



A defeat foretold

Maoists must abandon armed struggle and enter the democratic process

In yet another blow to the Maoists, 31 of their cadre, including senior members, were killed in a firefight with security forces on Friday in Abujmadh, the unsurveyed and forested stretch in south Chhattisgarh that is considered the last bastion of the insurgents. Scores of left-wing extremist cadres have been killed in “encounters” in Chhattisgarh and other States in recent months, as coordinated actions by various paramilitary forces and the police have intensified following significant attacks by the Maoists in recent years. The security forces are cognisant of the fact that while the Maoists have likely lost much of their clout and presence across jungles in central and eastern India, their remaining fire-power poses a threat in places where they remain active. The intensified campaigns, supported fully by the Union Home Ministry, have dealt blow after blow to the insurgents, leading to numerous surrenders. It should also be noted that the setbacks to the Maoists would not have been possible if the people in tribal areas, where the insurgents have mounted a guerrilla struggle, had adhered to the Maoist cause. After years of putting tribal people in India’s remotest areas in harm’s way, the Maoists are now facing fatigue from them, as well as alienation.

There are several problems with Maoist theory and political practice that suggest that the weakening of the insurgency was always on the cards. Similar insurgencies in Peru, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Colombia also failed. For the Indian Maoists, an over-dependence on militarism to pursue political aims and the subordination of political-ideological work, resulting in a spiral of violence, have turned away potential supporters, mostly poor tribal people. The adherence to an anachronistic ideology of Maoism in a diverse country where the terrain and political system bear little resemblance to 1920s China combined with an inability to recognise the resilience of electoral democratic institutions and the nature of the Indian state are other factors. These issues have led the Maoists to neglect the opportunities available within Indian democracy, despite its flaws. In an unsigned pamphlet released in August to mark 20 years of the movement since the formation of the CPI (Maoist), following the merger of the two strongest remnants of the Naxalite movement, the Maoists lamented their weakening and setbacks but doubled down on their ideological intent. This shows their unwillingness to learn from their own experiences. For the sake of the tribal people, whose interests they claim to represent, the Maoists must abandon arms and enter the democratic process.

A learning curve

The outcomes of the PM Internship Scheme’s pilot project need monitoring

On October 3, without much fanfare, the Centre launched an online portal that will serve as the platform for implementing one of the major announcements in the Budget for India’s unemployed, and to a significant extent, unemployable youth. The portal, which operationalises the PM Internship Scheme – part of a five-scheme package designed to spur job creation and impart skills to 4.1 crore youth over five years – will match companies willing to offer year-long on-the-job training stints with young people striving to find a job. In principle, the mainly Centre-funded scheme makes sense for a country with a large, young workforce which is also grappling with distressing levels of youth unemployment. Apart from bridging the gap between the education provided to students and the real-world practical skills desired by employers, well-known firms could offer some form of certification at the end of the internship, providing comfort to prospective employers reviewing candidates for jobs. This could address a key question that employers often grapple with: “They can get the job, but can they get the job done?”

Under a pilot project, the first batch of 1.25 lakh interns will begin stints with voluntarily participating companies on December 2. While the government has consulted industry bodies before and after announcing the scheme, it is rightly cautious before scaling it up to meet the target of creating one crore internships by March 2029. The lessons learned from the pilot project will inform the final scheme design. Some insights will be apparent in the initial process of matching applicants to companies, but the full scope of outcomes can only be assessed after December 2025, when the interns re-enter the job market. Along the way, dropout rates and grievances will need to be monitored closely. A few features pose challenges, such as the plan to place interns within or near their district, and if that is not feasible, within their State. It is unclear how this will play out in less industrialised and less services-oriented States such as Bihar, which are likely to attract higher numbers of applicants. Just five States account for over half of India’s manufacturing output, and youth unemployment is higher in States with lower business presence. Apart from shop floor skills, the scheme also needs to incorporate digital and soft skills that are vital for the modern workplace. The pilot project’s trajectory requires a diligent and candid evaluation without a self-congratulatory approach, ensuring that intended outcomes are eventually met.

In an essay in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in October 2023, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan wrote, “...Although the Middle East remains beset with perennial challenges, the region is quieter than it has been for decades... The Israeli-Palestinian situation is tense, particularly in the West Bank, but in the face of serious frictions, we have de-escalated crises in Gaza.” A few days after the piece was sent to press, on October 7, Hamas launched its deadliest attack in Israel, killing at least 1,200 people and taking some 250 people hostage, triggering the latest spell of war in the Israel-Palestine conflict. A year later, West Asia (or the Middle East, as Mr. Sullivan calls it) is deadlier today than it has been in decades.

Mr. Sullivan’s October 2023 prognosis was not entirely unfounded if the region is seen from an American perspective. The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020 by Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, announced a new age of Arab-Israel partnership. Saudi Arabia was in an advanced stage of normalising ties with Israel, as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman himself put it. At the G20 Summit in Delhi in September 2023, U.S. President Joe Biden announced an ambitious economic corridor that sought to connect India’s western coast to Europe through the Persian Gulf, Jordan, and Israel. But what Mr. Sullivan, the Arabs, and the Israelis overlooked was the Palestine question.

Two narratives

Israel believed that it had established a new status quo – occupation without consequences. The Arabs believed that the Palestine issue had lost its geopolitical currency and that they could go ahead with formalising their decades-long back-room relationship with Israel. The U.S. wanted to bring the Sunni Arabs and the Israelis, two pillars of its West Asia strategy, closer in its bid to reshape West Asia and isolate Iran. But by carrying out a murderous attack in Israel, Hamas not only torpedoed this status quo, but also triggered a chain of events that led to a wider regional conflict, reinforcing the old argument that there will not be peace and stability in West



REUTERS



Stanly Johny

This is a conflict loop where no side is deterring its rival. With no way to break out of the loop, Israel chose to climb up the escalation ladder

Asia unless the Palestine question is addressed.

But Israel has a different narrative. It has always sought to delink Palestinian militarism from its occupation of the Palestinian territories. Before October 7, Israel had been treating Palestinian violence as a security nuisance. But after the Hamas attack, the first large-scale one in Israel proper since 1948, the narrative shifted. Now, Israel is fighting an “existential war” against terror. Israel marched to Gaza with fire and fury. Over the past 12 months, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have killed more than 41,000 Palestinians (more than 110 every day) and injured nearly 1,00,000 Palestinians. Nearly the whole population of Gaza (2.3 million) has been displaced.

Octopus doctrine

As the onslaught on Gaza began, Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Lebanese militia group, opened a “support front” in Israel’s north. Israel expanded the war, defying pressure from the U.S., by doubling down on its assault on Hezbollah and taking the war to Iran by attacking its embassy complex in Damascus. In retaliation, Iran launched direct attacks against Israel. Now, Israel is fighting a three-tier regional war in West Asia.

Israel has different objectives at each tier, which collectively make for its strategy to alter the balance of power in West Asia to further its advantage. At the bottom tier, Israel went to Gaza with two declared objectives – to destroy Hamas and secure the release of hostages. In the middle, it wants to push Hezbollah from the border region of Lebanon and stop the Shia militia from launching rockets into Israel so that the displaced residents of the Upper Galilee region can return to their homes. At the top, it wants to weaken Iran, its main regional rival. Israel sees the conflict, as the former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett put it, as a war against a rival octopus. Iran is the head of the octopus and the militias (Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, Hashad al-Shabi, etc.) are the tentacles. In the three-tier war, Israel wants to destroy or degrade the tentacles and weaken the octopus and thereby reshape West Asia. Is this an achievable goal?

After 12 months of fighting in Gaza, which has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007 and has been besieged by Israel since October 7, 2023, Israel is yet to meet its objectives in the 365 sq. km enclave, sandwiched between the Mediterranean Sea and Israel proper. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants to obliterate Hamas, but now even the IDF says this is not an achievable objective. More than 100 hostages, many of them believed to be dead, are still in Hamas’s captivity. Hezbollah says it will not stop firing rockets into Israel unless Israel ceases fire in Gaza. Israel cannot do this unless it meets its goals in Gaza.

Mr. Netanyahu chose to expand the war to Lebanon not because he is achieving his

objectives, but because he is far from doing so. Granted that Israel’s back-to-back attacks on Hezbollah, including its killing of Hassan Nasrallah, perhaps the second most influential figure in Iran’s axis after Ayatollah Khamenei, was a huge setback for both Hezbollah and Iran. When Hezbollah was in shock after the killing of its leader, Israel launched a ground invasion of Lebanon. Here, Israel faces two questions. First, will the decapitation of Hezbollah’s leadership help Israel finish the war in Gaza? Second, will the decapitation of Hezbollah’s leadership help Israel defeat Hezbollah in Lebanon? The answer to the first question is an outright no. The second question will be answered in the coming weeks, months, or years.

History suggests decapitation hardly works in destroying or deterring militias. Nasrallah took over Hezbollah after Israel killed the group’s co-founder, Abbas al-Musawi. That did not stop Hezbollah from becoming what it is today: the most powerful non-state militia in the region. Israel killed two of Hamas’s founding leaders in 2004. But that did not stop Hamas from driving the Israelis out of the enclave in 2005, capturing the territory in 2007, and carrying out the cross-border attack on October 7 last year. If Israel has not destroyed Hamas in the besieged Gaza in 12 months, how is it going to stop Hezbollah from firing rockets from Lebanon? After Nasrallah was killed, Hezbollah has launched hundreds of rockets into Israel.

The Iran question

This takes us to the third problem: Iran. The IDF has great firepower. Israel has proved in the past that it can carry out pinpointed attacks inside Iran, which shows the deep penetration of its intelligence in the Islamic Republic. Israel is set to carry out a decisive attack in Iran, in retaliation for the October 1 ballistic missile attacks by the Iranians. But will that deter Iran from launching another attack or supporting the axis? If it doesn’t, what Israel, Iran, and the region as a whole will get is a shooting match between the two most powerful actors of West Asia. If Iran’s already porous deterrence is weakened further in the shooting match, there is a high possibility that Iran will change its nuclear doctrine. Israel does not have a clear endgame vis-à-vis Iran, unless there is a regime change in Tehran.

This is a conflict loop where no side is deterring its rival. With no way to break out of the loop, Israel chose to climb up the escalation ladder. To dial down the heat in the region, there has to first be a ceasefire in Gaza. For long-term stability, the Palestine question needs to be addressed. Israel is ready for neither now; it is seeking to reshape West Asia in its favour instead. The last time a country tried to do so was the U.S. And the world’s most powerful nation failed.

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Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and a travesty of justice

Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, the leader of the sect Dera Sacha Sauda, who is a convicted rapist and murderer, was released on parole days before the Haryana Assembly elections. He was released on parole in the run-up to the Punjab Assembly elections in 2022 and the Rajasthan Assembly elections in 2023 as well. Singh has come out on parole 15 times. Several of these occasions have coincided with some election. In all, Singh has spent more than 250 days of his sentence outside jail.

Convicted for rape and murder

The ostensible reason for his release is that, as a leader of a sect, he commands pockets of support and influence beyond Haryana and Punjab, in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, in an estimated 30 Assembly constituencies. His political clout aside, the fact that he has been convicted for raping two female disciples and also for murder by a special Central Bureau of Investigation court needs to be reiterated.

It is a travesty that such special treatment is made available to convicts such as him, especially since journalist Ramchander Chhatrapati had put his life in danger by exposing Singh and his crimes. Chhatrapati’s newspaper, *Poora Sach* (The Whole Truth), had carried an anonymous letter by a Dera follower, who had accused Singh of rape. In 2002, Chhatrapati was shot dead at



Hamid Dabholkar

State working committee member with MANS, an anti-superstition movement in Maharashtra

That the bureaucracy-political class nexus has gone out of its way to facilitate a murder and rape convict is a poor reflection of our society

his residence. It was only in 2019 that Singh was convicted for his role in the murder. This means that it took nearly 17 years for Chhatrapati’s son, Anshul Chhatrapati, to battle several odds to obtain justice. That the bureaucracy-political class nexus has gone out of its way to facilitate a murder and rape convict after all these years of struggle is a poor reflection of our society and raises disturbing questions.

The role of political parties and the ECI

The first question relates to the role of political parties. The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime in Haryana has been unapologetic and brazen about the decision to grant parole. It seems to suggest that due procedure has been followed for the parole to be granted and that is all that matters. While the Congress in the Opposition objected to the grant of parole, the sad reality is that the previous Congress leadership’s views on the matter were no different from the views of the current regime. These parties must take their cue from former Prime Ministers, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh, who showed courage in allowing the rule of law to take its course on the matter of conviction. Parties should not stoop so low as to seek political support through someone who has been convicted of heinous crimes such as murder and rape.

The role of the Election Commission of India (ECI) also comes under scrutiny. Mr. Anshul Chhatrapati had sought the intervention of the ECI, urging it to direct the Haryana government to cancel the parole application. He had insisted that the granting of parole ahead of the Assembly elections would be a violation of democratic values. It is hard to believe that the ECI has not taken note of the curious pattern of paroles given to Singh before specific elections.

The courts had played an important role in bringing justice in cases related to Singh – from taking suo moto cognisance of the letters by anonymous victims to ensuring that the cases were properly heard and punishment meted out. The hope is that the judiciary will again take a proactive role in preventing this travesty of justice being played out in the form of paroles being handed out liberally to Singh.

My father, Narendra Dabholkar, a rationalist who lost his life in fighting against forces promoting superstition, used to emphasise that the war against superstition, irrational practices, and crimes had to be waged not over decades but over centuries. As Singh’s saga – the crimes committed by him and the punishment meted out to him – completes nearly a quarter of a century, we need to show solidarity and wish more power to those in the fight such as Mr. Anshul Chhatrapati.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A mature decision

India’s decision to participate in the SCO summit in Pakistan is laudable (“Pak. visit is for SCO meet, not to discuss bilateral ties: Jaishankar”, October 6). This is a fine example of how a country should do what serves its own interests as well as the interests of the region, while keeping personal rivalries aside. India is showing its true commitment to multilateralism.

Kirti Wadhawan

Kanpur

A sad state of affairs

It is distressing that the Supreme Court has to intervene on issues that

belong to the domain of the executive (“Caste in jail,” Oct. 5). There have also been other instances where the judiciary has pulled up the executive for its failure to abide by the Constitution. This is a sad commentary on our governments.

Ravi Mathur

Noida

Bizarre and dangerous

The legislators have set a terrible precedent (“Tribal MLAs in Maharashtra jumped off building in protest”, Oct. 5). Legislators are expected to discuss issues in the legislature and come up with solutions. If they are not heard, they

must persevere. What kind of message are they sending to the public by adopting such a dangerous form of protest? Taking a cue from them, citizens too may resort to extreme forms of protest. Lawmakers need to learn to behave properly in public if they want our respect.

Kosaraju Chandramouli

Hyderabad

Tensions in West Asia

If Israel targets Iran’s nuclear sites and oil refineries, it could lead to a disruption of the global oil markets (“Israel expands its bombardment in Lebanon as tens of the thousands flee”, Oct. 6). As India is a

major importer of oil from West Asia, increased costs could have a substantial impact on our economy. Though U.S. President Joe Biden has warned Israel against attacking Iran’s nuclear facilities, Israel has shown no intention of holding back. Many oil-rich countries are subservient to the American regime, which could further complicate the geopolitical landscape. Israel’s pursuits have yielded no tangible benefit for either the regime or the peace process in West Asia.

Rajesh Hiremath

Bengaluru

When the French President called for an arms embargo,

the Israeli Prime Minister slammed him. The speed at which Israel is eliminating Hamas and Hezbollah leaders indicates that it is not interested in truce. It has placed a ban on the UN Secretary-General from visiting the country. It has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians. Where is the collective conscience of Israelis? For less grave acts, nations have deposed political leaders. Is it not time for the world to call on the people of Israel for a regime change?

Hemachandra Basappa

Bengaluru

End of an era

Vehicles on the road have

risen manifold (“End of the line for Kolkata’s trams”, Oct. 6). Separate tram tracks are occupying precious space on our streets. We may be sentimentally attached to trams, but they are no longer the desired mode of transport anywhere.

V. Lakshmanan

Tirupur



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100 days completed, but the work has just begun

With great responsibility comes an obligation to deliver what is best for our youth and to ensure their futures are bright, productive, and successful. In just 100 days, our government is well on its way to fulfilling its responsibility of making India a global skilling hub and setting an example of excellence at scale through our comprehensive skilling roadmap. I am fortunate to have the additional responsibility of being a Minister of State for Education, and the synergies between education and skilling for livelihoods are significant. There have been many highlights over the last 100 days, but from our nation's perspective, the work of being a skilling superpower has just begun.

In many ways, the Union Budget announcement, which gave tremendous support and responsibility to our Ministry, with the Prime Minister's clarion call for how skilling and India are integrated and synonymous with India's growth story during his 15th August address, have been encouraging and humbling. I am tasked not just with ensuring our children receive the best education and life skills that our government can offer, but also ensure that they are prepared for successful careers through a comprehensive skilling platform that we are putting in place.

Education and skill development have always been the twin pillars of any nation's progress. Together, they bridge the gap between the dreams of youth and the reality of a prosperous, self-reliant India. Since assuming charge, the learning curve has been steep. However, one thing became clear early on: government reports, numbers, and policies alone cannot capture the full picture. We need to understand lived experiences and learn from them to understand the impact and opportunity within the National Education Policy 2020 and other Central Schemes. To do



Javant Chaudhary

Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education, Government of India. Views are personal

The future of youth lies in the meeting of education and skill development, where schools nurture creativity and values, and skill programmes prepare young professionals to lead in emerging industries

so, it was essential to step beyond the confines of the written word and spend extensive time with the key stakeholders and beneficiaries. I have enjoyed and learned from my engagement with students, teachers, and industry leaders alike.

A glimpse of this impact was witnessed in schools like the PM Shri Kendriya Vidyalaya, Gontinagar, Lucknow, where students were excelling not only academically but also in extracurricular activities. For example, Ashish Pandey, an extraordinary artist who aspires to be a 3D artist. His portrait of my grandfather, former Prime Minister Shri Chaudhary Charan Singhji, felt lifelike as if he were present in the room. Similarly, my visit to JNV Palghar was highly personalised, as I was accompanied by the MP, who is an alumnus of the institution. One student, Akshita, brilliantly balanced tradition and modernity in her paintings, embodying what India's education system aims to foster – an appreciation for heritage while embracing the future. This narrative of success extends beyond classrooms to the realm of skill development, where young Indians are shaping industries. At the National Skill Training Institute in Noida, two young women who had completed training in Artificial Intelligence (AI) developed a chatbot. Their achievement demonstrated the immense potential of India's youth, and their dedication to mentoring others was a testament to the transformative power of skill development.

Education goes beyond academics; it is about preparing youth to engage with the world, to think critically, and to solve problems creatively. Likewise, skill development is more than technical training – it is about empowerment and ensuring that young people have the tools they need to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape. This is the time to identify and support high-impact sectors such

as sports among others, from school to skilling to livelihoods, and having these benefit the personal development of individuals.

In skill development, significant strides have been made. One of the highlights was India's participation in the WorldSkills competition in Lyon, France, where I watched proudly as 60 of our most skilled participants competed across 50 disciplines. Their remarkable performance showcased India's potential to become the skill capital of the world. The vision is to see India rise to the top of the WorldSkills leaderboard and perhaps be engaged beyond just as a participant. Another key milestone was revamping the Model Skill Loan Scheme. In alignment with the goals of the 2024-25 Budget, the loan limit for skilling was increased to ₹7.5 lakh, up from ₹1.5 lakh, with a broader lending network that now includes small finance banks and additional courses.

An industry-driven approach has been central to all these efforts. New partnerships are set to enhance our outreach and, partnering with countries such as our recent collaboration with Malaysia aims to strengthen workforce development and expertise exchange. The future of India's youth lies in the meeting of education and skill development, where schools nurture creativity and values, and skill programmes prepare young professionals to lead in emerging industries such as AI, robotics, and renewable energy. The work ahead is critical but we have reason to be optimistic.

Reflecting on such stories of resilience, talent, and determination evokes a deep sense of responsibility. These encounters have left a profound impact, renewing the commitment to serve with even greater dedication. Let us continue our work to build a nation where every dream has the chance to flourish, and every talent is given the opportunity to shine.

Maharashtra's populist gamble

Ladki Bahin scheme risks worsening the fiscal crisis, reflecting a troubling trend

STATE OF PLAY

Piyush Zaware



In a bold but perilous move, the Maharashtra government has introduced the 'Ladki Bahin' scheme, a populist initiative brimming with promises of financial aid and incentives. However, this well-intentioned but flawed programme highlights a grim reality: the State's leadership is sacrificing long-term fiscal stability for short-term electoral gains. While the scheme offers financial relief, its execution may worsen Maharashtra's precarious financial situation.

Maharashtra is grappling with a revenue deficit of ₹20,151 crore and a fiscal deficit of ₹1,10,355 crore, with its debt burden exceeding seven lakh crore. Amid this, the government has introduced seven new flagship schemes estimated to cost nearly one lakh crore. The reallocation of funds for these schemes has placed immense pressure on essential services and existing programmes.

A consequence of this mismanagement is the suspension of aid to families of farmers who have died by suicide – a critical support measure of one lakh per family. Additionally, contractors across the Public Works Department are awaiting payments totaling approximately ₹500 crore for completed projects. These delays and suspensions underscore the significant strain on Maharashtra's fiscal health.

The Ladki Bahin scheme exemplifies a broader trend in Indian politics: the reliance on populist schemes for immediate electoral gains. Financial aid may offer temporary relief, but these programmes rarely address the root causes

of poverty and economic inequality. Such initiatives lead to unsustainable fiscal practices, failing to generate long-term growth or job creation.

During the UPA-II tenure, India experienced a period of fiscal stability, with a focus on employment creation through programmes such as MNREGA. This approach, prioritising sustainable job creation and infrastructure development, laid the foundation for long-term economic stability rather than opting for quick fixes.

Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have set valuable examples with their cash transfer schemes for women. Tamil Nadu's Kalaigarn Magalir Urimai Thogai offers ₹1,000 per month to women above 21, with stringent eligibility criteria based on income and land ownership. West Bengal's Lakshmi Bhandar Scheme provides ₹500 to ₹1,000 per month based on caste and enrolment in the Swasthya Sathi health scheme. The Ladki Bahin scheme, however, appears to be a hasty imitation rather than a thoughtful adaptation of these models.

Flawed execution

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar once said, "However good a Constitution may be, if those who are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad. However bad a Constitution may be, if those implementing it are good, it will prove to be good."

This wisdom is particularly relevant to Maharashtra's current schemes. Despite noble intentions, the Ladki Bahin initiative is hampered by poor planning and execution, leading to diverted resources, broader financial distress, and ineffective outcomes.

The increasing reliance on freebie culture in Indian politics is reaching dangerous levels, posing risks to the country's fiscal health. While direct bank transfers are often promoted as solutions to poverty, they come with considerable costs. Other segments of society ultimately bear these financial burdens, especially when such schemes lack complementary strategies for employment generation or sustainable development.

Economists warn that India could face a fiscal collapse similar to Sri Lanka's if such trends continue. In countries such as Turkmenistan, subsidies have been curtailed to target only those in genuine need. As neighbouring nations retreat from excessive subsidies, India's political landscape appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

The current situation demands a critical reassessment of welfare schemes. States must shift from short-term freebies to sustainable solutions that offer long-term benefits. Expanding successful programmes, enhancing employment opportunities, and ensuring the efficient execution of welfare schemes can provide more substantial and lasting benefits to society. A strategic shift towards sustainable, employment-focused policies is essential to balance immediate relief with the State's long-term fiscal health.

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Varied voting trends in J&K

While the voter turnout was higher than the Lok Sabha polls, only six of the 20 districts registered an increase since 2014 Assembly polls

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

Continuing the trend of turning up in decent numbers for elections, the recently concluded three-phased Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir registered a voter turnout of 63.9%, higher than the 58.5% recorded in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election. The turnout figure was marginally lower compared to 2014 when the last Assembly election in the erstwhile undivided State of J&K was held.

The Assembly was dissolved on November 21, 2018, by the then-Governor of J&K, Satya Pal Malik, and less than a year later, the State lost its special status with the dilution of Article 370. The State was then split into two Union Territories of Ladakh and J&K.

A major delimitation exercise by the Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Commission that followed, notified new boundaries, names, and number of Assembly constituencies. This led to an increase of seven additional seats in J&K (six in Jammu and one in Kashmir).

Chart 1 takes a look, after excluding districts in Ladakh, at the voter turnout in J&K's Assembly polls since 1962. Voter turnout steadily increased after being as low as 39.2% in 1962 and peaked in 1987 with 73.2% participation. However, the figures from 1987 must be taken with a pinch of salt as these elections are reputed to have been rigged.

Since 1987, the advent of militancy and its intensity led to an infrequency of regular elections, and reduced participation in them, especially in constituencies belonging to the Kashmir valley. Turnout fell to 43.1% overall in J&K.

A weakening of militancy in the early 2000s, besides measures taken by multiple administrations to restore political dialogue, resulted in a growing participation in elec-

tions. The apogee was the 65.7% turnout registered in the 2014 Assembly polls when except for Srinagar, Shopian, and Kulgam, voter turnout was close to or more than 60% across the valley and in Jammu. Table 2 shows the district-wise voter turnout over the last three Assembly elections in J&K.

In the 2024 Assembly election, Kishtwar in Jammu recorded the highest turnout – 80.2%. While all 10 districts in Jammu have recorded at least 70% turnout, participation peaked in Kashmir districts at 67.7%, in Bandipore. Srinagar remains a district with limited participation, turning out only at 30%.

Data shows that the voter turnout has decreased in at least 14 of the 20 districts across the U.T. compared to the 2014 Assembly election.

The voter turnout in most of these districts is lower than that during the 2014 State Assembly polls except for six districts – Kulgam (increased by 3.4 % points), Pulwama (2.5% points), Shopian (8.5% points), Srinagar (2.1% points albeit over a low base of 27.9%), Kishtwar (3.4% points) and Baramulla (3.3% points). The presence of independents supported by the banned Jamaat-e-Islami and the Engineer Rashid-led Awami Ittehad Party being part of the fray in Baramulla has helped raise participation in these districts.

Map 3 shows the constituency-wise voter turnout in the 2024 Assembly election in J&K.

Inderwal and Padder-Nagseni, which share borders with Himachal Pradesh, registered the highest voter turnout in 2024 – 82.2% and 80.7% respectively. The seats, that were newly delimited, such as Shri Mata Vaishno Devi and both Udhampur East and West, have also managed to pull high numbers.

Map 4 shows the constituency-wise difference in voter turnout between 2014 and 2024. The Sopore seat in Kashmir recorded the highest increase of almost 15% points, while Budgam registered the steepest decline – 14%.

Ups and downs in turnouts in J&K

The data for the charts and tables were sourced from Lok Dhaba and the Election Commission of India

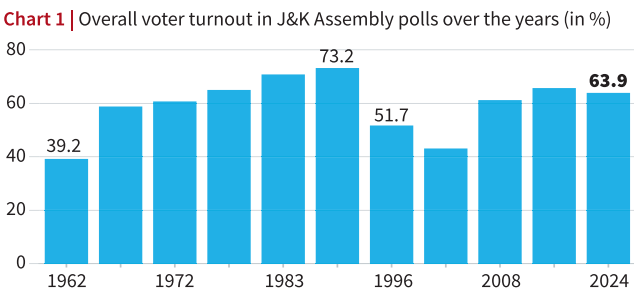
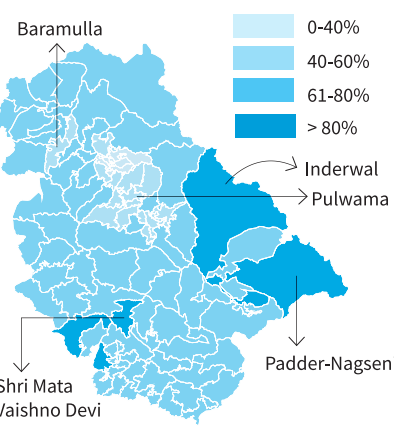


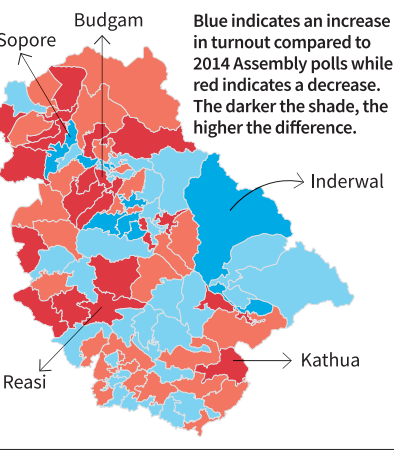
Table 2 | District-wise voter turnout in the past 3 Assembly polls in J&K. The last column shows the difference between 2014 and 2024 turnout. Figures in %

District	Phase	Region	2008	2014	2024	Difference
Kishtwar	Phase 1	JAMMU	73.6	76.8	80.2	3.4
Ramban	Phase 1	JAMMU	66.7	71.2	70.6	-0.6
Udhampur	Phase 3	JAMMU	64.0	76.8	76.0	-0.8
Samba	Phase 3	JAMMU	76.9	77.3	76.5	-0.8
Jammu	Phase 3	JAMMU	71.8	73.6	71.4	-2.2
Doda	Phase 1	JAMMU	68.7	73.6	71.3	-2.3
Kathua	Phase 3	JAMMU	70.5	76.4	73.4	-3.0
Poonch	Phase 2	JAMMU	75.6	77.5	74.4	-3.1
Reasi	Phase 2	JAMMU	75.6	81.4	74.7	-6.7
Rajouri	Phase 2	JAMMU	73.3	78.6	71.1	-7.5
Shopian	Phase 1	KASHMIR	50.7	48.5	57.0	8.5
Kulgam	Phase 1	KASHMIR	64.4	59.7	63.1	3.4
Baramulla	Phase 3	KASHMIR	48.0	57.7	61.0	3.3
Pulwama	Phase 1	KASHMIR	46.1	44.5	47.0	2.5
Srinagar	Phase 2	KASHMIR	21.6	27.9	30.0	2.1
Anantnag	Phase 1	KASHMIR	63.2	60.7	57.9	-2.8
Ganderbal	Phase 2	KASHMIR	55.1	67.6	62.8	-4.8
Kupwara	Phase 3	KASHMIR	68.0	72.0	66.8	-5.2
Bandipore	Phase 3	KASHMIR	59.8	74.5	67.7	-6.8
Budgam	Phase 2	KASHMIR	62.4	73.2	63.2	-10.0

Map 3 | Constituency-wise voter turnout in the 2024 Assembly election in Jammu & Kashmir



Map 4 | Constituency-wise difference in voter turnout between 2014 and 2024



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 7, 1974

Join mainstream of politics, Sirimavo appeals to Tamils

Colombo, Oct. 8: The Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, to-day promised to hold "fairly early" the by-election to the Kankasanturai parliamentary seat in the Tamil-speaking northern province. She made this promise at a trade union rally held in Jaffna to mark her first visit to the province as Prime Minister.

The seat was vacated by the leader of the minority Tamil United Front. Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, two years ago, as a challenge to the Government to prove by contesting the by-election, its claim that the bulk of the Tamil community had accepted the 30-month-old Constitution. The TUF has rejected the Constitution on the ground that Tamil language and non-Buddhist religions have not been given parity of status in it along with the majority Sinhala and Buddhism.

Mrs. Bandaranaike in her speeches, one at the rally and another at the inauguration of the first campus of Sri Lanka University in Jaffna, appealed to the Tamil community to eschew "communalism and sectarianism" and enter the mainstream of politics as equals and partners in nation-building. Mr. Bandaranaike hailed the Tamil community as "vigorous, intelligent, and patriotic".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 7, 1924

Anglo-Indian problems.

Calcutta, Oct. 6: The annual general meeting of the Indian and Domiciled European Association held today under the presidency of Lt. Col. H. A. Gidney has adopted the resolution recording its sense of deep concern at the anomalous and unsatisfactory position occupied by the Anglo-Indian community under the Indian Penal Code in so far as it touches trial by jury and earnestly requesting the Government of India to give this matter their urgent and sympathetic consideration with a view to remove this anomaly. Another resolution views with much surprise and disappointment the attitude of the Government in respect of the claims of the community for the formation of an Anglo-Indian unit and requests the Government that early steps be taken to raise such a regiment in deference to the unanimous wishes of the community.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since October 7

41,870 The toll includes 45 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the ministry, which said 97,166 people have been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the war began on October 7. AFP

The number of PTI party supporters arrested in Lahore

30 Over 30 supporters of former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party were arrested after they managed to reach the Minar-e-Pakistan premises late Saturday night demanding the release of their leader. PTI

Number of people left stranded due to floods in Bangladesh

1 In lakh. At least five people have died so far as devastating floods, triggered by heavy rains and upstream torrents, continue to ravage northern Bangladesh. In Sherpur, the water levels of major rivers have surged, submerging new areas and displacing thousands of families. REUTERS

The Lebanese pupils displaced by Israeli bombardment

40 In per cent. According to Imad Achkar, the Director General of Education, nearly half of Lebanon's 1.25 million school pupils have become displaced as Israel's strikes on Hezbollah strongholds forced more than one million people to flee. AFP

Migrants who crossed the Channel into the U.K. on Saturday

973 This is the highest single-day number of migrants making the cross-Channel journey this year, surpassing the last high of 882. Over 26,600 migrants have crossed the Channel in 2024. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The status of the civil war in Sudan

What is the extent of the war? Where did the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces begin? How have ethnic tensions and rivalries played a part in the war? From where are conflicting parties sourcing their weapons and arms?

EXPLAINER

Anu Maria Joseph

The story so far:

On September 26, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) launched a major offensive against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum and Bahri. Thus, the war which was quiet for a few months has gained momentum again. Eighteen months into the civil war, the UN said that more than 20,000 people have been killed. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration has recorded an estimated total of 10,890,722 internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of October 1. All ceasefire efforts and peace talks have failed so far. The latest offensive comes ahead of the U.S.-led ceasefire talks on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

Who are the actors in the civil war?

The civil war in Sudan between two military factions, the SAF and the RSF has crossed 18 months. It started as a power rivalry between the military heads of the SAF and the RSF, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Hamdan Dagalo respectively. What began as a conflict in the capital city of Khartoum has spread to Omdurman, Bahri, Port Sudan, El Fasher and the Port Sudan cities, as well as the Darfur and Kordofan states.

The RSF has an upper hand in multiple war zones. However, since August, the SAF has been carrying out frequent airstrikes and has captured pocket regions around Khartoum. The humanitarian crisis is worsening countrywide amidst limited and restricted access to aid and health care, especially in the Darfur states. The warring sides are also accused of carrying out war crimes including sexual violence and extrajudicial killings in several regions. In August, the UN declared famine in the Zamzam camp in North Darfur which hosts nearly 5,00,000 IDPs. The UN-Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Famine Review Committee says that 14 regions in the Greater Darfur, South and North Kordofan, and Jazeera states face conditions similar to Zamzam. According to the latest UN-backed IPC initiative, 25.6 million people, more than half of Sudan's population, face "crisis or worse" levels of food insecurity. Conditions have further worsened amidst heavy rains and floods and the subsequent spread of cholera. The outbreak has killed more than 200 people.

Why is the war continuing?

There is no sign of an end to the war. Firstly, both warring parties are adamant about gaining ground and legitimising their power. The SAF claims to be the legitimate government, with the UN just about recognising their claims, although it came to power through a coup in 2021. However, the RSF has territorial gains around the capital and other war zones. It opposes the SAF's efforts to represent Sudan internationally, claiming legitimacy. The RSF, a former Arab militia known as Janjaweed, seeks alliances from several Arab countries to support its claim to power.

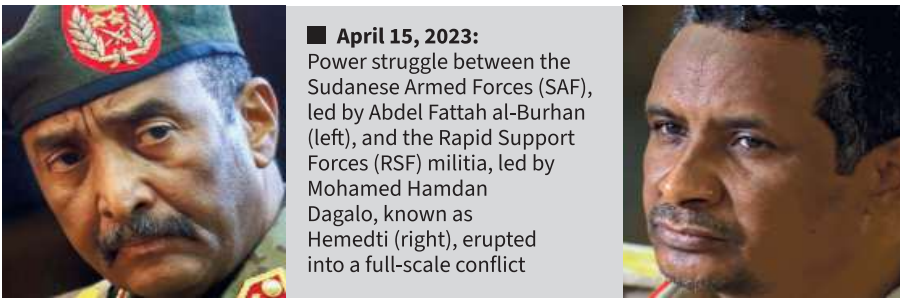
Secondly, Sudan has been under the UN arms embargo, since the 2004 Darfur crisis, which has recently been extended for another year. However, the embargo has not blocked the flow of weapons. A Human Rights Watch report in July claimed that the warring parties have been using armed drones, drone jammers, anti-tank guided missiles,

A multifaceted war

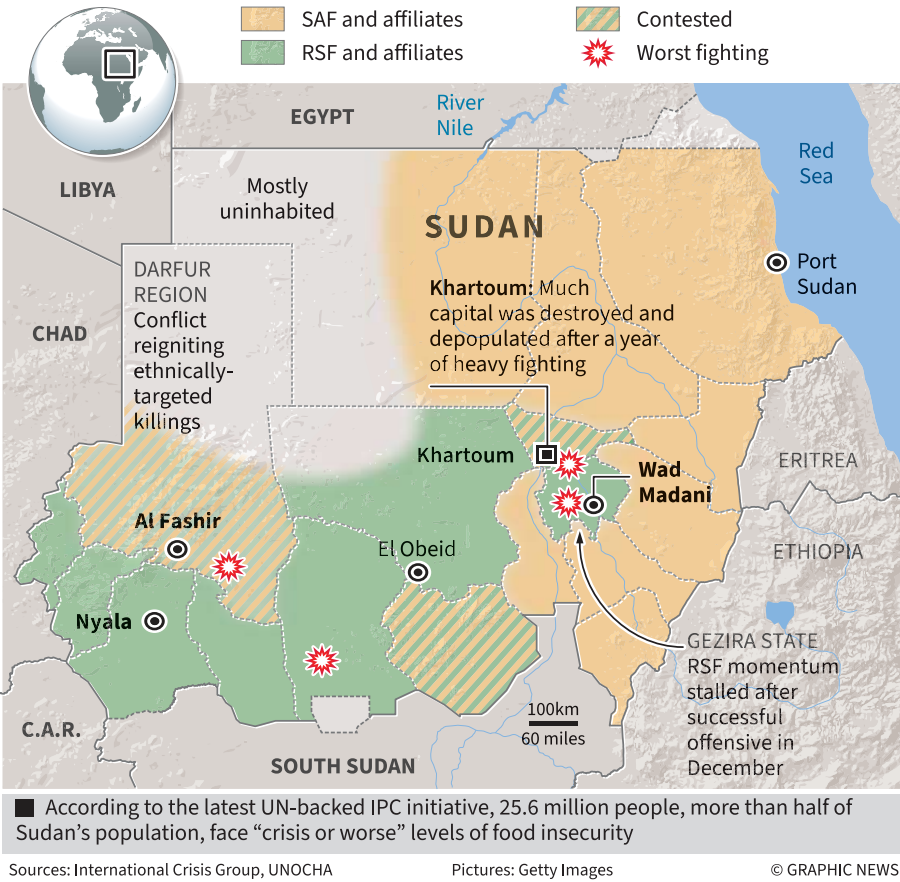
The ongoing civil war in Sudan has killed more than 20,000 people, according to the United Nations. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration has estimated a record 10,890,722 internally displaced people in Sudan



To the brink: Displaced people queue for food aid at a camp in Gedaref, Sudan on September 23. AFP



■ April 15, 2023: Power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (left), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti (right), erupted into a full-scale conflict



truck-mounted multi-barrel rocket launchers, and mortar munitions produced by companies registered in China, Iran, Russia, Serbia, and the UAE. Easy weapon procurement and use have aided the continuation of the war.

Thirdly, the war has become complex with the involvement of multiple actors and issues. What began as a military rivalry has now evolved through ethnic lines, involving several regional ethnic militias. Arab and non-Arab militias have taken sides with the RSF and the SAF respectively. The rebel group Sudanese People's Liberation Movement has been fighting alongside the SAF. The RSF and

its allied Arab militias have been targeting the Masalit community and other non-Arabs in Darfur states. Ethnic tensions have intensified the war.

Fourthly, the SAF has accused the UAE and previously Russia's Wagner Group of supporting the RSF. Although the Wagner group and the RSF have rejected any direct military engagement, the group is allegedly supporting the RSF by facilitating the supply of UAE's weapons through the Central African Republic. At the same time, Russia has been supplying weapons to the SAF as well. With abundant external support, both parties have little motive to end the war.

Have there been peace talks?

There were nine rounds of ceasefire efforts led predominantly by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia; all failed in their primary phase. On August 14, the latest round of U.S.-led peace talks were held in Geneva, Switzerland. But, neither of the warring parties attended. SAF boycotted the meeting, blaming the RSF for not adhering to the Jeddah Declaration 2023, including the withdrawal of forces from civilian regions. RSF also pulled out from the talks at the last moment.

The UN, the African Union, the U.S., the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the EU have all urged the parties to end the violence and work together to de-escalate the crisis. Egypt initiated a draft resolution on May 1 at the Arab League meeting in Cairo, calling for an "immediate and comprehensive cessation" of hostilities. Until now, any and all efforts at a long-lasting ceasefire have been ineffective.

The RSF and the SAF claim they are open to negotiations but have shown little commitment to comply. They attempt to gain a military advantage during the ceasefire, owing to mistrust between the parties. Both sides have not reached a possible bargaining stage for an effective mediation.

Another reason is that international media attention to the war on the ground is limited. International organisations' access to war zones is also restricted. With a limited understanding of the conflict on the ground, mediators like the U.S. and Saudi Arabia are challenged to formulate a ceasefire or peace talk which fit the multifaceted war situation.

What are the regional implications?

More than two million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries including Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia. The refugee camps are overflowed and have raised concerns in Europe that many will attempt to reach the continent. In February, dozens of Sudanese drowned when a migrant boat capsized along the Tunisia-Italy route. A lack of state apparatus and institutions has triggered ethnic clashes along the South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea borders. Since January, ethnic violence in the Abiey region, a disputed land between Sudan and South Sudan, has increased, with the UN reporting more than 100 casualties. Frequent clashes over agricultural land are reported in the El Fashaga region on the Sudan-Ethiopia border. The war has jeopardised an oil pipeline from South Sudan to the Red Sea.

What next?

The involvement of multiple actors and extended geography has made the war complex, challenging international actors to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table.

Multiple failed ceasefire attempts and peace talks imply the need to revisit international actors' approach to the war in Sudan. Although SAF has been gaining pockets in Khartoum, defeating the RSF is a long road. The RSF lacks international support to claim legitimacy. And, a RSF-SAF compromise is highly unlikely. The war will likely be prolonged until a major breakthrough.

There is an increasing fear that the military rivals will divide the country, leading to a plight similar to that of Libya's. Sudanese people have started to live with the war, and with much attention given to Gaza and Ukraine, the war in Sudan will continue to rage on the sidelines.

The author is a Research Associate at the Africa Studies, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru.

THE GIST

▼ The civil war in Sudan between two military factions, the SAF and the RSF has crossed 18 months. It started as a power rivalry between the military heads of the SAF and the RSF, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Hamdan Dagalo respectively.

▼ The war has become complex with the involvement of multiple actors and issues. What began as a military rivalry has now evolved through ethnic lines, involving several regional ethnic militias.

▼ There were nine rounds of ceasefire efforts led predominantly by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia; all failed in their primary phase.

CACHE



Under the scanner: Founder and CEO of Telegram Pavel Durov. REUTERS

How has Telegram changed its stance on content moderation policy?

On September 24, Telegram CEO Pavel Durov announced definitive changes to Telegram's privacy policy, saying they will now provide authorities with user data including phone numbers and IP addresses in response to valid legal requests

Sahana Venugopal
Poulomi Chatterjee

The story so far:
In the first week of September, Telegram quietly edited out language from its FAQ page that stated private chats were protected and that they “do not process any requests related to them.” The answer to a section titled, “There’s illegal content on Telegram. How do I take it down?” has now been altered to include directions on how to report illegal content and messages. It also turned off a ‘People Nearby’ feature that helped users find and message other users in the vicinity, and replaced it with a “Businesses Nearby” feature instead, allowing “legitimate, verified businesses” to display products and accept payments.

What happened?
On September 24, Telegram CEO Pavel Durov announced definitive changes to Telegram’s privacy policy, saying they will now provide authorities with user data including phone numbers and IP addresses, in response to valid legal requests.
The move, Mr. Durov said, intends to “deter criminals from abusing” the platform’s search function that was being abused to “sell illegal goods,” he added. In the past, Telegram had agreed to supply information on terror suspects as per policy, but now it covers criminal activities in general. The company will disclose if it provided user information to authorities, in its quarterly transparency reports.
Additionally, Mr. Durov said that platform moderators will be using AI to identify and remove “problematic content” from Telegram’s search feature.

How do other end-to-end messaging apps moderate content?
In 2021, post the January 6 riots at the U.S. Capitol, employees of the Signal app internally raised concerns that the app wasn’t doing all they could to stave off abuse, with reports showing a surge of users on Telegram and Signal.
Signal is owned by a non-profit and doesn’t sell ads or user data, or even collect demographic or personal details around users – other than phone numbers. Given that all groups and direct messages on the platform are encrypted, the company has taken a similar approach to Telegram in content moderation by saying they don’t want to find out how the app is being used, and that knowing would be the antithesis to its encrypted nature.
But Telegram offers more features than Signal that make the app a go-to place for anti-social elements. For example, Telegram enables mass communication, allowing groups to have up to 2,00,000 members, making the platform a hotbed for those exchanging child sex abuse media, terror-related content, and misinformation. By comparison, rival end-to-end encryption messaging apps like Signal and Meta-owned WhatsApp both allow up to 1,000 people in a group.
Signal doesn’t advertise these groups within the app, but Telegram has a search feature which makes it easier to find a publicly visible forum by looking up a specific hashtag or term. This makes it child’s play to find groups posting hateful content. The deluge of users to these apps and others like Parler put them under fire from several activists, but Telegram was closer to the threshold of amplifying these groups even more. Despite being marketed as a messaging app, these features make Telegram behave more like

a social media platform. So, while it isn’t that Signal followed any specific content moderation policies, it is more that Telegram’s features raised a greater number of red flags.
Meanwhile, WhatsApp’s claim of end-to-end encryption has often been questioned. The messaging app is known to hand over metadata to law enforcement agencies, while Meta has a long history of being hungry for user data. Regardless of the user’s privacy settings, WhatsApp collects user metadata. The app has at least 1,000 content moderators who are able to view some messages if the recipient reports them. WhatsApp disclosed in its terms of service that once an account is reported, it “receives the most recent messages” of the group or user in question as well as “information on your recent interactions with the reported user.” While the clause doesn’t mention it, this could include the user’s IP address, mobile phone, phone number, profile photos, and linked Facebook and Instagram accounts.

What are the obligations imposed on intermediaries operating in India?
Intermediaries such as social media or messaging platforms operating in India are expected to comply with national regulations and respond promptly to complaints regarding unlawful content.
However, there is a provision that may give tech or social media platform executives a safe harbour of sorts, in the face of legal action.
Section 79 in The Information Technology Act, 2000, states that “no person providing any service as a network service provider shall be liable under this Act, rules or regulations made thereunder for any third party information or data made available by him if he proves that

the offence or contravention was committed without his knowledge or that he had exercised all due diligence to prevent the commission of such offence or contravention.”
In simpler language, a person who is providing a social media or messaging platform shall not be liable under the Act if they prove that they were not aware of offending third-party content being made available on their platform, or if they did their best to stop such offences from taking place.
This means that an individual such as Telegram CEO Pavel Durov could potentially defend himself in India by saying that he is not responsible for unlawful content posted by others on the network that he provides as a service. However, Mr. Durov would be obliged to quickly remove such content once it comes to his notice, and Telegram must have preventive measures in place.
The IT Act also gives the government power to notify the intermediary that unlawful content is live. Intermediaries must quickly respond by disabling access to the content. This can be useful when one is, for example, trying to get explicit deepfakes or highly personal leaked media removed from digital platforms, as tech companies are mandated to act quickly. At the same time, there are concerns about censorship and governments unduly pressuring tech companies to remove content critical of it. In compliance with India’s IT regulations, Telegram has a designated grievance officer, in order to deal with “public content which is not in accordance with the applicable IT regulations,” per its website.
Other intermediaries such as Meta and Google also have grievance officers whom Indian users can contact.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on Mithun Chakraborty, who has been awarded the Dadasaheb Phalke Award

V.V. Ramanan

- QUESTION 1**
Mithun’s first released film won him the National Award for Best Actor. Name the film and the legendary director who made it.
- QUESTION 2**
The film that fans identify him most with was the 1982 flick directed by Babbar Subhash and had foot-tapping music by Bappi Lahiri.
- QUESTION 3**
Mithun also won two more National awards, with one of them being for essaying the role of an Indian mystic. Name the mystic.

- QUESTION 4**
Name the chain of hotels that he owns in places like Ooty, Siliguri, etc.
- QUESTION 5**
Which African country issued a stamp in his honour in 2010?
- QUESTION 6**
Mithun was parodied in a 2008 comic book written by Saurav Mohapatra, with art by Anupam Sinha. Name the character based on him.
- QUESTION 7**
According to IMDB, he turned down the offer to play the lead in which Mani Ratnam film because it would have required cutting his long hair?



Visual question:
Though a member of the ruling BJP now, which party nominated him to the Rajya Sabha in 2014? MOORTHY R.V.

- Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:** 1. The reason why the Nobel Committee thought Jimmy Carter ought to have received the prize earlier. **Ans: He successfully mediated a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel (the Camp David Accords)**
2. At the end of Carter’s presidency, U.S. diplomats and citizens were taken hostage in this country as he U.S. had granted admission to this deposed leader. **Ans: Iran; Mohammad Reza Pahlavi**
3. The site of the worst nuclear accident in U.S. history. **Ans: Three Mile Island**
4. This village in Haryana was renamed as this on the instructions of Morarji Desai in 1978. **Ans: Carterpuri**
5. In 1978, Carter was warned by this politician that Ted Kennedy might run against him in 1980. **Ans: Joe Biden**
Visual: The reason why the statue is a peanut. **Ans: Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer**
Early Birds: Sonali Das| Tamal Biswas| M. Suresh| Mahmood Lebbai



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

He has chalked up yet another deal

I don’t know how or why they became friends. They are like chalk and cheese

S. Upendran

“Everything okay? Bharath told me that you didn’t go for your usual early morning walk.”
“Lost track of time. I was busy reading this.”
“Isn’t that your favourite author’s latest novel? When did you buy it?”
“Didn’t buy it. Borrowed it from Sujatha.”
“I see. Is the novel as good as his previous one? You finished that one in one sitting.”
“Chalk and cheese, my friend. Chalk and cheese.”
“Chalk and cheese? What are you talking about?”
“When you say that two things or people are like chalk and cheese, what you’re suggesting is that they are very different.”
“The two are so different from each other that there’s no point in comparing them.”
“Very good! That’s exactly what it means. *Ram and Shyam may be brothers, but they are like chalk and cheese.*”
“How about this example? *My new boss’ style of management is very different from the old one. It’s like chalk and cheese.*”
“Good example! Comparing my interests with those of my sister’s is like comparing chalk and cheese. The two of us have nothing in common.”
“I agree with you completely. She has absolutely no interest in sports, does she? Anyway, whether you like your favourite author’s latest novel or not, I’m told it’s a bestseller.”
“That, it is. The man has chalked up another success.”
“Chalked up? What does it mean?”
“The expression ‘chalked up’ is mostly used in informal contexts to mean to achieve something significant. You’ve done something noteworthy.”
“I see. *The star batsman chalked up a double century and helped his team win the match.*”
“That’s a good example.”
“My uncle chalked up 40 years of teaching at the same college.”
“That is amazing. Nobody wants to stay in the same place nowadays.”
“I came across an interesting word yesterday. It was spelt s...h...a...r...e...n...t.
“It’s a combination of ‘share’ and ‘parent’. Any idea what ‘sharent’ means?”
“Kids sharing parents?”
“Afraid not! Nowadays, we find that some parents share a lot of information about their children. Not just with relatives and friends, but also with total strangers.”
“Are you thinking about those people who post a lot of pictures of their kids on the Net?”
“Exactly! A sharent is a parent who posts frequently on the social media about their kids.
“The couple next door are sharents. They post photos of their baby every day.”
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Strafe:
an attack of machine-gun fire or cannon fire from a low flying airplane

Usage: *It seemed that the plane was going to swoop down and strafe the town.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/strafepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /stɪɪf/

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

Inflexion point

Escalation of West Asia conflict could hurt India

On Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar expressed valid apprehensions over the “widening” of the conflict in West Asia and how the ‘Houthi firing in the Red Sea... is actually costing us’. The converse also perhaps holds true — that if the conflict remains confined to one between Israel and Iran-supported non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Houthis and Hamas, as has been the case for a year, its economic fallout on India may not be too damaging, even as the human costs of the war itself have been alarming.



But if the conflagration turns into a war between Iran and Israel, commodity and financial markets could turn volatile — especially if Iran’s oil and nuclear facilities are impacted. A war could involve hitherto neutral players in the Gulf Cooperation Council, if not China and Russia. There are indications that India’s exports have been dented, but perhaps not too seriously, by the disruptions of the last one year. Shipping costs rose as vessels went around the Cape of Good Hope to get to Europe and the US, instead of the Suez Canal, to escape the threat of Houthi attacks. This 15-20 per cent cost increase hurts India’s low margin, high volume exports. The Houthis are estimated to have made about 130 strikes over the last year, as a result of which average global daily transits through the Suez Canal have dropped from 80 last October to less than 30, according to an IMF database. Meanwhile, a dip in global demand for petroleum amidst a bearish oil market seems to have impacted India’s refiners.

Petroleum has dragged down India’s overall export growth. In August this year, petroleum exports fell 37 per cent to \$5.95 billion, against \$9.54 billion last year. Exports excluding petroleum and gems and jewellery were up 2.3 per cent to \$26.8 billion. This trend applies to the current fiscal; overall merchandise exports for April-August rose just 1.14 per cent to \$179 billion, but exports excluding petroleum and gems and jewellery were up by 4.6 per cent to about \$136 billion. According to an analysis by Global Trade Research Initiative, India’s exports to countries in the theatre of the conflict such as Israel, Jordan and Lebanon have dropped sharply this calendar year (till July), but increased by 18 per cent to the GCC countries, which have so far stayed out of the conflict. Interestingly, India’s exports to Iran were up 15.2 per cent over this period. EU exports were up 6.8 per cent. An escalation of the conflict could flatten these distinctions.

A flare-up will rock movement of freight, and financial and commodity markets. As reported by this newspaper, India’s benchmark equity indices fell 4 per cent last week, with a net outflow of \$3.19 billion in equities as foreign portfolio investors withdrew. While there is no cause for alarm given India’s forex and strategic oil reserves, the prospect of a rate cut decision this week might have receded just a bit in a situation where safe-haven investment seems to be picking up. India needs to be circumspect, while holding the course.

OTHER VOICES.

The Observer

A year on, there is only one way to a credible peace
The first anniversary of the 7 October Hamas terror attacks on southern Israel is also an opportunity to examine the response to the massacre of Israel's government and people, and of Israel's friends and enemies. The country's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was accused of presiding over an unprecedented security failure. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and intelligence agencies also faced harsh criticism. Netanyahu, urged on by his far-right coalition partners and fearing for his job, decided only blood could pay for blood. He vowed, unrealistically, to destroy Hamas. From that decision, many more massacres flowed. LONDON, OCTOBER 6

讀賣新聞
THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

U.S.: What Message Will The Candidates Send to Whom?
Who will win the U.S. presidential election, which is still a close race as the campaign enters its final stage? The outcome will be determined by swing voters who have not yet decided who to vote for. Simply resorting to personal attacks is not enough to make a difference. The candidates should appeal for support with dignified words and actions befitting the leader of a superpower. With less than a month to go until Nov. 5, the race has seen such unusual developments as Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump being injured in a shooting during a campaign rally in July, and Democratic candidate and President Joe Biden being replaced by Vice President Kamala Harris in August. TOKYO, OCTOBER 6



India’s regulatory hotch-potch

To ensure efficient functioning of markets, a thorough review of our regulatory institutions is of utmost importance

LINE& LENGTH.



TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

As India globalises even more in the coming years, it needs to start paying serious attention to the efficiency of its markets. Such efficiency is critical for allocating labour and capital efficiently and to compete internationally. The world also needs to believe that our markets are regulated without bias, favouritism and unquestioned integrity.

All economies have three markets: the market for things, the market for labour and the market for finance. When each of these markets is in equilibrium, the economy can be said to be functioning efficiently.

Equilibrium is defined as a state where there is virtually no pressure to change. But that never happens because that’s how it is. So in order to make these markets properly efficient, we must have market regulators who make the operating rules for each market.

India didn’t have real markets till the 1990s because Indira Gandhi had killed them off in the 1970s. But since then it has had both markets and regulators.

How have these regulators performed? Think about it and you will realise that we don’t really know. Regulatory capture happens quite frequently. Indeed our government is the

biggest capturer. That is why I think the time has now come for setting up a commission (not just a committee, like the Srikrishna Committee for the financial sector in 2011) to prepare a detailed report on their functioning.

The difference lies in authority and credibility. To ensure the former, it is Parliament that should set it up. To ensure the latter, it should be staffed half-and-half by Indians and foreigners.

The chairman should be appointed by India but should not be an Indian. Some Scandinavian countries might be the best. There are at least four to choose from.

These countries have blended capitalism and socialism most effectively. And they don’t have an axe to grind.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference should simply be best practice that aims at fairness. Both these concepts — best practice and fairness — are fully established and well understood.

Thus, best practice is not merely the

Regulatory capture happens quite frequently. Indeed our government is the biggest capturer. The time has now come for setting up a commission (not just a committee).

loans with just a few taps on their smartphones, which they then use to enter F&O trades. While these loans are more regulated, they are proliferating. SEBI research suggests that easy credit and speculative investments can lead to increasing retail indebtedness.

This trend of retail speculation could have had a pronounced effect on India’s savings rate. In 2022-23, household savings as a percentage of GDP fell to a historic low of 5.1 per cent. Savings are the backbone of financial stability, enabling investments in critical infrastructure projects. As more households divert their income away from savings towards speculative activities, the foundation needed for sustainable growth could be compromised.

FII'S AND MARKET VOLATILITY

FII’s participation in the F&O segment has only increased in recent years. In FY24, FIIs accounted for 17.6 per cent of the F&O market. They typically employ sophisticated trading strategies, including proprietary algorithms, to capitalize on market movements. This creates an environment where retail investors lacking the same expertise and access to advanced tools are often disadvantaged. The recent case involving Jane Street, a Wall Street firm that reportedly made \$1 billion in profit from

best interests of the government, which is what India does and which is colonial in its origin, nature and application. And fairness is neither justice nor equity.

Justice is an abstract philosophical construct. Equity is a political practice. Fairness is a good combination of the two. It’s that balance that has to be struck.

That’s why, whatever happens, the terms of reference should not be left to Indian bureaucrats. Most of them just don’t know enough about markets and economics. When acting in a group they can make a dog’s breakfast of things. Their efforts have been known to damage the very governments they serve. We are actually very lucky because an excellent guideline for framing any terms of reference can be found in Article 280 of our Constitution. It provides for setting up of the Finance Commission and spells out its charter breathtakingly precisely in four short paragraphs which I have summarised thus:

“It shall be the duty of the Commission to make recommendations to the President as to the distribution between the Union and the States of the net proceeds of taxes; the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India; the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a state; and any other matter referred to the Commission by the President.”

Parliament is also empowered by Article 280 to “determine the qualifications which shall be requisite for

appointment as members of the Commission and the manner in which they shall be selected.”

That’s 90 per cent of its substance and just one more thing is necessary. To this enabling power of appointment I would add a disabling one, namely, that no current or former bureaucrat or judge can be appointed. But a single politician would be fine, indeed necessary.

REVIEW NEEDED

The task before it: The starting point of the exercise must, of course, be a review of regulatory institutions and practices over the last three decades. This could start with the caste hierarchy in our regulatory institutions.

Some are mandated by the Constitution, some have been legislated by Parliament and the rest by the ministries. It should be a matter of the deepest concern that not all regulatory bodies are on an equal footing.

There is also the problem of vintages. Some are very old and some are very new. Reserve Bank of India is 90 years old. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is 27 years old and the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority just 15. Going by their records, they all mostly what TTK called the RBI in 1957: subordinate departments of the government.

To cut a long and sorry story short, there are far too many shortcomings in our regulatory systems and institutions. These institutions need a thorough review so that the economy can perform efficiently, both domestically and internationally.

Economic spillovers of F&O frenzy

It could lead to a drop in household savings, increase indebtedness and drive a wedge between credit and deposit growth

V Shunmugam
Reyhan
Ganesh Prabhu

A growing wave of speculative activity in the futures and options (F&O) markets, coupled with a simultaneous deposit shortfall in the banking sector, may not be entirely unrelated. They could threaten India’s financial stability and economic well being.

Between FY23-FY24, the number of individuals trading equity derivatives increased from 29 lakh to 40 lakh. This is dominated by those below 30 years of age. The majority — 94 per cent — are trading in highly leveraged index options. This is thanks to:

Digital Accessibility: Thanks to mobile trading apps and online platforms that have democratized access to the F&O markets, young people can participate in high-risk trading activities with unprecedented ease.

Speculative Appeal: The allure of rapid gains attracts many inexperienced investors who often need an understanding of the downside of such volatile instruments.

Easy Access to Payday Loans: The growth of India’s payday loan market has also facilitated speculative activities. Young investors can secure short-term



RETAIL PUSH. Disturbing trends
/ISTOCKPHOTO

Indian derivatives markets, underscores this disparity.

This speculation-driven boom seems to have significantly impacted the banking sector. The credit-deposit (CD) ratio, which measures how much banks lend relative to their deposits, rose from 64.68 per cent in FY19 to 76.05 per cent by July FY24. This increase perhaps suggests that banks are under more significant pressure to lend in response to rising retail credit demand, partly driven by the easy availability of credit, such as payday loans. The concern is that much of this credit, often sourced at a higher rate, is channelled into unproductive speculative activities, making the banking sector vulnerable.

At the same time, India’s broad money supply (M3) has been expanding at a

compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11 per cent, reflecting increased liquidity within the economy. This too could find its way into speculation.

The Buffett Indicator (Market Cap/GDP) further highlights the consequences of this speculative activity. As of September 2024, the ratio stood at 110.43 per cent, well above the 10-year average of 92.07 per cent. This overvaluation increases the likelihood of a significant market correction unless the risk-seeking money is distributed among new issuances.

Recent SEBI measures on containing volatility and market risk management couldn’t have been better timed. Many young retail investors are being drawn in by the allure of quick profits and easy access to credit. At the same time, foreign participation, while boosting liquidity, also contributes to market volatility, leaving retail investors vulnerable. The banking sector is pressured by increased credit demand being used to fund speculative activities rather than productive investments.

These trends could destabilize financial markets, hinder household financial security, and curb economic growth.

The writers are Partner, MCQube, and Emerging Scholars in Finance from the National Institute of Securities Markets. Views are personal.

● BELOW THE LINE



Residents rescued on boats during last year’s Chennai floods

Boats ready in Chennai

Given Chennai’s experience of getting marooned during monsoon and unseasonal rains, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) this time is preparing in advance to handle any eventualities as the city usually receives heavy rain in November and December. It has procured two boats to be used

in a particular zone (Zone 4) and has been working on rainwater drains. GCC said it is preparing itself to tackle situations in the event of heavy rains in the city.

‘Closure Commission’

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has slammed the Competition Commission of India (CCI) for its “lackadaisical” approach in handling complaints against Amazon and Flipkart, dubbing it the ‘Closure Commission of India’ in a scathing complaint to the Finance Minister. This despite the fact that the regulator under its current chief Ravneet Kaur has laid solid foundation to operationalise the recent reforms to competition law, by framing futuristic regulations. The regulator, however, has earned the

ire of not just start-ups, who first cried foul over the CCI’s sluggish handling of complaints against Google, but now traders as well. With the Public Accounts Committee already laying the groundwork for its detailed performance review, the regulator is heading into turbulent times, with the Government already keeping a tight vigil over its working. “The distance between Closure Commission and Closed Commission is very thin”, rued a competition law practitioner preparing to diversify practice into other areas of law, with diminishing returns from competition law practice.

Back to Ooru

In a meeting of representatives from

IT sector in coastal Karnataka this week, the MP from Dakshina Kannada, Capt Brijesh Chowta, highlighted his vision for the sector. One among them is ‘Back to Ooru’ concept — (Ooru is native place in Kannada). He said coastal Karnataka region has produced many entrepreneurs, and some of them are doing well in other parts of the country. He aims to encourage them to set up their units in their native region also. He expressed his desire to act as an enabler for the growth of IT sector in coastal Karnataka. Capt Chowta said the region has a good talent pool and better infrastructure for the IT sector.

Retirement planning

At the recent Pension Diwas event in

the Capital, Chief Economic Advisor Anantha Nageswaran dropped a nugget of wisdom that’s as practical as it is clever.

Pointing to the walking stick symbol in the PFRDA logo, he remarked that while the walking stick represents retirement, to enjoy those years, you have to start when you’re still in your jogging shoes! His message was crystal clear: the earlier you begin planning, the better your post-retirement life will be. But here’s the fun twist — despite this thoughtful analogy, the CEA admitted that it was the first time he even noticed the walking stick in the logo! Just goes to show, sometimes the most important things are hiding in plain sight — just like your retirement plan!

Our Bureaus

For investors of all ages

The book underscores the importance of saving smart

BOOK REVIEW.

MK Balaji

The literary world of investing and wealth creation adds yet another gem to its stable with Rohit Sarin’s *Unlocking Wealth: Secrets to Getting Rich at Any Age*. It’s a thought-provoking book that presents the process of wealth creation in a lucid way, making it accessible to everyone, regardless of age or financial status.

Sarin, in his book, keeps the reader immersed as he paints the big picture of the journey that the businesses of Bharat are ready to take upon, to make our nation the world’s third-largest economy in the next decade.

The book, meant for all ages, actually makes you feel that age is just a number when it comes to wealth creation. It emphasises that it’s never too early or too late to begin creating wealth. The advice is highly practical as well.

Sarin outlines the importance of saving smart with judicious risk management in the process of wealth creation. The book spends a good amount of time on the importance of saving which tends to be an overlooked topic when it comes to wealth creation.

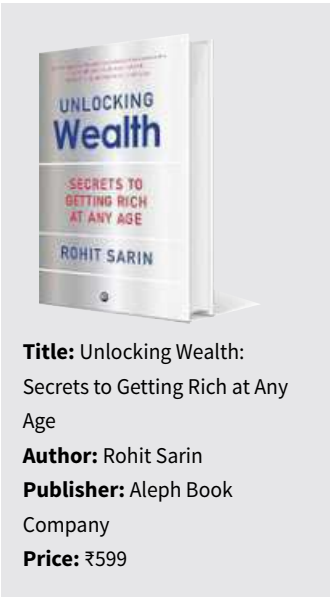
“The longer you stay invested, the more wealth you create” seems to be the nucleus of the book. The ‘compounding effect’ occupies a special place in this book, where its importance in both personal and professional situations is brought out beautifully.

The book explains the correlation between ‘Risk and Reward’ while giving its readers a quick glimpse of how risk taking in human beings has evolved historically.

A line from the book, “Every empire in history was the result of risk-taking by emperors and their generals” makes you think beyond numbers and realise that the modern man’s risk taking abilities are in no way comparable to the emperors of yore.

The book also subtly touches upon the consequences faced by emperors who were too greedy for their own good. The lessons taught by history are many and still would resonate with the modern man. Risk Management 101.

STAYING GROUNDED
Humility is an underrated trait in the process of wealth creation. And sometimes, usage of the term can get you in the midst of controversy despite your



Title: Unlocking Wealth: Secrets to Getting Rich at Any Age
Author: Rohit Sarin
Publisher: Aleph Book Company
Price: ₹599

intention. However, Sarin doesn’t shy away from asking you to be humble if you are successful. He almost says “If you have the intention of staying successful, stay grounded”.

The importance of showing up, learning from your mistakes, focusing on ‘purpose’ rather than numbers, lifestyle management are profound topics that are discussed in simple, effective ways. It is rather rare to find a piece of literary work in the world of finance unapologetically focus on the basics and still leave you wanting for more.

In conclusion, *Unlocking Wealth* is a masterclass in financial literacy, offering actionable insights for readers from all walks of life. Sarin’s writing style is engaging, making complex financial concepts accessible to everyone.

The book’s emphasis on humility, risk management, and long-term thinking resonates deeply. By applying the principles outlined in this book, readers can unlock their full financial potential. Furthermore, the book stands out for its unique blend of historical context, real-world examples, and actionable advice.

Whether you’re a seasoned investor or just starting out, this book offers valuable insights to enrich your financial journey. Sarin’s commitment to financial education is evident throughout the book. His expertise in navigating complex financial markets comes through. Don’t judge a book by its cover. As it might surprise you. And this surely did.

The book does more to you than what you think it might do.

The reviewer is Vice-President, itthought Financial Consulting

Charting India’s economic ascent

A snapshot of the Indian economy’s achievements in the last three decades and the challenges ahead

BOOK REVIEW.

B Baskar

Books on the Indian economy usually fall into two categories. The first category takes a very positive and gung-ho view and the other paints an excessively bleak and pessimistic picture of the economy.

Though Saurabh Mukherjea and Nandita Rajhansa’s book *Behold the Leviathan – The Unusual Rise of Modern India*, tries to tread the middle ground, the book takes a bullish view on India’s economic prospects despite not shying away from the pain points – both social and economic.

The book, not surprisingly, starts with India’s remarkable rise as an IT global power in the last two decades or so. The role played by Bengaluru in India’s IT story and how it spawned the e-commerce boom and start-up ecosystem is described in some detail. Interestingly, the authors say that India’s rise as a global Chess power mirrors its economic journey.

Though the 1991 reforms is rightly seen as the major inflexion point for the Indian economy, the authors tend to have a rather cliched and reductionist view of the period between 1947-91.

DIGITAL PATH
Among the positives, the authors talk about the JAM trinity, the public digital initiatives (Aadhaar, UPI, India stack), Jan Dhan accounts and their impact on the empowerment of the marginalised sections of society, especially women and the “historically oppressed castes”. The role of education for both women and the Dalits has been rightly highlighted.

The greater financialisation of

savings by Indian households and the breathless surge of stock markets, which shows no signs of slowing despite warnings of a correction, are seen as key indicators of economic resilience. The authors’ background as fund managers perhaps explains their bullish views on the stock markets.

The two most interesting chapters in the book are the ones on the rise of women and the impressive rise on the Peninsular States (the five southern States and Maharashtra).

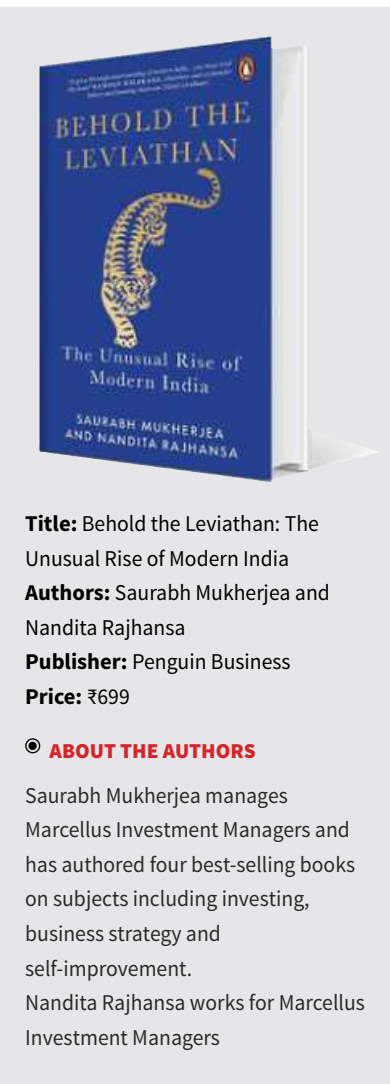
The authors rightly acknowledge the role played by the digital initiatives (JAM, Aadhaar, Jan Dhan) in the financial empowerment of women. Women have better access to formal credit now and are increasingly seen as more credit- worthy borrowers.

However, the authors explain away the low labour participation rate of women, especially in 15-24 age group, as greater focus on women’s education. Though this argument seems compelling, this is an issue which has sparked a big debate in the country with the jury still being out.

SOUTHERN SURGE
The spectacular rise of the peninsular States has been remarked by several economists and analysts, the most recent being a paper by the PM’s Economic Advisory Council. Both in terms of social and economic development these States have surged ahead.

Among the southern States the authors focus particularly on Tamil Nadu. In contrast to the companies based in Mumbai and in the Delhi-NCR belt, whose revenues exceed Rs 15,000 crore, the companies in Tamil Nadu fall into the Rs 100-5000 crore turnover, indicating greater industrial diversity and spatial spread.

Tamil Nadu is also a State where fewer people work in agriculture and



Title: Behold the Leviathan: The Unusual Rise of Modern India
Authors: Saurabh Mukherjea and Nandita Rajhansa
Publisher: Penguin Business
Price: ₹699

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Saurabh Mukherjea manages Marcellus Investment Managers and has authored four best-selling books on subjects including investing, business strategy and self-improvement. Nandita Rajhansa works for Marcellus Investment Managers

more work in industry and services compared to the national average. The same picture emerges in the Gross Value Added metric.

The authors also touch upon another crucial issue – the imminent

delimitation exercise. This is likely to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats of the North India. The South Indian States will surely chaff at having to live with lower Parliamentary representation despite contributing half of the country’s tax revenues. The Centre’s handling of this political hot potato will be crucial for the future of Indian polity.

However, the authors have omitted one crucial factor and drove the Southern States’ ascent – the role played by cheap skilled and unskilled labour from the Hindi heartland.

Being fund managers, the authors have had a ringside view of how commercial activity is surging in the Tier II and III cities and how that has spawned a new economic elite in the country. This has also perhaps led a greater social and economic ‘democratisation’ of the country.

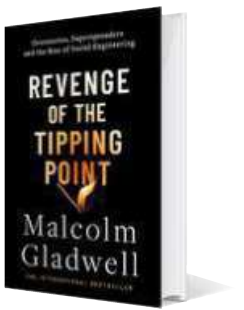
The potential of the China+1 strategy, the growth of Global Capability Centres and the key role that the India Stack II will play are brought out by the authors in the later chapters.

They also crunch numbers from the I-T department and CMIE and argue that the “fastest profit generators of India are not from among the top 900 companies; instead they are from among the 6,000 companies below the top 900”.

The advance praise for the book, which includes Nandan Nilekani, Mohandas Pai and Niranjan Rajadhyaksha. is gushing. This would normally make a reviewer wary, but the book is an engaging and readable one with plenty of interesting anecdotes mined form the authors’ travels across the country.

This book gives a good snapshot of the Indian economy, but for greater depth readers will have to look elsewhere.

NEW READS.

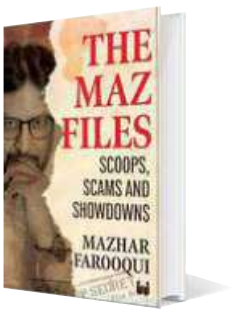


Title: Revenge of the Tipping Point: Overstories, Superspreaders and the Rise of Social Engineering

Author: Malcolm Gladwell

Publisher: Little, Brown

A book on how we have shaped and tinkered ideas



Title: The Maz Files: Scoops, Scams And Showdowns

Author: Mazhar Farooqui

Publisher: Westland Non-Fiction

This thrilling memoir, takes us for a wild ride extending from the Burj Khalifa to the badlands of Zimbabwe



Title: The Little Book of Big Gains Paperback

Author: Sandeep Tyagi

Publisher: bloomsbury India

Sandeep Tyagi provides readers with a clear and practical roadmap to financial success.

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 7, 2004

PM for voluntary job quota in pvt sector

The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, said he favoured a national policy on reservation for the weaker sections in the private sector, though not by legislation. “It can be done voluntarily by the private sector. I am not suggesting jobs should not be given without merit. People can be trained,” Dr Singh said. Addressing a press conference in Mumbai, “Nobody can stop an idea whose time has come,” he said.

Nissan in talks with Infosys for outsourcing

Nissan Motor Company is said to be in advanced talks with Infosys for outsourcing its IT services. The Nissan Motor CEO and President, Mr Carlos Ghosn, visited the Infosys campus in Bangalore on Wednesday and held exploratory meetings with the top brass.

Maruti top brass in Japan for Rs 6000-cr investment

The top brass of Maruti Udyog Ltd is in Japan to work out with its parent, Suzuki Motor Corporation, the modalities of the proposed Rs 6,000-crore investment plan announced recently. According to sources, the Maruti team led by MD, Mr Jagdish Khattar, is in Hamamatsu to hold a series of meetings with the Suzuki top management.

Short take

A new era of financial inclusion for women

Shambhavi Choudhary

Access to financial services is a basic necessity that gives a person social and economic empowerment, especially for those who have been excluded for the longest time. For women, especially in rural and remote areas, access to financial services has been a distant dream. Globally, approximately 55 per cent of the total unbanked population are still women.

In India, while the financial inclusion of women has significantly increased with 79 per cent of women aged between 15-49 years having a bank account in their name, however, there is still a long way to achieve the goal of financial

inclusion. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana was pivotal in increasing the number of women with bank accounts. The number of accounts under PMJDY witnessed remarkable growth, increasing from 147.2 million in 2015 to 462.5 million in 2022, of which 55.59 per cent of accounts were held by women. Further, schemes such as direct bank transfers, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana among others have also helped the inclusion of women.

Moreover, financial literacy initiatives to educate women about financial products, savings, investments, and basic financial management have been instrumental. Microfinance institutions and Self-Help Groups have played a

pivotal role in providing financial services to women, particularly in rural areas.

ROLE OF DPIS

The adoption rate of UPI among women has also seen an upward trend. However, there is still a long way to go.

Even today, less than 30 per cent of women use UPI. There is a need to significantly increase this number in the coming years with targeted policymaking and technological solutions. The next phase of DPI should enable financial inclusion of the underserved women.

There is a need for joint effort from the public and private sector to run financial literacy and awareness

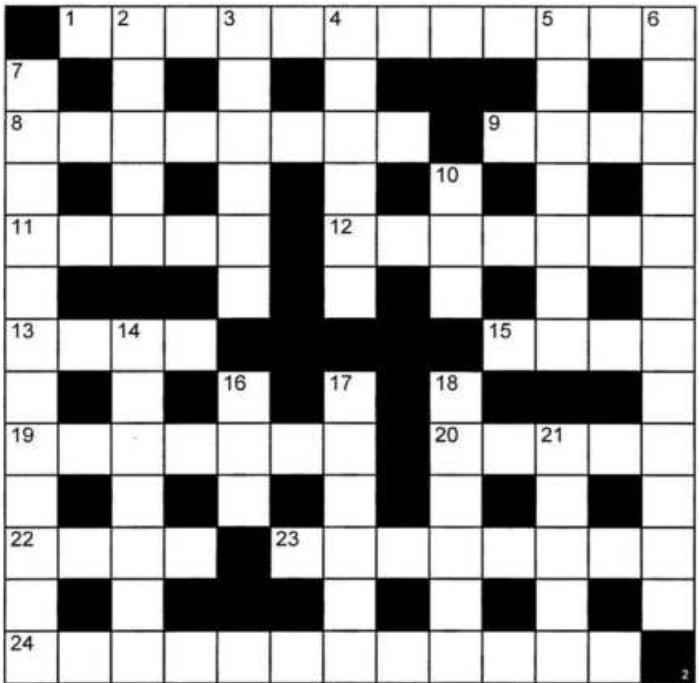
programmes to increase adoption of financial services among women. The private sector’s ability to innovate on top of the infrastructure provided by several DPIS puts them in a critical position to curate a set of products that targets gender-based financial inclusion.

In the next phase, the government should target the financial inclusion of women from rural and remote areas.

Further, financial institutions may adopt gender-sensitive lending practices and provide products designed for women. With the public and private sectors’ continuous efforts, women will increasingly become financially empowered.

The writer is Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2541



EASY

ACROSS

1. Cannot be forgiven (12)
8. Sluggish, lazy (8)
9. Donation (4)
11. Indian social class (5)
12. Pig’s foot (7)
13. Rule, pattern (4)
15. Be wasted by time or use (4)
19. Ambassadorial building (7)
20. School formal tests (5)
22. Gather, gird up (4)
23. Male horse (8)
24. Denunciation (12)

DOWN

2. Gets close (5)
3. Pollen-bearing part of stamen (6)
4. Pieces of turf accidentally dislodged (6)
5. Short, stiff hair (7)
6. Showing sense of adventure (12)
7. Not happy with one’s lot (12)
10. Acknowledge applause (3)
14. Stream in Italy Caesar had to cross (7)
16. Put question (3)
17. Mysterious, sacredly secret (6)
18. Madhouse (6)
21. Of birds (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

1. Bounder working out a plan that can’t be forgiven (12)
8. Doing nothing at home, I’ve cat to put out (8)
9. The present gran turismo, if included (4)
11. Indian class in Africa, stereotypically (5)
12. Sort of horse a porker will stand on (7)
13. The standard negative used by the Leathernecks (4)
15. It comes with long use to have clothing on (4)
19. Function of our man abroad Bess may have made something of (7)
20. In short, they are sat by same characters when about ten (5)
22. Fold under the food a schoolboy puts away (4)
23. No : it’s all different for the entire horse (8)
24. Giving of information against decent men on u-turn (12)

DOWN

2. Gets close to reason nothing is missing from mixture (5)
3. Part of the stamen that makes big cat lose its head (6)
4. Sod it replaces includes five bits of turf dislodged (6)
5. Show rage lest rib get broken (7)
6. Full of initiative, I ring present changes (12)
7. Not happy with descent, I’d not turned to it (12)
10. Sort of tie it to the front of the boat (3)
14. Stream Caesar crossed with one company in the burn-out (7)
16. Like the king to make a request (3)
17. Sacredly secret city’s sacked after end of millennium (6)
18. Lunatic asylum blamed for its disruption (6)
21. Of the birds that go by way of an outer part (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2540

ACROSS 1. Limpid 8. Limit 9. Saunter 11. Testator 12. Jetty 15. Tour 16. Ply 17. Gush 19. Sniff 21. Dumpling 24. Tussock 25. Liken 26. Toddle

DOWN 2. Image 3. Puncture 4. Diet 5. Sloth 6. Smut 7. Stir 10. Refulgent 12. Jute 13. Agonised 14. Chef 18. Plank 20. Focal 21. Dill 22. Make 23. Gust

Productivity boost

Increasing R&D spending may not be enough

It is often argued that India needs to substantially increase its research and development (R&D) capabilities to improve productivity, which is essential to compete in global markets. This, it has been pointed out, will also help expand India's industrial base and create employment. Unfortunately, India's spending on R&D, which is about 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), is much lower than that of its peers and is a big impediment to accelerating economic growth. According to some experts, India needs to increase R&D expenditure to about 3 per cent of GDP. Industrialist Naushad Forbes has rightly argued on these pages that large Indian companies spend very little on R&D. While there is little doubt that India must focus on R&D, simply increasing expenditure may not be enough.

In this context, economist Ufuk Akcigit of the University of Chicago has shown that an increase in R&D expenditure, particularly in the United States (US), has not led to a corresponding improvement in productivity. His findings, contained in an article in the latest issue of *Finance & Development*, published by the International Monetary Fund, can help policymakers avoid possible errors in other countries as well. Expenditure on R&D by the US in the 1980s was about 2.2 per cent of GDP, rising to 3.5 per cent in recent years. However, average productivity growth, which was 1.3 per cent between 1960 and 1985, has declined in the subsequent decades, except for a brief increase in the 2000s. Even though the number of people working on patent production increased substantially over the decades, productivity fell.

This paradox is explained by how resources are allocated. In terms of size, research shows small firms tend to be more innovative. On the other hand, large dominant corporations tend to focus on strategic moves over innovation, which affects potential output. There is enough evidence that market concentration increased in recent decades across several economies. Evidence from Italy shows that as businesses climb up in size, they tend to hire more politicians and innovation suffers. Since large corporations prioritise protecting their strategic positions, they not only acquire potential small rivals but also hire researchers from smaller firms at a premium, even when they don't necessarily need them. For instance, at the turn of the century, 48 per cent of inventors in the US worked for large establishments — companies at least 20 years old and employing over 1,000 people. By 2015, this number had increased to 58 per cent. Many researchers were often placed in roles where they could not fully utilise their skills. The learning from this is that as a result of this, R&D at macro level suffers, which has adverse implications for growth and development.

Some of these insights can be useful for developing economies like India. While it is essential to have large corporations leverage economies of scale, the government must ensure that firms do not use their dominant positions to stifle competition. To be fair, some of it will be unavoidable in the short to medium term. However, the government should not support large corporations at the expense of small and emerging businesses, which can potentially develop disruptive technologies resulting in substantial productivity gains. Fiscal support for R&D, wherever possible, should also not put smaller firms at a disadvantage. Focusing on a handful of corporations or champions may boost growth in the short run, but their dominant position can affect productivity and growth in the long run.

Moon rock

Chandrayaan-4 a test for Isro's manned moon mission

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) has an ambitious plan for the Chandrayaan-4 mission, targeted for 2027. The mission, cleared recently by the Cabinet with a tentative budget of ₹2,104 crore, aims to return lunar samples safely to Earth for study.

It will feature five modules launched on two geosynchronous launch vehicle mark 3 (LVM3) rockets, which will be assembled in space into one composite vehicle. The mission includes a lander, which will detach to collect a few kg of soil and rock samples from the lunar surface and return to Earth while carrying out other scientific experiments.

The propulsion module will ferry the combined modular spacecraft. The lander module will land on the moon with the instrumentation. The ascender module will detach from the lander and launch from the moon with the samples to enter a lunar orbit. The transfer module will collect the samples from the ascender module and transfer them to the re-entry module and that will loop back around Earth while releasing the payload to fall safely to Earth for collection.

The key tasks include space assembly, soft landing, collecting surface and sub-surface samples, and returning them to Earth safely while preventing contamination.

Very complex docking manoeuvres will be critical for success both for the assembly as well as the detachment of modules. While Chandrayaan-3 demonstrated Isro had the capability to manage a controlled soft landing, this is much more ambitious across various stages, including space assembly as well as re-entry to the Earth atmosphere with a delicate payload. Roving on the surface, the hopping of the lander module, and returning the propulsion module to the Earth orbit are involved.

This would demonstrate a grasp of several of the technologies required for a manned moon mission, which is on Isro's long-term "to do" list. However, of course, there is a vast difference between ferrying a few kg of rocks and transporting human beings so this is only the first step on the journey of putting Gaganauts on the moon.

After touchdown, a robotic arm, the surface sampling robot will scoop 2-3 kg samples around the landing site and transfer them to the ascender module. Meanwhile, a drilling mechanism will collect sub-surface samples and transfer these. The containers with samples will be sealed to prevent contamination and leakage. After collection is completed, the ascender module would ascend and dock with the transfer-and-re-entry module.

Samples will be transferred from the ascending module to the re-entry module. The transfer-and-re-entry module will return to Earth. At a suitable point, the re-entry module would be separated from the transfer module and re-enter Earth's atmosphere and finally land. It is designed to land on solid ground.

Major new technologies are required for docking/undocking, landing, safe return to Earth and sample collection and analysis. The mission is scheduled to be completed within 36 months with industry and academia involved in design, manufacture and scientific research.

Isro's ambitions have grown along with its successes. Alongside Chandrayaan-4, the Cabinet also cleared a Venus orbital mission, which will be even more challenging.

While the Mangalayaan missions have demonstrated Isro can design and operate a planetary orbiter, Mars has a thin clear atmosphere. Venus has a very thick, corrosive atmosphere and far higher gravity, presenting more daunting challenges.

However, each one of Isro's missions, even the failures, has gathered valuable data and helped improve technological capability. Those have translated into a series of useful terrestrial applications, and gradually brought Isro closer to being a big player in the satellite market while building India's aerospace and space ecosystems.

Global innovation frenzy

...can India match the pace?

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



Flip through any academic journal, wade through an opinion piece on an online news site or its print cousin, or glance at a news headline and you see businesses claiming their innovative new product/service launch or governments proclaiming innovation-related investment or legislation. And you start wondering what all this frenzy about innovation is about.

When I query my business friends, they promptly reply that innovation is essential to help them differentiate their products or services from those of their competitors. When I query my friends involved in state- or national-level policy making, their prompt reply is that innovation is central to creating industries that drive economic growth and thus create jobs and grow gross domestic product (GDP). And come to think of it, the term "GDP", which in my college days was perceived by all of us as something that only academics chant about, in today's world appears to be as important even to the non-professional as India winning the world one-day cricket championship, or having an Indian girl being crowned as Miss World.

Then we read about United States-based companies like Google and Microsoft dominating the current hot topic of innovation, artificial intelligence (AI), and then you hear that these great innovator tech giants are led by Indians: Google by Sundar Pichai, Microsoft by Satya Nadella, IBM by Arvind Krishna, and, hold your breath, the White House Science and Technology Policy Committee

by Arati Prabhakar ... the list goes on and on.

India also has its share of both large tech companies and large national laboratories, but why is it that these don't seem to be at the forefront of any innovation news headlines?

Even more bewildering is that all these Indian tech leaders in the United States and leaders heading Indian tech companies and labs, are all part of something we are all proud of: India's merit-based education system, which ensures that in all fields, be it science, engineering, management or social sciences (to name a few fields), entry to the best colleges and institutes is based on an entrance exam system and is not based on family contacts and inheritance and paying hefty amounts.

Co-existing with all of the above is the oft-reported news that we, because of this extreme merit-based system, seem to be creating a generation of students/entrants who have mastered a system of besting entrance tests using rote learning (through training schools such as those in Kota) and thus are not good at the kind of original thinking that innovation requires?

Maybe we can learn from other countries, particularly ones that overwhelmingly lead in innovation, and for this there is no better place to start than the United States of America. As we all know, in our times, outfits from this country dominate the innovators of the business world (Google, Microsoft, etc) as well as the innovators of the educational world (Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, etc). What makes the



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

Economy: Glass permanently half full

Many people seem convinced that the Indian economy is on track to becoming a developed nation. The untrammelled bullish case is that we have shed the vulnerabilities that were obvious until 2014, when the Indian economic renaissance burst forth. In this view, a steady gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of more than 7 per cent will transform India into a developed country or Viksit Bharat. The definite signs of this right now are a low level of debt-GDP ratio, a low current account deficit (heading towards a surplus), a strong banking system, a well-managed Budget deficit, and low inflation. According to another minority camp, to which I belong, these are glib claims. A lot of positive factors may have temporarily created a favourable situation for now, but they only serve to hide many continuing core weaknesses. Besides, the data behind some of the positives is questionable. Let's consider each of these positives one by one:

Debt-GDP ratio: While the government claims that India's debt-GDP ratio is low, according to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, it is above 82 per cent, among the highest ever. The ratio rose continuously from the low of 2014, hit a peak of 89 per cent during the pandemic, and remained above 80 per cent over the next few years. The last time the figure was above 80 per cent was in 2004, the peak of the previous 25 years being 83 per cent in 2003, not too far from today's level.

Current account: The current account is mainly influenced by imports, exports, and financial flows (from investors and remittances). Imports are growing and are largely inelastic (crude oil, electronics, gold). Exports are not growing fast enough. Exports were 25 per cent of GDP in 2013, collapsed after 2015, and are now 22.8 per cent. According to the official data, between 2014-15 and 2023-24, India's merchandise exports went up from \$310 billion in FY15 to \$437 in FY24, which is a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of just 3.3 per cent. Since this

is far lower than the inflation rate, and the rupee has been weak, showing how uncompetitive India's exports have remained. Meanwhile, imports were up by a CAGR of 4.67 per cent. What saved the day were services exports, which grew 8.92 per cent over the same period. The core of the current account — merchandise trade — remains weak. Of course, the weakness is partly compensated by capital flows from foreign investors and remittances but here too the numbers are not strong, contrary to popular belief. Capital transfer rose from \$65.7 billion in FY15 to \$105.8 billion in FY24, a CAGR of just 5.58 per cent. The current account deficit as a percentage of GDP has remained 1-2 per cent for the past 10 years; there is no fundamental improvement.

Banking system: This is the third significant improvement claimed. What this really means is that public-sector banks (PSBs) have cleaned up their balance sheets — since there was nothing much to fix in private banks, which are fairly well-run and regulated. Unfortunately, there is a huge difference between a one-time clean-up of the balance sheet and a fundamental change in operations and management. What is surprising is the continuing wilful blindness about the single-biggest reason for previous bad loans: Unchecked corruption of bank officers in sanctioning loans and hebest lending. Nothing has ever been done to make banks accountable. Indeed, officials of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Ministry of Finance, vigilance teams of banks, the Central Vigilance Commission, and bank chairmen have all blamed the problem of bad loans on two external factors: Genuine business failures and poor bankruptcy laws. But the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has shown us how wide and deep such corrupt banking was. Trillions of rupees have been written off without anyone being made accountable for it. What is the evidence that this has changed in any way? PSB reform was initially tinkered with at Gyan Sangams



IRRATIONAL CHOICE

DEBASHIS BASU

US such a dominant player in the innovations of our time?

The answer to this is (hold your breath) a public institution called DARPA, the full form of which is Defense Advanced Research Projects Administration. DARPA is the institution that defined the technical challenge and funded, for example, the innovation behind Google's original search algorithm. DARPA's funding also laid the foundation for the creation and dominance of Intel, Nvidia, Qualcomm, Cisco as well as Raytheon, Boeing, and more. A recent eye-catching one was the \$600 million funding by DARPA of Amazon's cloud-computing project. Incidentally, there are several of my left-leaning American friends who recount all this and say that this is why America needs to be at war all the time so that such funding will continue. But that is another story.

What makes me worry and perhaps you too, dear reader, is this: India also has its share of such large institutions like the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which alone had an annual Budget allocation last year of \$2.8 billion (₹23,000 crore) and a network of 52-plus laboratories spread all over India and employs more than 7,000 scientists. Why, then, does India not have world-leading technology companies like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon?

When I wandered through my friends and acquaintances with this same question, why is India not in the forefront of innovation, the wisest reply that I got, and unsurprisingly, from a friend who is a member one of India's "business communities" was this: "It does not pay to innovate in India." I immediately jumped on him: "Why is that so?" His answer: Indian companies, private or government-owned, think it is too risky to adopt a new innovative product or service.

In India, another friend says, a significant portion of research funding is government-led, particularly in sectors like defence, space, and energy. This can lead to bureaucratic inefficiencies and a slower adoption of cutting-edge technologies in the private sector. And, crucially, large Indian companies often prefer low-risk, service-oriented models over high-risk, high-reward innovation.

And, finally, India produces many highly skilled engineers and technical graduates, but many of them migrate to countries like the United States, where opportunities for tech innovation are greater, or they end up in the services sector domestically. The education system in India also tends to emphasise rote learning over creative problem-solving. Clearly, we have a lot on our hands if we set out to make India a more technologically innovative country!

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(which have stopped now), through Indradhanush, the Bank Boards Bureau, recapitalisation, and bank mergers. A former chairman of a PSB said about bank mergers: "If you combine two small messes, you will only get a bigger mess." All the tinkering studiously avoided the one thing that needed to be done: Setting up an apparatus of accountability, which can happen through ownership change. But then, even the much-discussed lone privatisation of IDBI Bank has gone nowhere.

Fiscal deficit: India's fiscal deficit was 5.63 per cent of GDP in FY24, higher than it was anytime between 2012 and 2019. Only in FY11 was the fiscal deficit higher at 5.91 per cent. There is no fundamental change in the state's financial strength. The deficit figure continues to be controlled either by squeezing capital expenditure (which the Congress-led government did) or squeezing revenue expenditure (which the current regime is doing).

Inflation: Of the three reasons for the humiliating performance of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the Lok Sabha elections a few months ago, one was high actual inflation, the other two being unemployment and lack of any real change in living conditions. Official inflation is low but real inflation on the ground is not. The inflation number is different for different people. While the overall official inflation is low, food inflation is almost in double digits. Also, official inflation is low because oil prices are low, which India can't claim credit for.

The fact is, only three-four countries in the past 100 years have transformed themselves into developed nations — Japan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Taiwan and South Korea in the mid-20th century, and China in the 1990s. Such radical transformation has three markers. One is farm-sector reforms, which would lead to a high rural surplus. The second is double-digit growth in manufacturing for years together. And the third is trade surplus from higher value-added products. Just ask yourself, have we even taken the first step on our journey towards any of these goals?

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Melania Trump whitewashes a presidency



BOOK REVIEW

ALEXANDRA JACOBS

White House memoirs tend to go on a bit. Melania Trump is slim, as befits an erstwhile fashion model who prepared for her husband's 2017 inauguration with "strong espresso and a light breakfast of fruit," but gravely out of shape.

Better brew a double before cracking *Melania*, which, though clad in a black cover — a choice that could symbolise mourning, sophistication or more likely abject nothingness — is a brazen whitewash of a presidency and a marriage of some tumult.

Its 182 pages are padded with a generous photo insert, including an

old ad she did for Camel cigarettes. There are long quotes from the former first lady's previously delivered speeches, and some of Mr Trump's, too. And as if to assert herself against his omnipresent monogram, some paragraph breaks are marked with the stark initial M. Is this a book or a souvenir tea towel?

Certainly the timing of its release, less than a month before the 2024 election, invites speculation about what exactly *Melania* is intended to accomplish. Its biggest revelation, that Mrs Trump supports abortion rights, could be a cry of independence — or a strategised attempt to further blur Mr Trump's unpopular policy position. The author briefly waves a manicured hand at the idea that trans women in sports might unfairly dash some dreams, and refuses to concede that President Biden won in 2020.

"I acknowledge that differing viewpoints are a natural aspect of human relationships" is a typical

bland, obfuscating sentence. No co-writer is credited; after a plagiarism incident at the 2016 Republican National Convention, as Mrs Trump explains in a chapter called "Why Was the Speech Not Vetted?", she's loath to delegate.

Like much of the best life writing, *Melania* begins when its subject, then surnamed Knauss, arrives in New York, after modeling vaulted her from communist Slovenia to Milan, Paris and "everywhere in Europe." She's 26, ready to take her career to the next level and wearing a necklace from her family engraved with the German words *Ich liebe dich* ("I love you"). The twin towers loom as her limo comes into Manhattan, and will not be referred to again.

Her mother, Amalija, who died this year, was Austrian, an onion farmer's daughter who became a patternmaker. Her father, Viktor, was a chauffeur turned auto salesman, and Melania fondly recalls the new-leather smell of

a Citroën Maserati he brought home when she was seven.

There's another chomp of the madeleine when Donald, after meeting her one night during Fashion Week in the VIP section of the now-defunct Kit Kat Klub, picks her up in a black Mercedes for their first date, a business-tinged visit to his property in Bedford. "Driving provides freedom," she writes, "which I always treasure."

She and an older sister, Ines, had grown up in a colourfully decorated three-bedroom apartment in the idyllic-sounding town of Sevnica, tended to by a nanny. The family summured on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia, where Melania remembers running barefoot over cobblestone streets and enjoying gelato. She was a diligent student and planned to pursue industrial design

before professional photographers began clamouring to take her picture.

Her idealism was punctured after her prize money was stolen following a runaway competition. "Such dishonesty has no place in my life," she writes, "and it never will."

Melania is less a confessional than a CV, most notable for what it leaves out than what it includes. Forget anything

about porn stars or crotch-grabbing; astoundingly, George Floyd's name is never mentioned during a discussion of Black Lives Matter. Instead she writes of business ventures like her jewellery sold on QVC, a planned skin care

line with "the rejuvenating properties of caviar" that never quite made it to eager customers and recent dabblings in blockchain.

"Knowing that I can stand on my own if necessary," she writes in one of those lines you're dying to read into, but can't quite, "gives me great confidence in everything I do."

If there's a plain truth in *Melania*, it's that she loves her son, Barron, and will protect him at all costs; and sincerely cares for imperilled children. She has an aversion to raw fish that was accommodated during an official trip to Japan, and an ongoing correspondence with King Charles III. There's plenty about her hard-hatted but high-heeled renovation of the White House, including a tennis pavilion, and her design of a flowery new rug for the Diplomatic Reception Room.

And yet the only entity called to the carpet by *Melania* is the media — a faceless monolith solely motivated by a desire to do damage to her family, wilfully misinterpreting and mocking messages — "Be Best," her initiative to stop cyberbullying; "I Really Don't Care, Do U?" scrawled on a jacket — that should be obvious to all.

"Lying is not acceptable," she asserts.

The reviewer is a Times book critic and occasional features writer. She joined The Times in 2010

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{ OUR TAKE }

A war that can have no winners

The Hamas-Israel conflict has wreaked havoc in West Asia, could debilitate the global economy

It's been a year since Hamas launched its ill-conceived and brazen terrorist attacks on Israel that enabled the group to take scores of hostages but led to a debilitating war. Israel's disproportionate response to the assault has led to the death of more than 40,000 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them women, children, and the elderly. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been unable to achieve his stated goals of destroying Hamas and bringing all the hostages home. With Israel's decision to expand the war to Lebanon, apparently, to decapitate Hezbollah and facilitate the return of Israelis who had fled the northern part of the country, concerns about the violence spiralling out of control have grown. Netanyahu, who just a year ago was desperately clinging to power to avoid facing corruption and fraud charges, today enjoys popular backing within his country. But this has come at a tremendous human cost — nearly two million Palestinians have been displaced in Gaza and nearly all of them remain trapped, while one million Lebanese have fled their homes in recent days. Netanyahu's actions in the West Bank and Gaza have triggered fears that he wishes to leave no room for a two-State solution. Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have faced the brunt of Israel's military might as Netanyahu claims he is destroying an ecosystem of Islamist terror.

Israel has the support of the US, from where evidence has emerged of the Biden administration turning a blind eye to Netanyahu's flagrant human rights violations, but Tel Aviv has lost the propaganda war. The Palestinian cause has received a fillip with countries such as Ireland, Norway and Spain voicing support for a two-State solution. The gains and diplomatic wins made through the Abraham Accords lie in tatters and West Asia has been dragged back several decades, with Israel isolated in a hostile region. The United Nations has again been exposed as a toothless body that is a prisoner to the interests of the five permanent members of the Security Council. In India and elsewhere, concerns have increased about the conflict's impact on oil prices and exports at a time when the global economy remains fragile. Israel's plan to retaliate against Iran could well tip West Asia past the breaking point. This war must end, and the world must then seriously look at UN reforms to ensure there are mechanisms in place to assert a rules-based order and avert prolonged wars.

Curing prisons of caste prejudice

Among India's oldest fault lines, caste and associated discrimination is both stubborn in its longevity and pernicious in its reach. More evidence of this unfortunate phenomenon came last week when the Supreme Court outlawed caste-based bias in prisons and scrapped an array of caste-discriminatory jobs given to inmates in Indian jails. The top court found that colonial era jail manuals that segregated professions based on caste were violations of the constitutional protections for equal opportunity and against untouchability.

The bench said caste-based assignments of labour, such as assigning menial tasks like cleaning and sweeping to marginalised castes while reserving cooking for higher castes, is a violation of Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution, which ensures equality and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of caste. It further stated that these practices fail to meet the test of intelligible differentia and do not contribute to the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners.

For an issue that flew under the radar for many decades, this is a watershed moment in several ways. One, the Supreme Court expanded the scope of Article 21, stating that caste-based discrimination hinders personal growth and development. It ruled that prison systems must allow individuals from marginalised communities to overcome caste prejudices and provide an environment that respects equality and dignity. Two, it recognised the discrimination faced by denotified tribes in a rare acknowledgment of how independent India has failed to eradicate the bias engendered by colonial tropes. Three, it spoke about indirect forms of discrimination and used the logic to order the Centre to tweak model prison manuals and rules notified in 2023. The order is a significant step in the battle against caste.

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



A year after the Hamas strike, insecurity grows

Israel's disproportionate response and failure of global powers and institutions to enforce a ceasefire have plunged the world into a crisis

A year ago, October 7 came as a distraction to the war in Ukraine. Today, Israel's response to the Hamas terror attack has become so all-consuming that everything else is a distraction. With close to 45,000, mostly civilians, dead, no ceasefire in sight, and a rapidly escalating conflict, the possibility of a war engulfing West Asia, is alarmingly real.

A world without diplomacy: The Ukraine war, to some extent, and the ongoing war in West Asia, more prominently, highlight the fact that we are today in a world with no mediators capable of mediating or ending regional wars.

There are hardly any useful back-channels or willing negotiators who can reach out to Israel, Iran or the United States (US). While, theoretically speaking, the US may be in a position to end or extend the war in Ukraine, its helplessness when it comes to West Asia is shockingly stark. The world continues to look at Washington for a solution in the region, which it is unable to provide thanks to its own presidential elections and the influence Tel Aviv exerts on the American body poli-

tic. If US intervention in regional conflicts is often unwelcome and problematic, its indifference could be troubling, and its inability to act due to partisan considerations even worse.

The silence of the superpower-in-waiting, China, is curious, too. While it sided with Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war, it sat it out during the Red Sea crisis and has contributed little to defusing global crises elsewhere, and it has been disinterested in mediating in the West Asia crisis.

India doesn't see itself as powerful enough to undertake such tasks, yet. A world without empowered institutions, crisis diplomacy, and trusted mediators able and willing to defuse serious crises will be akin to chaos on steroids.

A more insecure world: Given two simultaneous wars involving great powers in some capacity — with no meaningful conversations on global stability, the potential to fuel more grey-zone warfare and terrorism, and humanitarian concerns sidelined — a deeply insecure and unstable world is in sight. Add to this growing nuclear temptations that are bound to result from such systemic instability and uncertainty. While nothing may stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons now, more and more States with difficult neighbours, especially those with nuclear weapons, may consider taking this path.

Even though the post-World War II institutions have perpetuated structural inequality on a global scale, a world without institutions and norms is undoubtedly worse.

Consider the United Nations (UN).

The UN has not only become pathologically ineffective and helpless, with warring parties feeling little hesitation in bombing even areas where UN staff may be present, but it also faces the risk of being banned or declared *non grata*, as Israel recently did with the UN chief whose pleas to the warring parties are not taken seriously even by the media.

Take the case of the International Criminal Court (ICC). It is not only in Israel's line of fire but also in that of the US and some of Israel's close friends in Europe. Ironically, those very States that were keen to have the ICC issue arrest warrants against Russian President Vladimir Putin had warned of sanctioning the ICC for issuing the same against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Those who labelled the Ukraine war as Putin's war refuse to acknowledge that Israel's excesses are driven by Netanyahu's quest for political survival.

The two wars, particularly the one being waged by Israel in Gaza, are also taking us toward a world where moral considerations are becoming obsolete, despite this approach's inherent challenges, including the fact that political morality is rife with hypocrisy. And yet, moralpolitik provides us with a yardstick to measure the "banality of evil" in everyday State practice. In domestic politics or international relations, moral double standards are better than having no moral standards at all. We need a yardstick, however flawed in practice, for measurement. The most disturbing example of the banality of evil in this war is equating Hamas terrorists with



Despite Israel's ability to hit back at its enemies with more and more force, what is also clear is its utter vulnerability in the region

AFP

the people of Gaza, and our tacit approval of such framing.

Israel is more isolated and insecure: One year since the October 7 terror attacks on Israel and its disproportionate retaliation, Israel's perpetual sense of insecurity has only deepened alongside its now growing isolation.

Despite Israel's ever-growing ability to hit back at its enemies with more and more force, what is also clear is its utter vulnerability in the region. What Israelis call the ring of fire — Iran and its proxy groups in Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria — has only become more intense. Are Israeli citizens more secure today than they were a few years ago? No country, however powerful, would be able to defend itself from determined, ideologically motivated adversaries, especially when its own actions sustain the latter's cause.

Not only is Israel more insecure today, but it is also losing the world's sympathy. Israel is now routinely censured and criticised in various international forums for its excesses and violation of international law, in particular by those in the Global South. While the support of the Global South may not matter much to Israel, Israel's European and North American supporters might find it hard to ignore them for geopolitical reasons, at the very least. While the US is still battling for Israel, there are growing divisions within the former on

the Israeli question, especially among the younger generations.

The Abraham Accords is hanging by a thread, but it will come increasingly under stress as the war progresses, primarily driven by popular sentiments on the streets. As a result, the Gulf States, in particular, may be forced back into the Palestine trap even if they want to move beyond it.

What does all this mean for the state and people of Israel? Increasingly insecure, losing global sympathy, and being labelled as merciless villains, the war has not only overshadowed the popular protests against Netanyahu but also threatens to undermine Israel's liberal and democratic values. Is this truly the future the people of Israel envision for themselves as a people? What Israelis do to the people of Gaza is bound to have a defining impact on themselves as a people.

For us in India, it was easy to ignore the war in Ukraine as Europe's problem in which "White people were killing White people". But a war in West Asia is fundamentally different — it could affect us directly, indirectly and in unforeseen ways.

Happymon Jacob teaches India's foreign policy at JNU and is the founder of the Council for Strategic and Defence Research. The views expressed are personal

Jammu & Kashmir polls and Islamabad's shadow

The turnout in the elections in Jammu & Kashmir was high, as even historical boycotters like the Jamaat-e-Islami participated, and the electoral process took place peacefully and smoothly. Initially, it was assumed that the National Conference (NC)-Congress alliance would sweep the Valley and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could dominate the Jammu region. But the presence of smaller formations like Engineer Rashid's Awami Ittehad Party supported by the Jamaat, the J&K Peoples Conference, the J&K Apni Party, independents, and the BJP itself might upset these calculations in the Valley.

The NC and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) have demanded the restoration of Article 370 and J&K's statehood, as well as the nullification of laws amended since 2019. The BJP is equally vehement that Article 370 will never be restored, though statehood will be, at some point in time. The Congress has been silent on Article 370 but has promised statehood as well as a slew of freebies.

The big issue will be government functioning after the polls. Following the changes since 2019, the new Union Territory (UT) Assembly and government won't have many of the powers they had before 2018. Law and order, economy and land use will be decided by unelected officials reporting to the lieutenant governor (LG), under the Union home ministry. The BJP is banking on making a breakthrough in the Pir Panjal region and even in the northern reaches of the Valley, in places like Gurez.

The Pir Panjal area has been a stronghold of Valley-based parties, but post-2019 developments, such as the reservation of nine seats for Scheduled Tribes (mainly Gujjars and Bakarwals), are likely to be a factor. The BJP is seeking the ST vote but has also endorsed ST status for the Pahari community, comprising mostly Hindus but also Muslims and Sikhs.

A BJP victory in the UT will not result in too many problems because the party is in power at the Centre. But an NC-Congress victory will face all manner of problems. The Centre announced crucial rule changes

to further empower the LG vis-à-vis an elected government in J&K. A July 2024 notification has noted that the transfer or posting of any officer from the All India Services will have to be approved by the LG. The government will also have to seek the approval of the LG to appoint the advocate general and other law officers.

Essentially, the continuity of the Centre's control on J&K is ensured regardless of the poll results. The parties contesting do so with the knowledge that there has been a structural change in the governance system. Delhi's experience here could be instructive. But J&K politicians are probably hoping that UT gains back full statehood, and with that, the state government its powers. The BJP says the high turnout indicates its Naya Kashmir strategy is working.

The problem in J&K is that there is another malign element in the equation that wields a disproportionate amount of weight — Pakistan. In the run-up to the polls, Pakistan has been active on the ground through its proxy warriors. According to estimates, over the past year, Islamabad has managed to push in the UT through the international border in Jammu. These have been operating in small groups from the heights of the Pir Panjal. Through 2023, there had been a rise in terrorist activity in the Poonch-Rajauri area. In June, a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims was ambushed in Reasi, with nine people killed and many injured. Since then, there have been a number of incidents involving the security forces and terrorists in the region stretching from Poonch to Doda.

The security forces have pressed Army para-commandos to ferret out the terrorists, and the J&K police set up 19 special counter-terror units to deal with the challenge in the eight districts of the Jammu division. The police have also arrested several persons who have been providing logistic support to the terrorist squads.

Pakistani terrorists aim to keep the Kashmir pot boiling. We cannot ignore the nature of the Pakistani polity, where the Pakistan army calls the shots on ties with India. During General Qamar Javed Bajwa's term, we saw Pakistani efforts to stabilise relations with India. But the current chief, General Asim Munir, does not seem too favourably inclined towards India. As it is, the unity of the Pakistan army is frayed. The fallout between the army and Pakistan's most popular political force, Imran Khan, has badly divided the country. Internal challenges are mounting, so pushing *jihadi* against India in Kashmir remains the preferred option.

There is no doubt that India will defeat the immediate *jihadi* threat militarily. The elections seem to have consolidated the preference for peace and stability. But the problem of Pakistan will not go away that easily. It remains a pill stuck in our throat — we need to swallow or spit it out.

Manoj Joshi is distinguished fellow, Observer Research Foundation. The views expressed are personal



Manoj Joshi



In the face of internal challenges, Pakistan aims to keep the Kashmir pot boiling

AFP

{ OLAF SCHOLZ } GERMAN CHANCELLOR



We are in close contact with our international partners to prevent a further escalation of the conflict (in West Asia)



{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



In Vietnam's resilience, a lesson for India's economy

It's impossible for any visitor to the war museum in Ho Chi Minh City to not be thrilled by the experience. The Vietnamese have aesthetically preserved the memories of their civil war and the drubbing they gave France and the United States (US). They not only share these immortal stories of human dignity and the spirit of freedom with others but have internalised them as their code of honour. This is the surest way to ensure permanent freedom from slavery.

I saw a large number of locals at the museum. Young parents had brought their children there and the old accompanied their grandchildren to familiarise them with the unique history of the war. The elders read the descriptions before the exhibits to the young ones. I have seldom witnessed such a phenomenon on any of my foreign trips.

Four days spent in Vietnam reminded me of Howard Fast's *My Glorious Brothers*. We were slaves of the Egyptians a thousand years ago—that was on the lips of every Jew who lived in the Jewish nation established before the advent of Christ. Being aware of your subjugation is the surest way to never be in that position ever again. Israel follows the dictum till today. Vietnam has embraced it in a more sophisticated way. It's not fighting wars with its neighbours like Israel. Its relations with China have improved, too. This is the reason, the nation, smaller than the Indian state of Rajasthan has dazzled everyone by its economic progress. After a long spell of wars and the civil war, Vietnam finally managed to come into its own in 1976. But the next 25 years were spent nursing the deep wounds left by decades of violence.

It's only in the 21st century that it gathered economic steam. In less than 24 years, 99% of households have electricity. Load shedding is unheard of and potholes don't break your back on the roads. Fifty per cent of the population has access to clean drinking water, and close to 87% of Vietnamese have access to the national health insurance scheme. The World Bank in a 2022 report said just 4.2% of Vietnam's population was living below the poverty line.

It's no surprise that a country with a population of just 100 million has an economy that has crossed the \$1.350 trillion mark in

PPP terms. The World Bank has projected an economic growth rate of 6% for Vietnam this year and even higher for the next year. That's why Vietnam attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) of \$14.15 billion in the first eight months of this financial year.

India is far bigger than Vietnam in terms of size, population and economy, but this year we received less FDI compared with the year before. We shouldn't be alarmed but should remain alert. Vietnam is a member of the 10-nation grouping, the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean). The progress the Asean nations have made in the past 30 years is worth acknowledging.

Western nations, which profess their commitment to democracy, find themselves at ease in Vietnam's political atmosphere. Most Asean nations prefer economic progress over democratic values. Vietnam has a single-party rule. The Communists rule Vietnam as they do in China. People have the freedom to talk but they shy away from openly discussing their country's political issues. Like in Moscow and Beijing, citizens in Vietnam feel they are under constant surveillance. I wouldn't have noticed it had I not engaged with a young man in Saigon Mall, an upscale shopping complex, enquiring if he considered himself a comrade. He looked around and in a hushed tone said — we are "red capitalists". I probed him further. He replied — on the surface our leaders are socialists but in their hearts they are capitalists.

He wasn't wrong. The stores in the mall were packed with uber luxury items. Even in Delhi-NCR, you won't find many malls with so many luxury stores. As they say, there's darkness behind every glitter. To a keen observer, Vietnam betrays its dark side. The youth are turning away from marriage.

A 28-year-old man told me he couldn't muster the courage to marry. "The cost of living is so high, how will we raise kids?" He isn't wrong. This is the first country where I saw a currency note for 500,000 dong. Its value is close to ₹2,000.

Vietnam is dealing with its own maladies. But India can, nonetheless, take inspiration from Vietnam's giant leap forward.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

OUR VIEW



The AI market must not fail: It would hurt us all

The rise of artificial intelligence and the path taken by OpenAI could prove pivotal to public support for the profit motive. An AI let-down may hobble the case for free-market economics

It's time to admit that the profit motive—and hence the free market—is under a cloud of suspicion again, one gathered by a digital version in general and GenAI in particular. In the 20th century, sceptics arched their eyebrows at signs of labour exploitation by capital. Now, market failure is in focus: The risk of an AI-armed Big Tech monopoly, owned by a few, exploiting us all. In India, an AI-dystopia film in Hindi titled *CTRL* has rung an alarm bell. In America, artificial intelligence (AI) and its generative tools are arousing an unlikely debate, given the role of capitalism in the country's success, on the pursuit of profits. With the self-regulatory effect of competition having failed in online markets for search and social media, shouldn't antitrust oversight tighten on AI—whose market impact is projected to be profound? And if online markets fail so often to stay competitive, doesn't the profit motive itself deserve scrutiny?

The rise of OpenAI presents a test case. As the market pioneer of GenAI, its ChatGPT app claims 250 million weekly active users, with 11 million paying \$20 per month for this AI chatbot service. It also has about a million business clients. The non-profit startup expects to log revenues of \$3.7 billion this year and \$11.6 billion next. Last week, it raised \$6.6 billion in new funds in a funding round that places its value at \$157 billion. Last year, it got \$10 billion plus from Microsoft. While OpenAI began in 2015 with a mission to serve humanity with safe AI, it set up a "capped profit" subsidiary in 2019, the soaring prospects of which sparked an internal rebellion over the startup's direction within a year of ChatGPT's late-2022 launch. In a swirl of backroom intrigue and high drama, OpenAI's chief Sam Altman was ousted, but only to return

within days as its boss amid a shakeup of its governing board. Today, its investors want it turned into a fully profit-aimed business, with its cap on profit distribution lifted, within two years. This shift will not be easy. If its for-profit arm is cleaved apart, valuable R&D assets may get left behind, and if Altman seeks to convert all of OpenAI into a separate company, the non-profit entity may have to be paid a staggering sum. Although the startup does have AI rivals, speculation over Altman getting a stake worth \$11 billion in a rejigged OpenAI has stoked concerns of what a lurch for profits might imply. After all, trade-offs of profit-versus-principle confront almost every business; companies with market influence, all the more so.

AI industry opacity means chatbots may be in a position to bend ethics and exploit users. Sure, corporate governance could guard the public interest, but for this to work optimally, we need boards that reflect well dispersed ownership and true shareholder democracy. If super-normal profits beckon on the back of captive markets, private dominance of AI goes unchecked and ethical ideals get bent along the way, a scenario that looks plausible in the context of Big Tech's ascent so far, the profit motive's very legitimacy—as drawn from free-market theory—could face a popular backlash. For the self-interest of a few to serve everybody well, markets must stay rivalrous so that users have choice and businesses should be transparent so that we can identify players that are up to no good. Should these two conditions go unmet—as regulatory laxity or capture could mean—it would arguably expose the free-market formula of economic success to the risk of public resistance. In other words, we all have a stake in how the AI market evolves.

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why the world remains in the grip of fierce delusions

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoupled'

Joker: *Folie à Deux*, the second edition in the ongoing attempt at seriousness by Todd Phillips, director of *The Hangover* trilogy, released a few days ago. The film probably triggered a mass googling of '*Folie à Deux*,' which means 'madness of two,' a phenomenon that is more formally known as shared delusion. So, what was an unspoken flaw in the first *Joker* is spelt out more clearly in the sequel. The flaw is that it portrays its central character as crazy. Great stories never do that, even though they are all about madness.

The madness of the mad looks like madness; the madness of the 'sane' is heroic. And infectious. From the propensity of the world to be infected by what doesn't look like madness come our enduring abstractions.

Folie à Deux is a phenomenon in which a person with a powerful delusion transfers it to another person, who then begins to see a version of the delusion. The relationship is not equal (assuming that there really are 'equal' relationships). Usually, the person

who transmits the delusion ('the primary') is severely delusional and the receiver is someone with the potential to receive delusions upon contact with a 'primary.'

Then, together they believe in the same vision and corroborate it for each other. In the film, the Joker passes on his delusion to a woman who then amplifies it.

Shared delusion is all around us. A person begins to hear voices and a family member then begins to hear the same. A man believes a politician is an incarnation of divinity and someone else, or even the whole family, begins to believe in that. Most instances of shared delusion are so common and ordinary that they are categorized as human nature. Some ideologies, for instance.

There is also '*folie à plusieurs*,' or the 'madness of many,' where a single person infects many. But this too is common; we have to only think of ancient irrational ideas that have endured and still hold sway over the world. Anyone can see the 'madness of many,' except in the case of his own beliefs. Sanity is simply not the majority condition of the world. Mostly, the infection is very mild. But sometimes we get to see how powerful a shared delusion can be.

In 2018, a man in Delhi convinced 11 members of his prosperous household to hang

themselves along with him. Until that day, they were known to their neighbours and friends as just a regular family. The dead belonged to a wide age group—there were teens, the young, the middle-aged and a very old woman. The primary influencer was the head of the family—somehow, he persuaded his family to stand on stools with nooses around their necks and hands bound. Maybe they were led to believe that if they merely stood this way, they would experience something supernatural after which they could just step down from the stools. But they would dangle like the veins of a banyan tree, which was the specific stated objective of 'the primary.' (Only 10 died by hanging. The old woman probably could not get on a stool, so she was helpfully strangled in another room.) This is a world where it is hard to sell a Netflix subscription. Yet, a man could convince his entire household to hang themselves.

Instances of mass hysteria too may emerge from the same phenomenon, with a

single source. Usually, because of the sheer number of people who are infected, which could be in hundreds, the primary source is hard to identify. As it happened inaryana in 2017, when hundreds of women across the state believed that someone had chopped their hair when they woke up from sleep or after a blackout.

Joker: Folie à Deux is not only about the shared delusion between a man and a woman, but also his influence on society. A type of people who are primed to receive a convenient or fantastic delusion begin to see what 'the primary' sees. These are probably people in poor mental health, whose condition is made worse by traumas and failures. And they begin to see in a madman a revolutionary. As we can guess from the history of the real world, they are never really saved. They then move on to another delusional hero.

How is it that a vast number of people claim to 'understand' a madman? They don't. They, in fact, misunderstand. Madmen, by nature, are never clear. They leave

enough ambiguity for people to impose their own ideas on another person. And what we are all in love with is our own ideas, even if they are projected on another person.

This is why good scientists almost never become mass heroes, while actors do. There are, of course, some exceptions like Albert Einstein, but he was rare. Scientists are very clear about their ideas, so there is very little room for misinterpretation. On the other hand, many superstar actors, including those who are not identified as actors, are fluid. They are not what people think they are. This is not a deceit. It is just the way they are; that is their real talent. People see what they want to see in them. It appears that even when 'the primary' is not delusional, he can transmit a delusion to a wide range of people.

In comparison, sanity has no influence. The world does make it look as though its beliefs have come from deep debate, that we took all arguments into account and weighed each angle to arrive at our beliefs. In fact, the inverse is true. People believe what they want to believe and then look for proof. Often, they find it in a person who says ambiguous things.

The world has always been in the fierce grip of the madness of two. Most of the world's Jokers are revered.

MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION

The monopolization of space is bad for the world: Intervene now

SpaceX's dominance of satellite communication is a problem that should concern every country



NITIN PAI is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy.

When the man who runs Tesla, SpaceX and social media platform X announced last month that his company "now constitutes roughly 2/3 of all active Earth satellites," my instinctive reaction was one of shock and misgiving. How did such a situation come to pass? An extreme concentration of market power ought to have triggered alarms among competition regulators. They would have acted if a single firm controlled two-thirds of say, the telecom, banking or road transport markets in a single country. That one has come to dominate the orbital space around the entire planet is a marked failure of global governance.

The failure becomes all the more acute when Elon Musk, SpaceX's founder and CEO, has been quite open about turning his market power into political influence. Indeed, his behaviour reminds us just why liberal democracies must have effective competition laws. Anti-trust regulations and competition watchdogs do not exist merely to protect consumers from monopolies and cartels. Rather, the deeper purpose of competition policy is to ensure that no single entity amasses so much economic power that it can capture policy and undermine democracy. Musk has used his control over his businesses to overrule Ukraine's military decisions, and more recently, refused to comply with decisions of Brazil's Supreme

Court. His partisan use of X to promote his political preferences brings into the open what is mostly done behind closed doors. Every sovereign state should reflect on how we have arrived at this state of affairs.

Even if SpaceX was run by a team of faceless managers, the fact that it dominates the satellite market is a serious global concern. It is true that the company has become the biggest player in the satellite business through a commendable combination of entrepreneurship, innovation and visionary leadership. But it is also true that it did so on the back of the US government's financial and policy support. American policymakers might believe that promoting a homegrown champion is in their national interest. Yet, a situation where a single company has captured such a big share of space infrastructure is not in anyone else's.

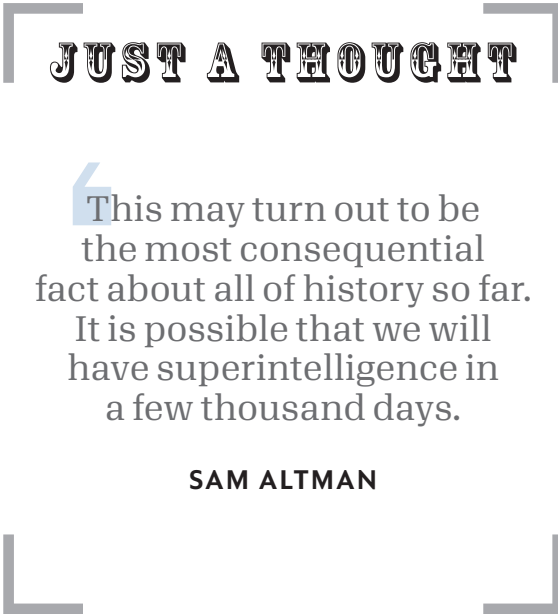
Indeed, even American policymakers have begun to realize that it might not be in their own public interest. Last month, Jessica Rosenworcel, chairperson of the US Federal Communications Commission, worried that "We do have one player that's got almost two-thirds of the satellites that are in space right now and has a very high portion of internet traffic," and that space should not be an exception to competition considerations. I am not sure how seriously the US government will pursue this line of thinking. Many wealthy tech industry figures are lobbying against regulation, and in any case, an issue of global interest should not be determined by US politics alone.

Part of the reason why SpaceX's Starlink constellation has managed to put over 7,000 satellites in low-earth orbit (LEO) is because orbital slots are allocated on what is effectively a first-come first-serve basis. With its Falcon re-usable launch vehicle, the company is able to put hundreds of satellites in orbit each month. Starlink aims at an eventual constellation size of 42,000 LEO satellites providing global coverage and acquiring

a dominant share of the world's internet traffic. Other than being first to claim those slots, it pays nothing to use humanity's shared resource. Chinese authorities have recognized the military strategic and political implications of it, and want to put 40,000 of their own satellites in orbit in the coming decade. Another constellation, including OneWeb in which Bharti Global is a shareholder, will have several thousand satellites. This is not competition in a real sense because billions of people will not have a choice.

Unlike LEO slots, the radio spectrum that satellites need to communicate with each other and with earth stations is assigned by an international body. The International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) radio regulations govern the allocation and assignment of spectrum and the rules of its use. Starlink is lobbying the FCC to get the ITU to change these rules to allow it to operate at higher power, arguing that this will improve coverage and connection speed. However, this comes at the cost of other users, especially geostationary satellites that occupy slots at much higher altitudes. Meanwhile, astrophysicists and astronomers have been upset about visible and radio-frequency pollution from LEO satellites. In other words, as much as LEO constellations provide valuable telecom connectivity, there are competing uses of space and radio spectrum that need wider global deliberation. The world should not allow itself to be railroaded by SpaceX, the Chinese government and other constellation operators.

India could help shape global rules for the use of space. We should use it to ensure that space remains humanity's common resource. Space and telecom policy should come together to ensure that the market for satellite communication is competitive. One part of the answer to that is multiple homegrown constellations that can compete in this space. The other part is to remember what the East India Company did to us.



Year of fighting dangerously

Israel and Iran must accept the need for fundamental changes, reject eliminationist fantasies



BERNARD HAYKEL

THE TINDERBOX

As Middle East stares at a great war, India's stakes in the region have never been as large. Silence is no longer an option

A YEAR AFTER the terror attack on Israel by Hamas, followed by the brutal reprisal in Gaza by Tel Aviv, the expansion of Israel's military campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the war of missiles between Israel and Iran have brought the Middle East to the brink of a regional war with deadly consequences for the entire world. Even by the traditional standards of violence in the Middle East, the costs of the current cycle of conflict have been immense. If the terror attack by Hamas on October 7 last year took the lives of more than 1,200 Israelis, Tel Aviv's disproportionate response has already seen the death of more than 40,000 people in Gaza, 1,00,000 injured and about two million Palestinians displaced from their homes and living in conditions of abject misery. The death toll has begun to mount in Lebanon, where Israel's ongoing ground invasion to decimate Hezbollah is turning the country into an uninhabitable zone like Gaza. All this could be overshadowed by the scale of potential regional carnage if Israel and the Islamic Republic stand by their declared intent to destroy the other in the next phase of the war.

In a region riven with centuries-old grievances and a modern history of extreme violence rooted in religious, ethnic, territorial and nationalist resentments, it is pointless to focus on "who started it?". The quest for regional domination in the name of Islam by the clerical regime in Tehran, and Tel Aviv's refusal to accommodate the aspirations of the Palestinian people in its uncompromising pursuit of absolute security, have left little room for common sense to prevail. Meanwhile, the growing salience of ideological extremism in Tehran and Tel Aviv has only reinforced the temptations for an all-out war. The US, the only country with the political influence to promote a ceasefire, has struggled to persuade Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to silence his guns and create some room for diplomacy. If President Joe Biden's call for restraint has fallen on deaf ears in Tel Aviv, the Republican candidate and former president, Donald Trump, is egging Israel on to embark on a massive confrontation with Iran. With the US elections less than a month away, Washington has become a pitiful spectator.

As the Middle East stares at a great war, India's stakes in the region have never been as large as they are today. With nearly 10 million Indians living in the Gulf, an economy extremely sensitive to oil prices, and rapidly growing trade and investment relations, India needs to contribute its bit towards averting the drift to calamity in the region. Until now, India has been reluctant to call out the dangerous policies of Iran and Israel that are driving the current tragedy in the Middle East. But silence is no longer an option. While pressing Tehran and Tel Aviv to walk back from the abyss, Delhi must join hands with India's most important partners in the region — the moderate Arab states including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — to help calm things down and create pathways for regional stability and peace.

UNDER PRESSURE

Global factors have weighed down markets. Outcome of state elections, MPC and firm results could also influence stock prices

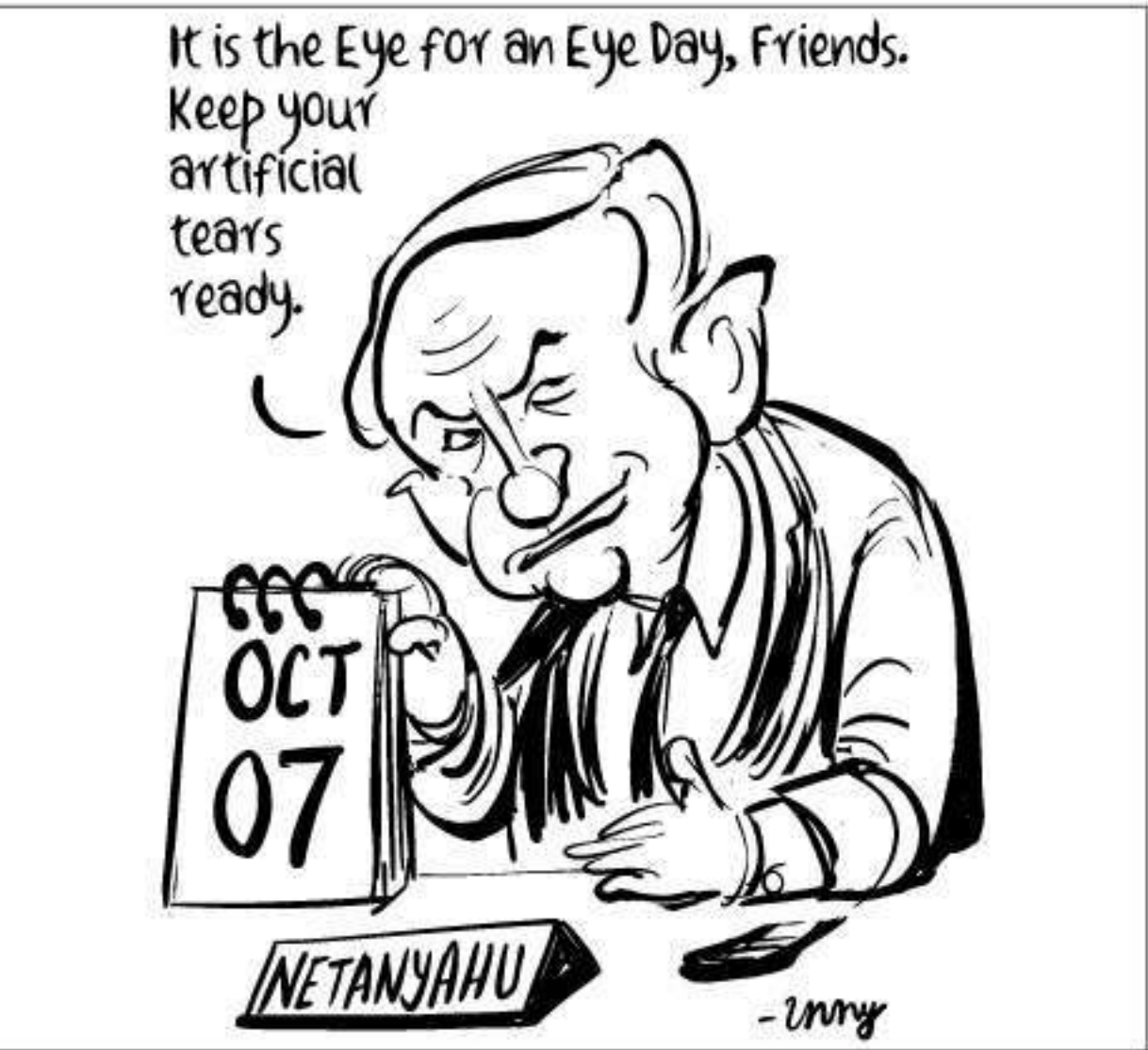
AFTER SCALING NEW highs — the BSE Sensex recently surpassed the 85,000 mark — stock markets in India have shown signs of weakness. Last Thursday, the markets tanked. The Sensex fell by 1,769 points or 2.1 per cent. The weakness continued on Friday with the index falling by almost 1 per cent. Over the course of the last five trading days, the Sensex fell by almost 5 per cent. The BSE Midcap index was down 3.1 per cent, while the Smallcap index has fallen 2.3 per cent. The Nifty VIX, a fear gauge, was up 19 per cent over this period, indicating growing investor uncertainty.

The immediate reasons for the souring of sentiment seem to be global. There are worries over the conflict in the Middle East escalating with the opening up of several fronts — the pager attack, the killing of a Hezbollah leader in Beirut, and the missile attack on Israel, among others. Fears that Israel might target Iran's oil infrastructure, which would bring down supplies in the global market, have gained traction. There are concerns that the conflict could spill over, disrupting key trade routes, especially the Strait of Hormuz through which roughly a third of the global crude oil supply is estimated to pass. Crude oil prices have surged during this period of uncertainty — Brent crude futures were up around 8.7 per cent over the past week. Then there is the China factor. Recently, authorities in China announced a series of measures to support a struggling economy. The People's Bank of China lowered its policy interest rate from 1.7 per cent to 1.5 per cent. It cut the reserve requirement ratio, and announced tools to support the stock market. The announcements have lifted sentiments, and considering, also, the attractive stock valuations, there is growing investor interest. The Shanghai Composite Index was up 20 per cent last week, while the Hang Seng was up 11.2 per cent. This renewed interest in Chinese stocks is leading to a rebalancing of portfolios. Foreign investors have been pulling money out of India. As reported in this paper, over the last four sessions, they have sold more than Rs 37,000 crore worth of shares, offloading Rs 9,897 crore on Friday alone. During this period, the stock market regulator in India announced measures to curb trading in the Futures and Options segment.

In the days and weeks ahead, on the domestic front, both political and economic factors could have a bearing on the markets. The outcome of the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir and Haryana, the first meeting of the reconstituted monetary policy committee, and the corporate results season could influence stock prices.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



THE ARABIC EXPRESSION "of standing on the palm of a demon (*ala kaff ifrit*)" describes the present situation in West Asia well — it carries the same meaning as the metaphor "teetering on a knife's edge". We are on the verge of an all-out war that might involve a direct, and sustained, clash between Iran and Israel and one that could drag the US into the conflict. America's Gulf allies, namely the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are also threatened because the Iranians have hinted that their oil fields might come under attack should Iran's installations be struck.

There are forces in West Asia, led by Iran and its proxies on the one hand, and by Israel on the other, that seek to reshape through violence the political order of the entire region. There is little benefit in pointing fingers at one or the other country since both are now responsible for the present chaos. Therefore, there is an urgent need to find ways to stop them from escalating the conflict, since neither can achieve its ultimate goal and all they offer is more violence and suffering for everyone, including their own people.

After Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023, Iran with its "Axis of Resistance" militias seemed to have the upper hand. Its proxies, which include Hamas in the Palestinian territories, Hezbollah in Lebanon, various Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen, appeared to have encircled Israel. Many believed that Israel could finally be defeated militarily, and they seemed to have garnered real strategic wins through the principle of the "unity of resistance movements" that Iran and Hezbollah had been advocating. Israeli towns along the Lebanese border were depopulated and some 60,000 Israeli citizens had to seek refuge elsewhere; Israel's economy was haemorrhaging; and the world's public opinion was increasingly siding against Israel due to the violence it was inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza.

Yet, Israel's "defeat" proved to be an illusion. Israel is a modern industrial and technologically advanced state with a powerful military that enjoys the full support of the US and European allies. Not only has Gaza been systematically destroyed and Hamas's militia decimated, but during the last few months, we have witnessed Israel's overwhelming power.



AAKASH JOSHI

"IF CHE GUEVARA can be on a t-shirt, why can't Gandhi be used to sell facial cleansers?" It's a fair question, asked after a knee-jerk reaction — an instant revulsion — to the "one-day exclusive offer" from an overpriced beauty products company on October 2. (This place sells "age-defying" sunscreen — in a rather diminutive bottle at that — for Rs 6,495.) A cursory Google search will throw up many a Gandhi Jayanti offer, and with the exception, perhaps, of the one by government-run Khadi stores, they all leave a bad aftertaste.

The question, though, is why. Mothers and fathers, lovers and friends, even dogs and cats — every relationship now has a "day" since the days of Archies stores, every emotional bond a discount and a package deal for its expression. The attire of politicians is branded by their name and sold at high-end stores at airports. Entire supply-and-logistics chains are set up to ensure same-day delivery for the consumer by companies like Amazon, arguably at the expense of the worker. "Fast fashion" makes clothes cheaper than ever, climate change and poor working conditions be damned.

Why, in all of this, should Mahatma Gandhi be so hallowed? Or for that matter, any "great" man? In the age when anyone can become an "influencer", when there is democratisation of both celebrity and brand endorsers, what could be more egalitarian

Neither Israel nor Iran wants these changes; yet, without these, there can be no peace and stability in the region. For Israel, it involves agreeing to an enduring solution to the Palestinian question in the form of a viable state. This is what Saudi Arabia has repeatedly called for. Yet being on a winning streak and probably full of hubris, Israel's leadership is unlikely to heed this call. For Iran, change means an end to aggressively promoting its revolutionary Islamist ideology of resentment that calls for wiping Israel off the face of the map and expelling the US from West Asia through jihadist violence.

GREAT MEN, BIG DEALS

Three reasons why Gandhi would be against consumerism encouraged in his name

than taking the birthday of the man on the currency note and using it to sell t-shirts and beauty creams? The producer (more accurately, the *maalik*) sells more, the consumer pays less. Win-win.

Except, of course, it's not. And it is in three of Gandhi's most well-known principles that the answer to the "why" of our discomfort can be found.

First, Gandhi did not believe in the moral escapism of consumers getting the "best deal". The entire reason he began spinning his own cloth was to undermine the exploitative economic system of the British Raj which impoverished the Indian farmer and British textile worker, while enriching a few. For him, all of us were not mere consumers but moral agents. How and what we bought could not be a blind act of self-interest. This is not to say he was Marxist. Unlike scientific socialists, he genuinely believed in the power of individual morality to alter social and economic structures.

In fact, long before Greta Thunberg, he showed the world that it is only by altering lifestyles that we can build a sustainable society.

Second, Gandhi believed in truth above all else. Contemporary marketing and advertising — whether by governments or private players — on the other hand, is based on selective appropriation and, for want of a better word, subterfuge. Will an anti-ageing serum really turn back the clock? Or, for that matter,

especially under the leadership of President Joe Biden. Biden's administration has refused to put effective pressure on Israel to stop its military aggression, as it could have done by enforcing an arms sales embargo, for example. Instead, it has provided Jerusalem with billions of dollars worth of weapons while making meaningless public statements about how it didn't want Israel to do this or that terrible thing.

Similarly, the Biden administration has never understood how to engage effectively with Iran. Like the Obama administration, it sought to de-escalate with Iran by resuming negotiations on the nuclear file and allowed the economic sanctions on Tehran not to be enforced. As a result, Iran has used its wealth to arm and train its proxies rather than focus on its people's immediate needs. Biden's policy was perceived by the Iranian leadership as weakness. This then allowed Iran to encourage its proxies to sow mayhem in the region, from the Houthi attacks on maritime shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to Hamas and Hezbollah's attacks on Israel. And this has resulted in the mess the region is in today.

Will any of these dynamics change under a new US administration after the November elections? Unfortunately, neither presidential candidate is likely to radically change US policy. Israel will continue to enjoy unconditional American support and Iran will seek to rebuild its military arsenal and its proxy militias. Were Donald Trump to be elected, he would put more economic pressure on Iran, but this is unlikely to yield results unless he is seen as putting pressure on Israel to address the question of Palestinian self-determination. This is not going to happen, unfortunately, because his support of Israel is even more unconditional than the Democrats.

We are likely to see more chaos and instability in this region unless the principal actors themselves realise the futility of their policies. Only divine intervention can make that happen, so let's start praying.

The writer is professor, Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University and the Nelson Mandela Visiting Chair in Afro-Asian Studies at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala



OCTOBER 7, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

CLASHES IN MP

CURFEW WAS CLAMPED on the industrial township of Nagda in Ujjain district and Ranapur in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh following communal clashes in which three persons were killed and 32 injured. Incidents of arson also took place at Nagda where trouble arose following a clash between two religious processions. Three bodies were later found in a school building.

LEADERS JOIN CONGRESS

THE AICC (I) announced the admission of Satyendra Narain Sinha and his wife Kishori

Sinha, both MPs and the former union minister, Manubhai Shah, into the party. The steady flow of a large number of leaders into the Congress (I) from other parties in the past few weeks has touched off new tension among the party MPs, legislators and other functionaries in states.

CENTRE EXTENDS BAN

THE CENTRE HAS extended by six months the ban on recruitment to fill vacancies and creation of new posts in various ministries, government departments and public sector enterprises. The ban was originally imposed for nine months up to the end of

September this year to economise on administrative expenditure.

TALKS WITH MNF

The Union Home Minister, P V Narasimha Rao, has said that the Centre has sent a formal invitation to the banned Mizo National Front (MNF) chief Laldenga, to come to Delhi to resume negotiations for a permanent solution to the Mizo problem within the constitutional framework. Rao told newsmen that the central invitation was in response to requests by some friends of Laldenga. The move was "partly" taken by Laldenga himself, the Home Minister said.

THE IDEAS PAGE

Too many walls, few bridges

The global rules of engagement that defined the world order since World War 2 have collapsed. Nothing has replaced it yet



OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

A YEAR AGO, Hamas killed over 1,000 Israeli civilians. Israel reacted with ferocity. They bombed Gaza to rubble. Thousands of innocent Palestinians were killed, including predictably many children. I say predictably because more than 50 per cent of Gaza's 2.2 million population are (were?) below the age of 18.

Both combatants have drawn wide condemnation but that has not contained the conflict. Israel has extended the fighting into Lebanon. They have detonated thousands of mobile devices, undertaken air strikes and are positioned to launch a ground invasion. Iran and its proxy, the "axis of resistance" (Hezbollah, Houthis and Hamas) have responded with missile attacks. The world is waiting with bated concern to see how far this step-by-step escalation will go.

This article is not another analysis of this conflict. Much has already been written about it. The article is simply my ruminations on the state of the world.

Decades on, when historians look back, they may well conclude that 2024 was the watershed year when geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geotechnical forces came together to create the "perfect storm" of World War 3.

Here are four reasons they might adduce to support that conclusion.

First, as is now obvious, the world is riven. Not only have the hostilities in the Middle East ratcheted up but the Russian-Ukraine conflict has also acquired a sharper edge with Ukraine opening up an offensive new front, and President Putin making clear that were NATO to approve the deployment of NATO-supplied weapons against Russian targets in Russian territory, he would deem it an act of war and contemplate crossing the nuclear Rubicon. There is also the "colder" conflict between the US and China. This has deepened with the US, in a volatile variant of the "Thucydides trap", imposing swinging taxes on a swathe of Chinese imports. The US is determined to prevent China from pushing it off the pedestal of technological and economic dominance.

Prima facie, these are unrelated occurrences. But one has to read Barbara Tuchman's book *Guns of August* to know it was precisely such seemingly unconnected and localised actions based on narrow nationalisms and egotistic leadership that came together in the aftermath of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in June 1914 to set off World War 1. People who have studied history have reasons to feel nervous.

Two, jingoism makes for good politics. This is evident from the increasing focus by politicians on the "other", the immigrant, that has disrupted the job market; the mercantilist that is dumping products; and the adversary that poses a threat to national se-



C R Sasikumar

curity. The problem is this kind of politics especially when driven by short-term electoral and personal prospects exacerbates existing geopolitical rivalries. It leads to high walls to protect the national backyard (to paraphrase the US National Security Advisor) and hurts efforts to address global problems like climate change, fundamentalism and pandemics that do not respect national boundaries.

An illustrative example of this problem is the actions of the Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu. Last year, he was arguably the most unpopular and polarising figure in Israeli politics. His Likud party had polled only 23.41 per cent of the votes in the general election and he led an extreme right-wing coalition. Protestors demonstrating on the streets in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were calling for his resignation. He also faced charges of corruption. Today, apparently, he is in a much stronger political position because of the military successes achieved against Hezbollah.

Netanyahu may well have saved his job. But at what cost? The region is on the edge of a major conflagration. And those Israelis that will settle on the lands conquered by the Israel Defence Force (IDF) will be surrounded by Palestinian Arab refugees whose singular purpose may be to exact revenge and recover their forcibly occupied lands. Netanyahu's actions remind me of Chancellor Bismarck's riposte to his German Parliamentary colleagues when pressed to attack France in 1876. "Preventive war is like committing suicide for fear of death".

Three, the global rules of engagement that defined the world order since World War 2 have collapsed. Nothing has replaced it yet. Therefore, every country is doing its own thing. Moreover, military and economic superiority has lost its "coercive" power. It is no longer the determinant of in-

The global rules of engagement that defined the world order since World War 2 have collapsed. Nothing has replaced it yet. Therefore, every country is doing its own thing. Moreover, military and economic superiority has lost its "coercive" power. It is no longer the determinant of influence. Take, for example, Israel. It is dependent on the US but that has not deterred Netanyahu from ignoring President Joe Biden's call for restraint. Sure, Israel has the support of the Jewish lobby and this does give the PM latitude. But his attitude is also influenced by the fact that international relations have lost their moorings.

fluence. Take, for example, Israel. It is dependent on the US but that has not deterred Netanyahu from ignoring President Joe Biden's call for restraint. Sure, Israel has the support of the Jewish lobby and this does give the PM latitude. But his attitude is also influenced by the fact that international relations have lost their moorings.

Finally, technology. A few days after the papers exploded in Lebanon, I read an article by the former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt. It was captioned, "War in the age of AI demands new weaponry". He wrote that the next batch of start-up "unicorns" would be built around the development of AI weapons. He suggested (implicitly) that investment should be directed towards "invent (ing), adapt (ing) and adopt (ing)" such weapons. The article was revealing. It reminded me that investors do not regard the human cost of war to be so high as to offset the profits that might accrue from leveraging AI technology to create cost-effective armaments and that governments will want to engage the best and brightest minds to equip their military to "fight wars in the age of AI with AI weapons".

This is depressing. But let me end on a note of hope as to why perhaps the world will not stumble over the edge. Power is pivoting away from the politicians and those who have a vested interest in perpetuating the cycle of violence and towards people who have wealth, leadership in technology and control over social media. Daron Acemoglu writes that these people have "persuasion power". The hope is that such people will recognise the dangers ahead and use these powers to innovate for peace. If so, that might forestall the "perfect storm".

The writer is Chairman and Distinguished Fellow, Center for Social and Economic Progress

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The transfer of the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius... will allow first- and second-generation islanders to return and draws a symbolic line under empire in Africa. Wrongs cannot always be undone, especially when so much time has passed. But redress is essential..."

— THE GUARDIAN

The laddu trap

Why even a 'technocrat' politician is forced to play by the Hindutva playbook



SAGARIKA GHOSE

IT HAS TAKEN a controversy over laddus at the Tirumala Tirupati temple for the Supreme Court to finally emphasise that religion should be kept separate from politics. "We expect Gods to be kept away from politics," declared the court in its order on allegedly contaminated Tirupati laddus.

At long last, the top court has sought to correct, at least by one sentence, the snowballing religion-isation of Indian politics. Almost every party is being forced to wear religion on its sleeve. In the decade of BJP dominance, the journey from so-called "minority appeasement" to a competitive majority appeasement has been achieved. The apex court has, by its order, at least forced some caution on the increasingly ready recourse to gods and goddesses to score at the ballot box.

Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who first went noisily public about his suspicions that Tirupati laddus were being made with animal fat, has never been an overtly religious politician or worn religion on his sleeve. In fact, he's always prided himself on his technocratic approach and on being India's first "tech-friendly" CM. So why did Naidu suddenly feel compelled to play by a religious playbook and level the allegation that ghee used to make holy prasadam was contaminated by animal fat under the previous Jagan Mohan Reddy dispensation in Andhra?

The first part of the answer is that Naidu, now a BJP ally, was playing well-worn cynical politics and settling scores with his arch rival Jagan Mohan Reddy by pigeon-holing and stereotyping Reddy (who happens to be a Christian) as a minority community politician and asserting his own majoritarian credentials.

The second part of the answer is that even liberal technocrats are being forced to play by the Hindutva playbook. Very few are still as brave as Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee who has coined a pithy phrase of modern multiculturalism: "Dhormo jaar jaar, utsav shobaar (We all have the right to our separate faiths, and we celebrate all festivals together)".

The lines between faith, god and politics have more than blurred over the last decade. The SC now says gods must be separate from politics. But the same Court in its 2019 Ayodhya judgement, while acknowledging that the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 was an "egregious violation of the rule of law," still unanimously allowed the disputed land (acquired by illegal means) to be returned to the Hindus and for a Ram Mandir to be built on it because the "faith and belief of Hindus... are in the Janmaasthan (sic) of Lord Ram." The same court in 1995 held that Hindutva is a way of life and in 2016 refused to reconsider that judgment. It is the same Court which allowed the Archaeological Survey of India to examine the Gyanvapi mosque complex in Varanasi. When the mosque's lawyer contended that the demand to examine the mosque was

frivolous, the CJI said, "What is frivolous to you is faith to the other side."

The courts' unwillingness to draw red lines on "faith" and "devotion" in civic and public life has meant that politicians have seen this as permission to virtually bury the constitutional ideal of religion being a private matter and not a matter of state or government policy. The Constitution expressly forbids discrimination based on religion, yet the ruling BJP has been particularly guilty in constantly appealing to religious sentiments of one community against another to snatch the so-called Hindu vote. Modi's politics is based on blurring the lines between faith and politics, as seen in all his speeches from the infamous 2002 "Hum paanch unke pachees" to his 2024 speech in Banswara in which he said "they will snatch your mangalsutra." The BJP-RSS have laboured over the last decade to turn the cultural Hindu into a political Hindu. But what is troubling is that this so-called Hindu "political consciousness" is spreading to parties other than the BJP.

Another BJP ally, the once-secular Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, recently announced plans to develop temples in Sitamarhi. Actor turned politician, Andhra Pradesh Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan, leader of the Janasena Party, was once an ally of the Left and displayed posters of revolutionary Che Guevara at rallies. Today Kalyan sports a red tilak and saffron garments, is a self-styled defender of Sanatan Dharma and in the forefront of the Hindus-in-danger laddu outrage. The Congress government in Himachal Pradesh, pushed on the backfoot on the Hindu plank by the BJP's high-pitched protests over a mosque in Shimla, announced that vendors should mandatorily display their names on stalls. It was borrowing from UP CM Yogi Adityanath's announcement that all street vendors on the kanwar yatra route should display their names. Government policy on street vendors should be focused on food safety standards. Instead, an attempt was made to inject religious colour in the public's food choices.

During the 2023 Karnataka polls when Congress promised to clamp down on the Bajrang Dal, Modi urged voters to chant "Jai Bajrangbali" while voting. The Congress responded in kind by also chanting "Bajrangbali ki jai." In Bengal the BJP targeted Mamata Banerjee as "anti-Hindu," accusations that didn't stick given Banerjee's deep roots in the Bengali cultural ethos. By dubbing all forms of minority welfare as somehow "anti-Hindu," the BJP is forcing Opposition parties on the backfoot and pushing competitive Hindutva-isation in parties not as culturally deep-rooted as the TMC or DMK.

The BJP failed to win in 2024. Hindutva suffered a defeat in its Ayodhya bastion and in large parts of UP. But instead of the 2024 result spurring a rollback of religion-based politics, the BJP's brand of Hindutva is becoming disturbingly all pervasive. Too many politicians today are falling into the laddu trap. It may require more than a one-line court observation to stir a change of direction. Civic constitutional participatory citizenship transcending religious faith must become the defining badge of identity in 21st century India.

The writer is a journalist and Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, All India Trinamool Congress



VINOD K PAUL

Stories of health and hope

Ayushman Bharat saves lives, reduces health-related insecurities

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD Raju (name changed) felt breathless and tired, even while performing usual tasks. He was diagnosed with a serious heart condition after an episode of chest pain. An endless search for treatment pushed the family into a debt of over Rs 5 lakh. Raju's father had to sell the family's livestock and land. In 2019, they received a letter from the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) but overlooked it. In 2022, Raju's condition worsened and he required urgent surgery. The family was desperate and out of options. Then, a hospital staff asked them to check about PMJAY. His eligibility for the scheme was confirmed and Raju underwent life-saving surgery, costing around Rs. 1.83 lakh. After 67 days in a hospital, he was discharged to live a new life.

This story of hope, health and happiness is one among countless others, centred on AB-PMJAY beneficiaries.

With approximately 7.8 crore hospital admissions authorised under the scheme over the last six years, PMJAY has saved millions of lives and prevented the impoverishment of their families due to hospital costs. The scheme is a testament to India's commitment to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

PMJAY forms the foundation of healthcare delivery across government and private hospitals by providing free healthcare of up to Rs 5 lakh for secondary and tertiary treatment per beneficiary family. This amount may appear small compared to the numbers

flaunted by private health insurers, but it is life-changing and life-saving for millions of families. Analyses show that, in general, almost all the annual inpatient care requirements of a family are met by this coverage.

By design, PMJAY is for inpatient secondary and tertiary care. Outpatient services are not a part of the scheme. The latter component of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is being addressed through the equally ambitious comprehensive primary health care mission under which over 1.75,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs), earlier called Health and Wellness Centres, have been established where free consultations and many medicines (up to 172) and diagnostics (up to 63) are being provided free. The government has begun focusing on a stronger two-way convergence and continuity of care across the two systems. Bharat's UHC model is based on a public-funded comprehensive primary healthcare. Health policy and services need to be seen in totality and not in isolation.

During the scheme's implementation, the procedures and prices under the Health Benefit Package (HBP) have been revised and rationalised. From 1,393 HBPs in 2018, the number now stands at 1,949 since 2022. A concept of differential pricing has been introduced to account for regional variation in the costs of healthcare services. Concurrently, states and Union Territories have been given additional flexibility to customise the HBP rates to local contexts.

To ensure seamless delivery of services

and mitigate the scope of abuse in the system, PMJAY is technology-driven, paperless and cashless. There is no provision for reimbursement or co-payment. Though most claim settlements are timely, intense efforts are being made for further improvements in partnership with the states.

The scheme's success and the government's commitment to public welfare have led to two major initiatives this year. In the interim budget, the government extended the scheme to approximately 37 lakh families of ASHA and Anganwadi workers and helpers. Second, taking account of India's rising life expectancy, another major development is the government's decision to extend PMJAY's coverage to all citizens aged 70 and above, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This will benefit 4.5 crore families and about 6 crore such senior citizens. The National Sample Survey's (NSS) 75th round report on Health in India shows that the hospitalisation rate for this age group exceeds 11 per cent. The Longitudinal Ageing Study of India (LASI) 2021 report reveals that 75 per cent of the elderly have one or more chronic diseases, 40 per cent have some form of disability, and one in four suffers from multimorbidity. Notably, 58 per cent of the elderly population are women, with 54 per cent being widows. Unlike many private insurance products for senior citizens, PMJAY does not exclude anyone because of a pre-existing illness, nor does it impose a year-long waiting period before the benefits are allowed. The scheme empowers the elderly to lead

healthy and dignified lives.

PMJAY connects the public and private health sectors into a one-nation, one-system. It has a pan India network of more than 29,000 empanelled hospitals of which 13,000 are in the private sector. Close to 25,000 of these hospitals are in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. About 57 per cent of hospital admissions are in the private sector, indicating the significant participation of this sector.

The scheme has also significantly impacted service delivery in public sector hospitals across many states. These hospitals have utilised funds reimbursed under the scheme to enhance their amenities and infrastructure. With an increasing pace of coverage and reach, PMJAY has the potential to spur the growth of private hospitals in Tier 2 and 3 cities by creating a market where there was previously unmet demand due to a lack of paying capacity.

A recent study by an eminent economist (based on unit-level data from Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23) concluded that the bottom 50 per cent of our population has become significantly less vulnerable to medical expenditure-related shocks in the past 10 years and that this trend is closely associated with PMJAY.

PMJAY is poised to play a pivotal role in building a Viksit Bharat. Health, after all, is the very foundation of well-being, national productivity and prosperity.

The writer is a Member (Health) NITI Aayog. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REVDI & POPULISM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Fiscal ruin in near future' (IE, October 6). Political leaders generally try to woo the poorest sections with money. They exploit the poverty of people, hoodwink them and secure their votes. PM Modi dubbed the guarantees by Congress as "revdi culture". But he skipped the fact that the BJP-ruled governments made effusive promises of "Modi's guarantees". Financial crises are often associated with populism. A government's role is to ensure equality for all, freedom from hunger, disease and poverty instead of doling out money that cripples the beneficiaries.

SS Paul, Nadia

NOT RELIABLE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Cong likely to win Haryana, its alliance with NC has edge in J&K, show exit polls' (IE, October 6). The exit polls in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir, once again, have given more talking points to parties and political commentators. The polls give an edge to Congress and its alliance in both states. But there have been several instances in the past when exit polls were way off the mark. Exit polls are often misleading; they should be banned by the Election Commission. It's a business model for TV channels and other agencies involved in the process of conduct-

ing exit polls. We know these polls are not going to have an impact on the results in any way. So, what is the need they fulfil?

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

A CRUCIAL SHIFT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Prisons are prejudice' (IE, October 7). The Supreme Court's recent ruling, which bans caste-based discrimination in prisons, is a landmark step toward dismantling entrenched social inequities. The order rightly underscores that even prisoners have the right to live with dignity. Caste-based discrimination within prisons reflects broader societal biases. The court emphatically declared that no social group is born as a "scavenger class", and that the notion of certain occupations being degrading is an aspect of "untouchability", explicitly prohibited under Article 17 of the Constitution. As states revise their prison manuals within the mandated three months, this judgment represents a crucial shift toward dismantling the oppressive systems that continue to harm the most vulnerable. The decision reminds us that justice and equality must extend to all, including those behind prison walls, bringing India closer to the constitutional promise of dignity for all its citizens.

Khokan Das, Kolkata



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

KEY MOMENTS OF ISRAEL’S GAZA CAMPAIGN

OCT 8, 2023: Israel declares a state of war; begins to bomb Gaza. So far, the war has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians, many of them women and children.

OCT 9, 2023: Israel announces “complete siege” of Gaza; says “no electricity, no food, no fuel” will be allowed to enter. The UN later estimates that 90% of Gaza’s 2.1 million people have been displaced.

OCT 27, 2023: Israel launches ground invasion of Gaza.

NOV 15, 2023: Israeli forces raid al-Shifa Hospital. Patients, including premature babies, die after the hospital loses electricity.

NOV 19, 2023: Houthi militants in Yemen hijack a ship and take crew members hostage in the first of many attacks on shipping in the Red Sea to protest Israel’s actions.

NOV 24, 2023: Israel and Hamas pause fighting for a week and swap some of the hostages for prisoners. Hamas releases more than 100 hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

DEC 4, 2023: Israel expands its offensive into southern Gaza, where it had previously encouraged civilians to go for safety.

JAN 26, 2024: The International Court of Justice orders Israel to prevent “genocide” but stops short of ordering a halt to fighting.

APRIL 1, 2024: Iran’s embassy compound in Damascus is hit by a suspected Israeli airstrike, killing several military officers.

APRIL 13, 2024: Iran retaliates by firing hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel — Iran’s first ever direct attack on Israel.

MAY 7, 2024: Israeli tanks roll into Rafah. Israel seizes control of Gaza’s crossing point into Egypt and seals it, blocking a key entry point for aid.

JULY 13, 2024: An Israeli strike in southern Gaza kills the chief of Hamas’s armed wing, Mohammed Deif. Israel also hits several Houthi targets in western Yemen after a fatal drone attack by the rebel group in Tel Aviv on July 12.

JULY 31, 2024: Hamas’s political chief Ismail Haniyeh is killed in an Israeli attack in Tehran.

AUG 25, 2024: Israel launches “preemptive” strikes against Hezbollah’s pagers and walkie-talkies explode across Lebanon, killing at least 39 people.

SEPT 17-18, 2024: Thousands of Hezbollah’s pagers and walkie-talkies explode across Lebanon, killing at least 39 people.

SEPT 27, 2024: Israel launches strikes in south Beirut, killing Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah.

OCT 1, 2024: Iran responds by firing nearly 180 missiles at Israel.

OCT 3, 2024: Israel carries out an airstrike in Beirut targeting Hashem Safieddine, the presumed successor to Nasrallah. It is not yet clear if Safieddine was killed.

Oct 7 marks a year of the terrorist assault by Hamas on Israel. After flattening parts of Gaza, Israel has taken its retaliation north to Hezbollah. With West Asia on the brink of all-out war, here’s what the situation looks like from the US, Arab capitals, and India

EXPERT EXPLAINS



BASHIR ALI ABBAS

THE WEST Asia crisis that began with the terrorist attacks by Hamas on October 7, 2023 has now continued for a year. Israel’s ground operations and aerial bombardment in Gaza and Lebanon have, by conservative estimates, killed more than 41,000 people. Gaza is all but flattened, but Hamas is believed to be still holding 97 of the original 251 hostages.

On the anniversary of the October 7 attacks, here’s what the situation looks like from Israel, Washington and other Western capitals, the Arab states in the region, and New Delhi.

ISRAEL

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose personal popularity was at its nadir before the attacks, had vowed to wipe Hamas “off the face of the Earth”. Operations by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have since extracted a grossly disproportionate death toll in Gaza.

Israel has also sought to press its military advantage against the other Iran-backed “axis of resistance” groups — especially Lebanon-based Hezbollah and the Yemen-based Houthis — who began exchanging rocket and missile attacks with it late last year. The Houthi attacks disrupted international shipping in the Red Sea, and imposed economic costs on countries far beyond the theatre of the conflict.

In retaliation, Israel has carried out strikes in Syria and Yemen apart from launching a fresh attack on Lebanon — even as it has continued ground operations in Gaza, ignoring a call for ceasefire by the UN Security Council, US advice of restraint, and the fact that Hamas has already been significantly weakened. Israel also retaliated after Iran launched an unprecedented cruise missile and drone barrage against it in April, and has vowed to make the regime in Tehran pay for a second wave of aerial attacks on October 1.

International opinion in favour of Palestinian statehood has strengthened over the past year, bolstered by an International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion deeming Israeli occupation illegal. Over this same period, Israel has moved farther away from accepting the two-state solution, and is now perhaps more opposed to it than ever before. In July, the Israeli Knesset overwhelmingly passed a resolution rejecting Palestinian sovereignty.

The consolidation of Israeli political opinion against Palestine reflects the evolution of Netanyahu’s own situation since October 2023. Even Benny Gantz, the retired general who left Israel’s war cabinet in early 2024 due to the government’s failure to secure the release of the hostages, favoured the resolution. Netanyahu, who faced huge street protests by Israelis demanding a hostage deal last month, sits secure in the embrace of the extremist far right that holds up his government — which includes the likes of Bezael Smotrich of the pro-settlement National Religious Party who has called for “starving” Palestinians in Gaza, and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir who wants all humanitarian aid to the enclave blocked.

It would be a misjudgment then, to term this as Netanyahu’s war alone — even though Israeli military gains especially in recent weeks may have come as a shot in the arm for him. The initial criticism of the failure of Israel’s security apparatus on October 7, 2023, has faded for now, but will

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Netanyahu on the phone both in October 2023 and 2024, expressing concern and offering solidarity. Modi also spoke to President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine, reiterating India’s commitment to the two-state solution.

India’s blossoming relationship with Israel has not led to New Delhi being openly supportive of the Israeli position on Gaza or Lebanon. Rather, India has chosen to silo terrorism as a distinct issue — which needs to be condemned and mitigated — from the political question of Israel and Palestine. This has allowed New Delhi to express sympathy and support for Israel after the October 7 terrorist attacks while refraining from backing it wholesale on the question of Palestinian sovereignty.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has been vocal in highlighting the inextricable relationship between enduring peace and a two-state solution based on the recognition of Palestine’s legitimate aspirations of sovereignty. India has consistently voted in favour of recurring UNGA resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. Its recent abstention was triggered by attempts to impose a 12-month deadline for such withdrawal, as New Delhi believes that a negotiated settlement among Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab leaders is the only viable approach.

Prior to the new crisis, India sought to spearhead the effort to capitalise on

What is the view from New Delhi?



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on October 1. X/DrSJaishankar

the regional reset through the planned India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. While the character of the reset has not changed, its terms have. The future of India’s connectivity plans depends not only on a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, but also on how Arab states navigate the post-war environment, with or without a Palestinian state.

In the long term, Israeli recognition of a Palestinian state will take the wind out of Iran’s ability to draw support for the so-called resistance, and remove all significant hurdles in the Arab-Israeli relationship. However, Israel has not only moved away from the two-state relationship, it has actively embarked on a fresh settlement expansion programme

in the West Bank.

On the issue of settlements, international opinion in both the West and the East is critical. Should Israel sustain its *fait accompli*, the long-term prospects of peace in the Middle East will remain under threat, even if the Arab states show an ability to abide in the short term.

likely re-emerge in the future.

ARAB STATES

Major Arab powers such as Saudi Arabia and UAE seemingly remain committed to the process of a geopolitical and geoeconomics reset in the Middle East that was underway before October 2023. Israel’s expanding war has not undone those foreign policy priorities, underwritten by attempts at economic diversification.

The war has, however, pushed the question of Palestinian sovereignty to the centre, with all states in the region increasingly viewing it as a precondition for enduring peace. Instead of abandoning efforts to normalise ties with Israel, therefore, these states appear to be looking to leverage it for a settlement of the Palestine question, removing the oldest hurdle for regional stability.

This would explain the sustenance of the 2020 Abraham Accords despite the highest death toll in Gaza in decades. Even Riyadh now uses the potential normalisation framing to call for the two-state solution — a far cry from its traditional visceral aversion to Israel. The regional stability needed for economic development requires peace with not just Israel, but also Iran. Just as the Abraham Accords have held, so has the rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh.

The Arab aversion to another ‘forever war’ was evident in the Saudi call for US restraint against the Houthis, and in its staying out of the US- and UK-led naval coalition to strike at the Yemeni group. Both the Saudis and Emiratis were focused on pulling back from their involvement in Yemen before the ongoing crisis gave the Houthis new priorities.

The clamour in the Arab street for Israel



to cease its assault has, meanwhile, increased. Consequently, Middle Eastern powers have adopted either a mediatory or a confrontational position vis-à-vis Israel.

While Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has intensified his anti-Israel rhetoric, Qatar has shown a proclivity to reprise its mediatory role between Israel and Hamas despite limited success so far.

For Qatar’s primary mediating partner Egypt, the cost of the war is more direct, since it shares a border with Gaza. Both Jordan (bordering the West Bank) and Egypt strongly seek to avoid a refugee influx, and Egypt has been sparring with Israel as it pushes more and more Gazans towards the southern border. Cairo remains opposed to potential Israeli control over the Philadelphi Corridor straddling Gaza and Egypt.

US & THE WEST

The US-Israel relationship is ironclad. The approach of the West, led by the US, has been to consistently warn all actors against further escalation, commit to humanitarian aid for Gaza, but staunchly stand by Israel even if it breaches any perceived red line. The Biden administration has been deeply frustrated with Netanyahu, but remains committed to Israel’s defence. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has made at least nine visits to the Middle East in 12 months, but failed to help negotiate a ceasefire in Gaza.

Washington, which successfully mediated a controlled engagement between Iran and Israel in April, continues to focus on restraining Israel’s hand. However, the space for the US to exert influence on Israel has

diminished. The US presidential election is now less than a month away, and Netanyahu would be waiting to see whether the incoming administration seeks to enable (under Donald Trump) or curb (as Kamala Harris might) Israel’s war effort.

The war has caused an outcry in Europe, with the European Union’s foreign policy chief even calling for sanctions against Israel. Major European states have, however, followed the US’ lead — calling for escalation control while reiterating Israel’s right to defend itself. These states also remain sensitive to US commitments against Russia in the other war that is ongoing in Ukraine, and which probably makes them more nervous. For instance, just after French President Emmanuel Macron implicitly called for an arms embargo on Israel, Netanyahu’s public rebuke forced the Élysée to reiterate France’s ‘steadfast’ friendship with Israel.

The war in Ukraine also limits President Vladimir Putin’s ability to influence Middle Eastern events, despite Moscow having shown interest — including hosting Hamas and Iranian leaders in October 2023.

China, on the other hand, has made significant diplomatic and economic inroads in the Middle East over the past year, which includes brokering a Fatah-Hamas reconciliation agreement in July.

Amid the crisis, Beijing has focused on nourishing its economic and strategic relationship across the Arab/ Iranian aisle in the Gulf, while harshly criticising Israel. However, China remains restrained in its security/ military involvement — a long-standing position that has ensured continued US dominance in the Middle East.

(Bashir Ali Abbas is a Research Associate at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi)

Why Israel has invaded Lebanon — and what to make of the war so far

BASHIR ALI ABBAS
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 6

EARLY ON October 1, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched “limited, localised, targeted ground raids” against Hezbollah infrastructure in South Lebanon.

Since then, Israel has expanded its operation, repeatedly bombing the capital Beirut, and targeting a possible successor to Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader who was killed on September 27.

Lebanon’s Health Ministry said on Saturday morning that more than 2,000 people have been killed in Israeli attacks across the country.

Why did Israel choose to invade Lebanon now?

For Israel, there has never been a larger geopolitical window to press against Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shia military and political group, than now.

Through Israel’s year-long war in Gaza, the US has provided steady tailwinds in the form of sustained arms supplies, despite

some political dithering. In the region, Israel’s new Arab partners have restricted themselves to rhetorical criticism and diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire.

With Iran’s new moderate government focused on economic recovery and sanctions relief by engaging the West, Israel’s first major gambit was to kill Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, in the heart of Tehran. The harsh punishment that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promised in response never came, with Iran choosing “strategic patience” instead. To Israel, it confirmed that a window for escalation indeed exists, as it expanded air strikes to eliminate top leaders of the so-called “axis of resistance” — Iranian overseas proxies Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis — leading to Nasrallah’s assassination. This hunt has not stopped.

Hezbollah has long been the biggest and most proximate manifestation of the Iranian threat, located in the north at Israel’s jugular. Israel’s long-time objective has been to push Hezbollah to the north of the Litani river, where the UN Security Council’s Resolution 1701 mandates it to be. More im-

mediately, having destroyed Hezbollah’s senior leadership, the IDF now looks to decimate its rank and file.

Where does Hezbollah stand in the current situation?

While Israel holds the geopolitical and military advantage, Hezbollah too has evolved significantly since its last war with Israel in 2006. The group has gained crucial combat experience in Syria and Iraq over the past decade, fighting an array of rebel and jihadist forces. Fighting alongside the Russians

and Syrian government forces, Hezbollah was credibly viewed as the most effective fighting force in Syria, exhibiting strong discipline and training. It has stockpiled a very large arsenal of rockets and missiles, and the IDF estimates it has 25,000 active fighters, with tens of thousands in reserve.

Hezbollah is also the only force that has effectively forced an Israeli withdrawal from any Arab territory in this century, by fighting the IDF to a stalemate in 2006, and bogging down Israeli military units in urban guerrilla warfare. That Hezbollah retains its battlefield

effectiveness despite the loss of senior command was evident when the IDF lost eight soldiers on October 2, its biggest single-day setback since the two sides began exchanging fire a year ago.

What does each side — Israel and Hezbollah — aim to achieve in this war?

Each side sees ‘victory’ differently. Israel’s *casus belli* is the “return of (displaced) citizens of Northern Israel to their homes”. The military necessities to service this are vague enough for Israel to withdraw whenever it determines Hezbollah to have been degraded enough in South Lebanon. However, the IDF’s widening evacuation calls signal an intent to exploit the window for escalation toward the “decisive victory” it has long sought.

For Hezbollah, the threshold for ‘victory’ is far lower — it is merely survival. As Nasrallah once asserted, “as long as there is one fighter who fires...the resistance (*muqawamah*) still exists”.

If Israel looks to push further north into Lebanon to exploit its window of opportunity, the likelihood of a protracted war of at-

trition will increase. Also, “decisively” eliminating Hezbollah is a far more difficult proposition than doing the same with Hamas in Gaza (where Israel’s military objectives are being increasingly questioned).

Hezbollah has integrated itself within Lebanese society and government, outpacing the state’s ability to deliver public goods, even though its image has been dented by economic mismanagement and the Beirut port explosion of 2020. With both the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (which includes a 900-strong Indian battalion) and the Lebanese government harshly criticising the Israeli invasion, the IDF risks providing Hezbollah a fresh plank to consolidate domestic support. The provenance of its popularity was precisely this — to eject Israeli troops from Lebanon.

As the death toll in Lebanon balloons (it is officially 41,000-plus in Gaza), the IDF campaign faces new costs. Unlike in Gaza, where the cost for Israel was defined in indirect, geopolitical terms (like the degree to which Arab states and other allies would tolerate the destruction), the cost in Lebanon is defined in direct, military terms.

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IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

ON KEEPING PRIVATE LIFE AWAY FROM PUBLIC DOMAIN

Anything which is very personal and private, I would not like to come out with it in the public domain. I'd rather keep it to myself because as a judge I need to draw the line

Apurva Vishwanath: At your farewell, the Bar was struggling to find words that were not gendered to praise you. As a judge, did you ever feel your gender played a role in what you did?

When I became a judge, we had some women in the Delhi High Court. All, except one, were from the district judiciary and then others also came in. So one had a comfort zone. But in the Supreme Court (SC), I was only the ninth woman judge to be appointed. We are talking of a span of seven decades. When my two female colleagues and I came, Justice Indira Banerjee was there and happily welcoming us. So it felt good to be at least four, if not more.

I only hope that I look to see the day when we have a buzzing SC of maybe 50 per cent women representing the population in proportion to the women population of 48.5 per cent in the country. But that will take a bit of time, let's be honest.

Apurva Vishwanath: How important is it to have representation based on identities – gender, minorities, caste...

It gives a balance. It gets more people with their experiences onto the bench, it adds value and what are hands-on experiences. All those layers which you carry with you, they do add to matters that are constitutionally important. I'm not saying communities at all, it should not be done that way in any case. Merit should count and if that is the only count, I would say that maybe then many would be sidelined and not have a representation at all, which would to an extent create an imbalance of sorts. So those life experiences they carry would count to mull over and interpret the Constitution in particular manners. It broadens the path.

Apurva Vishwanath: In an abortion case you decided, you disagreed with Justice Nagarathna and said your conscience doesn't permit you to allow termination of pregnancy... It led to a debate around the rights of the foetus versus a woman's right to choose. Are we changing how we look at abortion in India?

To start with, I didn't say my conscience, I said my judicial conscience. So that makes a difference. I always prefer to keep myself as me away when I am on the bench because we have to look at things judicially.

The counsels put before us that the woman was reluctant, and that they had a complete family. We sent the case to a body of experts (doctors) since the lady had crossed the Rubicon of 24 weeks (statutory limit for termination of pregnancy). The way the report came, it was worded to my mind a bit guardedly, and as an after-thought. So I gave consent for the abortion. Then came the second report by the same set of experts. Now, they were more candid that the foetus had a life by then and they didn't see anything unhealthy about the foetus and that the life of the woman would not be in danger.

In that process, and in the interaction with the woman, and going through the records, to my mind, it was a case where maybe the child, the foetus, who had a life, took precedence over the mother's resistance to having the child.

As an aside, I later checked on the case to make sure the child has a home. I was told they had a baby boy who the parents didn't want to part with and insisted that they wanted to keep the child as part of the family, and they had settled well. It was very heartening for me to know that. Not that that would have counted when the decision was taken, but post-decision it felt good to know that the child remained in the same family and remained with the biological parents.

Apurva Vishwanath: The decision came when there was a parallel conversation in the US on the Dobbs verdict, and foetal heartbeat as a yardstick. So it did seem like that was a turning point in how India looks at abortion.

I think it was very case-specific. There was no message that was being given that a woman can't drop a pregnancy in circumstances contemplated under the statute. So I wouldn't say that the right of the foetus overcomes the right of the mother because ultimately she owns the body in which the child is living. So one can't make small of it. I don't think so.

Apurva Vishwanath: On the same-sex marriage case, all five of you on the bench had delivered judgments overwhelmingly in favour of liberty in your long tenures. So, what was going on in your mind when you were hearing the case?

See, I'll be very candid. We were open



WHY JUSTICE HIMA KOHLI

Former judge of the Supreme Court, who retired last month, Justice Hima Kohli's legal career is marked by significant rulings on diverse issues, from the marriage equality plea to directions against misleading advertisements and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. The first woman

to serve as Chief Justice of the Telangana High Court and former judge of the Delhi High Court, she has promoted several legal reforms. The ninth woman judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court, she has always been vocal about women's rights and rights of the marginalised communities



ON POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS OF RETIRED JUDGES

You can't taint an entire body of work done by a judge, which is a time span that can run up to one or two decades, on a presumption that at the end of the tenure he was offered something

‘The safeguards for judicial autonomy must come from within’

Justice Hima Kohli, who retired from the Supreme Court last month, on some of her landmark rulings and healthy friction between the executive and the judiciary. This session was moderated by Apurva Vishwanath, National Legal Editor, *The Indian Express*



Retired Supreme Court Justice Hima Kohli (right) in conversation with Apurva Vishwanath *Abhinav Saha*

to everything. In my mind, we were very clear that they are entitled to many rights. Several of them were put on the record and we said that the respect that goes with this, one must respect the relationship, one must respect their independence, one must ensure that they have all those rights of opening bank accounts, of provident fund accounts, of having joint accounts, all of that, transfer of properties, everything. But the fundamental issue at that time was recognition of marriage under a particular statute. I agreed with Justice (S Ravindra) Bhat that the statute was to be able to give it a sanctity in law.

At the end of the day, these things should come from society and go up. It can't be foisted by the judiciary and filtered down. That's not the route. If society is more accepting, if society evolves and grows as it does, and all of us are doing it from time to time, this may be a reality in the near future.

Apurva Vishwanath: Would it have been better for the High Courts to have heard the issue before the SC took it up?

I can't comment on that because that was the prerogative of the Chief Justice of India to have taken it up. They were pending matters, it's not as if he pulled it out from various courts. Perhaps, that was done earlier, prior to him, I don't recall. To my mind, it works better when we have the benefit of one or two judgements from High Courts. We do this, for example, in taxation matters where even when the government comes up and says, club them all, bring them to the SC, we say, all right, let us have one HC hear the case, where it is at an advanced stage, and then you come to us.

So there are ways and to my mind having the benefit of one judgment coming from a constitutional court is certainly required in many matters.

Ajoy Karpuram: The court is dealing with an unprecedented pendency crisis. Should the SC be more discerning about what cases it chooses to hear?

Constitution benches were pending for a long time. I would attribute a large part to the Covid phase. Constitution benches can't be pushed beyond a point as many times other cases which are pending before several High Courts and the SC as well, have to be deferred to await the outcome of

the Constitution bench's answers.

On the SC taking in too many matters, maybe we open the doors wider sometimes to ensure that the last man in the queue has that satisfaction, and we think that he deserves the satisfaction of the order being tested which has been passed by the court below, which could be the HC or the district court. We have a huge population. The judge to population ratio is around 20 judges to a population of 10 lakh.

Vandita Mishra: Recently, a video of the Chief Justice of India and the Prime Minister praying together caused a lot of controversy in the bar as well as outside it. It raises concerns on the extent of the presence of religion in the public domain and on the separation of powers. How would you look at this?

I've always drawn that distinction because I feel that some things are very private and personal and should remain in the private domain. Other things in which I engage as a judge should come in the public domain and remain there. Let's draw the distinction between religion and spirituality. The nuances are different and religion would have a different nuance, more personal. Anything which is very personal and private, I would not like to come out with it in the public domain. I'd rather keep it to myself because as a judge I need to draw the line and keep that because at the end of the day, what am I looking at? Who's the ultimate consumer of justice? A litigant. And a litigant could be coming from various backgrounds. He or she is not concerned with what my private life is all about. He's concerned with how I deal with a matter

and how I decide a matter. The impression shouldn't go for any reason that my view was coloured in any manner.

With regard to separation of powers, there is and has been a friction. It's healthy. If there is separation of powers, it's meant to keep the three wings insulated, and particularly the judiciary so that it remains in balance. But when it comes to aspects relating to the administration of justice, not dispensation of justice, it requires manpower, infrastructure and things for which the judiciary has to look at the executive and the legislature.

Parveen Dogra: It is being reported on how Gurmeet Ram Rahim comes out of jail just before elections and it looks like a mockery of the judicial process. Your comment?

Furlough is the prerogative of the state. It's not to do with the court. It's only when it is refused that the aggrieved parties come to court. So if the executive has faltered, it is for somebody to point it out to the court.

Aakash Joshi: In a lot of cases, we see post-retirement appointments, often political appointments of judges. One cannot help but read back or speculate on motives then at the time of politically sensitive matters when the judgments were made.

You can't taint an entire body of work done by a judge, which is a time span that can run up to one or two decades, on a presumption that at the end of that tenure, something was offered to him, so she or he walks backwards and starts from the starting point to give a particular slant to the judgment. If you're talking of the last phase, perhaps, then again it is a call of that partic-

ON HOW INDIA LOOKS AT ABORTION

I wouldn't say that the right of the foetus overcomes the right of the mother because ultimately she owns the body in which the child is living

ular judge to accept an assignment or not. But to say that there would be a slant on all that he or she has decided over a span of a couple of decades would be really carrying it a bit far.

Apurva Vishwanath: What about political posts? Like a Rajya Sabha membership or governorship?

There are demarcations. Speaking for myself, I would never look at (them). I wouldn't go that way. Tribunals etc are involved in judicial work, which is pretty par for the course.

Aakash Joshi: What do you make of the live telecast and how has the court changed?

I think it's the perfect thing to do in today's day and time. We are living in the world of AI (Artificial Intelligence). So how can we insulate ourselves completely from being put on the domain for the public to see how courts function? The public doesn't know how courts function. If they actually log in, they see how courts function. It gives them an idea of what goes on in a court. The more the sunlight, the better it is for all of us. There's no harm in it at all.

There are also downsides. For that, perhaps the media needs to introspect. Out-of-context statements quoted can create some kind of misimpressions.

Apurva Vishwanath: Looking back, do you think the way the sexual harassment complaint against former CJI Ranjan Gogoi was handled dented the judiciary's image?

Perhaps the very fact that you're asking this question gives an impression that there has been a dent. Otherwise, maybe, you wouldn't be asking this question and in your question seems to be the answer.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: Can we really take the independence of the judiciary for granted? What are the challenges ahead?

I think 75 years has done us good. We have evolved. When the Constitution is a living document, then there are judges who put life in that document, they interpret it in manners to bring it to the next level, to read into its rights that perhaps were not contemplated by the Constitution makers. Had it not evolved, many judgments would still be holding good, which have now been quashed and set aside. The institution is growing, is willing to learn from its own experience and grow further. Perhaps the anxiety is

that does it continue to remain as insulated as it should, from any pulls and pressures.

That would depend on what kind of judges man those courts and I don't use that word in a gendered sense. As long as that growth is going on well, there is a chart that shows that upward movement, we are on par.

P Vaidyanathan Iyer: You spoke about the institution being insulated from the pulls and pressures. Are there enough safeguards for that?

The safeguards, if required, are internal. There should be introspection. You're not talking of external safeguards, you're talking of introspection, it should come from within, it has to. If it doesn't, then how many barriers will you create?

Those should be self-built and those should remain. As a judge, you learn from your senior colleagues on how they would conduct themselves. But I always think that isolation shouldn't mean that you live in an ivory tower; your hands should be on the pulse of society. As judges, one can't be cut out from reality.

Damini Nath: Should judges' assets be declared and should they be in the public domain?

Just to tell you, the assets are declared. I think it's more important that they are declared and kept in a sealed cover with the Chief Justice, which is a procedure. Whenever required, it is also updated.

Raj Kamal Jha: Should the government have a seat at the table in deciding who should be judges?

The government already has a role when the Intelligence Bureau reports are called for. How do we assume the government doesn't have a role? What is an IB clearance? The input that the government gives about a candidate. Those inputs come to the Collegium. The Collegium goes through those inputs and if it has questions to ask on those IB reports, there are further interactions with the government. That interface is always there. We must make it clear that that interface is the role they have.

Raj Kamal Jha: Should the government have a veto?

They shouldn't have a veto because within the system the Collegium has inputs from several sources, and it is after taking a well-rounded view that the Collegium takes a call.

Go beyond nuts & bolts

The I-T Act review must not be confined to making the legislation lucid, it is an opportunity for key reforms

THE GOVERNMENT IS reportedly going to invite suggestions from the private sector and tax experts soon, as part of an exercise to rewrite the Income-Tax Act, 1961. The comprehensive review, as announced in Budget FY25, is expected to be completed in six months. There can be no two views on the fact that the Act has turned complex and unwieldy over the last six decades, with nearly 3,000 amendments, and hundreds resulting from court judgments. To be sure, there were similar attempts in the past too to simplify the law, most notable being the Direct Taxes Code drafted in 2009. The intent behind the redrafting of I-T Act is “to make it concise, lucid, easy to read and understand... reduce disputes and litigation, provide tax certainty and bring down the (tax) demand embroiled in litigation”. But the exercise must go well beyond this desirable, yet limited objective, and ought to be used as an opportunity to move further on the ongoing reforms in the direct tax laws.

The overarching purpose of the exercise should be to lay the ground for a medium-term plan to raise the tax-GDP ratio (Centre + states) to close to 25%, from around 18% now. While the ratio must be brought up to generate the public resources needed to fund the social development needs, the challenge is how to meet this objective, without ruffling too many feathers. The key is to expand the tax base, keep rates affordable to the taxpayers, and make the tax structure conducive for higher economic growth and revenue productivity. In fact, in her Budget speech, the finance minister did speak of “enhancing revenue” in the context of the proposed I-T Act review.

The Narendra Modi government’s last decade and more has seen demonetisation, one of the objectives of which was to launch a frontal assault on black money, and several compliance-boosting measures that constitute enhanced “tax effort”. The Modi regime has also ushered in simplified regimes, without exemptions and deductions. It has also been quick to tap on the trend of households shifting from savings to financial wealth creation (equity market exposure), and to physical assets like real estate. Revenue from capital gains tax is over ₹1 lakh crore already, and the fastest-growing one among all revenue heads. While all this has helped make some headway on revenue productivity, much is left to be desired. Tax-GDP ratio has risen by just 1.3 percentage points in the 10 years to FY24.

Also, the share of direct taxes in total tax revenues for the Union government needs to grow further from the current level of 53% (budgeted for FY25) to at least 65%, in the interest of progressive taxation. Policies must not only boost aggregate GDP, but also allow income to be more dispersed. As far as tax anti-avoidance measures are concerned, there is no point in pinning much hopes on the multilaterally coordinated mechanisms like G20-OECD, as these could unravel in an uncertain and increasingly polarised global economic environment. The domestic tax policy must be restructured to shun the current implicit taxation of investments and the (unintended) incentives for debt. It should also discourage shifting of profits abroad by corporates and individuals. The Indian economy is fast-evolving, as is evident from the preference for households to invest, rather than save. Global investors are bullish on the country. The tax policy ought to move in step with these developments.

A way to reduce income inequality is to work more

THE VARIOUS BESTSELLING books on income inequality cite a variety of driving factors. Robert Kuttner blames global capitalism. Paul Krugman pins it on bad domestic economic policies. Thomas Piketty writes of capitalists as if they are rentiers, extracting royalties from the system.

There is another factor that tends to go unrecognised: the time-honoured virtue of hard work. If you work harder — and smarter — you will earn more money. This would not have surprised my grandmother, but in today’s intellectual world, old truths sometimes need to be repeated. And studied.

Economists from Princeton, Vanderbilt, and the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis have estimated just how much hard work contributes to inequality in lifetime earnings. While the answer depends on context, they arrived at an average for the US workforce: About 20% of the variance in lifetime earnings can be explained by differences in hours worked.

That’s a lot, but it is far from everything. Other explanatory factors probably include where you were born and grew up, who your father happened to know — and sheer luck.

The decision to work harder operates on at least two levels. First, you put in more total time, which leads to higher lifetime earnings. Second, you invest more in your human capital, which makes you more productive. Between one-third and one-half of the higher income for the harder workers stems from this human capital channel. One lesson is that if you are going to work hard, you should do so relatively early in your life, so as to reap the human capital benefits for future years.

Another crucial point is that those who work harder do so because they want to. There can be different kinds of heterogeneity in ability, including in learning capability or initial human capital. But in the researchers’ model, 90% of the variation in earnings due to hard work comes from a simple desire to work harder. Note again this is an average, so it does not necessarily describe the conditions faced by, say, Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg.

The study focuses on the US, but it has implications for Europe as well. In France, for instance, work is limited to 48 hours per week, with a standard week of 35 hours. That reduces average earnings and inequality in earnings, since it is harder for the top achievers to keep making more money. This research finds that the losers from this regulation are found at all parts of the wage distribution, not only at the top.

Some Americans view European workers as lazy and unmotivated. But in the 1970s, when European tax rates and regulations were lower, Europeans worked on average somewhat more than Americans did. So, it is possible that, if Europeans were allowed to work more, they would.

This research measures the averages, but other economists have focused on behaviour at the extremes. In virtually all societies in human history, elites have used their wealth to work less and enjoy life, and sometimes to wield power over others, as in the Roman Empire. The wealthy American, in contrast, seems to want to work ever harder.

Is this because of the extreme sums of money they can earn? Or is it the power of the American work ethic? Perhaps these two forces are related. In any case, America’s wealthy class is distinctive for wanting to work so hard. I periodically hear Europeans commenting on how strange this is — don’t you Americans care about more than just money? — and I often reply by pointing out that one of the wealthiest people in the world is Bernard Arnault of France.

I should also point out that many low earners work very hard and are very conscientious, yet do not get very much ahead. They might lack the right skills or education, or have family and child-care obligations, which limits their opportunities for advancement. Hard work alone is not a solution to income inequality.

Nonetheless, hard work does indeed matter, as does a willingness to work hard. It is good to have economists quantifying what most people would say is just plain common sense.

GREEN FINANCING

MDBs CAN ONLY PARTLY FINANCE CLIMATE NEEDS OF LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

Pinning hopes on MDBs

EMERGING MARKET AND developing economies (EMDEs) need large financing for climate action. The Independent High-Level

Expert Group (IHLEG) on Climate Finance, which submitted its report in November 2022, estimated external fund requirement for EMDEs (excluding China) at \$1 trillion per year up to 2030. To meet such large external requirement of funds, multilateral development banks (MDBs) are expected to play a major role, for which several high-level committees have made useful recommendations to augment their lending capacity. The major suggestions that have emerged in this regard are: (i) optimisation of balance sheets of MDBs, (ii) increase in their capital base, and (iii) re-channelling of special drawing rights (SDRs, an international reserve asset created by the International Monetary Fund) through MDBs. The role of MDBs in financing climate action is indeed critical, especially for countries which are heavily indebted. Least developed countries (LDCs), in particular, face enormous challenges, with their external public debt climbing from 20% in 2010 to 26% in 2022, and their interest payment burden soaring from 2.7% of their public revenue in 2010 to 7.8% in 2023. Many of them are, therefore, not able to access international capital markets, and for those which can, the cost of borrowing is prohibitive.

MDBs had set for themselves the target of \$65 billion for climate finance for 2025 at the UN secretary general’s Climate Action Summit in 2019. Climate finance extended by MDBs in 2022 was \$100 billion — the second year when climate finance exceeded the target of \$65 billion. The share of climate finance in incremental loans extended by MDBs rose consistently from 32% in 2018 to

JANAK RAJ PRITI DUBEY

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47% in 2022. Climate finance activity in 2022 was led by the European Investment Bank, with its share of 37% in total climate finance by all MDBs, followed by the World Bank Group (33%).

Though efforts made by MDBs to scale up their climate finance in recent years are laudable, the present scale of their operations is too small, considering the external requirements of climate finance by low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Overall climate finance extended by MDBs to LMICs was \$61 billion in 2022, which constituted 6.1% of the total requirement. The quality of climate finance by MDBs also raises concerns. Of total climate finance extended by MDBs to LMICs, only 23% was for adaptation action and a very small share of 6% was by way of grants.

A lot of emphasis has been placed on the optimisation of balance sheets of MDBs to augment their lending capacity so that a “dollar in” managed by them results in many times a “dollar out” for financing development and climate action. However, the situation on the ground has not changed much. Capital and reserves of MDBs grew by 2.3% during 2018-22 (compared with 6.0% during 2013-2017) and their overall balance sheets expanded by 2.7% during the same period. However, the multiplier (the ratio of total assets/liabilities



to capital and reserves) increased only marginally from 3.7 in 2017 to 3.8 in 2022. On an average basis, however, the multiplier at 3.8 during 2018-2022 was significantly lower than 4.3 during 2013-2017.

In any case, optimisation of balance sheets cannot be expected to make a large difference to the overall lending capacity of MDBs. Since MDBs are keen to retain their highest credit rating, the only other way to augment their lending capacity is

to expand their capital base. Despite the recommendation by the G20 Independent Expert Group (IEG) in November 2023 to expand the capital base of MDBs by \$100 billion in the next 10 years (\$10 billion every year), there has hardly been any progress to this effect. It seems that the stressed fiscal situation in

major advanced economies and the current geopolitical situation have become the main stumbling blocks.

In the absence of any capital increase and assuming the same compound annual growth rate (CAGR) as in the last five years for the entire climate finance portfolio (15%), MDBs’ climate finance to LMICs is estimated to rise from \$61 billion in 2022 to \$180 billion in 2030. In all, this aggregates \$940 billion during 2023-2030, which will meet only about 12% of external climate finance requirements of LMICs (based on \$1 tril-

lion requirement every year).

Re-channelling of SDRs through MDBs has a huge potential to strengthen the lending capacity of MDBs by generating a much-needed multiplier effect. Many advanced economies are sitting on large idle SDR balances of their total allocations (59% of total SDRs allocations of SDR 660.7 billion). The IMF in May approved that SDRs recycled to MDBs can be considered as reserves, though it initially capped the amount of SDRs that can be utilised by such facilities at SDRs 15 billion. Re-channelling of SDRs through Europe-based MDBs seems unlikely as the European Central Bank (ECB) has indicated that recycling of SDRs to MDBs is not permitted under current ECB rules and regulations. However, it is reported that some headway has been made by the African Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank for re-channelling SDRs.

To conclude, MDBs are severely constrained in their lending capacity in the business-as-usual scenario. Their reserves have grown at a meagre CAGR of 2.5% in last five years and there are no signs of expansion in their capital base as recommended by the G20 IEG. Approval by the IMF to re-channel SDRs through MDBs is a welcome development, but it remains to be seen how far this gets materialised. In the absence of any further change in capital and/or re-channelling of SDRs, even the most optimistic estimates suggest that MDBs can finance only a small part of climate-related requirements of LMICs. Furthermore, in the absence of any significant improvement in the lending capacity of MDBs, financing of climate action by them can come only at the expense of financing of development activity.

Views are personal

India Inc. credit profile: A tale of 2 halves



SACHIN GUPTA

Chief rating officer & executive director, CareEdge Ratings

It has shown resilience amid uncertainty, supported by robust domestic fundamentals and govt-driven infra initiatives. But the months ahead will be a test

THE FIRST HALF of FY25 paints a picture of cautious optimism within India’s corporate sector, where stability and resilience meet global challenges head-on. Recent data from CareEdge Ratings reveals a credit upgrade-to-downgrade ratio of 1.62 for H1FY25, slightly lower than in the previous half but still reflective of overall stability. Yet, a closer examination reveals significant disparities between sectors, as well as between large and mid-sized companies, providing deeper insights into the current economic landscape.

Sectors focused on the domestic market have fared particularly well, benefiting from consistent demand and significant government infrastructure investments. However, the anticipated boost in private capital expenditure is yet to materialise, signalling a lingering hesitancy among businesses to commit to long-term investments in an uncertain global environment.

A key trend that stands out is the disparity in performance between large corporations and smaller enterprises. Large companies, especially in sectors like capital goods, real estate, hospitality, pharmaceuticals, iron and steel, and automotive components, have shown strong credit performance. In contrast, mid-sized and smaller firms, particularly those reliant on exports, have encountered greater difficulties. These stem from weaker global demand and the impacts of China’s economic slowdown, which have hit export-dependent sectors like textiles and chemicals particularly hard.

The infrastructure sector, a key driver of economic activity, continues to be a bright spot. The commissioning of projects, especially in road hybrid annuity model and solar power, has driven a credit

ratio of 3.50 for the sector in H1FY25. Timely payments from state distribution utilities have helped power producers reduce their debt, while favourable regulatory interventions and medium-term power purchase agreements have provided stability. These developments underscore the critical importance of policy support in driving sectoral growth and highlight the infrastructure sector’s role in underpinning India’s broader economic recovery.

Financial services also present a mixed picture. While larger financial institutions have shown strength, driven by expanding assets under management

and robust capitalisation, smaller non-banking financial companies and fintech firms are facing regulatory challenges. Regulatory changes that have increased risk weights on unsecured consumer loans have led to slower growth expectations and higher funding costs for smaller players. This highlights the

delicate balance between encouraging financial innovation and ensuring adequate regulatory oversight, particularly in the rapidly evolving fintech space.

There are three critical factors that merit close attention. First, interest rates remain a key variable. The Federal Reserve has already implemented rate cuts, and the Reserve Bank of India is expected to follow suit with possible reductions of up to 50 basis points in FY25. However, the key question is whether these cuts will lead to corresponding reductions in bank lending rates. With high credit-deposit ratios and intense competition for deposits, banks

may be reluctant to pass on the full benefits of lower policy rates. This could create a lag in the transmission of monetary policy, affecting borrowing costs for both businesses and consumers.

Second, while India’s GDP growth remains robust at 6.7% for the first quarter, with full-year estimates hovering around 7-7.1%, there are early signs of weakening consumer demand, particularly in automobiles. Passenger vehicle sales have shown a decline, which may reflect broader economic headwinds. While this could be a temporary blip, especially with the festive season approaching, it will require careful monitoring. The health of rural demand, in particular, remains a crucial indicator, as it often acts as a bellwether for broader consumption trends.

Third, China’s economic slowdown and aggressive export strategies pose significant challenges for Indian manufacturers. The much-discussed “China+1” strategy, aimed at diversifying global supply chains, has been overshadowed by Chinese dumping particularly in sectors like chemicals, steel, and textiles. While government initiatives like the production-linked incentive scheme aim to enhance competitiveness, many Indian manufacturers find themselves in a defensive posture, focusing on protecting revenues and margins rather than pursuing aggressive growth strategies. This calls for a more nuanced policy approach that balances the need for trade protection with the need to be globally competitive.

The festive season offers a glimmer

of hope, particularly in terms of boosting rural demand and consumer spending. If realised, this could provide a much-needed lift to corporate credit profiles in the second half of FY25. However, this optimism must be tempered by the reality of ongoing global challenges, including weak export demand, elevated freight costs exacerbated by geopolitical tensions, and continued uncertainty in the trade environment.

For Indian corporations, navigating this complex landscape will require both strategic foresight and operational agility. While strong domestic demand provides a solid foundation, the sustainability of this demand, combined with external factors such as geopolitical risks and shifts in global monetary policy, will shape the corporate credit outlook for the remainder of FY25. Companies will need to focus on maintaining operational efficiency while preserving financial flexibility to navigate potential disruptions.

The manufacturing sector, in particular, faces a critical period of transformation. As global supply chains continue to evolve, Indian manufacturers must capitalise on the opportunities presented by the China+1 strategy, while competing effectively against low-cost Chinese exports. Success in this area will require government support and also substantial investment in technology, quality control, and cost optimisation.

India’s corporate sector has shown remarkable resilience in the face of global uncertainty, supported by robust domestic fundamentals and government-driven infrastructure initiatives. However, the months ahead will test this resilience as businesses grapple with global headwinds while seeking to capitalise on domestic opportunities.

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RESOLVE LABOUR UNREST WITHOUT CAUSING DISRUPTION

THE month-long workers' strike at the Samsung plant in Tamil Nadu is reminiscent of the 1970s and 1980s, when employee protests were a constant irritant in the country's industrial hubs. With the politically connected labour unions always in a battle-mode, such strikes in the pre-liberalisation era led to the downfall of several manufacturing hubs in the country such as Kanpur, Kolkata and Punjab. Even the textile mills of Mumbai were once notorious for their militant labour unions. We now know how some of these manufacturing hubs have been in complete disarray as promoters of companies shifted their base to relatively more business-friendly centres such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka – even though these states had their own share of labour problems. The strike in the Samsung factory in TN is for higher average salary and better working conditions. The workers have been complaining of low average salary of ₹25,000 a month and long working hours in unfavourable working conditions. They are demanding fixed 8-hour shifts and a hike in average salary to ₹36,000 a month. The workers have also demanded more frequent breaks without being penalised by the management.

While these demands are not unfair, labour unions cannot be allowed to disrupt day-to-day operations of the factory. However, poor working conditions remain an issue of constant debate. A few months ago, a similar issue erupted in Amazon's Manesar facility in Haryana, where workers complained of long working hours with little or no breaks and low salaries. Similar issues came to the fore when a young chartered accountant in EY collapsed and died allegedly unable to bear the work culture.

While the government (Centre or the state) has a limited role to play in matters like these, it can ensure effective labour laws are in place, and chalk out a better mediation system to diffuse labour disputes. The Centre and state government should collaborate to timely douse the fire of labour dispute and prevent it from spreading to other states. There is a need for political will to put in place labour law reforms which are balanced and not tilted too much in favour of the corporates or employees. Promoters must also ensure they have the trust of employees and should not be seen as anti-workers. At a time when India is striving hard to expand its manufacturing base, resolving labour unrest with minimal disruption is the way forward.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY HIT BY POLITICAL ATTACKS

POLITICAL rhetoric, particularly in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, has always been problematic. While some utterances were understandable if seen in the context in which they were made, others were malicious in nature but the loud mouths have always, with a few exceptions, have had their way. The list of culprits is long and illustrious. Unprintable expletives have made their way into the political lexicon and several leaders of all parties use them whenever it suits them.

The latest to join their ranks is Telangana Endowments Minister Konda Surekha, a firebrand of the Congress. She has a history of making stinging remarks but what she said about former IT minister and BRS working president K T Rama Rao and actors Samantha, Naga Chaitanya, and Nagarjuna has shocked everyone. Her target was KTR and, she held him responsible for the divorce of Samantha and Chaitanya. Though she retracted her remarks, it didn't seem like she was remorseful since she threatened KTR that she wouldn't let him walk free. Just as for everything, her ugly outburst too has a context. She was trolled by BRS supporters after she attended a function wherein a BJP leader felicitated her. The social media trolling was equally disgusting and for that, BRS senior leader Harish Rao had apologized too. In fact, the minister teared up. In her own words, she did the unthinkable in a fit of anger. One wrong doesn't make another right. That too, as she holds public office she ought to have known that she cannot violate the right to privacy of others, and level utterly defamatory charges.

The worst-affected parties here, KTR, Nagarjuna and Naga Chaitanya, have taken legal recourse as they are entitled to. But the problem is that when a minister and a politician makes such comments, at least a sizeable section of the population tend to believe, for, it is scandalous in nature. The damage done is irreparable. It is a wonder that a few Congress leaders have come out in the minister's support. The party ought to take disciplinary action against her to send a message that it doesn't encourage irresponsible conduct. After all, the right to privacy, as per the apex court, is an intrinsic part of the right to life and liberty. There is another political angle as well. In one fell swoop, she managed to relegate the debate on Musi encroachments to the background. That, is a disservice to the people.

QUICK TAKE

HOW TO BE A SINGAPORE

SEVERAL Indian politicians have, over time, promised their electorates to transform their state capitals into something as glitzy, clean and efficient as Singapore. But the bit about the city state they perhaps did not have in their sights is its extremely low level of corruption. It has just charged former transport minister S Iswaran and property billionaire Ong Beng Seng for corruption. The state's tallest leader, former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, ensured that his ministers were among the highest paid in the world. At the same time, he instituted a strong anti-corruption framework. Those features should be emulated among Indian states, too.

IN September, Sri Lankans broke their faith with the island's political elites and elected left-leaning Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the National Peoples' Power (NPP). The economic collapse, hardships placed on the people and the governance crisis resulting in public protests changed the island's political future.

The installation of a new president representing a diametrically opposite political ideology was phase 1 of political transformation, and phase 2 is marked by the parliamentary election. What happens between now and November 14 is, hence, future defining. In general, there is cautious optimism that this political experiment may yield some results—at least, at this moment.

With the September victory, the JVP, NPP's main constituent partner, has ended years of political stagnation and been propelled to lead a nation that requires complete rebuilding. For its own part, the JVP/NPP has risen from the ashes, increasing its support base from a mere 3 percent to 42 percent last month.

However, while there may be both appreciation and apprehensions about the JVP, a party that continues to generate extreme public responses, it has shown its ability to mobilise public support, an improvement made possible both by public anxiety and rejection of the old guard as well as the JVP/NPP's new rallying call around a fresh political agenda that takes into account specifics that need urgent addressing.

Phase 2 will be different. Firstly, 42 percent of the popular mandate was cast in favour of an individual, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the most trusted political figure at present. He has a carefully cultivated public image, particularly over the recent years, coupled with a sustained mass appeal. What was offered from the presidential platform has caught the public's imagination and the broader electorate has shown confidence in said agenda.

In the past three weeks, the new president has demonstrated pragmatism by engaging with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and by offering an assurance for its continuity—but with room to make some necessary alterations to reduce the burden on the public. There is also a presidential pledge to the Catholic church to bring to book the perpetrators of the Easter Sunday attacks. Similarly, there are other undertakings to end impunity and bring out the truth relating to the mystery murders of iconic editor Lasantha Wickrematunge as well as Wasim

The island nation's new president has promised to tackle burning issues like corruption, terrorism, and the economic crisis. But the challenge will be delivering on these post November 14

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR SRI LANKA'S NEW ADMINISTRATION

DILRUKSHI HANDUNNETTI

Award-winning journalist and lawyer; founder and director of the Colombo-based Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR)



SOURAV ROY

Thajudeen, a popular rugby player whose murder remains highly contentious. Then there is the most difficult of them all, the anti-corruption and reformist agenda to improve the current political cesspit.

Prior to the parliamentary elections, the JVP/NPP is required to let the public know how things are meant to change—how the promised agenda will be implemented post November 14. To get there, the new administration will require at least a working majority, 113 seats in the House.

The general trend is to vote the incumbent into office, which should make it somewhat easy for the JVP/NPP to muster the required seats. However, since the introduction of the 1978 Constitution and the complex preferential voting system, voters do cast their preferential

votes. The JVP has consistently campaigned against marking preferences, but it is part of the voter psyche by now.

Beyond the euphoria lies the political reality that beyond some well-known political figures, the JVP/NPP is going to introduce very fresh faces. The voters are decidedly tired of traditional political parties and their breed that continues as if retirement is anathema. Still, there is a need for the electorate to know the candidates to ensure a clear win. It is going to be a case of attempting to shift numbers, from 3 to 113—at a minimum. While it would not be daunting, it is impossible to expect a landslide victory.

The JVP/NPP's main Achilles heel is its inability to address Sri Lanka's minorities, making up 20 percent of the elector-

OLD PROMISES TO THE JEWS FROM AGES PAST

RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

Haggadah, a 2000-year-old book that retells the story of the Exodus from Egypt in detail. Children sing 'The Four Questions', called Mah Nishtanah in Hebrew, which introduce the retelling of the story.

The other main part of the Seder is eating ritual foods symbolic of the journey of the Jews from slavery to freedom: four small cups of wine, symbols of joy; bitter herbs, reminding Jews of the suffering of food and then they sang. The love, longing and pain in their voices and deep gratitude to God for their deliverance was immensely moving. They sang as though they themselves were crossing over from slavery to freedom, reliving the experience of their ancestors. I felt one with them, thanking God for bringing us through the vicissitudes of our own history. Mitzrayim, the Hebrew word for Egypt, means "the narrow place". The festival calls for Jews to introspect on where they feel constricted in their lives and what they can do to attain freedom.

Jews believe they have a special relationship with God, whom they trust for their eventual well-being. Through centuries of torture, religious taxes and persecution (but not in India), they clung to the faith of their ancestors. They renewed their hope with their central affirmation: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloihamu, Adonai Echad*, meaning 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Deuteronomy 6:4 in the Old Testament).

When they were given their promised land after centuries of being a scattered people, they recalled God's promise in Isaiah 11:12—'He will raise a signal for the nations and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.' Also, God's promise through Isaiah 46:4 is, 'I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.' Further, in Isaiah 54:17, is the assurance, 'No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgement you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me, says the Lord.'

As observers, we can well imagine how Jews down the ages found strength in these words, especially from Deuteronomy 33:29: 'Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will tread on their heights.'

(Views are personal) (shebaba09@gmail.com)

One part of the Seder is eating ritual foods symbolic of the journey from slavery to freedom: four small cups of wine, symbols of joy; bitter herbs, reminding Jews of the suffering of slavery; green leafy vegetables representing the gifts of spring; and matzah, the thin, crisp unleavened bread, the symbol of freedom

slavery; green leafy vegetables representing the gifts of spring and renewed life; and matzah, the thin, crisp unleavened bread, which is both the poor bread of slaves and the symbol of Jewish freedom.

I had enjoyed matzah ball soup very much at the home of American Jews in Chicago and was very touched by the sincerity and fervour with which they had arranged the dinner to share their culture with me. So, matzah was one of the special things I looked forward to at the Seder in Delhi.

The international community of Jews, whoever happened to be in Delhi, was also gathered there for the Seder. We shared

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MAILBAG

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Strong leadership

Ref: *BJP hunts for an assertive new chief* (Oct 6). The editorial highlights the urgent need for strong leadership within the BJP as it faces internal turmoil and electoral challenges. The party's search for a capable chief is critical, especially with upcoming elections looming. A decisive leader could unify factions and reinvigorate the party's base.

Uddeshya Thakur, Dhenkanal

Young blood

The author's analysis of the next BJP national president encompasses only selective political celebrities from the north and west. Nevertheless, in the view of experimenting new thoughts, both the RSS and BJP can opt for a young leader like K Annamalai of Tamil Nadu, Tejasvi Surya of Karnataka or Anil Antony of Kerala to inject a young new shot to BJP's organisational structure.

Venkat Desikan, Chennai

Women's harassment

Ref: *Break Bollywood's wall of silence* (Oct 6). From time immemorial, many men have been guilty of harassing women, not just in the cinema industry but in all spheres of society. Rape and harassment cases of girls as young as 10 months old are reported in the news daily. Even when such crimes are exposed, fast prosecution and stringent punishment is abysmally few.

R K Margabhandu, Kanchipuram

No support

The root cause for the silence in Bollywood is because there is no one to support the women in the industry. Some women have talked about it, but they had to flee the industry because they raised their voice towards this issue. In film industries the heroes are worshipped and respected larger than life, but they must take a heroic stand with their coworker.

Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi

Alarming suggestion

Former US President Donald Trump's weird suggestion that Israel should hit nuclear sites in Iran is aimed at Jewish votes in the upcoming US presidential election. Winning by any means seems to be his agenda. Can the US trust Trump with the nuclear button if he gets elected?

C G Kuriakose, Kothamangalam

BJP's losses

Ref: *Pollsters predict BJP's Haryana exit* (Oct 6). The BJP central leadership seems to be clueless about their back-to-back losses. They don't seem to have learnt their lessons from the electoral debacles of the past. It remains to be seen what the return of the opposition in J&K will mean for the country's security scenario.

RSriramprasad, email

Democratising AI Is a Fine Balance

Govt's role in regulation, innovation is key

India's growing role in AI applications positions it as a key player in democratising the technology, as IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted at the ET Startup Awards last week. Any approach that seeks to make AI accessible to all, including individuals and organisations that do not have the technical capabilities to run AI applications, would have to set out progressive benchmarks on intellectual property rights. The idea is to create a universal ability to experiment with AI programming. The constraints are privacy, confidentiality and competitiveness. The regulatory framework around these constraints guides the openness of AI and pushes the tech frontier outward by driving down costs. Governments have a critical role in shaping the development of AI and India leads by example in affordable access, ensuring abstraction and enabling control of stack elements.



Yet, democratisation of AI is not free of internal conflict. This arises from how stakeholders approach democratisation of use, development, profits and governance. Any democratisation effort that works on AI technology or its market derives value from aligning with the interests of those who will be affected. The work must begin with the democratisation of governance and the rest of the processes will evolve as a corollary. The downsides of a new tech need to be protected through government intervention so that dispersal, development and dividends are not inimically affected.

Broadly, AI is expected to increase the world's consumer surplus. How this surplus is divided among those with and without access to tech is a job for governments. India's approach has been to harness any available technology locally while redistributing gains to the deprived. This is as good an approach to AI governance as it gets. Putting an emerging tech to work towards creating a more inclusive society should be the guiding principle for AI democratisation across the world.

The Law Can't Doze Off By Bulldozing

In a genuine democracy, the law is the sole arbiter of justice, not state-sponsored vigilantism in the form of 'innovations' like 'bulldozer justice' or 'encounters'. Last week, the Supreme Court rightly hauled up the extrajudicial mechanism involving the razing of premises of individuals accused of crime, stating that such action is 'absolutely illegal'. Several state governments have taken recourse to razing properties of accused to demonstrate that it 'means business'. Justice is not a matinee show for audience applause—the law can't be made redundant.

The Supreme Court emphasised that neither accusation nor conviction justify 'bulldozing', adding that guidelines must apply across the country—and to all communities. The bench did clarify that unauthorised structures on public land are not protected. Conflating proper process with random acts of demolition should be verboten.

The use of bulldozers to clear illegal encroachments and shanties isn't new. The fact that governments in 2024 have been inspired by an activity thrown up during

Indira-Sanjay Gandhi's Emergency is as telling as it is unfortunate. More recently, 'bulldozing' as a statutory trend—an Israeli government SOP to 'tackle' accused Palestinian 'terrorists'—started in Indore in 2017, and was then picked up by the UP government. Rajasthan saw similar actions in 2023. The issue isn't just about demolishing property but about bypassing due process. Make this an 'out-of-the-tool box' tool and you'll have plenty of others that governments won't be able to contain. Selective targeting of individuals based on community, as is evident in some states, only deepens concerns about discrimination. Let the law work its course and not be made redundant.



JUST IN JEST

The lows of climate change can be mitigated by Earth-hugging highs

Psychedelics, It's A Planetary Thing

Stuck with a nagging problem that just won't quit? Management gurus say it's time to toss out the usual playbook and get creative. Well, a group of climate academics and activists have fully embraced that advice. Their solution? Psychedelics. Yes, they're convinced that a good old 'consciousness shift' courtesy of some trippy experiences might just spark climate-friendly behaviour. And before you laugh them off as Deadheads, know this: the 'Psychedelics for Climate Action' crew isn't some tie-dye-wearing sideshow. They were front and centre at New York City's Climate Week.

So, how does this psychedelic wizardry work? According to Marissa Feinberg, founder of Psychedelics for Climate Action, it's not just regular folks who could benefit. She believes even C-suite execs (read: fat Cheshire cats) could use a little help 'thinking outside the box' on social and climate issues. Jeff Bezos, for example, Feinberg reckons Amazon's anti-worker policies and massive carbon emissions might come from some deep-rooted insecurity. One magic mushroom later, and voila! Bezos could transform from wealth-hoarder to a beacon of compassion and sustainability. Who knows? The ultimate climate plan could be discovering new planets while tripping. Who needs carbon offsets when you can explore entire solar systems in your mind? Take that, peoples.

RBI gov's given enough signals he's not cutting rate – which markets have chosen to ignore

Sitting on the Cutting Edge



Mythili Bhusnurmath

Spare a thought for Shaktikanta Das. It's not often that heads of central banks repeat themselves to make markets hear. Yet, that is precisely what Das has been doing over the past many months, going by what is fast emerging as his pet phrase—the 'last mile of disinflation'—and the challenges posed in getting to his goal of 4% inflation on a sustained basis.

Only to have markets, seemingly, disregard his words. Especially after the US Federal Reserve cut rates by an aggressive 50 bps on September 18. More importantly, it has signalled that there's more easing likely in future.

No wonder that in the run-up to the next 3-day meeting of RBI's MPC starting today—with three new external members—the old 'Will RBI follow the Fed?' debate has got a fresh lease of life. This is surprising. As with markets elsewhere, Indian markets, too, usually hang on to every word the guy says. They can't afford to do otherwise. But, for some unfathomable reason, they seem to have chosen to gloss over Das' public position on RBI's war against inflation.

In February, Das spoke of the 'last mile of disinflation' being 'the most difficult part of the journey' during his keynote address at the South East Asian Central Banks (SEACEN) conference in Mumbai. At the MPC meeting in February, Das reiterated, 'We must remain committed to successfully navigating the last mile of disinflation which can be sticky'.

He followed this up at the April MPC, saying, 'Lingering geopolitical tensions and their impact on commodity prices



Show your hand on Wednesday

and supply chains are also adding to uncertainties in the inflation trajectory. These considerations call for monetary policy actions to tread the last mile of disinflation with extreme care.'

At MPC's June meeting, Das again spoke of 'the last mile of disinflation', saying, it is 'turning out to be gradual and protracted'. He followed that up soon after, saying, 'This last mile of disinflation journey is proving very sticky, arduous and very slow,' adding, 'The central bank will remain watchful.'

Not content with that, in the minutes of the MPC meeting held early August, he elaborated, 'Monetary policy has to remain vigilant to potential spillovers of food price pressures to the core components. This is critical for the last mile of

disinflation and anchoring of inflation expectations.' Yet again, on September 5, Das explained, the 'last mile in disinflation—bringing down inflation—is yet to be covered and the central bank should successfully navigate this journey to preserve the credibility of the monetary policy framework'.

More recently, at the Bretton Woods Committee's annual Future of Finance Forum in Singapore on September 13, he drove home the point once again, although in different words, saying, 'Inflation has moderated from its peak of 7.8% in April 2022 into the tolerance band of +/-2% around the target of 4%, but we still have a distance to cover and cannot afford to look the other way.'

That's as many as eight times in as many months. Surely, by now, one would have expected markets to get it. Unlike the Fed, which unleashed a bazooka late September, RBI is not for easing policy.



Take Indore Activity All Over



Amitabh Kant

Cities are key drivers of growth, and with ambitious targets, more than half of India's population is projected to live in urban areas. However, 42 Indian cities rank among the top 50 globally for the worst air pollution. Nearly half of our 603 rivers are polluted, and less than 20% of the generated waste is treated. Climate-related events are also putting increasing pressure on cities.

A comprehensive roadmap is needed to clean India's 50 most polluted cities by 2030, alongside sector-specific action plans targeting residential combustion, industrial and power plant emissions, transport, and waste management.

Indore's transformation offers valuable lessons. In 2015, it lacked proper waste management infrastructure and had a century-old legacy landfill. Rivers and nullahs were contaminated by sewage from homes. Today, Indore stands as India's cleanest city.

Here's how Indore did it: ► **Waste management** Door-to-door waste collection and training of municipal workers were central to the

strategy. Six types of waste were segregated from 5.85 lakh households, with specialised vehicles used for transportation. This waste was then transferred to six fully mechanised processing plants. Technology was leveraged to track vehicles, and a digitalised weighing system was implemented. A bio-CNG plant, set up in 2022, now produces 17,000 kg of CNG daily from wet waste.

GIS was used to identify sewage outfalls in nullahs, and leakages were fixed. Over 200 km of nullahs were cleaned, improving discharge efficiency during the monsoon. Reuse of treated sewage, rainwater harvesting and other initiatives earned Indore the title of India's first Water Plus City.

► **Air pollution management** The city banned the burning of solid waste and imposed strict regulations on construction and demolition waste. Transitioning to clean cooking fuels and using cleaner industrial boilers were part of the plan. Indore is also gradually electrifying its public transport system.

► **Financing mechanisms** Indore sold advertising rights at community and public toilets, embedding circular economy principles. It became India's first urban local body to trade carbon credits and issued the country's first green bonds, raising ₹244 crore.

Based on these learnings, a city-level Grand Challenge (GC) programme with clear timelines and targets is needed to clean our cities. Govt, along

with bodies like CPCB, could run this programme by scaling up NCAP, aiming for at least a 35% reduction in PM2.5 levels by 2030. Cities should be evaluated on their performance in addressing pollution sources.

These steps need to be taken: ► **Residential combustion** can account for up to a third of PM2.5 levels, according to NCAP. Key indicators could include the shift to clean cooking, elimination of stubble burning, biomass power plant projects and a transition from firewood to electric heating.

► **Stricter norms for industrial emissions** Traditional brick kilns are significant contributors to PM2.5 pollution and converting them to advanced tech should be a focus. Another priority is enforcing the 2015 emission standards for thermal power plants. Transitioning industrial boilers to electric alternatives will also be essential for reducing emissions.

► **Electrification of transport** Phasing out old two-wheelers (over 12



Spick and span

years), mandating registration of electric three-wheelers, e-buses and electrifying airport transport are potential targets.

► **Clear waste management practices** A value chain for waste segregation, collection, recycling and reuse—following the Indore model—should be incentivised. Other action areas include prohibiting the burning of solid waste, phasing out single-use plastics, developing green belts and moving to a waste-to-wealth model. Installing air quality monitoring devices should be a priority.

► **Strong funding** Responsibility for action lies with cities and municipal governments. A fund of ₹10,000 crore could be set aside for the next five years, with the top five performing cities receiving financial incentives.

To effectively combat urban pollution, India must adopt the GC programme, drawing lessons from Indore's success. With clear targets and strong accountability, cities can reduce pollution and improve livability. This mission requires collaboration between Govt, state governments and municipal bodies.

Together, we can transform our cities into sustainable urban centres—making them not just engines of growth but models of environmental stewardship. The time to act is now, for the future of our cities and the well-being of our people.

The writer is India's G20 sherpa

What You're Here, Not Everywhere



Poonam Khaira Sidhu

Last month, Delhi High Court upheld the plea of authorities to tax the permanent establishment (PE) of Hyatt International in India even if the global company incurs losses. This overturned an earlier verdict given by its division bench in the Nokia Solutions case in 2022, and grants India greater autonomy to attribute income to PEs based on their local activities, rather than relying on the overall profits or losses of the global entity. This new approach not only strengthens India's tax sovereignty, but also distinguishes the country from prevailing international tax practices, particularly those guided by OECD norms.

Historically, India's tax policies toward PEs were governed by Article 7 of various double-taxation avoidance agreements (DTAA), which stipulated that the income attributable to a PE in India should be linked to the global profits or losses of the parent company. This principle allowed MNCs operating in India to leverage global financial results to minimise their tax liabilities in this country.

For example, in the Nokia Solutions case, global losses of a parent company could be reflected in the financial records of its Indian PE, even if that local PE was profitable, resulting in lower tax obligations for the Indian operation.

This model provided a loophole that enabled some corporations to avoid paying fair taxes on profits generated from Indian operations.

Implication of the Delhi High Court ruling is profound: MNCs can no longer hide behind global losses to reduce their tax liabilities in India. Instead, Indian tax authorities can independently assess profits generated by a PE based on its local business activities. This newfound tax independence is further reinforced by Rule 10 of I-T Rules 1962, which provides tax authorities with wide latitude to estimate income for PEs in cases where traditional transfer pricing methods or other approaches don't adequately reflect income generated by the PE in India. Rule 10 allows for various income attribution methods, including profit splits or formula apportionment, which offer greater flexibility to ensure that the tax paid by a PE aligns with its local activities.

A case that demonstrates India's use of local activity-based profit attribution is the 2008 Rolls-Royce case, in

which Indian tax authorities attributed profits to the company's Indian operations based on the local value added by functions like R&D, risk management and marketing. Even though these activities did not directly generate sales, they were critical to the company's overall value creation. By attributing profits based on these local functions, tax authorities ensured that the PE paid taxes on its actual contribution to the global business, reinforcing the principle of local economic value being taxed within the country.

India's approach will still align with OECD's 'Authorised Approach', which recommends that PEs be treated as independent entities transacting with their parent companies at arm's length. According to this principle, profits attributed to a PE should reflect the value of its functions, assets and risks as if it were a standalone enterprise. The high court ruling doesn't reject this principle, but enhances the focus on local activities as the primary basis for income attribution.

To build on this ruling, Govt is working on draft rules that will introduce a three-factor approach for income attribution that's expected to include sales generated, manpower employed and assets used in India for the business. Once implemented, these rules will provide clearer guidelines on how income is attributed to PEs. This should add

transparency to the income attribution process, while also curbing profit-shifting practices by MNCs.

India's new approach contrasts sharply with tax policies of many other countries. In the US, tax obligations of foreign subsidiaries are often influenced by the parent company's overall profitability. Many countries, including India, are signatories to DTAs, which aim to prevent double taxation by allowing MNCs to offset taxes paid in one country against their liabilities in another. However, by taxing PEs solely based on local activities, India's new approach could result in situations where MNCs face different tax obligations across jurisdictions, potentially increasing their overall tax burden.

Moreover, this approach diverges from OECD's global minimum tax initiative, which seeks to establish a universal tax rate to prevent profit-shifting. While OECD promotes a standardised approach to taxing PEs, India's ruling prioritises local activities over global harmonisation, reflecting a shift toward more sovereign tax policies.

For MNCs operating in India, this ruling signals a major shift in how they approach tax compliance. Transfer pricing will continue to play a role. But the emphasis will be on local operations rather than the parent company's global performance. India is signalling a shift toward a more localised, sovereign approach to taxation, which could reshape how businesses operate in the country.

The writer is former principal DG, income-tax (administration), New Delhi



THE SPEAKING TREE

Enthu Cutlet, Are You?

NARAYANI GANESH

You are almost always bustling with enthusiasm and energy. You are what in Indian English slang is called an 'enthu cutlet'. Tamil slang would call you an 'enthu pattani'. These terms have no direct link to cutlets or to peas, but are monikers for those who are full of life and exhibit great vim and vigour in whatever they do. Enthusiasm, like laughter, is infectious.

When you are around an enthu cutlet, involuntarily some of that energy rubs off on you as well, and things begin to look sunny and happy. There are killjoys who get annoyed with enthu cutlets. They try their best to dampen their spirits, but fail miserably, thank goodness. Which is why happy people make more friends and cynics don't.

What makes you happy? When you do good for others without expectations, you feel happy. When you do something that interests you, you do it well and that makes you feel good. When you think positive and keep negative thoughts at bay, you feel lighter. All of this will help you look at life's challenges as just that: challenges to be overcome or accepted, and not get bogged down or get into the habit of blaming others or your circumstances. Your physical and mental health improve.

Enthusiasm is a special gift of the soul. It makes your heart sing. It is your life's purpose, say the Brahma Kumaris. It gives you the courage to overcome all obstacles and transform storms into gifts; you never become disheartened and always remain cheerful. It is truly a blessing to be upbeat and joyful most of the time.



MELODY FOR MONDAY

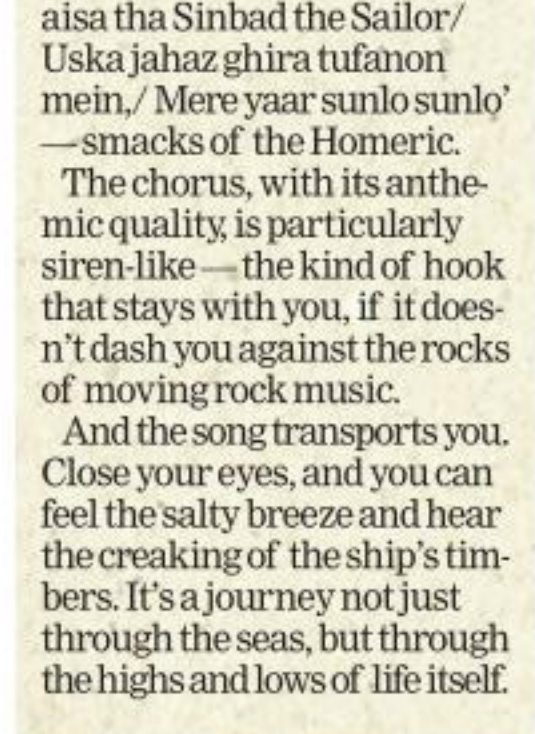
Sinbad the Sailor

Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, Farhan Akhtar & Raman Mahadevan

Farhan Akhtar's 'Sinbad the Sailor', from the 2008 movie Rock On!! is much more than a rollicking musical adventure. It sweeps listeners off their feet and on to the high seas. The ballad-turned-rock song is a testament to the sinewy versatility of Shankar Mahadevan, Ehsaan Noorani and Loy Mendonsa's composition, and Javed Akhtar's lyrical prowess.

From the very first strum of the guitar, the song hooks you—it's infectious. Farhan and Raman Mahadevan's raw vocals add a layer of authenticity, making you feel every word of the tumultuous journey. The lyrics—'Uske thay jo sapne' wahi uske thay apne'—also the Sinbad the Sailor/Uska jahaz ghira tufanon mein, 'Mere yaar sunlo sunlo'—smacks of the Homeric.

The chorus, with its anthemic quality, is particularly siren-like—the kind of hook that stays with you, if it doesn't dash you against the rocks of moving rock music. And the song transports you. Close your eyes, and you can feel the salty breeze and hear the creaking of the ship's timbers. It's a journey not just through the seas, but through the highs and lows of life itself.




Chat Room

US Lever to Past, Prez and Future

Apropos the Edit, 'Escalating Tensions, Fasten Your Seatbelts' (Oct 4), an uncertain world got even more uncertain with the entry of Iran into the West Asia conflict. While the Indian markets tanked, the American markets have shown no such panic. Probably because of the expectations of another rate cut by the Fed. The rupee has taken a hit and is nudging the ₹84 mark to a dollar, and the worst is not over. Indian exports to Iran are facing the heat, but the worst is the spike in oil prices that can make life difficult for oil-importing nations such as India. However, the most crucial event takes place next month when America votes for its 47th president. The winner could change the course of geopolitics and cause the world to hold on to their seatbelts.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES
Mumbai



CONTRAPUNTO

Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means

-RONALD REAGAN

Fading Red

Success in anti-Maoist ops must be backed by local development for a lasting victory

It was a big win for security forces: 31 Maoists were eliminated in a fierce gunbattle in Bastar's Abujmahad forests, long considered a stronghold of left-wing extremists (LWEs). The operation – the single-largest encounter in Chhattisgarh's history – also saw the neutralisation of top Maoist commanders Kamlesh and Niti. Anti-Maoist security operations are already witnessing their best year with 202 LWEs having been eliminated so far, another 723 surrendering and 812 being arrested.

Secret to success | A combination of factors appears to be driving this success. That a large number of LWEs have been neutralised in Chhattisgarh can be partially attributed to better coordination between state and central govts. Operationally, more security camps have been set up in Maoist hotspots this year; restricting the movement of LWEs. Plus, tech improvements such as the deployment of drones have significantly aided security forces in their operations.



Winning formula | There's no denying that Maoist violence has seen a significant dip across the country. Sustained operations by a combination of security forces, better connectivity in previously remote areas, and better delivery of govt services have all played a part in bringing Maoist violence down by 72% in 2023 as compared to 13

years ago. LWEs today are largely confined to certain pockets straddling inter-state borders. It's now clear that Maoists cannot hope to dislodge the Indian state, and this is drying up their recruitment. Add to this the elimination of top Maoist leaders, and LWEs are more vulnerable than they have been in decades.

Challenges remain | But GOI shouldn't declare victory yet. Ensuring tribal rights, giving tribals stakes in local development, restricting the flow of illegal weapons from Nepal and Myanmar all remain works in progress. Plus, LWEs can prey upon those caught in persistent deprivation to sustain their movement. It is only through social and economic policies complementing security measures that the Maoist threat can be snuffed out for good. The Indian state has shown it is winning this battle. It now has to comprehensively win the hearts and minds of the poorest of the poor to decisively triumph.

High On Failure

No major party has dared call out Nitish's prohibition policy. Will Prashant Kishor's critique matter?

Pundits are debating whether Prashant Kishor's claim that his party will lift the ban on alcohol in Bihar within an hour of being elected will be a political gamechanger. There is little debate that the state's prohibition policy has failed – as any such ban invariably will. If anything, the Bihar ban triggered unintended consequences. For one, it created a sprawling empire of illicit alcohol that flows smoothly throughout the state, in cahoots with police-neta nexuses. It was to happen, since Nitish Kumar imposed the universal ban on *all* types of alcohol, including country liquor, announced the policy as a 'surprise', and enforced it strictly at one go.


Result? First, it crashed the state's already meagre treasury. Neighbouring states took on the state's demand – excise revenues of Bengal and Jharkhand increased manifold. Second, Bihar overnight criminalised its own people who would consume alcohol. Bans on alcohol do not impact consumption. Like water finds its way, those who seek to drink will find a way. Third, as any such ban is wont to do, with the activity driven underground, illegal factories flourished – a new mafia came up. Hooch tragedies shot up. Fourth, given that it was mostly marginalised communities engaged in manufacture and sale of country liquor, their livelihoods went poof! As police cracked down, more and more people were jailed, and courts raised concern over the rising caseloads. The law was diluted to be more lenient to first-timers. But all in all, it was quite the mess.

But hey, Nitish Kumar was winning election after election, and even early detractors seem to lose their voice given the sudden explosion on the scene of the new electoral constituency – women. If former CMs Jitan Manjhi and Lalu Prasad called out the failure of prohibition, no political party in Bihar found it compelling enough a matter to make it an election issue since 2016 when the law was made. If Kishor's junk-the-ban call has takers, don't be surprised if Nitish Kumar does a U-turn on his pet policy. The women constituency is possibly also wanting change.


De-cap-itated

Flood of confusion after EU's new rule on water bottles

Reshmi R Dasgupta

 Germany checking the Schengen visas of all those travelling to that country even from within Europe is not the alarming thing to happen on the continent this autumn. It isn't even the unprecedented floods, except for people touring central Europe, that too by some form of surface transport, as this writer was. Nope, the most perplexing thing is the new bottle for beverages mandated by Eurocrats.

Arguably, drinking water is the most precious tourist accoutrement in Europe; more than adaptor plugs or oversized sunglasses. Bottled water costs a bomb (especially for rupee-minded Indians) and is the one item that defies all protestations about carbon credits and pollution. Though makers of many bottled beverages in Europe have reverted to glass, water still largely comes in plastic ones.

 And that means a lot of recyclable material. But de-cap-itated bottles being sent for recycling are becoming increasingly common, with plastic lids outnumbering shells on beaches these days, if proponents of the new caps are to be believed. Solution: make sure lids and bottles stay together till recycling machines do them part. Hence, from this July, visitors to Europe were introduced to the tethered bottle cap.

The result was a deluge of spilled water; apparently, as millions of 'confused' tourists – mostly Americans, judging by media reports – gagged as caps attached by thin strips of plastic to the necks of bottles poked their proboscises, ruffled moustaches and displaced nose rings as they attempted to drink. That was not the reason for the floods in central Europe, though; Brussels cannot be blamed for everything.

Given that most westerners remain slaves to toilet paper, their bewilderment over caps tethered to bottles will not surprise Indians, at least. For most desis, this innovation causes a momentary pause at best. Either they wrench it off without a second thought or realise, as I did, that it conveniently frees the other hand from holding the cap while drinking.

No cap left behind is a more achievable goal for a continent riven by differences than dealing with climate change, illegal immigration and the war in Ukraine. But making drinking water widely and *free*-ly available from fountains would be a better solution than tethered caps on Euro 1.99 bottles of the stuff.

War Of Hate Or War On Innocents?

A year since Oct 7 Hamas attack, West Asia is bloodier. An Israeli & a Palestinian analyst speak their mind

Izhar Shay

 On Oct 6, 2023, no Israeli would have imagined we'd be in a situation like today's. But let's be very clear, this conflict was imposed upon us. We never chose it, we never asked for it. Israeli Defence Forces' operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon need to be seen in this context. Recall that in 2006 we signed a UN-brokered ceasefire agreement with Hezbollah, under UNSC Resolution 1701. But Hezbollah never abided by the agreement beyond the first few weeks. It is on top of those 18 years of repeated violations of the agreement that the terrorist group then chose to intensify its attacks against us since Oct 8 last year in solidarity with Hamas that had carried out a barbaric attack against Israelis.

This is what Israel is dealing with today. Around 70,000 Israelis are unable to return home for months due to Hezbollah's rocket strikes. That's why Israel says enough is enough. We have to take decisive action now to secure generations to come. There is absolute consensus across Israeli society on this. Oct 7 wasn't just an attack against Israel. It was a planned, coordinated attack against the Western world by Iran and its regional proxies. If one looks into Hamas's ideological texts or the Iranian regime, it becomes clear this war isn't only about anti-semitism or Israel but is an assault on liberal values, including equality for women, equal rights for LGBTQ community etc. It is a civilisational war where Iran and its proxies are trying to destroy liberal, democratic values. And Israel, which embodies these values in West Asia, is the first hurdle for these forces of extremism.


But Iran miscalculated badly when it launched ballistic missiles against Israel last week. Most of those missiles targeted Israeli civilian infra in cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Thanks to Israel's excellent air defence system, damage was minimal. But Israel will respond – a response that West Asia will remember for decades. We hope then that the Israeli response will force international powers to put sufficient pressure on the Iranian regime. This is about Iranian aggression, on its way to becoming a nuclear power, which in turn is a threat for the whole world. The international community must get Iran to drop its military aggression and extremist policies and focus on their economy and their people's well-being. Tehran must stop wasting resources on

its nuclear programme and anti-Israel war machinery and use that money for the good of its citizens.

Iran and its proxies were also mistaken in assuming that Israel's contentious, democratic political divisions were a sign of weakness. True, Israeli society is divided over a number of polarising issues. But that doesn't mean our resolve to stay in our historic homeland has wavered. No matter where we are on the political spectrum, Israelis are united when it comes to protecting borders and defending our homeland. Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah should know this clearly: this is our homeland. We Israelis are here to stay. We're going nowhere.

No one wants peace more than an Israeli. Our schools teach children songs of peace. But kids under the care of Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran are indoctrinated to hate Jews. This must stop. Whatever we're doing is to drive home that

Makram Khoury-Machool

 I'm a Nakba survivor. Among only 3,500 of 150,000 Palestinians, my family miraculously managed to remain in Yaffa (Jaffa) city and not become, in 1948, one of 800,000 Nakba refugees (now 6mn) living in camps scattered worldwide, denied the right of return to our ancestral homeland despite UN Resolution 194 and many others.

If reading this makes you raise your eyebrows, you could be many things, but certainly also a victim of structures of disinformation that manufacture brutal propaganda with the aim to concoct Zionist history. Thing to do is to try to typify the difference between international relations and political communication.



message to adversaries. We'll do what it takes, however long it takes, to protect our people. There's a one-year-old, and elderly people, among the 101 hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza.

All this has to end in a political arrangement between Israel and its neighbours. Endorsement of global powers, including that of US, is needed. Till that time of peace, we'll continue to rise above our adversaries' hate. The Next October project does this by seeding start-ups for every fallen victim of this war. Three hundred companies endorsing the victims' families are already building start-ups that'll unlock Israeli innovation for global solutions in areas such as clean water, agriculture, fintech etc. A year ago, they came to kill us. But we respond by making the world a better place.

On crises such as the Palestinian cause, we always talk of positions of global powers such as UNSC's permanent members. Ask, are they working towards a win-win situation? Or, are they, in fact, part of a zero sum game where one party wins and the other loses?


The Zionist movement's plan has been to ethnically cleanse Palestine and seize the land in full and beyond. Netanyahu wants Palestinians to be either willing slaves, or be forced to migrate, or simply be killed. It's part of a triangular plan: 1) apartheid in western Palestine, 2) ethnic cleansing and low intensity genocide in West Bank and 3) Cleanscicide, that is, ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu escalated his aggression in West Bank late Aug-early Sep. But why did this trigger a media uproar? After all,

Valley Diary: Kashmiris Are Like Us, With A Twist

Like rest of India, joblessness is youth's key worry, made worse by fears of stepping out of J&K

Subodh.Ghildiyal@timesofindia.com

 To the many bonds – emotional, cultural, geographical and historical – that link Kashmir with the mainland, add a new existential one: joblessness/economic downturn. Bread 'n butter issues, just as in Haryana or Karnataka or UP or Bihar, strongly resonated among Kashmiris in these elections, even as the emotive planks of Articles 370 and 35A, which roiled the Valley the last five years amid concerns of 'cultural subjugation' and 'demographic changes', formed the electoral contest's backdrop.

Kashmir, south to central to north, barely reflects what GOI dubs 'Naya Kashmir' to paint a rosy future amid tremors triggered by the abolition of special status. Five years on, Kashmir's a picture of confusion – paranoia about Centre and its institutions, and fear of outsiders mixed with a desperate hope for 'secular' treatment by keepers of Hindutva ideology and even some indulgence by New Delhi. Irony is that Kashmiris – with politicians and commoners seething over what they call constant vilification by Delhi media on issues ranging from Islam to Pakistan – pine for old days of 'secular' India, though the bond was testy marred by separatism and militancy.

Jobs top charts | The young qualified talk about the serious jobs crisis even for engineers, like Aamir Nazir of Ganderbal who runs a tea stall, and graduates/PGs looking for work beyond the menial. Underemployment is real, parents fret about children's futures. A hotel receptionist in tony Srinagar said the struggle of *their* generation was different, a mix of worry for the future and sentiments of separatism. "But I look at my little daugh-

ters, and I know their struggle will be harder," he said.

Shakir Bhat, an engineer from a Mumbai private college, lunches at a rundown shack in Pattan, though the young man makes a 'good salary' working in a large construction company. His MTech friend teaches in a private school, earns ₹8,000 pm. Engineer Nazir argued that Article 370 was a safeguard helping natives in local employment. He says post-2019, settlers from Jammu



seize opportunities in all of J&K. Joblessness is also linked to a rising trend of drug abuse. Business is down – apparel stores to restaurants all claim a crisis of income.

Youth is paranoid | A non-Kashmiri is met with a furtive glance or a cautious greeting, from Srinagar to Baramulla. Questions about 370 or sensitive issues elicit a reticent "don't know", "who knows" or a shrug. There's paranoia about being photographed or sharing phone numbers or addresses. In the sweep of an animated conversation, facilitated by a local and helped by evidence of the printed word in *TOI*, a Shakir might unthinkingly share his coordinates. Don't be surprised if he calls within hours to

shakily enquire why his number was sought. Or if a restaurateur like Fayyaz happily agreed to talk, his younger brother Tariq could later raise questions about the chat's "purpose" because "my brother's a simpleton".

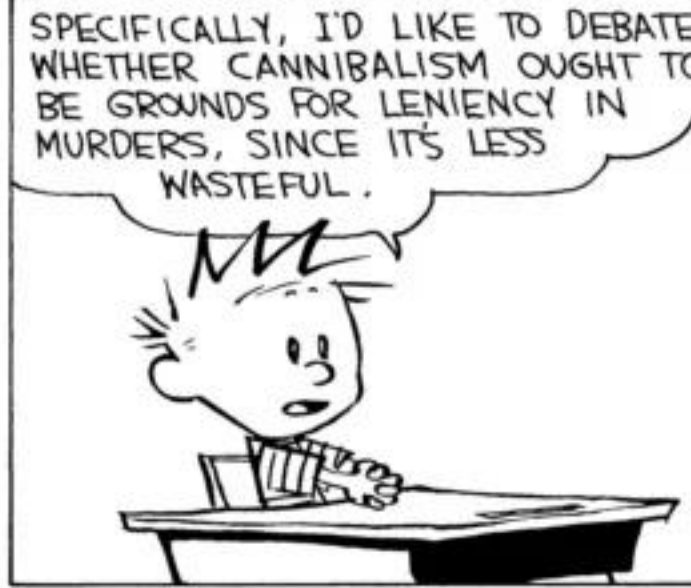
People claim jailing youngsters on vague suspicions or for no reason at all has ended up with boys viewing every stranger as a potential threat. PSA finds frequent mention. Shakir says engineers receive offers from outside J&K, but families worry about their safety as a Kashmiri and Muslim outside the province.

Disgust with media/social media | Islamophobic themes on many electronic media is a major grievance across the Valley. Provocative coverage threatens the safety of both traders, students and Kashmiris working outside J&K. A well-heeled Muzaffar refused to be interviewed by a TV crew stationed outside his Srinagar showroom. The reporter later asked if the office had a toilet. A deadpan Muzaffar retorted yes but "it's a Mussalman's toilet". At the puzzlement, he reasoned it's a fair warning given TV "communalises everything".

The average Kashmiri is hurting from the 'othering'. They say Pakistan has disappeared from youth's mindscape, but "India looks like it's rejecting Kashmiris". Constant linking of well-known Kashmiri politicians with Pakistan disturbs commoners, exacerbated by Hindu-Muslim polarisation and campaigns of "Hindu CM".

Polls panacea to paranoia | Cynicism about local political parties aside, Kashmiris believe a popular govt will stop "police highhandedness" and result in "release of innocents from jail". Electricity meters, power cuts, roads, schools and jobs are people's grievances — MLAs and ministers seen as the addresses to plead with for redressal.

Calvin & Hobbes



Devi Is The Primal Force Underlining All Existence

Swami Sivananda

Devi is the supreme Shakti of the Supreme Being. When Vishnu and Mahadev destroyed various asuras, the power of Devi was behind them...Devi is the creatrix of the universe. She is the universal Mother: Durga, Kali, Bhagwati, Bhavani, Ambal, Ambika, Jagadamba, Kameswari, Ganga, Uma, Chandi, Chamundi, Lalita, Gauri, Kundalini, Tara, Rajeswari, Tripurasundari, are all Her forms. She is worshipped during the nine days of Navaratri as Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati.

She is nature Itself. The whole world is Her body. Mountains are Her bones. Rivers are Her veins. Ocean is Her bladder. Sun, moon are Her eyes. Wind is Her breath. Agni is Her mouth. She runs this world show. Shakti is symbolically female; but it is neither male nor female. It is only a Force that manifests itself in various forms. The five elements and their combinations are the external manifestations of the Mother. Intelligence, discrimination, psychic power, and will are Her internal manifestations. Humanity is Her visible form. She lies dormant in the Muladhara

chakra in the form of serpentine power or coiled-up energy known as the kundalini shakti. She is at the centre of life in the universe. She is the primal force of life that underlies all existence. She vitalises the body through Sushumna Nadi and nerves...She vitalises the universe through Her energy. She is the energy in the sun, fragrance in flowers, beauty in the landscape, Gayatri or blessed Mother in the Vedas, colour in the rainbow, intelligence in mind, potency in homeopathic pills, power in Makaradhvaja and gold oxide, will and vichar shakti in sages, devotion in bhaktas, samyam and samadhi in yogis. Vidya, shanti, lust,

anger, greed, egoism, pride are all Her forms. Her manifestations are countless.

Shiv and Shakti

The Supreme Lord is represented as Shiv, and His power is represented as His wife – Shakti, Durga, or Kali. Mother Durga is the energy aspect of the Lord. Without Durga, Shiv has no expression, and without Shiv, Durga has no existence. Shiv is the soul of Durga. Durga is identical with Shiv. Shiv is only the silent witness. He is motionless, absolutely changeless... Shiv is omnipotent, impersonal, inactive. He is pure consciousness. Shakti is dynamic. The power, active aspect, of the immanent God is Shakti. Shakti is the embodiment of power.

Source: Devi, Divine Life Trust Society



Salutations... to the Devi who abides in all beings in the form of intelligence

Devi Mahatmyam

Feminine Divinity

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Jaishankar's Pak trip

SCO meet raises hope of a thaw in India-Pak ties

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's upcoming visit to Pakistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit represents a significant opportunity for India to explore diplomatic possibilities. This will be the first visit by an Indian foreign minister to Pakistan in nearly a decade, the last being in 2015 by Sushma Swaraj.

Though Jaishankar has stated that this visit is not aimed at discussing India-Pakistan relations, it is a unique opportunity to initiate a thaw in the bilateral ties. Relations between the neighbours have been strained since the Pulwama terror attack and Balakot airstrikes and the subsequent abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. However, developments such as the 2021 Line of Control (LoC) ceasefire have offered a glimmer of hope. This agreement revived the 2003 truce along the LoC, greatly improving the lives of civilians in border areas. The peaceful Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir further signal a potential for stability, which could foster an environment conducive for dialogue. Despite the ongoing tensions, a conversation between Delhi and Islamabad, even if informal, could set the stage for future cooperation on shared regional concerns, including security and trade. By holding talks on the sidelines of the SCO summit, India can assert its commitment to peaceful coexistence while maintaining its firm stance on terrorism.

Pakistan, for its part, must demonstrate its commitment to creating an environment free from terror and hostility. Jaishankar's visit, while primarily focused on multilateral cooperation, could serve as the first step towards reducing longstanding hostilities between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

Advantage Congress

Exit polls predict party's comeback in Haryana

IF the exit polls are to be believed — and most of them were off the mark for the Lok Sabha elections this year — the Congress is set to regain power in Haryana after a decade. The grand old party is expected to form the government on its own, while the ruling BJP is likely to finish a distant second. Over the past two decades, the outcome of the Assembly elections in the state has followed a predictable pattern — two successive terms for the Congress, then two for the BJP. It is wishful thinking for any party to hope for a third straight term in Haryana, where voters tend to lose patience when the government of the day fails to live up to their expectations. Anti-incumbency has indeed weighed the BJP down, with the move to replace Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini as CM in March reeking of sheer desperation. The release of Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmee Ram Rahim ahead of the polling day was a last-ditch attempt aimed at upsetting the Congress' calculations, but it seems to have been futile.

Defeat in Haryana will worsen the BJP's northern discomfort. The party had lost Himachal Pradesh to the Congress in 2022 after having suffered electoral debacles in Punjab as well as Delhi. An underwhelming performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls has already exposed its vulnerability. Various elections held over the past decade have seen the BJP's ascendance coincide with the Congress' decline. The latter's recent resurgence at the national level will be bolstered if it manages to add Haryana to its kitty.

The Congress is also tipped to make gains in Jammu and Kashmir, where it contested elections in alliance with the National Conference. With the prospect of a hung House looming large in the state-turned-UT, the PDP has indicated that it is keen to keep the BJP out of power. The saffron party, as is its wont, is not going to take an adverse verdict lying down, considering that this was the first Assembly poll held after the historic abrogation of Article 370.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1924

A little plain-speaking

IN a recent issue, the *Pioneer* did a little plain-speaking about "the rabid and unscrupulous campaign that is being carried on in many Indian journals against British officials for their inability to perform miracles and to prevent Hindus and Mahomedans from flying at one another's throats." We can claim to be fairly close readers of Indian journals of all shades of political views, but have not yet come across any journal in which a rabid and unscrupulous campaign has been or is being carried on against British officials. The little that some of these journals have said is solely by way of a reply to the *Pioneer* and other newspapers of the same ilk to whom the occurrence of these unfortunate disturbances has been a veritable godsend and who have in every single instance exploited them for the purpose of proving the indispensability of British officials in India and the unfitness of India herself for a responsible government. It is necessary to remind the authors of this selfish and sinister attempt to mislead the ignorant English opinion or the more unwary and simple-minded among the people of India. These riots have taken place, not after the abdication of his authority by the British official, but at a time when he is still the supreme master of the situation, so far as the maintenance of law and order is concerned. It is neither logic nor common sense, let alone fairness, to construe his failure to either prevent these riots or suppress them before they would do any great mischief into an argument proving his special fitness for maintaining law and order in India and the absolute unfitness of the people of India themselves.

Despair, dread a year after Hamas attack

Justice for the Palestinians and security for Israel are more elusive than ever



NAVDEEP SURI
FORMER AMBASSADOR

THE first anniversary of the brutal and surprisingly effective attack by Hamas against Israel comes with a sense of despair and foreboding. October 7, 2023, witnessed the slaughter of young men and women at a music concert, of residents of Kibbutz Be'eri and Nir Oz, and Jews young and old taken hostage. But after that, it's been a year of searing images from Gaza, of over 42,000 dead, of dismembered toddlers and grieving families, of caravans of hapless refugees moving from one bombed-out location to the next, of flattened neighbourhoods and a dystopian landscape that defies imagination. It has also been a year that exposed the utter hypocrisy of Western sermons about the sanctity of international law, of a rules-based order. And it's been a long year that has demonstrated the utter impunity of the powerful and the abject misery of the dispossessed in equal measure.

West Asia today is teetering on the edge of a full-scale regional war, while justice for the Palestinians and security for Israel are more elusive than ever. So much has happened on so many fronts that without unpacking some of the key strands, it is easy to miss the woods for the trees.

Let's start with Israel. After the shock of multiple military and intelligence failures on October 7, the Israeli Defence Forces, along with intelligence agencies Mossad and Shin Bet, clearly regained their mojo. From the exploding pagers in Lebanon to the assassination of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, from the targeting of a senior IRGC



MACHISMO: The continued use of brute force by Israel only plants the seeds of a forever war. REUTERS

(Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) commander at an Iranian embassy building in Damascus to the use of bunker-busting bombs that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, Israel has once again demonstrated its formidable intelligence, technical and military capacity. But the military successes have also given rise to a growing sense of hubris, with some influential Israelis openly advocating a "reset of the Middle East" that would include a regime change in Iran and possibly in Lebanon. Saner voices in Israel do bring up the lessons of history, pointing to the folly of building up Hamas to undermine the Palestine Liberation Organisation, to the painful invasion of Lebanon in 2006, to the deliberate scuppering of the Oslo Accords and more. Their voices, though, are lost in the clamour for retribution. In politics, machismo evidently works and Prime Minister Netanyahu's approval ratings have shot up in recent weeks.

Iran was hoping for its own reset, having surprised many by electing the relatively moderate Masoud Pezeshkian as President in July with the hope of bringing a semblance of normalcy in the country's troubled ties with the West. Tehran displayed remarkable restraint after the affront of

It's been a long year that has demonstrated the utter impunity of the powerful and the abject misery of the dispossessed in equal measure.

Haniyeh's assassination, but successive Israeli provocations have brought the hardliners back to the forefront. They see restraint as an abject surrender and they are baying for retaliation. The missile attack on October 1, 2024, was unleashed at least in part to assuage this lobby. Israel has vowed to respond and is reportedly looking at Iran's oil installations and nuclear facilities as possible targets. A major attack may well achieve the unintended objective of weakening a moderate government and strengthening the religious hardliners who are among Israel's most implacable foes.

Hezbollah under Nasrallah was Iran's most reliable and effective proxy in the region. Over the last two decades, its armed forces had grown to a point that it was virtually a state within a state in

Lebanon's fractured polity. The killing of Nasrallah and other top Hezbollah commanders by Israel in recent weeks is undoubtedly a blow to Iran and the influence that it had so assiduously cultivated in the region. But Israel's relentless aerial bombardment has already left over a thousand Lebanese dead, many of them innocent civilians. Relief over the emasculation of Hezbollah is offset by outrage over the impunity with which Israel is destroying civilian infrastructure as it targets Hezbollah facilities.

The Houthis in Yemen, another of Iran's proxies in the region, have emerged as an unexpected actor in the wake of the October 7 Hamas attack. Their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have affected global supply chains and led to a costly detour around the Cape of Good Hope. This has raised freight and insurance costs and reduced Suez Canal revenues for the cash-strapped Egyptian economy by a quarter. Asserting their stout commitment to the Palestinian cause, they have also taken a few potshots at Israel and attracted their own share of disproportionate retaliation.

This brings us back to Palestine itself. The International Court of Justice in the Hague, by an overwhelming 14-1 majority, ruled that Israel's occupation of Gaza,

the West Bank and East Jerusalem was unlawful and must cease immediately. Israel's Knesset perversely passed a resolution opposing the formation of a Palestinian state. Proceedings on a second case accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza are underway. But that has neither curbed Israel from moderating its military campaign nor slowed down the runaway growth of illegal Jewish settlements in the Occupied West Bank that are now incentivised and protected by fanatics like National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, key members of Netanyahu's ultra-right-wing government. They are systematically executing their plans to control all of the land from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea, thereby closing every possible pathway to a two-state solution where an independent Palestinian state can co-exist with a secure Israel. And they make no secret of their designs.

The US avows its commitment to a two-state solution but has done little to prevent its principal ally from demolishing its viability. After a year of feeble protestation over Israeli atrocities, hand-wringing over his inability to control Netanyahu and the continued supply of lethal munitions, President Joe Biden has placed himself in a lose-lose situation. While Netanyahu would clearly prefer a Trump administration that gives him carte blanche to continue on the present trajectory, Biden's equivocation could lead to the loss of crucial Arab-American votes in a key swing state like Michigan and potentially aid a Trump victory.

Israel's long-term security will come from establishing a modicum of peace with its Arab neighbours and by accommodating the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the Palestinians. The continued use of brute force only plants the seeds of a forever war. But these simple truisms are more elusive than ever.

The outlook on this 7th of October is distinctly gloomy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can we return the occupied territories? There is nobody to return them to. —Golda Meir

The old man's bag of gems

BUDDHADEV NANDI

IT was an autumn morning. Roused by the hurly-burly on the street, I peeped out through the window of my study. I saw an old man being pestered by a group of teenaged boys. They were pulling a long-strapped leather bag slung across his shoulders. He was frothing at the mouth and choking while trying to shout at the top of his voice. His arms and legs were trembling and his lips were quivering. I went out and shooed away his tormentors.

Later, I came to know that the man used to get livid if anybody tried to touch his bag. I guessed that it contained something precious. A sweetmeat seller said the bag had deeds and records of immovable property the man had possessed.

A few months after the incident, preparations began for Saraswati Puja. Our local club erected a marvellous *pandal* and decorated it with dazzling lights and colourful drapery, as usual. Everything was fine, except the loudspeaker was blaring out film songs. I was forced to close the doors and windows to prevent the din from disturbing my peace of mind.

In the early afternoon, to my utter astonishment, I noted that those film songs were no longer being played. Instead, I heard someone reciting short poems one after another in a mellifluous voice. I opened the doors and windows to listen to the words clearly. At times, the performer was describing the subject matter of the poems before the recitation. I was impressed by his poems, which were predominantly on nature, and nonsense rhymes for children.

My inquisitiveness knew no bounds; I wanted to have a close look at that person and so I went to the club *pandal*. I was astonished when I found that the poet was none other than the old man who had been hurling abuse at kids a few months ago. My eagerness to know more about the man intensified, and I spoke with him — he told me he was a retired teacher of Bengali literature in a village school and was reciting poems he had composed.

Having got angry at the boys in the past, he was now determined not to lose his temper on Saraswati Puja. Therefore, before the boys started troubling him, he emptied the bag and showed them its contents — it contained only manuscripts of his poems. He then started reciting them as the loudspeaker operator went away for a break. I was overwhelmed with joy when I found that the same boys were now helping him — installing the microphone, holding his bag that had been the apple of discord. Indeed, the bag did contain precious gems.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

High stakes for PM Modi

With reference to 'When the dice rolls in Haryana' (*The Great Game*); the BJP's loss in the state would signal the fall of a crucial domino, threatening PM Modi's dominance. The people of Haryana seek to punish the arrogance of their leaders, particularly Nayab Singh Saini. The Congress' Bhupinder Singh Hooda offers an alternative; the former CM is challenging the BJP's invincibility. This battle transcends local politics. Will the voters be able to take revenge for the CM's arrogance, or will Modi's magic prevail? The dice has been rolled and the EVMS will reveal the answer soon.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

Congress on comeback trail

Apropos of 'When the dice rolls in Haryana'; the Haryana Assembly election results will be out soon. The wind is clearly in favour of the Congress. Even the BJP's workers and bigwigs have secretly conceded defeat after its ill-treatment of farmers and women wrestlers. The BJP should have remembered how the Left Front tumbled down after a rule of 34 years in West Bengal. In a democracy, it is the people who can make or break those in power. The Modi-Shah duo has understood this and their frustration came to the fore during the poll campaign. They failed to showcase their achievements, and focused on accusing the Congress and attacking the Gandhi family.

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

Need for better voter education

Refer to '67% turnout in Haryana; voting pattern shows urban-rural divide'; the turnout in Haryana's elections highlights a persistent urban-rural divide. While rural districts like Fatehabad showed robust participation with 74.51 per cent turnout, urban centres like Faridabad lagged at just 55.46 per cent. This stark contrast raises concerns about civic engagement in urban areas, where apathy towards voting continues to grow. The lower turnout compared to the 2019 elections further signals the need for better voter education and outreach in cities. Urban voters must recognise their role in shaping the state's future, just as rural voters have done.

GANGA ARORA, CHANDIGARH

Strict implementation of SC ruling

Refer to 'Caste bias in jails'; the Supreme Court has done a great job by scrapping caste-based discriminatory practices in state prison manuals. What is sad is that this discrimination continued after Independence and survived despite initiatives taken by the National Human Rights Commission and the National Legal Services Authority. Division of labour and segregation of quarters by caste in prisons remained unaddressed. OBCs rebuking lower OBCs and Dalits castigating Mahadalits in prisons is a sad commentary on caste hierarchy. The apex court has done its bit, but state governments must ensure strict implementation of the ruling in jails across the country.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Create a more inclusive society

Refer to 'Caste bias in jails'; the Supreme Court has ordered an overhaul of prison manuals. The judgment has brought hope for equality in society. The court has ruled that distribution of work based on caste in prisons is a form of violation of the Constitution. This decision is a significant step towards eradicating caste discrimination, which has plagued India for far too long. The court's directive to revise prison manuals within three months and remove caste references from prisoner registers is a welcome move. It's crucial that we recognise the harm caused by these practices and work towards creating a more inclusive society. We must work together to ensure that these directives are implemented effectively and that caste discrimination is eradicated from our society.

SALONI SHARMA, JAMMU

Primary allegiance is to power

Apropos of 'The Chagos handover'; the UK's decision to hand over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius is geopolitical manoeuvring disguised as goodwill. By retaining Diego Garcia under the US control, Britain has shown that its primary allegiance is to power and not justice. The rhetoric of safeguarding global security in the Indian Ocean masks the reality of clinging to strategic assets. The UK's declining naval might and dependency on the US reveal its vulnerability. The handover is incomplete and disingenuous. True sovereignty for Mauritius remains elusive while Diego Garcia stays in foreign hands.

GURDEV SINGH, MOHALI

Unshackling prisons from caste prejudice



UPNEET LALLI
PENAL REFORMS EXPERT

PRISONS are a microcosm of society, reflecting the disparities that prevail in it. A parallel world exists in prisons. It operates on the basis of both written rules framed by the State in the prison manuals and unwritten codes of the inmates and the staff.

In India, prison is a state subject and each state has framed its own rules and regulations. The colonial legacy in terms of the Prison Act of 1894 is reflected in the prison manuals. While dehumanising practices such as whipping, mentioned in the Prison Act, had been declared unconstitutional, derogatory practices related to the distribution of work on caste basis still persist in prison manuals.

The Supreme Court has, over the years, delivered significant judgments on prison-related matters that have ushered in reforms. It was in the *Sunil Batra case* in 1978 that the SC held for the first time that a person in prison does not become a 'non-person' and retains all human rights, except within the limitations of imprisonment. It was affirmed

that the prisoners have a right to live with dignity.

In its latest judgment in the case of *Sukanya Shantha vs Union of India*, the SC has directed the Union and state governments to ensure an end to the caste-based discrimination in prisons. Sukanya had highlighted how caste identities governed prison labour assignments, segregation in barracks and discriminatory treatment towards prisoners belonging to denotified tribes and habitual offenders. The apex court held that these provisions violate Articles 14, 15, 17, 21 and 23 of the Constitution. It declared that "the right to dignity is not forfeited upon incarceration". Caste-based bias within jails strips prisoners of their dignity.

Nearly 17 states will need to make the necessary changes in their manuals. The SC has asked the Centre to modify its Model Prisons Rules to address caste-based segregation.

Prisoners come from multiple vulnerable groups, ranging from Dalits to tribals and religious and ethnic minorities. The discrimination and marginalisation are further perpetuated and even embedded inside the prison.

The SC held that the practice of assigning labour based on caste, where Dalits and members of denotified tribes were forced into menial tasks, such as cleaning toilets, must cease immediately. For instance, the Madhya Pradesh jail manual states that 'Mehtar prisoners' are responsible for handling



CALL FOR REFORM: The SC has ordered the ending of caste-based practices in prisons. ANI

human excreta in the toilets. Those who are at the bottom of the societal class pyramid would be required to do the menial work and those higher up would get other work, like legal documentation.

While prisoners do get paid for the work, it is a paltry sum in many states. Remission is also earned by the convict inmates who work in the prison and the performance of maintenance work earns more remission. But who gets to do what work may be at the discretion of prison staff. The SC has declared that all labour assignments should be made on the basis of equality and non-discrimination.

"Prisons should not be spaces where historical wrongs are perpetuated. They must embody reform, rehabilitation and, most important, equality."

The SC held that the provi-

sions which allow for classification and segregation based on caste are unconstitutional. The states have been directed to do away with the provisions in prison manuals that perpetuate discrimination based on caste within three months and file compliance reports. The "caste" column and any references to the caste of jailed undertrials or convicted prisoners' registers inside the jails should be "deleted", it ordered. It is not for the first time that the right to equality has been found to be violated in various manuals and practices. It is a known fact that the highest class people get treated well everywhere, even in jail.

Notably, the Punjab Jail Manual of 1996 made a distinction between 'better-class' and 'ordinary-class' prisoners on the basis of social status and education as well as whether the inmate

We remain a socially stratified society, still entrenched in a social order where equality remains a dream for many.

was accustomed to a superior mode of living. 'Better-class' inmates got to stay in separate wards with furniture, had a separate kitchen and better diet and were not required to do menial tasks. Courts would recommend the classification for 'better-class' facilities.

This was struck down by the Punjab and Haryana High Court in 2000. However, the practice continued even after the judgment. The manual was superseded by the Punjab Prison Rules 2021.

In 2023, Haryana came up with new Prison Rules that prohibit classification on the basis of status, caste and religion.

The United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners, ie the Nelson Mandela Rules, and the Bangkok Rules for the treatment of women prisoners prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, gender, religion and social status.

These rules, along with the apex court judgments on prisons, had formed the basis of the Model Prison Manual 2016. As a member of the committee that framed this, we had specifically prohibited any special treatment to prisoners belonging to any particular caste or religion. The classification of prisoners is to be done scientifically and not on the basis of socioeconomic status, caste or class.

The Model Prison Act 2023, prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), does

not contain any reference to the prohibition of caste-based discrimination. The SC has asked for the provision to be incorporated in it. The MHA advisory of February 2024 told the states to take immediate steps to amend/remove the discriminatory provision in their state prison manual/ prison Act.

To ensure compliance with these directives, the SC has ordered that the state governments submit periodic reports detailing the steps taken to revise their prison manuals and implement the SC directions. The District Legal Services Authorities and the Board of Visitors set up under the Model Prison Manual 2016 have been directed to jointly carry out inspections to ascertain whether caste-based bias or discriminatory practices, as pointed out in the verdict, are being practised inside prisons.

However, as BR Ambedkar, in his classic essay 'Annihilation of Caste' (1936), observed: "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated." We remain a socially stratified society, still entrenched in a social order where equality remains a dream for many. Systematic caste-based discrimination in all spaces needs to be identified. Challenging the comforting routines and patterns of behaviour that may appear to be the natural order of things requires much unlearning at individual, societal and institutional levels.

Views are personal

The growing threat of fake, substandard medicines



RAKESH KOCHHAR
FORMER HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF GASTROENTEROLOGY, PGI

THERE have been several disturbing reports about the quality of some commonly used drugs. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), in its monthly report for August, declared more than 50 drugs as 'not of standard quality' (NSQ). They include the commonly used paracetamol, vitamins and calcium supplements, available over the counter. Medicines that failed the quality check also include anti-ulcer drug pantoprazole, anti-diabetic drug glimepiride, hypertension medication telmisartan and some life-saving antibiotics. Another five drugs were declared spurious, adulterated or misbranded.

This raises safety concerns about the use of not only these drugs but also others.

The CDSCO releases a list of drugs in the category of NSQ every month from amongst the drugs that are randomly checked in the pharmacies. In February 2023, as many as 1,251 drugs were checked and 59 were found to be NSQ. In

March 2023, 48 of the 1,497 drugs tested were NSQ.

Though it amounts to less than 0.05 per cent of all drugs tested, it is a serious matter for a country which claims to be the pharmacy to the world. India has the highest number of US-FDA-compliant plants outside of the USA and over 3,000 pharmaceutical companies, with a network of over 10,500 manufacturing facilities. The country is the largest manufacturer of generic drugs and vaccines in the world.

Drug manufacturing, distribution and sale in India are regulated by the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. The state drug regulatory bodies regulate the grant of licence, production, marketing and distribution of medicines while the central drug regulatory body is responsible for approving new drugs and clinical trials.

From time to time, the Indian pharma industry has come under a cloud. A couple of years ago, there was international uproar over deaths in Africa following the ingestion of a cough syrup made in India. A similar episode had been reported in Uzbekistan. There was an instance of five deaths at PGI-Chandigarh due to the use of a substandard anaesthetic agent, propofol. About 15 years ago, Ranbaxy, a leading pharmaceutical company, was found by the US FDA to have falsified data and test reports at its manufacturing plants in India.

As per the CDSCO report, some drugs were found to be



QUALITY CONCERNS: The CDSCO report has highlighted lapses in safety measures. ISTOCK

spurious, with the manufacturers claiming that they had not made them at their facilities. This raises the question of whether they have been made by some other manufacturer and marketed under a renowned brand. This would amount to the drugs being fake.

One can imagine what would happen if intravenous drugs were made spuriously. They would cause instant reaction, shock and, even, death.

Drug-manufacturing in India is supposed to be well regulated, with each manufacturer required to have basic infrastructure, trained manpower and due licensing. However, getting a licence to start one's own production is not a difficult task. This is evidenced by the mushrooming of drug-making units like a cottage industry in many states.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is hampered by outdated regulations, weak penalties and slow prosecution.

At the same time, we have a category comprising state-of-the-art units of major companies which comply with the US FDA norms. They conduct periodic inspections and verifications. The second category of units adheres to WHO standards, with periodic checks. The third category is the one which is certified to be following good manufacturing practices (GMP). There is a gradient of quality in these three types of manufacturing.

The quality of drugs in India is dependent upon the sanctity of the manufacturing processes followed by the company. Certain MNCs would rather destroy the whole batch of a questionable product than bring it to the market. That is not the case with some smaller companies. For them, profit-making supersedes patient safety. This is exemplified by

third-party manufacturing by many companies.

The active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) in each drug has to meet the purity standards laid down. But since most APIs are imported and their cost depends upon the actual concentration of the compound, an element of cost-versus-quality exists. Then, the finished product has to meet the standards laid down in the Indian Pharmacopoeia, which include drug assay, dissolution and tests for particulate matter and pathogens etc. It is the job of drug inspectors to check the manufacturing processes at each facility periodically. They also collect samples of drugs for analysis and enforce legal standards.

One of the main problems with ensuring the quality of drugs manufactured in India is the permissiveness in licensing drug-manufacturing units. The government gives licences to 15-20 companies to make the same drug from the same APIs. Many larger companies outsource some of their products to third-party manufacturers. Then, there are ghost manufacturers where the licensee may not have a manufacturing unit and gets the drugs made from another unit. The end result is a compromise on quality.

To make matters worse, there are groups of chemists and doctors who set up their own units to make some fast-selling products. The recent directive of the government to prescribe gener-

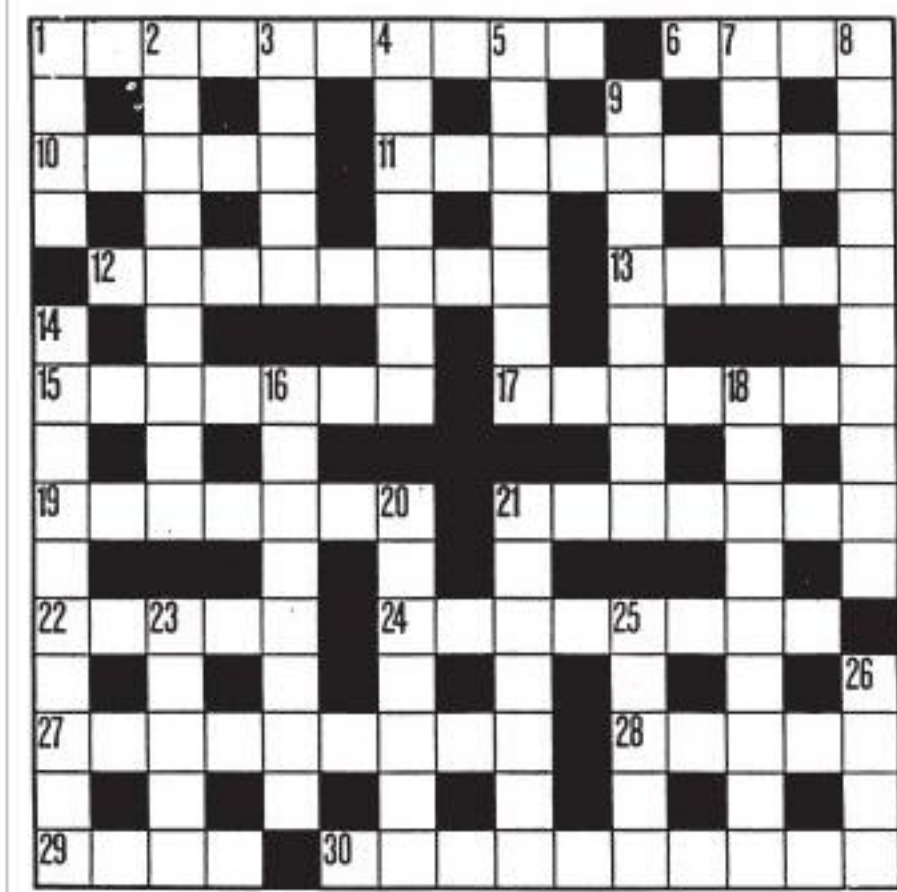
ic medicines and the opening of Jan Aushadhi stores, which dispense cheaper generic medicines, has led to the mushrooming of small manufacturing units. This makes their regulation difficult.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is hampered by outdated regulations, weak penalties and slow prosecution. Two years ago, the manufacturers of the substandard cough syrups were made to suspend manufacturing of only those drugs and allowed to continue with the rest of their activities. Earlier this year, the Drugs Controller General of India announced policy initiatives on three issues: recall guidelines, norms on good distribution practices and the use of similar brand names by pharma companies for their drugs. But the implementation of the remedial measures is tardy.

The monthly alert report of the CDSCO is a positive initiative of the government, but a lot more is required to be done. There is an urgent need to make the raw material or the APIs in India. Currently, a majority of them are imported. At the ground level, a larger trained and skilled workforce is needed. The government should spare funds for technology for analysis and testing. Drug-unit licensing and regulations to run them should be more stringent. At the same time, stiffer penalties are required for defaulters.

Nobody should be allowed to play with our lives.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- In general (2,3,5)
- A long time (4)
- Improbable account (5)
- Put an end to (9)
- Sudden flight in panic (8)
- Courage (5)
- Form of parallelogram (7)
- Betrayer (7)
- A good-for-nothing (7)
- A level in a hierarchy (7)
- Book's promotional publicity (5)
- Flowering climbing shrub (8)
- A flower-head vegetable (9)
- Ill-defined (5)
- Variety of cabbage (4)
- Alert (2,4,4)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Delight, 5 Weber, 8 Out of turn, 9 Asp, 10 Left, 12 Maniacal, 14 Maroon, 15 Revolve, 17 Stealthy, 18 Stab, 21 Ant, 22 Leviathan, 24 Tarry, 25 Legible.

Down: 1 Droll, 2 Let, 3 Gift, 4 Toucan, 5 Winnipeg, 6 Branch out, 7 Repulse, 11 Far better, 13 Foul play, 14 Miscast, 16 Shovel, 19 Binge, 20 Fang, 23 Hub.

DOWN

- Enthusiast (4)
- Large long-winged seabird (9)
- Strongly desired goal (5)
- Ingenious (7)
- Item of clothing (7)
- A tropical American fruit (5)
- Oppressively hot (10)
- Confused mixture (8)
- Find nothing (4,1,5)
- Without a saddle (8)
- A reprimand (7-2)
- The inside facts (7)
- A US time zone (7)
- Up to the time of (5)
- Underside of projecting roof (5)
- Fresh information (4)

SU DO KU



V. HARD

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 7TH 2024, MONDAY	
■ Shaka Samvat	1946
■ Aashwin Shaka	15
■ Aashwin Parvishite	22
■ Hijri	1446
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 4, up to 7.50 am	
■ Priti Yoga up to 6.40 am	
■ Anuradha Nakshatra up to 2.25 am	
■ Moon in Scorpio sign	
■ Gandmoola start 2.25 am	

FORECAST

SUNSET: SUNRISE:	MONDAY TUESDAY	18:00 HRS 06:20 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	36	23
New Delhi	35	25
Amritsar	35	19
Bathinda	36	22
Jalandhar	35	19
Ludhiana	35	20
Bhiwani	36	23
Hisar	37	21
Sirsa	36	23
Dharamsala	30	16
Manali	24	12
Shimla	25	13
Srinagar	28	12
Jammu	33	19
Kargil	26	08
Leh	15	04
Dehradun	33	20
Mussoorie	24	14

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Change on the cards

Exit polls predict change in Haryana and a hung assembly in J and K; if true, would indicate Indian politics is in transition

Exit polls from the state elections in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir are indicating a decisive win for the Congress in Haryana and a hung assembly in Jammu and Kashmir. As these predictions dominate political discourse, they offer a glimpse into possible power shifts in these two critical regions. In Haryana, the exit polls suggest that the Congress is set to reclaim power, ousting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government, which has been in office since 2014. If these predictions hold true, it would also underscore the growing discontent among Haryana's electorate, particularly farmers and rural voters, who have been dissatisfied with the BJP's handling of agricultural reforms and the aftermath of the 2020 farmers' protests. The Congress, capitalising on this unrest, appears to have successfully mobilised voters, especially in the rural areas and among the Jat community. Meanwhile, in Jammu and Kashmir, exit polls point towards a hung assembly, signaling the challenges of forming a stable government in the Union Territory. With no single party projected to secure a majority, political maneuvering and coalition-building will become crucial in the coming weeks. The fractured verdict reflects the complexity of the region's political landscape post the revocation of Article 370 in 2019. The People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) is expected to emerge as a significant player, but the BJP has also made inroads, particularly in the Jammu region. So not only numbers but post-result alliances would decide the formation of the government. Indeed, a hung assembly could lead to prolonged negotiations and possibly a fragile coalition, underscoring the political uncertainty that has



plagued the region in recent years. A Congress victory in Haryana could be a defining moment in national politics. It would signal that the BJP's stronghold in the Hindi heartland is weakening and Jats (who have significant presence in western UP) are returning to Congress fold and non-Jats — upper castes — the traditional BJP voters are also have also splitted. Congress couldn't be happier as it could also galvanise Congress supporters across other northern states, particularly Rajasthan and Punjab, where state elections are due soon. But it would have a daunting task of keeping the rebels happy as they could turn the tables. In contrast, the outcome in Jammu and Kashmir-if a hung assembly materializes-could deepen political instability in the Union Territory. A coalition government would have to balance the diverse and often conflicting interests of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, complicating governance. Moreover, this result could prompt national parties, particularly the BJP, to reassess their strategies in sensitive regions like Jammu and Kashmir, where identity politics and security concerns dominate. However, as with all exit polls, it's important to approach these predictions with skepticism, given how they have been inaccurate in past elections.

PICTALK



Artists take part in 'Garba', in Ahmedabad

Why 'Make in India' can be a game changer

By fostering indigenous innovation and cutting-edge technology, India is challenging long-held economic paradigms and rewriting its own narrative on the world stage



ANURAG SAXENA

For centuries, Western nations have reaped the rewards of their focus on innovation, intellectual property (IP), and the relentless pursuit of technological advancement. By glorifying creation, often over manufacturing and service, these nations have not only monetised their inventions but also exported their ideas globally, establishing themselves as economic powerhouses. The United States, for instance, transformed industries through disruptive technologies like the internet, pharmaceuticals, and aerospace, creating global demand for their products and services. Similarly, European nations have led in sectors like infrastructure (think about the economic advantage of railroads), automotive engineering and luxury goods, where innovation and IP are at the core of their global dominance. In contrast, economies like India and China historically anchored their growth on manufacturing and services—both positioned lower on the value-addition spectrum.

This approach, while effective for driving industrialisation and job creation, did not prioritise innovation or IP creation, the intellectual asset that is monetizable, leaving these nations as consumers rather than creators of advanced technologies. China, however, has broken away from this model in recent years, making massive investments in innovation, intellectual property, and tech platforms. The country has developed cutting-edge technologies in fields like telecommunications, social media, and gaming, exemplified by global giants such as Huawei, TikTok, and Tencent. These efforts have not only strengthened China's domestic economy, positioned it as a formidable global exporter, and given it access to priceless data from across the world. India, on the other hand, followed a different trajectory. Instead of focusing on production and technology creation, India became synonymous with contact centres, Global Capability Centers



(GCCs), and IT services. This positioning earned India the moniker of the "backroom of the world," a role that, while economically beneficial, left the nation lagging in terms of innovation and high-value technology creation. While India excelled in providing services, it often supported the innovation and product development efforts of other nations rather than leading them. However, the past decade has witnessed a significant shift in India's global stance.

India has emerged as a geopolitical force, flexing its muscles in various domains. Diplomatically, India has taken a more assertive position on the global stage, engaging in strategic partnerships with major powers while maintaining its autonomy in international affairs. In the geopolitical arena, India has strengthened its defence capabilities and has been pivotal in initiatives like the Quad, countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. On the trade front, India has renegotiated trade deals and is increasingly seen as a critical player in global supply chains, particularly in the wake of global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This newfound

INDIA HAS EMERGED AS A GEOPOLITICAL FORCE, FLEXING ITS MUSCLES IN VARIOUS DOMAINS. DIPLOMATICALLY, INDIA HAS TAKEN A MORE ASSERTIVE POSITION ON THE GLOBAL STAGE, ENGAGING IN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH MAJOR POWERS WHILE MAINTAINING ITS AUTONOMY IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

assertiveness underscores why India's current focus on "Create in India" is both timely and strategically crucial. By fostering a culture of innovation and supporting the development of indigenous technologies, India is positioning itself to dominate the next century, both economically and in terms of soft power. Economically, a focus on creation will enable India to move up the value chain, generating higher returns on its intellectual assets and reducing its dependency on foreign technologies. In terms of soft power, leading in fields such as media and entertainment will allow India to shape its narrative, instead of continually reacting to distorted Western narratives. When PM Narendra Modi made the call, "Let us together start a 'Create in India' movement," not everyone understood its second and third-order effects, especially the ramifications on narrative-correction, and exporting our civilizational ideas globally. The "technologies" of Eastman colour and vinyl records helped America prop its heroes and rockstars. The era of XR and gaming will help India prop ours. The Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting recently announced the 'Create in India Challenge' under the aegis of World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) 2025; a first-of-its-kind event showcasing the future of our AVGC sector to the world. This broad-spectrum challenge showcases the best of our talent across 25 types of content and games. India needs more of these visible celebrations. It's time the world saw our creativity and our ambition. However, to fully unlock this potential, India must also invest heavily. The AVGC sector represents the future of digital interaction and entertainment. Unlocking this future needs skill development, investment pipelines, platforms that scale, a progressive regulatory regime, and much more. It is indeed a tall order, but by establishing the Gangotri here, India can ensure its leadership in the global economy and narrative for years to come. (The writer is a policy affairs expert. He is a nominated member of the National Tourism Advisory Council, Govt. of India and Board Member, Centre for Insolvency and Financial Laws; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SECULAR CREDENTIALS INTACT

Madam — Apropos of the editorial 'How secular in India' (October 5) based on the report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, certain ground realities of the present circumstances emanating from Israel-Hamas war wrapping Lebanon, Iran and Syria, extremist groups of Pakistan operating in India, terrorist attacks from across the border and coup in Bangladesh, which are directly boiling the Indian Muslims against Israel, US etc, can't be factored for any judgment by a US group. It is true that there are serious violations of human rights and religious freedom in the US. India has very peculiar problems relating to religious issues. The Waqf Act has embroiled the sentiments on possession of their lands and temples, the insurgency from Bangladesh and Myanmar have changed the demography of the North East, Bengal and other bordering states. Our neighbourhood has been troubled with army coups, dictatorships, religious violence against Hindus and anti-India governments. Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar are failing in economies with unstable governments. Hindus are restive not against Muslims and minorities but against indiscriminate appeasement politics. These aspects have not been factored in the report of USCIRF. It is surprising & unfortunate, highly biased and discriminatory that such organisations don't carry out similar investigations and publish reports on Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Maldives, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and China. However, such extraneous reports are mostly inconsequential in Indian politics. Such reports don't help Muslims too. US should also denounce and discredit such organisations and their reports. Such reports vitiolate diplomatic relations and mutual cooperation.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

Address the demands of Ladakh



The people of Ladakh are deeply concerned about pressing environmental issues, regional affairs, and the lack of essential services, all of which continue to plague the region. The key issues they are raising include the demand for tribal status under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, full-fledged statehood, separate parliamentary constituencies for Leh and Kargil, and the establishment of a Public Service Commission. Sadly, even as they did 21

days fasting protest, getting no results they began another Delhi Chalo Padyatra for their rightful claims, despite being totally peaceful protest, were detained by the Delhi police, sparking outrage across the country. It is alarming to see the government's apathy and the Indian media's strange silence on such critical matters. Ladakh is an integral part of India, and its people deserve to be treated with the same respect and consideration as any other citizens. Their development is India's development, and their issues must be addressed without further delay. I urge the government to fulfill the demands of the people of Ladakh promptly and work towards ensuring their welfare and dignity. Jakir Hussain, Kanpur

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

JUSTICE RESTORED

Madam— The recent Supreme Court decision against prejudice based on caste in jails is a major step towards ensuring that everyone is treated with dignity and equality. But how can we make sure that every state implements these changes in an effective way? Concerns regarding the extent of social injustice are raised by the practices from the colonial past that remain present in jail manuals. What steps will be implemented to monitor compliance and permanently end this prejudiced conduct as we work towards a more equal system? The Court's order is an important first step, but more work needs to be done.

Anshu Bharti | Begusarai

A BETRAYAL OF TRUST

Madam — I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the adulteration of Tirupati laddus. The Supreme Court's decision to form a five-member independent SIT is a commendable step. Any allegations of adulteration or misusing of any ingredients in the Tirumala

Tirupati laddus are disrespectful to the sentiments of crores of devotees. It also questions about the quality control and the safety standard that is being maintained by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD). I urge the SIT to conduct an impartial investigation turning no stone unturned. The findings of the investigation should be made public which would restore the faith of devotees in the TTD and also prevent such incidents from happening in future. The investigation must be done in such a manner that it does not become a political issue as Tirupati laddus is connected to crores of people and their beliefs, it deals with the sentiments of devotees. I urge the SIT to conduct an impartial investigation which would not just resolve this issue but also ensure that next time such thing doesn't happen by ensuring regular maintenance and laboratory tests are done.

Fiza Fatima | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Overcoming Phobia: A Journey of inner strength and inspiration

Resilience and determination can help us overcome even the toughest challenges. All you need is a spark to ignite your spirit

I had a phobia of speaking in public. It is quite surprising given that I was good at debates during school and college. I was also a successful manager as I traversed my professional journey. I dealt with hundreds of staff since I joined the railways as a young officer.

I also interacted confidently with my peers and the seniors. However, I would break out in a sweat and lose my sleep each time I had to be on stage. I was envious of those who could spontaneously break into a joke or recite a poem. I decided to do something about it. I started preparing notes days in advance.

I would keep memorising the lines by rote till they were branded in my memory. I would even repeat them standing in front of the mirror watching intently my facial expressions. This was the best that I could do. I realised in later years that my handicap was nothing when compared to the challenges faced by many. Recently, I watched The King's Speech, a movie on the life of King George



VI, who found himself on the throne after his older brother, King Edward VIII abdicated. The film largely dealt with King George's determination to overcome his stutter with the help of a speech therapist. I understood that the will to beat the odds comes from within. No therapy can help an unwilling person. There are many instances of people overcoming their handicaps to pursue their dreams. We have all heard of Stephen Hawking. He was diagnosed with motor neuron disease at age 21 and was not expected to live more than a couple of years. He survived the odds but the disease paralysed him over decades. After he lost his speech, he communicated

ed through a hand-held speech-generating device, and then through a cheek muscle. Helen Keller was an American author. Medical science was much less advanced than what we know today. An unknown illness, when she was only 19 months old, left her permanently blind and deaf. She painstakingly learned to recognise words through hand movements. We, who are blessed, cannot even fathom the hard work that would have gone into her transformation to be the voice that she became. The famous Bharatnatyam danseuse Sudha Chandran underwent amputation of her right leg at the age of 18 due to a road accident. Many would have lost hope and might have ended up wallowing in self-pity. The lady regained her mobility with the help of a prosthetic. She also pushed herself to accomplish the unthinkable. One need not look up to only the famous to witness these stories of human courage and conviction. My maternal grandfather was comatose for a few

months after a botched-up surgery. The doctors were not even certain about his coming out of the coma. He was paralyzed on his right side. He worked painstakingly to lead as normal a life as he could, he even developed writing skills with his left hand. Many in our country are differently abled but do not have the means to pursue their dreams.

On the other hand, we have big business houses that do not even bat an eyelid before spending more than the GDP of a small country on lavish events. We, many other individuals, and the business houses have the means to make a difference in the lives of others. Stephen Hawking said, "Concentrate on the abilities your disability doesn't hinder and don't dwell on the things it interferes with. Be disabled physically, not in spirit." We need to be the spark that ignites the spirit. (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

FIRST COLUMN

LEADERSHIP AND MENTAL HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES

Supportive leadership can reduce stress and enhance job satisfaction



SAKSHI SETHI


In today's dynamic workplace, the mental health of employees has become a focal point for organisations aiming to foster a productive and harmonious environment. One of the most significant factors influencing employee's mental health is the role of leadership. Bosses and managers possess the power to shape workplace culture, influence employee satisfaction and directly impact mental well-being. Leaders hold a unique position of authority that can significantly affect an employee's perception of their work environment. The tone set by leaders creates the foundational culture of an organisation. It is undeniable to say that a positive, encouraging atmosphere promotes employee engagement and satisfaction, whereas a toxic environment leads to stress and anxiety. Several research indicates that employees who feel supported by their leaders are more likely to experience lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction. Studies also indicate that transformational and supportive leadership styles co-relate with better employee mental health outcomes. Leaders who provide emotional support and recognition can significantly reduce stress levels among employees. Conversely, authoritarian leadership styles often result in increased employee anxiety and decreased morale. Flexible work arrangements such as remote work, and flexible hours positively impact mental health by allowing employees to manage personal responsibilities alongside work demands. One of the most crucial aspects of effective leadership is the ability to provide support and recognition. There is no denying the fact that employees thrive when their contributions are acknowledged and valued. A boss who regularly provides constructive feedback and celebrates achievements fosters a sense of belonging and motivation. This recognition can enhance employees' self-esteem and reinforce their commitment to the organisation. On the other hand, a lack of recognition can lead to feelings of inadequacy and disillusionment, ultimately affecting mental health negatively.

The interplay between workplace factors and employee mental health is complex but increasingly recognised as critical to organisational success. By fostering supportive leadership, promoting a positive work culture and prioritising employee well-being, organisations can enhance mental health outcomes and overall productivity. Continued research in this area is essential for developing effective strategies to support mental health in the workplace. The impact of leadership on employee mental health is profound and multifaceted. Bosses have the authority to shape the workplace culture, provide support and recognition, communicate effectively, manage workloads, resolve conflicts and model healthy behaviours. Understanding the importance of these factors can help organisations create healthier work environments where employees feel valued and supported.

As businesses continue to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace, prioritising mental health through effective leadership is not just beneficial for employees but is also essential for fostering a productive and engaged workforce. The interplay between workplace factors and employee mental health is not only complex but also increasingly recognised as critical to organisational success. By fostering supportive leadership, promoting a positive work culture and prioritising employee well-being, organisations can enhance mental health outcomes and overall productivity. Continued research in this area is essential for developing effective strategies to support mental health in the workplace.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Elevate wellness experts as industry leaders



DINESH SOOD

Backed by government initiatives and vocational training programmes, this sector offers global placements, entrepreneurial opportunities and job openings in small towns



Beauty, wellness and grooming are indispensable aspects of life, particularly for young professionals striving for financial success and a luxurious lifestyle. It's crucial to recognise that a professionally trained hairdresser can earn more than an engineer or a doctor, dispelling the outdated notion that community-based hairdressers only fulfil basic needs. Their workplaces also serve as vibrant community centres where people gather, exchange ideas and foster belonging and bonding while waiting for a haircut. Therefore, it's imperative to rebrand the skills and professionals in the beauty and wellness sector as 'Beauty Architects' or 'Glam Gurus', elevating their profession's status and attracting more talent to this lucrative industry. Our country's beauty and wellness industry presents unparalleled employment opportunities and global placements. Recognising this, the government has initiated various measures to create pertinent content, curricula, information databases, and delivery systems, standardise accreditation and certification processes, and establish industry-aligned infrastructure. These efforts aim to equip young individuals to perceive beauty and wellness as a promising profession. The beauty and wellness sector should streamline its curricula to emphasise industry exposure. As the industry transitions towards more excellent organisations, professionals must be educated on adhering to professional service standards, obtaining industry-specific qualifications and certifications from reputable organisations, and enhancing their existing qualifications through access to higher education and research. Integrating extensive internship, apprenticeship, and on-the-job training opportunities will provide candidates with practical work experience and a comprehensive understanding of the industry. The absence of employer-led apprenticeship standards and career pathways leads to limited internship opportunities, depriving numerous students of valuable learning experiences. Early introduction of beauty and wellness

OUR COUNTRY'S BEAUTY AND WELLNESS INDUSTRY PRESENTS UNPARALLELED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND GLOBAL PLACEMENTS. RECOGNISING THIS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS INITIATED VARIOUS MEASURES TO CREATE PERTINENT CONTENT, CURRICULA AND INFORMATION DATABASES,

courses in schools is essential. Our current education systems prioritise knowledge-oriented training through rote learning, neglecting practical, experiential learning crucial for real-world application. Therefore, orienting students towards vocational education as an alternative career choice is imperative. The absence of practical and experiential learning impedes innovation, creativity, and imagination among learners, leaving them ill-prepared for the evolving world of work. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates integrating vocational education with mainstream education to expose 50 per cent of K12 and PG learners to vocational skills by 2025 and 100 per cent by 2030. Schools play a crucial role in raising awareness about vocational career paths. Notably, beauty and wellness skill courses have been part of the curriculum in Delhi Government schools for over a decade. Early exposure to such vocational education can aid students, parents, and guardians in considering alternative career paths and foster a positive outlook on the workforce's dignity in the beauty and wellness industry. The vocational education sector has tried mainstream vocational courses such as BVoc, MVoc, BSc, and MSc in Beauty and Wellness. However, these programs have seen low enrollment due to a need for more awareness about career opportunities and limited seats. There is a need to design more BVoc and MVoc courses with multiple entry and exit points, focusing on practical application in areas such as Beauty Culture, Cosmetology, Yoga, Ayurveda Dietetics, Sports Nutrition, Physiotherapy, Salon


Management, Beauty Therapy, Aesthetics, Aesthetic Dermatology, Hair Dressing, Makeup, and Spa Therapy, rather than just theoretical knowledge. Additional focus is also required in the areas of human psychology, stress management, mental well-being, nutrition and diet, reflexology, alternate therapies etc. An alternative pathway to a bachelor's degree is completing a one-year ITI program and gaining a year of industry experience. Expanding training capacities in the Beauty and Wellness sector within ITIs is crucial, as the current short-term training programs are insufficient to meet industry standards and demand. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is essential for informal workers with significant industry experience. Despite possessing valuable skills, many informal workers in the Beauty and Wellness industry need more formal education and training. RPL can help them gain formal certification based on their industry experience. Additionally, there is a need to support entrepreneurship in the Beauty and Wellness sector. More than 50 per cent of vocational graduates in this sector opt for self-employment, and there is a growing trend of industry workers starting their enterprises. A robust support system is required to support these entrepreneurs and foster innovation and employment. The Indian beauty and personal care market is experiencing rapid growth in tier-II and tier-III towns, with a substantial value of \$22 billion and projected to expand at a rate of 10-12 per cent to reach \$34 billion by 2028, as per the Nykaa Beauty Trends Report. This surge in

tier-II and tier-III cities is not surprising, given the global trend. In India, approximately 38 per cent of the demand for beauty and wellness products and services, particularly direct-to-customer (D2C) offerings, originates from these cities, making them highly lucrative markets. Despite being underdeveloped, tier-II and tier-III cities hold significant potential in the beauty and wellness sector. Research indicates that professionals in these cities are well-versed in domestic and international trends, products, and hair services. Social media's influence has been pivotal in driving lifestyle changes, especially among the younger population. Young customers and professionals in tier-II and tier-III towns are eager to explore new trends and various beauty and wellness services. In contrast to metropolitan cities, recruiting a skilled workforce in these smaller cities is more accessible, as a motivated and trainable young workforce is readily available. Beauty, wellness, and grooming have become integral to everyone's lifestyle, regardless of whether they reside in metropolitan cities or smaller towns across India. People increasingly seek professionals to help them achieve their desired makeovers, so it's time to adopt an inclusive approach to rebrand the traditional workforce as professionals in the beauty and wellness sector.

(The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and a network Member of India International Skills Centres, an initiative of GoI; The views are personal)

Mobilising climate finance in India: Uncovering alternative routes

Blended finance models, carbon pricing and strategically aligned CSR funds could be the key to unlocking the private sector's investment potential



KAVIN KUMAR KANDASAMY

Among the many deliberations that India helmed with the other delegations, there was also a renewed global focus on the urgency of climate action. The Urgency of Mobilising Capital in the Global South, while the impacts of climate change are global and far-reaching, the impacts of this Research shows that 55 vulnerable countries have suffered \$525 billion combined cli-

mate crisis-fueled losses in the last 20 years. The number is estimated to reach \$580 billion per year by 2030. This is because large-scale investments are required for mitigation or adapting to the consequences. The Loss & Damage Fund, proposed at COP27 and operationalised at COP28, was a move India with the rest of Global South welcomed. Though it is receiving initial contributions from developed nations, these fall short of what many developing countries deem necessary. Further, a recent study by CEEW found that the developed world, which is responsible for three-fourths of existing carbon emissions in the world — will end up emitting 38 per cent more carbon in 2030 than they

have committed, if one were to look at the current trajectories. 83 per cent of this overshoot will be caused by the European Union, Russia and the United States. It is critical to ensure the rescue and rehabilitation of countries facing the cascading effects of this global issue disproportionately. India has held the Global North accountable - not just as the voice of the Global South but owing to its vulnerability. Understanding India's Stance around 619 million persons in India bore the brunt of climate change-induced extreme heat between June 16 and June 24. This is more than any other country in the world. These incidents are not just environmental, but also economic and health-related. Cities grind to a halt under the force of



extreme weather, leaving economic scars and jeopardising the marginalised. Creating a resilient and sustainable future for India necessitates a just transition, which in turn requires significant financial investment. India faces a substantial climate financing shortfall of USD 3.5 trillion. To address this, we need investment support amounting to USD 1.4 trillion

by 2070, translating to an average annual requirement of USD 28 billion over the next five decades. While international support is undoubtedly crucial, harnessing the potential of domestic mechanisms like carbon pricing and blended finance models is crucial for long-term sustainability. Novel mechanisms of blended finance can not only help bridge the financing gap to fulfil India's needs but can also unlock significantly higher investment from the private sector. This will also help in reducing overdependence on external climate capital as the primary instrument for climate capital. Strategic Alignment of CSR Funds Corporate India makes substantial expenditures as part of their Corporate

Social Responsibility. We have an opportunity here to strategically align these CSR funds in a manner that accelerates our efforts of achieving SDGs. According to provisional data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), spending on health reached Rs 9,987 crore in FY22, compared to Rs 8,382 crore on education. In contrast, spending on the environment was Rs 2,837 crore in FY22, which is double the Rs 1,337 crore spent in FY21. There is a major scope for increasing the quantum of CSR funds being streamlined towards carbon projects. This notion reverberates further in the Reserve Bank of India's report on currency and finance, wherein equitable CSR funding is listed as the crucial policy alternative to

mitigate climate risk. While energy and mitigation have received the most amount of climate financing for India, more investments should be directed towards nature-based solutions and environment ecosystems that crosscut both mitigation and adaptation in India. This will help create permanence in carbon removals that will help mitigate the effects of climate change. The flexible nature of CSR provides businesses in the country a significant chance to foster positive transformation and marry socio-economic advancement by finding environmental solutions. Yet, these dual benefits are attainable only with a committed long-term vision and detailed planning.

(The writer is CEO, ProClima; views are personal)

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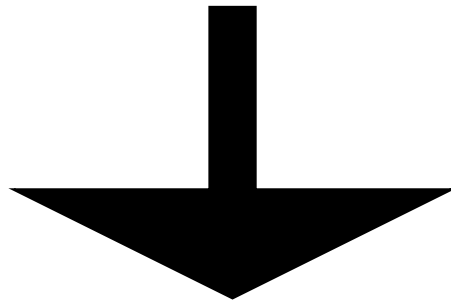
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