. That was lower than the 22% of 2022 and 30% in 2012, it even fell 33% last year. Yet, it remains the farmer's first choice, especially in the south-central districts of Sangrur, Malerkotla, Barnala,



Farmer Vikas Chaudhary at his Pusa-2090 paddy field in Taraori village in Haryana's Karnal district. Harish Damodaran

Ludhiana and Moga. While the Punjab government has banned Pusa-44 from this crop year, with the IARI also not supplying breeder material for multiplication after 2021, farmers are still growing it — using saved grains from the previous crops as seed.

In the current season, Harpreet Singh has sown Pusa-44 on 90 out of his 100-acre holding, transplanting these between June 10 and June 24 for harvesting from around October 20 to November 2. Singh does not burn the stubble: "I plough it into the soil using a Super Seeder, which also sows the wheat seeds in a single pass".

Not all farmers, though, can afford such expensive tractor-driven machines.

#### A viable replacement?

IARI has bred a new, improved shorter-duration variety, Pusa-2090.

A selection from a cross between Pusa-44 and CB-501, an early-maturing Japonica rice line, it has a seed-to-grain maturity of 120-125 days. That's the same as PR-126, but Pusa-2090's paddy yield of 34-35 quintals per acre — now being tested in farmers' fields — is closer to Pusa-44's.

Agricultural scientists have, for long, worked at introducing genes from



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## EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

turing some 35 days earlier translates into significant water savings, with at least 5-6 fewer irrigations required against the normal 29-30 for Pusa-44.

#### What farmers think

Harpreet Singh last year planted Pusa-44 on 90 and PR-126 on 10 acres. This time, he has grown Pusa-2090 in place of PR-126 on the same 10 acres.

"I sowed my nursery on June 2 and transplanted on June 28-July 2. As of now, I am expecting a grain yield of 35 quintals, but we will really know only after the crop is harvested by October 4-5 and weighed," Singh said.

Harvesting paddy in early-October should give Singh plenty of time to sow wheat. But he plans to plant potato instead, the 'Diamond' variety sown in mid-October would be ready for harvesting by mid-February. "After that, I will immediately plant Delab-9108 (a maize hybrid) for harvesting in 80-85 days towards mid-May," he added. Farmers wanting to only take wheat after paddy can transplant Pusa-2090 even in mid-July.

Sukhjeet Singh Bhangu, a farmer with 20 acres of land in Kankhal Bhangu village of Sangrur's Sunam tehsil, who also grows and markets seeds under his 'A-One' brand, felt that Pusa-2090 may replace Pusa-44 in the areas where it is still dominant. "Most farmers will hesitate growing a banned variety, for fear of it not being procured by government agencies. If Pusa-2090 gives 34-35 quintals, which is almost as much as Pusa-44 and above PR-126, they would go for it".

Vikas Chaudhary, a seed grower from Taraori village in Nibhkehi tehsil of Haryana's Karnal district, harvested 35 quintals of paddy from his one-acre trial plot under Pusa-2090 last year. "That was good, as the grains had only 13% moisture (against the normal 16-17% content). This year's crop (nursery-sown on June 6 and transplanted on July 6) should also yield around that level".

Farm yields apart, there is also the issue of milling quality. "PR-126 paddy isn't liked much by millers because the rice recovery from it is hardly 63%, whereas the government's required norm is 67%. If Pusa-2090's grain quality matches that of Pusa-44, there will be acceptance for it from the millers' side too," Bhagwan Dass, secretary-general of the Rakhra (Patiala)-based Young Farmers Association Punjab, pointed out.

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## Cadaver donations: need, rules and challenges

ANONNA DUTT  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 29

CPI (M) LEADER Sitaram Yechury, who died on September 12, donated his body to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

This is not a decision that a lot of people in India make, but perhaps many more should. Here's why.

#### What are cadavers used for?

Cadaver donation sees a person donate their entire body (rather than individual organs) to science after death.

Generally, cadavers are used to train doctors by helping them better understand human anatomy and practice surgery. Although dummies can be used for training, cadavers provide the most realistic experience of performing surgery on a human being. Apart from training, cadavers can also be used for developing new medical devices, and studying the physiological impact of diseases.

#### Who can donate their body?

Anyone over the age of 18 years can

legally consent to become a cadaver donor. In case they are not registered as one at the time of death, their guardian or next of kin can still donate their body.

Although those who have died of chronic illnesses are eligible donors, the bodies of those with infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, sepsis, or HIV are unlikely to be accepted. Same is the case with bodies of organ donors.

Lastly, medical colleges may also refuse to accept bodies of persons who have died due to unnatural reasons, and are subjects of any medico-legal cases.

#### How to donate one's body?

There is no national organisation to track whole body donations (unlike organ donation). Usually, anatomy departments of medical colleges are directly in-charge of the process. Thus, one has to go to the specified department where one wants to donate one's body and sign requisite forms. After death, the donor's next of kin have to contact the department to process the donation.

#### How many cadavers are donated in India?

Not enough. Although no consolidated estimates exist, medical institutes have often reported shortages.

Currently, undergraduate medical colleges require one cadaver for every 10 students they admit. The AIIMS Delhi, where Yechury donated his body, has received 70 cadavers in the last two years, enough for its batch size of 132. But the story elsewhere is very different.

Situated right across the road from the AIIMS, the Safdarjung Hospital and its affiliate Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMMC) has received only 24 donated cadavers in the last five years. The Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital and its associated Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Medical Sciences (ABVIMS) have received 18 cadavers since the inception of its MBBS course in 2019. VMMC has a UG batch size of 150 (with 170 students permitted for the upcoming session). ABVIMS admits 100 MBBS students annually.

Notably, both these institutes are located in

the national capital — the situation is likely to be worse in most other parts of India.

#### So, how do medical colleges make do?

Given the shortages, medical colleges are forced to use unclaimed dead bodies, as per the provisions of their state's Anatomy Act. Although the specifics can vary, all these acts allow for the use of unclaimed bodies for science. Most laws state that the body of a deceased has to be claimed by relatives within 48 hours or "with least practicable delay".

A 2020 study published in the journal *BMC Medical Ethics* said that the rise in the number of medical institutes over the past 25 years, and exponential increase in the number of students studying medicine has led to the requirement of cadavers shooting up. Unclaimed bodies have traditionally been the major source of cadavers for medical institutes, the study further says.

However, there are major ethical issues here as most unclaimed bodies are of the poor, destitute, and other marginalised people. Many countries have explicit consent for cadavers to be accepted, some even require wills signed in presence of lawyers.

## A childhood in poverty to Hezbollah chief: the story of Hassan Nasrallah

ALIND CHAUHAN  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 29

HASSAN NASRALLAH, whom Israel killed in an air strike last week, led Hezbollah, the Iran-backed armed group and political party that has controlled much of southern Lebanon, for more than 32 years. Known for his charismatic oratory and strong organisational skills, Nasrallah transformed Hezbollah into Israel's most formidable non-state adversary. This is his story.

#### Musawi, Khomeini, Hezbollah

Nasrallah, the eldest of nine children, was born in 1960 and grew up in Beirut's eastern Bourj Hamoud neighbourhood, where impoverished Christian Armenians, Druze, Palestinians, and Shaities lived. His father Abdul Karim, a seller of fruits and vegetables, came from Bazouriyeh, a small Shia village in southern Lebanon.

The family was not particularly devout,

but Nasrallah became interested in religion as a teen. He was influenced by the teachings of Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian-Lebanese cleric revered by Lebanon's Shias, and the founder of a Shia party called Amal. Nasrallah said later that he spent long hours meditating before al-Sadr's portrait, and praying to God to "make him like Sayyid Musa some day", wrote Aurélie Daber in *Hezbollah: Mobilisation and Power* (2014).

In 1975, as civil war broke out in Lebanon, Nasrallah, then 15, joined Amal, and started to organise members in Bazouriyeh. The following year, he moved to the Shia holy city of Najaf in Iraq to study in its famous religious seminaries. *Hezbollah: A Short History* (2007), Augustus Richard Norton)

In Najaf, Nasrallah met the two people who would arguably have the most influence on his life: the Lebanese cleric Abbas al-Musawi, a co-founder of Hezbollah, who became his mentor and friend, and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who would lead Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Following a crackdown on Shia Islamists by Iraq's Ba'athists, Nasrallah and Musawi returned to Lebanon in 1978. Nasrallah remained associated with Amal until 1982, when he left, convinced that the movement was "no longer up to the task" of resisting invading Israeli forces.

Nasrallah joined the paramilitary Islamic Amal, co-founded by Musawi and backed by Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Islamic Amal, the most prominent and effective of the Shia militias in Lebanon, carried out suicide bombings at the UN Embassy in Beirut and the barracks of American and French peacekeepers. At least 360 people, including 241 American service members, were killed.

In the early 1980s, the Shia militias formed Hezbollah, the "Party of God". Nasrallah began as a fighter, and quickly rose to become the group's director. In 1985, Hezbollah announced its aims: fighting Israel and the West in Lebanon.

In 1992, Israeli helicopters struck Musawi's vehicle in southern Lebanon, killing him, his wife, and his son. Nasrallah succeeded him as the chief of Hezbollah at the age of 32.

Nasrallah's retaliation included Hezbollah bomb attacks at Israel's embassies in Turkey and Argentina; 29 people were killed in the latter attack.

#### A charismatic leader

The killing of Nasrallah's 18-year-old son Hadi by Israeli commandos in 1997 raised his stock among Hezbollah's members and supporters. The day after Hadi's killing, Nasrallah said: "We, Hezbollah's leadership, do not jealously guard our children".

Nasrallah's success in the low-intensity war against Israel that led to the Jewish state ending its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000 cemented his reputation. At the same time, under Nasrallah,

Hezbollah worked to develop a large welfare network in Lebanon, including health centres and schools. Hezbollah worked to become a political force (the pro-Hezbollah bloc has 62 of the 128 seats in Lebanon's parliament today), even as it built up a formidable military arsenal with the help and backing of Iran.

In 2006, Nasrallah led Hezbollah in another war against Israel, triggered by the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. The 34-day conflict resulted in large-scale destruction and loss of life, but earned Hezbollah admiration in the Arab world.

Thereafter, Nasrallah began to project himself as the champion of all Muslims in the war against Israel. "Nasrallah is vainglorious... He sees himself as a unique, visionary figure, a revolutionary hero like Che Guevara," researcher Hussein Bish said in a 2006 interview with the Council on Foreign Relations.

As Israel focused on him, Nasrallah began to live largely underground. His frequent speeches were broadcast from un-

known locations and delivered via secure links to his followers. He was a charismatic speaker, holding his audiences captivated by a unique, light style that included cracking jokes.

#### Near irreplaceable loss for Hezbollah

In more recent years, Nasrallah helped expand Hezbollah's influence well beyond the borders of Lebanon. It supported the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria against a popular uprising that started in 2011. It also trained fighters from Hamas, as well as other members of Iran's so-called Axis of Resistance, including Iraq's Shia militias and Yemen's Houthis.

It will be a daunting task for Hezbollah and its patrons in Tehran to find a replacement for Nasrallah. The group has lost several key leaders in Israeli strikes in recent weeks, and there does not appear to be anyone surviving who is close to Nasrallah's stature, experience or influence.

# 12 The EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE  
WAR IS ONLY A COWARDLY ESCAPE FROM  
THE PROBLEMS OF PEACE.  
— THOMAS MANN

## The Indian EXPRESS

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## A DANGEROUS EDGE

Killing of Hezbollah's Nasrallah brings an inflection point in West Asia conflict. Israel and others must step back, let diplomacy in

**A** REGION BATTERED by violent conflict since the brutal October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas last year now holds its breath following the killing of Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Shiite militant group Hezbollah, in Beirut in an Israeli airstrike. Will it expand the theatre of conflict, drawing reprisals from Lebanon and Hezbollah's main backer, Iran? Or will it offer a desperately needed pause in an embattled region, in which diplomacy can find and seize a vital opening?

What is already clear is that, with the death of Nasrallah, geopolitical equations in the region will shift considerably. Iran, which has armed and supported Hezbollah as part of its "Axis of Resistance" has vowed vengeance for the death of a man it describes as a "martyr". Yet, its bluster belies a slowness to action, a seeming reluctance to retaliate against Israel's maximalist tactics — including the deadly pager attacks less than a fortnight ago, which also injured the Iranian ambassador to Beirut. Even as it moves its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to a safe location, the prospect of prolonged engagement with Israel — which is bound to draw in the US as well, with all its military might — may well stay Iran's hand. It is also a fact that while Nasrallah's death may be mourned in Shia-dominated regions, few tears are being shed in the Sunni Arab world. States like Saudi Arabia and the UAE will be watching Iran and Israel's next moves carefully and closely, weighing the gains to be potentially made in a more stable region, including through the expansion of economic opportunities beyond oil, against the mounting losses inflicted by greater escalation.

Since the conflict began nearly 12 months ago, red lines have been crossed, including and especially by Israel, which has consistently ignored any attempts, including by the US, to temper its aggression. The official death toll put out by authorities in Gaza crossed 41,000 this month. The already horrifying scale of the humanitarian crisis, with large-scale displacement of people and the spectre of famine, cannot be allowed to engulf the entire region. As the one-year anniversary of the conflict approaches, it is in the interest of not just the people of the region, but states around the world, including India — with the lives of 9 million Indians working in the region at risk, as well as strategic and economic interests — that work towards de-escalation begins.

## A TIRUPATI LESSON

Milk fat is already costly. Taxing it higher makes it more vulnerable to adulteration

**F**IRST IT WAS Baba Ramdev who sought to create a niche market for cow ghee and also helped unlock the real value of milk fat, so to speak. The row over the alleged supply of adulterated ghee for making the iconic Tirupati laddu, distributed as prasadam to devotees at Andhra Pradesh's Tirumala Venkateswara temple, may further reinforce this premiumness. Milk fat is inherently expensive. Its current ex-dairy price of Rs 460-470 per kg is way above the Rs 125-130 wholesale range for refined palmolein, soyabean or sunflower oil. Beef tallow is available even cheaper, at Rs 85-90/kg. Not surprising that ghee or melted milk fat is prone to adulteration by "foreign fats", both of vegetable and animal origin. The relative expensiveness also explains why a lot of what sells as ice-cream is actually frozen dessert: Both contain minimum 10 per cent fat, but the source of that is vegetable oil, not milk, in the latter.

Premiumness has largely to do with availability. India imports 150-160 lakh tonnes (lt) of vegetable oil every year, over and above its domestic output of 100-105 lt. As against that, organised dairies produce hardly 4 lt of milk fat annually, much of which goes for their own reconstitution/rebalancing use or for ice cream, butter and ghee sales in consumer packs. It leaves not much for marketing as a bulk commodity, whether in 15-kg tins or 15,000-litre tankers. Households may meet their ghee needs substantially from the cream skimmed off the daily milk they consume. But this cannot be so with sweetmeat shops, hotels and other buyers who claim their product to be made from pure desi ghee. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams' own annual ghee requirement is about 5,000 tonnes. That's the equivalent of 12.2 crore litres of cow milk with 4 per cent fat — not small at all. The probability and temptation of lacing ghee with foreign fats is more when it comes to supplying such large quantities.

The Tirupati laddu saga may lead to consumers becoming more conscious of ghee quality and switching from loose or local to reputed brands. That, together with crackdowns by the authorities and overall reduced supply of adulterated material, could further push up milk fat prices in the short run. The government can help by cutting the goods and services tax on ghee, butter and other milk fat from the current 12 per cent. It makes no sense when vegetable fat and milk powder are taxed at 5 per cent. Milk fat is already costly. Taxing it higher makes it costlier and even more vulnerable to adulteration. There's no better time to fix the anomaly than now.



SONALDE DESAI

DEVELOPING GLOBAL INDICES and rankings has turned into a minor industry. The Global Competitiveness Index, Global Happiness Index, Global Hunger Index, Ease of Doing Business Index, Corruption Perception Index, Global Go-To Think Tanks rankings, you name it. Think tanks specialise in creating these indices; they are good for increased funding and publicity. Some governments boast of improved rankings, while others rant about the methodology. Life goes on until the following year when the cycle begins again.

Every time these indices appear, I wonder why some countries are where they are. Apparently, young people in Lithuania and Israel are the happiest in the world. Why are they happier than the youth in Australia, New Zealand, or Sweden? Is Gallup just courting the Jewish population of Israel, or do Arabs count? Unfortunately, these questions rarely get asked and answered.

Sometimes, we get to see strange anomalies. Take, for example, the Global Gender Gap Index. India ranked 26th on educational attainment in 2023 but mysteriously dropped to 112th rank in 2024. As far as I know, no Taliban-style attacks on Indian girls' education have taken place. This rapid descent remains inexplicable. Could there be some anomalies in the data?

All global rankings are not equivalent. Some, like the Human Development Index, are well thought out and carefully constructed, although they also face challenges in getting accurate country-level data. Others seem to be hastily put together, often excluding perspectives from the Global South. For example, the now-abandoned World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index focused on limited liability companies, covering only 14 per cent of Indian businesses and excluding sole proprietorships, the mainstay of Indian businesses. The Global Gender Gap Index focuses on the gender gap in earnings but not in poverty — an indicator on which

If we can't get away from them, we should set up parameters under which they are sensibly used

All global rankings are not equivalent. Some, like the Human Development Index, are well thought out and carefully constructed, although they also face challenges in getting accurate country-level data. Others seem to be hastily put together, often excluding perspectives from the Global South. For example, the now-abandoned World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index focused on limited liability companies, covering only 14 per cent of Indian businesses and excluding sole proprietorships, the mainstay of Indian businesses.

the United States might do poorly due to a large number of mother-only families, but where South Asian countries might fare better.

Nonetheless, given how much international organisations and foundations that fund them love ranking countries and are convinced these are effective tools in holding countries accountable, it is unlikely that any criticism will vanish this industry. However, it is possible to hold it accountable through simple steps.

First, we must expect that any index will contain a methodological appendix that justifies why specific indicators were chosen to be a part of the index and the rationale underlying the differential weights given to these indicators. The publications must include links to source data. The lazy approach of citing the World Bank indicator or the Food and Agriculture Organisation's indicators is insufficient. Index authors must cite the original sources for each indicator for each country. As it stands, data errors in index construction are impossible to decipher, even when we see absurd results like India's descent from rank 26 to 112 in educational attainment in the Gender Gap Index in a year. This does involve a considerable amount of work, but hard work is what research is all about, what the public and policymakers deserve. Where primary data is presented, sample sizes, sampling methodology and confidence intervals must be presented.

Second, those who cover the release of various indices must find a way of fact-checking the results. An editorial moratorium of coverage for 48 hours after the release of the index will give time to critically examine the results and consult experts. The rush to be the first to report that India is below war-torn Sudan on the Global Hunger Index without a critical examination does not serve the public. In particular, the rankings that do not provide citations to source data and methodology should not be covered.

Third, governments must stop taking

these results seriously. Countries are well aware of their priorities and hopefully try to ensure that appropriate data are available to monitor their progress. However, these efforts have little to do with how a country is ranked globally. Take, for example, the Global Hunger Index (GHI). India's child mortality fell from 9.1 at the turn of the century to 3.1 in two decades, and stunting, defined as low height-for-age, fell from 51 per cent to 36 per cent. Where India is lagging is in caloric intake and low weight-for-height resulting in it being ranked at 117 on GHI. Data challenges for these two indicators are well recognised.

Caloric intake is estimated from consumption expenditure data, which is a poor approximation at best. Moreover, the underlying figures for undernourishment, calculated by FAO combine the 2011-12 NSS consumption data and a recent Calorie poll of 3,000 people to estimate undernourishment. These models deserve greater scrutiny for external validity. Similarly, the wasting data for India is affected by most of the fifth National Family Health Survey interviews being conducted during the monsoon due to the pandemic-related delays. Greater intestinal infections during the monsoons are associated with weight loss, which biases wasting estimates. Instead of focussing excessively on rankings with well-recognised shortcomings, recognising achievements and refining goals consistent with national priorities will be a more fruitful approach.

Amartya Sen, one of the originators of the Human Development Index, has suggested it may be time to move beyond rankings. If we can't get away from these rankings, at a minimum, we should set up parameters under which they are accurate and sensibly used.

The writer is Professor and Centre Director, NCAER National Data Innovation Centre and Professor Emerita, University of Maryland. Views are personal



ABHINAV SINGH

INDIA STANDS AT the threshold of a transformation. With a burgeoning middle class, increasing disposable incomes, and a young population, the country is poised for a retail revolution. Projections indicate a leap to an impressive \$2 trillion by 2033, from \$820 billion in 2023. E-commerce has a crucial role in this transformation. With rapid digitalisation and growing internet penetration, the Indian e-commerce market is expected to reach \$325 billion by 2030.

The retail and e-commerce boom stands on the backbone of logistics and supply chain infrastructure in the country. As we target a \$5 trillion economy by 2030, the seamless and efficient movement of goods is essential to meet demand and drive the growth of this sector. This growth, however, hinges on the ability to manage and reduce logistics costs, which currently account for a hefty 11-14 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In comparison, the global average is around 8 per cent, with logistics costs amounting to 8-10 per cent of the GDP in the US and Europe, and 9 per cent in China respectively.

To unlock the full potential of our retail sector, it is imperative to bring down logistics costs. This reduction can lead to more competitive pricing, better profit margins for retailers, and ultimately, more affordable products for consumers. Achieving this target requires a multi-faceted approach, adopting global best practices, and implementing strategic infrastructural developments. Backed by recent announcements by the government that it will increase the outlay for infrastructure and initiatives on trade facilitation and reduction, affordable tech, and changing consumer behaviours, the logistics industry is predicted to grow 8.8 per cent annually to \$484.43 billion by 2029. India has moved up six places in the World Bank's Logistics

## UNLOCKING THE RETAIL ADVANTAGE

Logistics, supply chain infrastructure are backbone of e-commerce boom that is key

The logistics sector also requires a skilled workforce capable of managing sophisticated systems and technologies. As envisaged in the Gati Shakti National Master Plan, investing in training and development programs for logistics professionals can create a pool of skilled labour that can drive the sector forward. Partnerships with educational institutions and industry bodies can facilitate this skill development.

Performance Index to 38th in 2023, out of 139 countries. A significant catalyst for transforming the logistics landscape is the government's National Logistics Policy (NLP), which works towards a comprehensive framework to improve the logistics performance index, reduce cost and create data-driven decision support mechanisms for an efficient logistics ecosystem by promoting standardisation, encouraging investments and fostering innovation.

The NLP also focuses on the digitisation of processes. Digital platforms for real-time tracking, e-documentation, and seamless information exchange can eliminate inefficiencies and reduce delays. Moreover, the policy emphasises the development of a Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP) to bring all stakeholders onto a single platform, facilitating better coordination and collaboration.

The emphasis on sustainability is another crucial aspect. By promoting eco-friendly practices such as the use of electric vehicles, energy-efficient warehousing, and sustainable packaging, we can also minimise our environmental footprint.

Countries like Germany offer valuable lessons — its logistics sector is renowned for its efficiency and reliability, supported by advanced infrastructure, technology integration, and a skilled workforce. The German model emphasises the seamless integration of various transport modes, robust warehousing facilities and efficient inventory management systems. For instance, the use of digital technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and data analytics has significantly enhanced the predictability and reliability of logistics operations.

We can take a leaf out of Germany's book by investing in technology and infrastructure. We began this journey with the Gati Shakti National Master Plan, which focuses on pro-

viding formal education and skill training. Additionally, improving warehousing standards and practices is essential as a modern, tech-enabled warehouse can streamline inventory management, reduce storage costs, and minimise wastage. Implementing warehouse automation technologies such as robotics, AI, and IoT can optimise operations and enhance efficiency. This is particularly crucial for the e-commerce sector, where efficient warehousing can lead to faster delivery times and improved customer satisfaction.

The logistics sector also requires a skilled workforce capable of managing sophisticated systems and technologies. As envisaged in the Gati Shakti National Master Plan, investing in training and development programmes for logistics professionals can create a pool of skilled labour that can drive the sector forward. Partnerships with educational institutions and industry bodies can facilitate this skill development.

A robust logistics ecosystem is not merely an economic imperative but a vital step towards achieving holistic development that can enhance the competitiveness of Indian businesses, create job opportunities and improve the standard of living for millions. That will also enable us to leverage our strategic location, connecting East and West, and become a hub for international trade.

By adopting global best practices, investing in infrastructure and skilled labour, and leveraging technological innovations, India can fully unlock its retail sector's potential. This will propel the country towards a Viksit Bharat 2047, where the logistics industry is a catalyst for sustainable growth and economic prosperity.

The writer is Vice President (Operations), Amazon India

## FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



DMK's Rising Sun symbol -  
refreshed from time to time.



## SEPTEMBER 30, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### GOLDEN TEMPLE OPEN

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE complex was thrown open to the public as the security forces which occupied it in June withdrew from the complex. Unrestricted entry into the Golden Temple was permitted after 117 days. The process of handing over the complex began after the Nihang leader, Baba Santa Singh, who along with around 1,000 Nihangs performed "ardas" in the Akal Takht to mark completion of its repair, vacated the temple at 10.30am.

### AKALI LEADERS' RELEASE

THE RELEASE OF detained Akali Dal leaders and

installation of a popular government in Punjab are reportedly underway as a part of the process of normalisation of the situation in the state. Orders for the release of Akali Dal president Sant Harchand Singh Longowal and other senior Dal leaders are likely only after a political decision in this regard is taken by the Centre.

### ON ARMY IN TRIPURA

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the state Chief Minister over the deployment of Army in Tripura to control extremists are rather marked, with both holding opposite views on the matter. While Mrs Gandhi at her press conference at Guwahati

was critical of the Left government for opposing the deployment of Army to control the situation, Nipen Chakravorty disagreed with her assessment of the situation.

### RAM BHOOMI MARCH

THE UTTAR PRADESH government is keeping its fingers crossed over the proposed march of large numbers of people from Ayodhya on October 8 to "liberate" Ram Janam Bhoomi (birth place of Lord Rama) in Lucknow. The march, organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, will start with volunteers of the "Bargang Dal" and others proceeding on October 7 with Saryu water in their hands.

# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Food that doesn't feed

Lowering post-harvest losses and food waste is not just a matter of improving economic efficiency, but also providing nutrition, eliminating hunger and saving the environment



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI AND  
RAYA DAS

THE UNITED NATIONS has designated September 29 as the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (FLW). Events to mark the day are jointly convened by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) because the issue has important implications for food security and saving our environment. An FAO 2023 report estimates that food lost between harvest and retail amounts to 13.2 per cent of the global food production. Interestingly, UNEP estimates that 17 per cent of food is wasted between retail and feeding people. Together, the food loss and waste (FLW), amounts to about 30 per cent of the global production. Even if half of this food is saved and used, it could easily feed all the hungry people in the world. Such savings could also help reduce at least eight to 10 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and 38 per cent of total energy usage, making our planet breathe better. Both these dreams remain unfulfilled. Therefore, it is important to be aware of these potential benefits and commit ourselves to reducing FLW by at least 50 per cent, thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

Where does India stand in this global picture of FLW and how can the country help eliminate hunger and save the environment? The all-India post-harvest loss survey by NABCONS, 2022, reveals that the country suffers staggering food losses worth Rs 1.53 trillion (\$18.5 billion) with a loss of 12.5 million metric tons (MMT) of cereals, 2.11 MMT of oilseeds and 1.37 MMT of pulses. Around 49.9 MMT of horticultural crops are lost annually due to poor cold chain infrastructure, reducing both the availability of fresh produce and the income potential for farmers. The NABCONS survey does not estimate the wastage by the customer, but that too is likely to be significant given the waste at lavish weddings and other feasts.

While existing surveys primarily estimate quantitative losses, researchers at ICRIER-ADMI have tried to estimate quality losses, besides the quantity losses. A comprehensive survey of 1200 farmers was conducted across Punjab, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh for key crops such as paddy, wheat, soybean, and maize in 2022. The study revealed that at 15.34 per cent soybean has the highest post-harvest loss, followed by wheat at 7.87 per cent, paddy at 6.37 per cent, and maize at 5.95 per cent including quantity and quality losses. Such significant losses point to the urgent need for enhancing technological interventions across the value-chain to prevent food loss between harvest and retail. The study shows that food loss largely occurs during harvesting, threshing, drying and storage stages, predominantly due to low levels of mechanisation and inadequate logistics infrastructure.

Farmers who use combine harvesters, for instance, see a marked reduction in paddy losses compared to those relying on traditional manual methods. The study re-



CR Sasikumar

veals that overall loss in paddy drops to just 2.84 per cent if mechanisation in harvesting and drying is adopted at the farm. According to the All-India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) in 2019, only 4.4 per cent of cultivator households in India owned tractors, and a mere 5.3 per cent owned either power tillers, combine harvesters, or threshers. Small and marginal farmers, who constitute over 86 per cent of Indian agricultural households, often cannot afford to buy costly machines. For paddy, 97 per cent households use combine harvesters in Punjab, whereas in Bihar only 10 per cent paddy-producing households use combine harvesters. To promote farm mechanisation, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) can play a crucial role through group leasing arrangements and the 'uberisation' of farm machinery.

The availability of proper drying and storage infrastructure also plays an important role in reducing food losses. Traditional sun drying methods are fraught with risks, including the addition of foreign matters, uneven drying, and exposure to moisture, which can lead to mycotoxin contamination. Solar dryers and dehydrators offer a solution to reduce losses and extend the shelf-life for perishables. These green technologies are cost-effective for small-scale farmers, they are climate-friendly and need to be encouraged by appropriate policy formulation.

Furthermore, storage infrastructure remains inadequate in India. As per (ICSMR, 2021), post-harvest losses account for approximately 10 per cent of total food grain

Small and marginal farmers, who constitute over 86 per cent of Indian agricultural households, often cannot afford to buy costly machines. For paddy, 97 per cent households use combine harvesters in Punjab, whereas in Bihar only 10 per cent paddy-producing households use combine harvesters. To promote farm mechanisation, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) can play a crucial role through group leasing arrangements and the 'uberisation' of farm machinery.

production due to poor and inadequate storage infrastructure. Recently, the Government of India has launched a major grain storage plan. This initiative is part of a broader strategy aimed at modernising the agricultural system of India. The plan entails the expansion of storage capacity by 70 MMT over the next five years. If implemented properly, it holds the potential to reduce post-harvest losses at the storage level.

Mechanisation, enhanced storage, and efficient transportation systems are key areas where technology can make a difference. Yet, beyond technological solutions, policy support is critical to ensure that small and marginal farmers can access these technological changes. The Jute Packaging Material Act (JPMA, 1987) talks of using jute bags for packaging rice, and wheat grains. Even though jute is biodegradable, it is a water guzzler and a labour-intensive crop, and its use leads to frequent rodent attacks and pilferage in tropical climates. There is a need, therefore, to revisit the JPMA for an expansion in the use of airtight bags which can lower storage and transit losses.

In a country where climate change and malnutrition still pose a major challenge, it would be only wise to focus on reducing FLW. Reducing post-harvest losses is not just a matter of improving economic efficiency, but also providing food security to people while building resilience in our food systems. Thus, save people and save the planet.

Gulati is Distinguished Professor and Das is a Research Fellow at ICRIER. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"None of the candidates has said anything of substance about public services - why they matter, how they should be financed. None has dared to be contrite about failures in office and the succession of Tory prime ministers who were egregiously unfit for the role."

—THE GUARDIAN

## One election is a win-win

Frequent polls have led to voter fatigue, financial burden on government, uncertain policy environment



GOURAV VALLABH

INDIA IS A modern-day exemplar of democratic values. Elections are crucial to the democratic process. However, the country is always in election mode because of the existing staggered nature of polls. Politicians are diverted from their core duty of governing, and the system is severely strained, financially and administratively. The proposed reform of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) seeks to overcome these issues, drastically altering how elections are held and how governance can be streamlined in our country. This reform will not only reduce the financial burden on the government but also allow citizens to focus on their daily lives without the constant political upheaval.

A critical problem with the current electoral system is the distraction it creates for the political class and the electorate. Leaders often prioritise short-term political gains over long-term administration because elections are held somewhere in the country practically every few months. This ongoing political focus takes attention away from the greater purpose of national development, particularly in a country like India, where long-term initiatives and policies are essential for progress.

The relentless cycle of elections leaves little room for citizens to critically reassess or evolve their political ideologies. Just as they settle back into their daily lives after a municipal election, they are thrust into state assembly polls, followed soon after by Lok Sabha elections. This constant barrage keeps them locked into familiar voting patterns. The need for change is palpable, and ONOE could be the solution to break this cycle and allow for greater political reflection.

The financial strain of conducting multiple elections within a short time frame is a significant concern, with the overall election expenditure soaring. From Rs 9,000 crore in 1998, it has increased sixfold to about Rs 55,000 crore in 2019. The total estimated expenditure for the 2024 elections is expected to reach a staggering Rs 135 lakh crore, surpassing the spending in the 2020 US elections, which stood at Rs 12.1 lakh crore. In all state elections, the expected amount spent can go up to Rs 1.7 lakh crore (assuming 40 per cent over the general election) for one election cycle. This economic burden is a stark reminder of the need for reform. The government alone has spent more than Rs 15,000 crore to conduct the 2019 Lok Sabha election, a sharp increase from Rs 3,800 crore in 2014. Such exorbitant costs heavily burden public finances, diverting funds from critical areas like infrastructure, healthcare, and education. Studies suggest that by holding elections simultaneously, the government alone could significantly reduce these duplicate costs, potentially saving between Rs 7,500 and Rs 12,000 crore per election cycle.

The uncertainty caused by regular elections in the business climate is another often overlooked effect. Political unpredictability brought on by frequent elections shatters policy continuity, which makes companies hesitant to commit to long-term projects or expansion plans. Sectors that heavily depend

on labour and supply networks are especially susceptible to these disruptions. Election synchronisation would give businesses the stability they need to make long-term plans more confidently. This, in turn, would enhance economic growth and allow India to become a more attractive destination for both domestic and international investors.

Regular elections also strain the nation's security and administrative apparatus. Teachers, government workers, and security personnel are taken away from their primary duties to oversee the election process during election seasons. Public services like education become inefficient since schools are frequently closed to make room for voting booths. Additionally, law enforcement organisations are overburdened and concentrating more on election-related tasks than upholding public safety and internal security. A synchronised election cycle would relieve this pressure.

Another issue with the current electoral system is voter turnout. Voter turnout has decreased recently despite the significance of elections. Election turnout for the Lok Sabha in 2024 was 65.79 per cent, down from 67.40 per cent in 2019. Voter fatigue is evident in this reduction since residents are frequently asked to cast multiple ballots in state elections that are spaced out. Election participation would probably increase if ONOE is the possible solution of state-level concerns and general elections. According to historical data, election turnout tends to rise during simultaneous elections, as seen by the 1999 Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh elections, where turnout increased by 11.5 per cent. Aligning elections would ensure that citizens are more engaged in a single, unified electoral process.

A commonly expressed apprehension about ONOE is the possible exclusion of state-level concerns and groups. According to critics, simultaneous elections might divert attention from regional issues and favour national parties while marginalising local voices. Indian voters' previous voting patterns seem to indicate otherwise. In the 1989, 1991, and 1996 parastate elections in Tamil Nadu, voters showed that they could tell the difference between national and state elections by selecting different parties for the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Since national parties would have to handle regional issues alongside their own, ONOE could promote greater engagement with local issues instead of marginalising regional parties.

Conversely, across the globe, including Brazil, the Philippines, and Honduras, have adopted some form of simultaneous elections, demonstrating that this model is practical and effective. These nations have simultaneously seen the benefits of holding elections at multiple levels, including reduced costs, improved voter turnout, and more efficient governance. With its sizable electorate and intricate political structure, India stands to benefit much more from a system like this. Once put into practice, the improvements in budgetary discipline, political engagement, and governance would significantly exceed any practical difficulties.

India has continuously shown itself to be a creative and adaptable democracy. By adopting the revolutionary idea of ONOE, India can take a step towards becoming a fully developed country and a "Viksit Bharat", where governance is effective, responsive, and focused on the needs of the people rather than the demands of the election calendar.

The writer is a professor at XLRI and is with the BJP



RAJAT KATHURIA

## The day I opted out

An Olympian quit table tennis, I did too, but many don't have the option

IT IS A story that I have been wanting to tell for at least the last 35 years, and with a modicum of humility I might add. The humility is justifiable. An apocryphal quote, sometimes attributed to Winston Churchill, is a good beginning. It is said someone once remarked that Clement Attlee, one-time Prime Minister of Great Britain, was a modest man, to which Churchill is reported to have retorted, he had much to be modest about. My achievements in table tennis (TT) have been modest and I have understandably been diffident. The reason for being jolted out of this self-induced reveries is due to an insightful article ("Why did Archana choose academic over TT? Because she could", IE, August 27).

There is much to agree with the article based on my experience. But there is some disagreement as well I begin with the latter, but before that, let me state why I may be considered qualified to react to this article. I spent a good part of my five years in Delhi University while pursuing a Bachelor's and Master's in Economics on the TT table rather than in class. The days were spent playing tournaments or attending coaching stints at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala. I played two national finals, won a few national tournaments and represented the Commonwealth games, among others. I was

also ranked the number one player in the country for a brief period.

The year was 1987 and India was getting ready to host the World Table Tennis Championships at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in Delhi. I competed in the national tournament circuit in the run-up to the 1987 World Championships and finished the year as the number three player in the country. To my shock and horror, I was not selected to play the Championships in Delhi, my home at that time, perhaps because some felt that having finished a Master's degree while donning spectacles for myopia, I would unnecessarily consume a slot that could be given to a promising young player who prioritised TT over academics. I was all of 24. The pursuit of a Master's degree had signalled that TT was my hobby. Nothing could be further from the truth, but it was a convenient excuse. I was devastated and immediately retired from the sport. Indian newspapers on February 9, 1987, including this one, carried the story of my quitting. It was big news, especially since there was limited portage on sports in those days.

Thirty-five years on, I am truly and humbly grateful that I was dropped from the Indian team and forced to choose an alternative career. I went on to do a PhD in Economics and have been engaged in teaching and research following that red letter day

in 1987. I made the choice not because I could, but because I was forced to. There have been others, too.

The article in *The Indian Express* offers valuable insights. If you have a choice between academics and sport in India and if the prospects of your sporting ambition are challenged either by the competition or by the ecosystem, chances are you will opt for a switch to academics. Olympian Archana Kambhakar quit TT because she could exercise an option but there are several who cannot and are left to the mercy of the sport and the insidious system that governs it. The national sports federations that are not in the limelight, like cricket or badminton, continue to be run as personal fiefdoms of their leaders, even after their terms are over. The courts have had to intervene through a Committee of Administrators (CoA) mandated to clean up the system. But the culture of sporting federations is such that the system returns to business as usual once the CoA demits office.

The article also presents evidence that medal winners in India are largely under-educated. Sports demands full-time attention; talent or inspiration is only one per cent of the story. Even after 99 per cent perspiration, the outcome is not guaranteed. Those who can, therefore, choose alternative careers. The US,

which has dominated the Olympics in several sports, has a well-codified sporting culture in universities from where players go on to represent and win medals for the country. I remember my PhD advisor in the US, himself a sport enthusiast, telling me that he preferred to watch university games because the intensity of rivalries and the attendant competition was a heady mix. The National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) that organises college sports events in the US is a happy hunting ground that routinely produces world champions. In India, who can forget the legendary St Stephen's versus Hindu cricket matches that produced rivalry of legendary proportions and many distinguished Indian cricketers to boot. The Rohinton Baria trophy for university cricket was coveted and would be the envy of the Khelo India system that has more or less replaced university-level contests. I'm not sure which one is better, but Khelo India has taken over the task of reviving sports in India at all levels. Let's hope it doesn't ignore investing in a back-up for players who can't or don't make it.

Kathuria is dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of Economics at Shiv Nadar University. He represented India in TT and has been a national selector. Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### FOR DIGNITY OF ALL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Shilpa stain' (IE, September 28). Shopkeepers have loyal customers with whom they have developed trust through regular dealings. The display of names is unnecessary and may create fissures among sections of society. In the state of Punjab has been and is a peaceful state. No effort should be made to disturb the prevailing peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. Rahul Gandhi and the Congress high command must ensure that the bond of mutual respect is strengthened in the states they are ruling and contribute their might in other states too so that all citizens live a dignified life.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

### DELHI'S AIR QUALITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A last-minute plan' (IE, September 28). Come winter, millions in Delhi brace themselves for the worst, as the city's air quality plummets drastically. It is reassuring that the government's initiatives to combat this problem have resulted in a 35 per cent fall in the city's average AQI since 2016. During the winter months, however, when smoke from stubble burning

in surrounding states and the bursting of firecrackers around Diwali hover over the city's skies, the AQI crashes dramatically. Without people's cooperation, the government's action plan to address its chronic problem will have only limited success. Lack of coordination among all levels of the administration is another significant challenge.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

### REAL LAND REFORM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Some hard land questions' (IE, September 28). The nature of land holdings in India has long been a bone of contention. The Green Revolution had its main adversary in small and fragmented holdings. Added to this is the fact that landholders of vast tracts of land put their holding on lease. When compensation arrives for crop failure, it is credited to their account, leaving the actual cultivator at the mercy of the landlord. Digitisation is beneficial in making policy decisions easier. But ground change can happen only when cooperatives are strengthened and farmers are educated. Women's participation and division of profits need to be the catalysts in the entire process.

Ramanpreet, via email

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[ OUR TAKE ]

## War clouds all over West Asia

The international community must force a ceasefire before Israel does a Gaza in Lebanon

Israel's actions in Lebanon, including the killing of veteran Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, have taken West Asia well past the brink it has teetered on for almost a year since the brazen terrorist attacks by Hamas on October 7. Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's threat to Iran, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's pledge to avenge the killing of Nasrallah and the overall escalation in the region, including by Tehran-backed proxies, are all ominous developments. It is worrying that Netanyahu ordered the strike on Lebanon that killed Nasrallah while in New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly, where many countries have called for a cessation of hostilities. Israel continues to thumb its nose at the world community while continuing on the reckless and wanton path of escalation and destruction chosen by Netanyahu, while its strongest backer in the West, the United States, has turned a complete blind eye to the country's actions while supplying it with the weapons of mass destruction that have wreaked carnage in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

The policy of assassinations targeting extremist groups in Lebanon and Gaza may lead to short-term gains for the Israeli military but organisations such as Hezbollah and Hamas are not oriented around any one individual leader, and it is anybody's guess if killing one leader can truly make a difference in the long run. Israel's actions will lead to a hardening of attitudes among Arab States, even those who had signed on for the Abraham Accords, because of fears about these measures giving a boost to radical and extremist forces. These actions, especially the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, also limit the options available to Israel, including its new reformist leadership, which may be forced to respond. The developments in Lebanon could even end up hampering efforts to revive the Iranian nuclear deal, on which there have been talks in recent days.

All this is happening when the UN General Assembly is meeting and days after the world body overwhelmingly passed a resolution demanding an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine within the next year. The consequences for the entire world will be catastrophic if Netanyahu's actions lead to the situation in West Asia spiralling further out of control. World leaders must intervene with Israel and force a ceasefire before Netanyahu does a Gaza in Lebanon.

## DMK fosters dynastic politics with son rise

The decision of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the party in office in Tamil Nadu, to elevate Udhayanidhi Stalin, son of CM MK Stalin, as deputy CM, institutionalises the much-talked-about succession plan in the outfit. Udhayanidhi, 46, a first-time legislator entered active politics just four years ago after an indifferent career as an actor in Tamil cinema. His controversial remarks on Sanatana Dharma last year, interpreted as in line with the DMK's ideological orientation, had got him national attention. However, the fast-tracking of his political career smacks of dynastic politics in a party that claims to be the electoral vanguard of the Dravidian Movement. Udhayanidhi's appointment—a representative of the third generation of the M Karunanidhi clan—comes at a time when the DMK is celebrating its 75th year. Under founder CM Annadurai, the party projected a collective leadership ideal. Annadurai's death in 1969, two years after he led the party to office, changed the intra-party dynamics and led to the concentration of power in the hands of Karunanidhi, who became CM by outsmarting other senior leaders. He encouraged his family to join politics. His preference for son Stalin to succeed him saw the marginalisation of Vaiko, then seen as best suited to lead after Karunanidhi, causing the DMK to split in 1994. The next challenge to Stalin's elevation came from elder brother, MK Alagiri, who was expelled from the party in 2014.

There seems to be little challenge to Udhayanidhi's rise within the DMK now—the extended Karunanidhi dynasty controls the party's finances and the party lacks pan-state leaders. However, the transition could face hiccups in the form of the DMK's allies insisting on a role in government and more electoral space—the rumblings have started. The entry of popular actor Vijay—who has announced his decision to contest the 2026 assembly polls—could also reset political equations in Tamil Nadu.

## Crime stats miss plight of West Bengal women

In terms of the state's rate of decline in crimes against women and gender-sensitive policing, the picture is disconcerting

It has now been more than a month since the rape-murder of a young doctor at her workplace, RG Kar Medical College and Hospital—a government hospital in Kolkata—hit the headlines and the conscience of an entire nation. Investigation is still underway, but there is no doubt that the victim was subjected to sexual violence. This has renewed debates about how safe West Bengal is for women and has led to widespread popular protests, putting the state government—led by the only female chief minister in the country until recently and one for whom protesting crime against women has been a rallying cry throughout her political career—on the defensive. Perhaps, this is why one has heard an apology of sorts by voices sympathetic to the government, that this was an unfortunate but isolated incident, and that Bengal is relatively safe for women compared to the rest of the country.

The statistics cited in support are based on data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Indeed, a cursory glimpse at the data gives the impression that per capita crime rate in Bengal is below the national average and has remained so over the last decade. This is true of almost any and every crime—be it severe crimes like murder or rape, or

less extreme ones like assault of women, and even for all categories of crime. In fact, the gap between Bengal and India is highest for rape.

But then, a closer look beyond average crime rates suggest that Bengal is far from being among the best-performing states. If we rank the 31 states for which we have the latest NCRB data (2022) from the best to the worst for rates per capita, Bengal's rank is 19 (with Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh being the worst performers) and 24 for per capita murder.

More importantly, we should also look at growth rates in crime, instead of just their levels, to understand the true picture. After all, in a given year, a state's crime records reflect a number of factors that prevent these crimes from occurring and being reported. If a state is lower or higher than the national average in a particular crime, it is due to many factors, the credit or blame for which cannot be assigned to the present state of policing and governance alone. It reflects the effectiveness and social norms which tend to change slowly—for example, Bengal has a distinguished history of social movements in support of women's rights going back well into the past. In contrast, the change in the rate of a specific crime is where one can make a more credible attribution of what is happening at present and where things are headed. For instance, if a crime is going up or

down with respect to the national average, we can ask if this change is due to factors directly controlled by the government (like policing infrastructure) or driven by other trends affecting the likelihood of such crimes happening or being reported. Observing changes makes it possible to see how the situation shifted, no matter where it started.

Since 2017, more detailed NCRB data on different types of sex crimes became available. Since then, India's crime rate relating to all crimes against women or severe crimes like murder and rape (including rape and murder) has been coming down and has continued the downward trend till 2022. It is interesting to note that Bengal, too, displayed a downward trend in all these categories. Not just that, Bengal shows a sharper decline in two of these three categories. Guess which is the category in which Bengal's rate of decline has been less than the national rate of decline? It is rape.

The rate of decline in rapes in West Bengal, at just 0.35%, is much worse than the national average of 7%. Could this be because India had much more room for improvement compared to West Bengal, to begin with? But then, West Bengal continues to look much better in handling gender-neutral crimes like murder during this period despite being much below the India average six years ago. Clearly, the trend in crimes against women in Bengal is worrisome.

Now, while considering sex crimes



Not only is the superficial reading of NCRB data to suggest West Bengal is safe for women misleading, reporting bias in the state has worsened

against women, one cannot ignore the potential role of reporting bias. Many women hesitate to report sexual violence to male police officers, perhaps due to a combination of social stigma, humiliation, shame, or reluctance of male police officers to register crimes against women in patriarchal societies. Indeed, recent research shows that women police officers are much more likely to register FIRs in cases of gender-based violence compared to male police officers.

A large part of gender-based police reforms in the aftermath of the 2012 gang-rape murder in Delhi has been geared towards making police stations more accessible for women. It is in light of these possibilities that we should look at the reported numbers for sexual crimes in Bengal. A19,522, the number of women in the official police in the state today is half of that in Andhra Pradesh (35,599) and one-third of Maharashtra's (29,406) and more than 30% lower than even Bihar's (27,795). On per-capita metrics, Bengal is ranked 34th among 37 states, with one officer serving more than 5,000 women. And this is not just driven by a smaller size of the overall police force. Even within the existing force, the share of women is much lower in Bengal (9%) compared to the India average (12%). The reason for the prime assigned in the current case carried on with his policing assignment despite an assault complaint from his former wife's fam-

ily. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent of reporting bias, we compared information on crime against women reported in the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) with that from NCRB. The NFHS reports "physical violence inflicted by people other than husband". If we compare this with NCRB numbers on crime against women, we expect that data from the two sources to roughly align. In 2005, Bengal was close to the India average in both NCRB and NFHS, in terms of per capita incidences. By 2015, it was still close to the India average in NFHS but well below in NCRB. By 2023, this gap in NCRB had increased further even when NFHS continued to indicate that Bengal is close to the India average. The comparison not only suggests that Bengal has a high reporting bias in the official records on crime against women, but also this bias has increased over time.

On top of our argument that the view based on a superficial reading of NCRB data suggesting Bengal as safe for women is misleading, evidence on extensive and worsening reporting bias in the state suggests that what NCRB data reveals could well be the tip of the iceberg.

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## It is too early to write Hezbollah's obituary

Hours after Israeli airstrikes in Beirut killed Hassan Nasrallah, the supreme of the world's most lethal non-State militia, Hezbollah, the organisation defiantly vowed to "continue the holy war against the enemy". The billion-dollar question is whether it can absorb the tremendous blow of the loss of its co-founder and undisputed leader for 32 years and maintain its stature as the deadliest menace on Israel's doorstep.

To kill a snake, cut off its head. So goes a oft-cited maxim in warfare and counterterrorism discourse. The chessboard analogy, wherein if the king is checkmated, it means the end of the game and the defeat of the opponent, also points to the same logic. Eliminating the principal leader of the adversary has for ages been considered as a national strategy for blunting and deterring a major threat to one's security.

In contemporary times, this approach has been implemented by Israel and the United States (US) in their long campaigns against Islamist terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State (ISIS). Whenever a high-value target from these outfits has been taken out, Israel and the US have announced it with dramatic fanfare and declared it would significantly degrade the evil perpetrated by these organisations.

Yet, decapitation of jihadist organisations has not been decisive or very effective in terminating their violent "holy wars". The American scholar Jenna Jordan examined a database of 1,276 cases of leadership assassinations between 1970 and 2016 and found that Right-wing Islamist groups are among the most resilient terrorist outfits. Owing to certain inbuilt characteristics, jihadist organisations survive what might be a coup de grace for other types of terrorist groups.

Firstly, Islamist outfits tend to be "bureaucratised" with diversified structures, division of roles and responsibilities based on specialisation among fighters and commanders, and relatively decentralised in operations. In the case of Hamas and Hezbollah, even though they are hierarchical and built around cults of personality of their top leaders, they have autonomous cellular fighting units with well-defined mandates and independent decision-making authority.

Secondly, Islamist terrorist movements have legitimacy in their local communities and areas. Jordan argues that terrorist groups with greater "communal support" increase their chances of survival in the face of external shocks like leadership decapitation. Hezbollah is embedded into the daily lives of more than 1.6 million Lebanese Shias and draws from among them some 100,000 or more trained fighters. It is a cultural and social service provider as well as a political platform whose candidates compete in elections and wield considerable influence in Lebanon's national affairs. Such socially interwoven Islamist groups are not easy to vanquish through decapitation of leaders.

Thirdly, jihadist terrorist outfits institu-

tionalise their ideologies among adherents and have fanatical belief structures that seep into generations of followers. In the case of Hezbollah, the history of civil war, sectarian divisions and competition for resources and power in Lebanon, as well as the mythology of Shia and Muslim victimhood and resistance against oppression, have mainstreamed its ideology among large segments of Lebanese society.

Nasrallah was undoubtedly a charismatic cleric and reinforcer of this ideology. But even after his death, Shias, mobilised along deeply held religious narratives about shared suffering, sacrifice and struggle, will remain radicalised and willing to pick up guns.

The hand of Iran, which fed and propelled Nasrallah to rule over a de facto "State within a State" in Lebanon, is also there to revive Hezbollah's ideological spirits after the demoralising losses of not only its chief but also its entire senior leadership under relentless Israeli attacks.

The defiant remarks of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, after Nasrallah's killing—that "the fate of this region will be determined by the resistance with Hezbollah at the top"—indicate that Tehran will try to resuscitate its main proxy irrespective of decapitation of its leaders. It is worth recalling that Iran increased its aid and assistance for Hezbollah after Israel assassinated Nasrallah's predecessor, Abbas al-Musawi, in 1992. Especially because of the sponsorship of a key radical State like Iran, the chances of Hamas and Hezbollah surviving and continuing to vex Israel remain, despite their top leaderships being systematically wiped out.

Even jihadist organisations lacking any State financing and shelter have not been easy to suppress through decapitations of leaders. Al Qaeda's so-called "emirs", Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, were killed by US special forces in 2011 and by a US drone strike in 2022 respectively. ISIS's much vaunted "caliph", Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi, were liquidated in targeted attacks by the US in 2019 and 2022.

These operations did stymie Al Qaeda's and ISIS's Islamist supremacist messaging and operational readiness. But their franchise model and global propaganda channels have ensured revival in newer avatars in different corners of the world. The threat of yet another spectacular Al Qaeda or ISIS attack somewhere or the other is as real today as it was in the heydays of Bin Laden or Baghdadi.

Given these sobering facts, it may be too soon to write Hezbollah's obituary. Nasrallah and his core team are gone but their mentality, ideology, social base, and international support mechanisms are intact. Targeted assassinations are politically popular and favoured in counterterrorism policymaking, but they do not get to the bottom of the problem which can keep festering and breeding fresh waves of terror.

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[ BV NAGARATHNA ] JUDGE, SUPREME COURT

Rights of children living with disabilities must be given the widest possible realisation in theory and practice

[ STRAIGHTFORWARD ]  
Shashi Shekhar

## Time to repose faith in ideals of the Mahatma

October evenings in South Africa are a treat for the mind, body, and soul. It was on one such evening many years ago in a brightly lit convention hall, back from a pleasant evening walk, that I got to be part of a discussion with Ahmed Kathrada, a South African politician and anti-apartheid activist of renown. Kathrada's ideas had taken shape and matured during the apartheid days. I was eager to learn his views on the then fledgling democracy, the condition of the Indian diaspora in South Africa, and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's work in that country. I asked Kathrada why the South Africans were occasionally opposed to Gandhi's ideals. Don't South Africans feel he is their friend?

Kathrada countered: "Tell me a place where Gandhi didn't encounter opposition. He was vilified when he was alive and, even decades after his death, if people are making a career out of denouncing him, it means he's still relevant." According to Kathrada, with a rise in the chorus of opposition, the curiosity of the new generation to know more about Gandhi and his ideas will also grow. "They will discover him in greater detail and will feel more inspired by him," he said. Gandhi was considered the predecessor of Nelson Mandela in South Africa till recently.

We are celebrating the Mahatma's birth anniversary the day after. Around this time over the past couple of years, there have been attempts to mislead "long live the man Gandhi" hashtags viral on social media. In these moments when I feel ashamed, I am reminded of Kathrada and I become quiet. Kathrada was right, the resilience of Gandhi and his ideas make him immortal. Godse is known solely for his "atheistic" assassination as no independent identity. Gandhi is a global giant. On January 30, 1948, he had passed away from natural causes, too, he would still have been a towering global personality for what he achieved in 78-odd years of his life. It's not for nothing that every global leader who visits India or our leaders who travel to foreign lands always invoke Gandhi and pay their respects to the Mahatma. Even last month when Prime Minister Nar-

endra Modi visited Ukraine, he paid respects at the Gandhi statue in Kyiv's Peace Park and wrote on X: "The ideals of Bapu are universal and give hope to millions. May we all follow the path he showed humanity."

Modi's Kyiv visit was aimed to bring the disastrous Russia-Ukraine conflict now in its third year to an end. Brand Gandhi solidly represents India globally. This is why voices of sanity in Bangladesh invoked Gandhi when Hindus were being brutally targeted in their country. Bapu holds a special place in the Bengali psyche. Noakhali in Bengal being torn by communal violence just before Independence. People who had lived together for centuries became bloodthirsty rivals overnight. On November 7, 1946, Gandhi arrived in Noakhali with a message of peace. His magic inspired the Muslims to contribute to restoring the temples they had damaged during the riots.

A couple of days later, Gandhi was in Kolkata, when a mob surrounded him chanting, "Gandhi go back". Gandhi told the crowd: "I have come to serve Hindus and Muslims alike. I am going to place myself under your protection. You are welcome to turn against me. I have nearly reached the end of life's journey...but if you again go mad, I will not be a living witness to it."

His efforts saved Kolkata and the newspapers gladly reported it as a "calcutta miracle" and termed Gandhi as a "one-man army". However, an irony of our times is that while Bangladesh is invoking Gandhi, India is witnessing his reverse.

On May 19, people celebrated Godse's anniversary in Gwalior. The news of the celebration grabbed headlines the next day. Whether it is a tragedy of our times, or some vested interests bent on exploiting fault lines, is anybody's guess. No matter how thick the envelope of falsity may be, humanity is synonymous with the relentless endeavour towards the bright light of truth. Like Kathrada, I have firm faith in Gandhi's eternal relevance.

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