



HEMANT SOREN
Jharkhand Chief Minister

“Manish Sisodia's struggle will become history and inspire future generations. The Supreme Court verdict is a triumph for democracy and defeat of dictatorship



SIDDARAMAIAH
Karnataka Chief Minister

If Yediyurappa has any shame, he should have retired from politics. He is 82 years old. He is an accused in a POCSO case... He is asking me to resign by August 10. What moral right does he have?



KINJARAPU RAMMOHAN NAIDU
Union Aviation Minister

One of my top priorities is to make airfare affordable... We are considering setting up an online mechanism to handle grievances to ensure flyers are not exploited by airfare hikes

Cautious approach

The Reserve Bank of India's decision to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50% should not come as a surprise, given the inflation scenario. In its first meeting after the central budget, the six-member monetary policy committee (MPC) opted to continue a cautious approach, citing food inflation risks amid the ongoing economic uncertainties. This is the ninth consecutive time the central bank has opted for stability in its monetary policy. It must be pointed out that the battle against inflation is far from over. Inflation remains above the RBI's target range. The central bank's commitment to bringing inflation down to its 4 per cent target continues to face challenges due to the ongoing food inflation and other economic factors. Those rooting for a cut in the interest rates must bear in mind that the RBI's primary goal is to maintain stable inflation which is critical for sustainable growth. While monetary tightening is negative for the short term, it is important to keep inflation under control which in turn facilitates long-term growth. The RBI is expected to keenly observe how the inflation scenario pans out in the coming months. Any easing of monetary policy would occur only when average retail price inflation approaches the RBI's target of 4 per cent. Headline inflation, after remaining steady at 4.8 per cent in April and May 2024, increased to 5.1 per cent in June, primarily driven by the food component, which remains stubborn. With growth holding up — the central bank expects the economy to grow at 7.2 per cent this year — it provides the MPC the policy space to focus on inflation. With interest rates staying steady, it is hoped that EMIs will remain manageable for homeowners. It is clear that rate cut is not on the priority list of the RBI as it continues to bat for patience. The domestic inflation is slowly but steadily trending towards the 4 per cent target. In addition, global volatility, and geo-politics add to the challenges that keep the central bank on watch. It cannot afford the slightest error of judgement.

The RBI's stance suggests a continued focus on price stability over immediate rate cuts, given the recent history of rate hikes and the current economic climate. In most major economies, central banks have either begun to cut interest rates or are on the cusp of doing so. In June, the European Central bank cut interest rates, followed by the Bank of England. The US Federal Reserve recently indicated the possibility of cutting rates in its September meeting. The next MPC meeting is slated for October. With the harvesting of crops, the prices could begin to ease. Global food prices, as seen through the FAO food price index, have already eased in July. This could provide the MPC more clarity on the path of food inflation, which would lead to greater certainty on the trajectory of interest rates.

The RBI's stance suggests a continued focus on price stability over immediate rate cuts, given recent history of rate hikes

Merit of longevity depends on the spirit of the person and the prevailing conditions



B MARIA KUMAR

More than six years past superannuation, I often wonder what lies ahead in life. With no professional responsibilities, a retiree like me can discover, invent and innovate new ways to stay active.

As we age, realisation dawns that nothing is more important than health. Thus, older individuals tend to explore and try to adopt healthier lifestyles to the best of their ability. As senior citizens become accustomed to watching media and going through newsfeed for passing (killing) time, they frequently come across numerous reports on both offline and online platforms about tips and strategies to achieve longevity. It seems that almost all elderly folks yearn to follow Warren Buffett's ambitious plan to become the oldest living person in the world. Modern research is abundant with findings on how to attain a long life, with the potential to reach nonagenarian, centenarian or even super-centenarian status. Some companies are investing billions in experiments and services to help people prolong their lives.

Renowned Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari believes that life-extending therapies are possible through scientific advances, especially in biotechnology. He asserts that due to the costly procedures, wealthy individuals will have more access to these treatments, such as expensive organ replacements and other medical interventions, further exacerbating inequalities across the world, since the



poor will be unable to afford these facilities.

Indian-born British-American Nobel Prize-winning scientist Venki Ramakrishnan opines that human ageing is not inevitable. He suggests that it may be feasible to circumvent natural lifespan limits by altering our biology. Noted futurist Raymond Kurzweil's theory reminds us of the biblical Methuselah, who lived for almost a thousand years. Kurzweil believes that nanorobots, by blending biotechnology with artificial intelligence (AI) and rectifying the errors in cell production, could stop ageing and enable us to live for thousands of years.

A recent study from Boston University's Chobanian and Avedisian School of Medicine found that the overall effort older people put into coping with stress is crucial for longevity. SciTech Daily, in its January 2024 report, reviewed research conducted by Corina Amor Vegas and colleagues at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, indicating that genetic modification of T-cells can eliminate senescent cells, unlocking a new fountain of youth akin to F Scott Fitzgerald's fictional character Benjamin Button, who aged in reverse. Additionally, last December, a team of Chinese scientists claimed in 'The Sun' that an anti-ageing protocol involving hydrogen atoms could mark a significant step towards human immortality.

Despite extensive scientific endeavours to develop methods for preventing infections, accidents and the wear and tear of ageing processes — considered the prime triad of life's greatest threats — and to increase lifespan, there are dissenting voices that argue

against significantly extending life. One prominent figure among these ideologues is Ezekiel Emanuel, an American oncologist, who has publicly stated his intention to stop seeking healthcare services after the age of 75. Emanuel's basic proposition is that life beyond a certain point loses its quality due to various factors. Now 66, he has confessed that he will not pursue antibiotics or medical procedures once he reaches 75 because he believes that at that age, the body and mind will be unable to maintain or enjoy the same level of joie de vivre as before. In his view, efforts to extend lifetime through clinical measures simply don't seem worthwhile if the charm and utility of life cannot be preserved.

Having explored different perspectives on longevity, it becomes clear that there is no absolute judgement on whether a long lifespan is good or bad. The merit of longevity depends on the spirit of the person and the prevailing conditions, which determine how well a long or short lifespan matters. An age-old dictum suggests that it is more important to add life to years than years to life. This saying finds mytho-

It can be ascertained that life, regardless of it being lengthy or short, holds no value unless it serves a purpose for the benefit of fellow humans

logical validation in the story of the Greek goddess Thetis, who granted her son Achilles, the hero of Homer's 'Iliad', a life that was glorious rather than long. On the other hand, many long-living older adults have greatly advanced societal progress. Their vast experience provides them with a richer pool of wisdom, empowering them to do good, guide younger generations properly and help them become humane.

Just as dualities like light and darkness, hot and cold or brief and long occur side by side, we see both good and bad too coexisting in the world we live in. Between these extremes of inherent natures, the people we encounter daily have personalities in varying degrees. Legends, historical facts and current events bear witness to a wide range of individuals, instances and situations. While the immortal Markandeya from the ancient Puranas is known for his benevolence and sharing his divine knowledge and powers with humanity, history also recounts the tale of the 30-plus-year-old Alexander, who caused insurmountable tragedy by waging wars across multiple ancient kingdoms.

Furthermore, the ageless Endymion of Greek mythology, in his eternal sleep, symbolises countless youngsters who are concerned only with themselves. If the deathless Loki, the Norse god, is a trickster and villain, we have contemporary young icons such as Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai and climate activist Greta Thunberg, who have dedicated their lives at a tender age to bettering the human condition. Therefore, it can ultimately be ascertained that life, regardless of it being lengthy or short, holds no value unless it serves a purpose for the benefit of fellow humans.

By analysing these observations holistically, we can categorise individuals into three general groups. The first group comprises those who, whether they live long or not, cause the least possible unavoidable inconvenience and do the most possible good for others. The second category includes those who, whether they live long or not, cause the least possible unavoidable inconvenience to others and live for themselves. The third group consists of people who, whether they live long or not, cause harm to others. This broader understanding of these individual tendencies can help us draw lessons as well as inspirations, motivating us to enhance the collective wellbeing of humanity.

(The author, a retired IPS officer, is a winner of National Rajbhasha Gaurav Award for 2022-23)

Letters to the Editor

Kudos to Sreejesh

Hats off to the Indian hockey team. Happily India won the fourth bronze medal at Paris in the Olympics by beating Spain (2-1) in the men's hockey team marked by winning consecutive medals in the Olympics after 52 years. India team's combined work paid a handsome dividend. Goalkeeper Sreejesh merits special accolades because he saved a number of goals from being netted by agile Spain. Kudos to Sreejesh, the wall of Indian hockey, who retires after four Olympics. Actually, the win consoles

the injured heart of every Indian, who was upset by the abrupt disqualification of wrestler Vinesh Phogat who missed the gold medal at the last moment.

RAJAMANI
CHELLADURAI, Tirunelveli

Viral fevers on the rise

There is no doubt that viral fevers are on the rise not just in Hyderabad and surrounding areas but also in cities such as Mumbai. Authorities have rightly issued advisories to take proper care. But in our country, especially in fast-paced cities, open stalls, the humble vada pav or samosa are a blessing. Over time perhaps, immunity rises.

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA,
Mumbai

Cartoon Today



India in the hotspot

■ New York Times

India's future still bright

Wrestler Vinesh Phogat had a chance to become the first woman from India to win an Olympic gold, but she was disqualified when she missed her weight class by a few ounces.

■ The Mirror

India's coal rush continues

India has been significantly increasing its renewable energy capacity, but still relies on coal when demand for electricity surges. Despite the growth of renewable energy sources, coal still meets over 70% of power needs.

■ Star Tribune

India's regional power put to test

The dramatic resignation of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina poses a dilemma for India's government, and the South Asian powerhouse could even see its influence in the region wane, according to experts

N Bengal neglected by Kolkata'

Two-time BJP MP Raju Bista is also a national spokesperson for the party. This young parliamentarian is articulate and calls a spade a spade. Manas R Banerjee caught up with the Darjeeling MP and asked him pointed questions on some difficult issues.

Q: Following a statement by Union Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar, the Trinamul Congress and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee have blamed the BJP for attempting to divide Bengal by separating its northern part. Although Mr. Majumdar claimed his statement was misinterpreted, its implications are significant. If North Bengal comes under the Department for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), or the North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP), what might this mean?

A: See Trinamul Congress is fundamentally against the development and progress of North Bengal. Even the TMC MPs and MLAs from North Bengal are coming to this realization. TMC is a south-Bengal-oriented party, and they see the entire North as a colonial outpost, from where they will extract the resources and revenues, but they will not take any steps towards its development. In the 2024-25 WB budget of Rs 3.7 Lakh crores, the WB Govt has only allocated Rs 861 crores for the development of North Bengal. This is 0.002 per cent of the total budget. Even out of this, in reality, they will spend less than Rs 300 crores only; this is what they have done, if you check all previous budgets as well. How can the eight North Bengal districts develop with so little funds?

So Sukanta Da has only echoed what the majority of the people in North Bengal have been feeling. The inclusion of North Bengal in the NE Council will expedite the development of our region, and bring additional funds, investments, and schemes like the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), the North East Rural Livelihood Project (NERLP) etc will be implemented.

TMC is opposed to any development of North Bengal, so they are only trying to mislead the people of the state.

Q: Is this a political strategy to appease the people of North Bengal, or is it a plan to create a separate state of North Bengal?

A: See what happens in the future is for the future to tell. But, currently, the people of North Bengal are discriminated against and deprived by the TMC government.

Q: Why is a section of people demanding a separate state of North Bengal? Is this feasible?

A: The fact of the matter is, if you speak about feasibility, West Bengal state became unfeasible some 30 years ago, and the problem has been exacerbated in the past 12 years.

CPI-M left West Bengal under a debt of Rs 1.95 lakh crore, in the past 12 years TMC has raised that debt to over Rs 7 lakh crores. If you look at their budget document, they are planning to borrow a further Rs 60,262 crores this year and use up the contingency funds as well. In 2023-24 they borrowed Rs 1.12 lakh crores, in 2022-23 they borrowed Rs 70,243 crore. Every year West Bengal is getting more and more under debt, and the government has no plans on paying it off. They have already turned the state bankrupt.

North Bengal contributes substantial revenue to the WB Govt. We are rich in resources, hydro potential, forests, tea industry, cinchona/medicinal plants, cross-border trade and commerce, we are a major hub of tourism and travel. The growth potential of North Bengal is immense.

Q: Since the 1980s, a large section of the Gorkha community in the Hill, Terai, and Dooars regions has demanded a separate state of Gorkhaland. Similarly, the Rajbanshi community in Cooch Behar has been demanding a separate Kamtapur state. What might be the solution? As an MP of the Darjeeling Parliamentary Constituency, what is your perspective?

A: Our Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars regions are home to ethnic

minorities - Gorkhas, Rajbanshis, Adivasis, Rabha, Toto, Koche, and Meche communities. These communities have been deliberately suppressed and kept deprived by the succeeding WB governments. The government under TMC has taken active steps to undermine their language, culture, and heritage, and even their ancestral lands are being snatched from them.

Look at the tea gardens, cinchona gardens, forest villages, and DI Fund land residents - they have been denied Parja Patta to their ancestral land since independence. WB government has not even implemented the Forest Rights Act passed by Parliament in 2006. WB government has refused to implement the four New Labour Codes passed by Parliament in 2019-20, which would ensure higher wages and better living and working conditions for the tea garden and cinchona garden workers. So naturally people feel they will be better off in their state. The Central government has to intervene because we cannot allow this subjugation of a section of the population to continue.

Q: What is the Permanent Political Solution (PPS) demanded by the Hill people since 2019? As an MP, you have raised this issue in Parliament several times. Why is it being delayed? What is the reason behind this delay?

A: See the government of India looks at all issues holistically, before arriving at a decision. It consults all stakeholders and looks at the potential implications and fall-out of any decision. So it is taking time. But, whenever the solution is approved, it will be according to the Constitution of India and will address the aspirations of the people from our region.

Q: Is PPS a more powerful form of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, compared to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) or the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA)?

A: See both DGHC and GTA were supposed to be autonomous bodies. But, the WB Govt did not allow them to function autonomously. For example, land is a transferred subject to GTA,

but today WB Govt is putting up notice boards in school premises claiming "this land belongs to WB Govt." It is sending a direct signal to the people, that you are not autonomous, but you are controlled from Kolkata.

So definitely when PPS is arrived at, it will ensure that control remains with the people. The form and share of PPS will be decided by the Union Home Ministry, so it is wrong to speculate on what it will be.

Q: Why does a section of people in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong Hills want to merge with Sikkim? Have you studied this issue? What is your opinion?

A: People in Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills have shared history with Sikkim. Before the British took over Darjeeling and Kalimpong, our region was part of Sikkim. We share the same blood, history, heritage, geography, language, lifestyle, customs and traditions, so naturally, some feel merging with Sikkim will be better.

But Sikkim is a state protected under Article 371F of the Constitution, and we must respect that. Why burden them with our issues and problems? Darjeeling Hills, Terai and Dooars are capable of handling our issues, and we will handle them.

Q: You have often spoken about the 'Chicken's Neck', which is a national security concern. Can you elaborate on this issue and the Central government's plans regarding it?

A: We share four international borders - with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet (China). In the past 12 years, we have witnessed a massive demographic shift here. Illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators are being settled, with active help from the ruling government in West Bengal. If this situation is not taken care of now, someday in the future, it will pose a grave national security risk for India. We have already seen people like Sharjeel Imam calling for "cutting off North East India from rest of India by taking over the Chicken Neck". The local MLA of Islampur is already referring to this area as "Muslim Rashtra" As the MP from the



region, it is my duty to make the Central government aware of the ground realities, and I have been doing so through the Parliament, and also in person to the Ministers. The Central Govt is extremely sensitive to the threats facing our region, but since it concerns national security, I am not in a position to divulge the plans of the Central Govt on a public platform.

Q: Is the 'Chicken's Neck' a barrier to creating a small state like Gorkhaland?

A: On the contrary, it brings the region more in focus of the Central Government. West Bengal is ruled from Kolkata, and it is apparent that those governing from 600 km away are unable to take care of this distant but highly sensitive border region.

Q: A reliable source hinted that creating a separate state or a Union Territory comprising areas of North Bengal centred on the Chicken's Neck might be a solution for national security. What is your opinion?

A: It will depend on the composition of the UT, which areas are included, or excluded, if the UT will have a legislature or not, will a UT be able to protect the rights of the indigenous communities or not. These are matters of inquiry, and I am sure the Central Government must be reflecting on all these issues.

Bangladesh's constitutional gridlock

PSYMH E WADUD

Bangladesh witnessed arguably the largest student movement since its independence and as an outcome, the government led by the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is no more in power. However, in the face of what we can term as "lack of objectively suitable conditions for dialogue," the transition is not going to be plain sailing. The lack of forethought for a smooth transition has also brought forth further violence, mayhem, and terror. Indeed, the process of transitioning into a new order is hanging in the balance. The interim government is expected to hold general elections for a smooth democratic transition. There is also this "academic" debate going on, on having a constitution-making or constitution-amendment episode - I seek to address both.

One of the motivations behind the discussion on a new constitution-making episode is the fact that the "interim" government will have to operate beyond the constitutional scheme since the current one does not endorse an interim or caretaker government. Indeed, an interim government will have to be seen as a revolutionary breach of legal continuity. However, installing an interim government will potentially be a difficult, if not impossible, academic and judicial exercise.

In any case, in order to come out of the gridlock, I do not see a new constitution-making episode as a solution; particularly because, among others, there was no such demand emanating from the

movement to begin with. With the parliament now dissolved, there is no possibility of forming an interim government with members of the parliament either, as was suggested by some scholars.

Social movements are now a growing area of study within the paradigm of constitutional law. Particularly, in studying constitutionalism in Asia, social movements are relevant more than ever. Such movements often frame their strategies based on the texts of the constitution or to address the disharmony between the constitution and the lived realities of citizens at large (the Indian movement against 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act and the 2004 South Korean sex workers' movement are illustrative here).

At times, social movements call for instating or redefining new structures or institutions within the constitution (the 1993 Indian movement for recognition of local self-government is an example). At other times, movements call for new and different interpretations of the texts of the constitution; differently again, certain movements call for revision or annulment of constitutions as well.

Ours was not a movement that explicitly relied on the texts of the Constitution of Bangladesh, although it did touch upon equality clauses. The hasty (judicial and executive) outcome of the movement has not really been a reflection of substantive equality (as it gravely fell short on protecting rights of women, Indigenous minorities, persons with disabilities, and gender-diverse populations). However, the initial demands did

not call for something that goes or operates beyond the constitutional scheme. Later claims were political in nature (including the last one calling for the resignation of the then incumbent prime minister); however, those too did not call for remaking the constitution or challenging its basis.

It is reductionist to try to underscore an "essentialised" or "one true" purpose underlying social movements. Just as social movements are discursive bottom-up instances of mobilising, so are the purposes for social movement actors' engagement. However, at least the demands that surfaced were not ones that disregarded the constitutional framework.

The movement certainly made certain "academic" discussion points to come to the front (including constitutional provisions to ensure firmer checks and balances among different institutions and limiting prime-ministerial/political term limits). These may in the longer run prove to be immensely useful to prevent perpetuation of power; however, whether they require a new constitution-making episode is an important question to ask.

Indeed, bringing in a new constitutional framework for a society divided along multiple axes (including religion, ethnicity, sex, and gender) requires time, labour, and massive efforts. In the current world order, wider public involvement is also deemed key to a legitimate constitution-making effort which can prove to be immensely cumbersome in the present context in Bangladesh. Also, in

the shifting geopolitical reality, it may also prove to be difficult to withstand the pressure of interested international actors. Any haste would only prove to be counterintuitive in the longer run, particularly for failing to adequately address and accommodate concerns and needs of the non-dominant voices and minority communities.

The interim government may decide to go for substantive constitutional amendments for a smoother transition into and functioning of democracy. However, in such cases, there will be legitimate constitutional questions as to how an unelected "interim government" can exercise "derivative constituent power" and go on to amend the constitution. To stretch the revolutionary breach of legal continuity to such a point may also fail to withstand the constitutional test of time. Therefore, it would ideally be wiser to leave the task of amending the constitution to the next government. Alternatively, the interim government may formulate certain principles to potentially guide the constitution amendment episode by the next parliament.

In any case, for an inclusive society, I would want a steadfast commitment to secularism and as a feminist, commitment to equal rights between men and women in all spheres of life - instead of "in all spheres of state and public life" as appears in Article 28(2) that (unknowningly perhaps) calls for a rather conservative interpretation of women's right. However, for these changes in particular, amendments need to be brought to the entrenchment of the basic structure doctrine (i.e., unamendability of certain

provisions and parts of the constitution)—the process of doing so is the subject of a different constitutional discourse altogether.

We also need to be mindful to one of the core demands of the movement: of bringing an end to the culture of impunity and expediting the adjudicating processes for the brutal killings committed over the quota reform movement. Any attempt to bring in a new constitution would inevitably delay the process of serving justice to all those who were killed and tortured - both at the hands of the state apparatus and at the hands of other political elements at play.

Politics need to have certain non-negotiable ideals and values to stand by—the overwhelming deaths, including of children, over the quota reform movement, made me realise this the hardest way. Experiencing two nights without a government with news of condemnable brutality against police personnel, vandalism of Hindu minority houses, and arson violence on Bangabandhu's historic Dhanmondi 32 residence, made me internalise it. My major scholarships have so far only critiqued our constitution. Nonetheless, the constitution we have does seem like a document that we should stand by firmly.

Let's not lose out on the "constitutional moment" we had in 1971; because indeed, creating one is not as easy as we may theoretically assume. Also, a constitution can only do so much - we need a system that works.

The Daily Star/ANN.

SECRETARY Wilbur, referring to Mr. Ponsonby's statement yesterday, as regards increasing the range of the American and Japanese naval guns, said that it was a good idea to have the question raised in order that it might be settled. As far as was known the Government had not taken steps in reply to the British representations on turret guns. At any rate it was evident that no haste was necessary as the navy at present lacked both the authority and appropriations to increase the gun elevations. The proposal therefore could not be resubmitted to Congress until its regular session in December. -Reuter.

FORMULA ADOPTED? "THE GREAT DIFFICULTY NOW OVER"

REUTER learns that the First Committee of the Conference unanimously adopted the French formula. The British amendment was withdrawn, after which the British and French delegates congratulated each other. One delegate said: "The great difficulty of the Conference is now over. If the report of the Third Committee on deliveries in kind and cash transfers be favourable the Conference can be regarded as finished so far as the Allies are concerned, and an invitation to Germany may be regarded as imminent. The views of the bankers are, of course, still awaited." -Reuter.

(LATER.) IT appears that only the first part of the French formula as regards arbitration was adopted. The second part, dealing with the plan for the military evacuation of the Ruhr proportionately as Germany pays her debts, has not yet been considered. -Reuter.

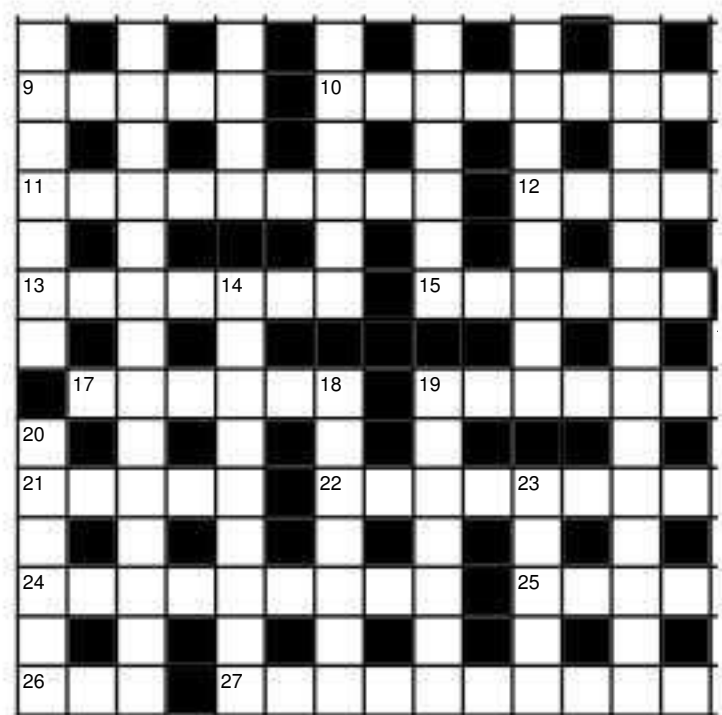
"WAIT AND SEE" NO TRANSFERRED SUBJECTS IN C. P.?

IT is understood that the Central Provinces Government is expecting the Secretary of State's sanction to retransfer the transferred subjects to the list of reserved subjects. Government will wait and see what the Swarajists decide at Calcutta before actually taking action.

If there is no change in the policy or no immediate prospect of a change, the transferred subjects will be made reserved and no meeting of the Council will be held till March. There will then be only one meeting every March for the Budget till the expiry of the term of the Council.

CROSSWORD

NO-292870



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

TORN LAUNDERIE
R O I T
ASHRAE TOUCHIT
E A O N
YLEM RUIN DAWD
I N Y R I
LITCHI CODE LI
G A U A D
ONE LINER MUEF
E E L E I
ROTHSCHILD RIA
U A U P O E
SICRIOTIE OFIUSIE

ACROSS

- 1 Politician recycling trite remarks, wasting a bit of time (4,7)
- 7 Regular departures from Kennedy terminal (3)
- 9 Horny individual's New Year in the French style (5)
- 10 One's used to shift clothes cool model collected (4,5)
- 11 No longer tied up, ex-husband Jeremy went fishing (9)

- 12 2's back to take over Sunday lunch (5)
- 13 Kraftwerk, REM, Lindisfarne touring Russian venue (7)
- 15 He's often out on the tiles (6)
- 17 Roughly beat silver leaves in this (3,3)
- 19 Zeppelin songs? Cool! (7)
- 21 Golfer Rory admits blunder (5)
- 22 Famous American Model T vehicle (4,5)
- 24 His band shot to fame where Isherwood lost his head (5,4)

- 25 Dance coach from Germany endlessly piquetted, with Anton's lead (5)
- 26 Colour to fade, reportedly (3)
- 27 "Deport them!" ordered Farage, finally entering likely to blow his top (3-8)

DOWN

- 1 24's friend visiting coffee producer (not a place for bourbon) (8)
- 2 The first Tsar? I haven't a clue (4,3,8)

- 3 Male escort Ewan stripped in a den of vice (5)
- 4 African director Lee arranging loan (7)
- 5 Near bloody revolting snake (7)
- 6 21, I've swum across small lake (9)
- 7 Working at The Ritz, all obey a Hollywood legend (9,6)
- 8 A bit upset, OK, about packing an old crate (6)
- 14 Los Angeles Times runs international hotel complex (9)

- 16 As Sánchez drops rising, inside political adviser (8)
- 18 Okra on table; first impressions - it's rubbery (7)
- 19 Contract card game (ace high) (7)
- 20 Got very hot water in the Middle East when cycling (6)
- 23 Charge leaders of teachers organisation planning unauthorised protest (3,2)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

PM Modi congratulates Muhammad Yunus, expresses concerns over the plight of minorities in Bangladesh

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has reached out to Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Laureate from Bangladesh, to congratulate him on heading the interim government of Bangladesh. PM Modi took to X, to express concerns over the situation of Hindus and other Minorities in Bangladesh amidst the ongoing political turmoil. Muhammad Yunus, on his part has emphasised his commitment to restore law and order. Meanwhile, the Indian government, through various channels has reiterated its concerns about the situation of minorities for regional stability. Hundreds of people trying to cross over to India but have been sent back by the Border Security Force. The situation in Bangladesh is rather fluid as the students, the initial protesters have been overshadowed by the rogue elements who are taking advantage of the situation and indulging in looting and arson while attacking minorities to garner popular support. Slowly but surely the political tension has also exacerbated communal tensions within Bangladesh. The Hindu minority,



which makes up about 8-10% of the population are worst hit. Recent reports have indicated a surge in attacks on Hindu temples, businesses, and homes, triggering fear and insecurity within the community. Prime Minister Modi's outreach to Yunus can be seen as a calculated move to engage with a respected figure in Bangladesh who has international credibility and influence. By engaging with Yunus, Modi may be signalling India's support for democratic values and human rights in Bangladesh, while also voicing concerns about the security and well-being of the Hindu community. India is at the moment in a quandary. It has all along supported Sheikh Hasina and continues to do so but

things have changed drastically. Sheikh Hasina is now unpopular while her opponents are all powerful. She may be called to join the investigation against her which may put India in dilemma. The silver lining is that Yunus is now in command, and he is widely regarded as an honorable man with an impeccable track record, even though he is an outsider in the corridors of power. He is India's best bet as China and Pakistan who have allegedly supported the movement to oust Hasina would like to subvert Indo Bangladesh relationship. He could be persuaded to be neutral. The political instability and potential for communal violence could lead to a refugee crisis, with many Hindus and other minorities seeking asylum in India. This could complicate India's domestic political landscape, especially in the bordering states of West Bengal and Assam. Meanwhile, the trade with Bangladesh has already nose-dived and the refugee crisis is growing. Bangladesh is a key partner in maintaining security in the Bay of Bengal region. This is a time for serious diplomacy. Prime Minister Modi would do well to engage with Muhammad Yunus at the earliest opportunity. While Twitter diplomacy is a good starting point, it needs to be followed up with direct engagement. A lot is at stake for India in Bangladesh's future direction.

PICTALK



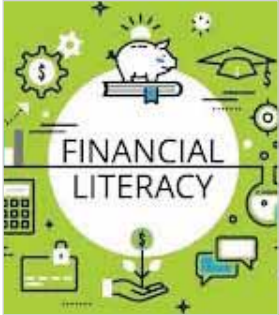
Military aircrafts during the multinational air exercise 'Tarang Shakti 2024', in Sullur

PTI

The role of technology in driving financial literacy

With the power to democratise financial literacy, it can bring people from every stratum of society onto a level playing field

Financial literacy is no longer just a useful skill. It is now essential knowledge required to traverse the modern economic landscape. Studies have shown financially literate individuals can use their money wisely to plan for a secure future. Today, technology is an important enabler of access to resources required to cultivate financial literacy, democratise the sector, and empower people to improve their lives. However, despite the increasing penetration of the Internet and technology, a 2021 survey found only 27% of Indians are financially literate. Furthermore, only 16.7% of students have a general understanding of finances. With India projected to become one of, if not the leading, global economies by 2030, our society must be educated on the best practices for handling funds and making smart financial decisions. Online platforms such as YouTube, Skillshare, Udemy, and others are invaluable tools in the pursuit of



knowledge. YouTube has tutorials and explanations for practically every subject under the sun. Not only does it boast a vast catalogue, but everything on the site is free to access. This is a critical requirement in India where the common man is looking to save as much money as possible. Channels such as Khan Academy are great starting points for everyone's financial literacy journey. It's not just about breaking down complex information. While the concepts should be easy to understand, the modules must also be presented engagingly to retain the person's interest. No one enjoys being lectured with a barrage of informa-

tion in a boring manner. Social media and digital channels have also made it easier for educators and financial experts to share information. Instagram, TikTok, and X are now filled with financial gurus offering their opinions on the latest economic trends, up-and-coming investment opportunities, and the state of the global economy. Keep in mind that advice from such channels shouldn't be taken at face value. But they do offer a macro perspective of the economy and break down complex information into easily digestible pieces. Advancing technology also allows financial institutions such as banks and NBFCs to offer financial literacy directly to their customers. Bank apps can utilise push notifications, pop-ups, bank representatives, and even AI avatars to offer pertinent and timely advice. NBFCs can leverage subscription services to reach out to their customers via messengers to advise them on how to manage funds effectively. Artificial intelligence is going to significant-

ly improve access to and delivery of financial literacy. With just a smartphone, one can access tools such as ChatGPT to help answer common questions regarding finances. While it should not be used to gain investment advice, the current models of AI tools can offer practical knowledge regarding financial literacy and point the curious reader towards additional sources to gain more knowledge. It's no wonder that AI in BFSI is expected to hit a whopping \$100 billion by 2032. Technology is a powerful tool in the hands of those with an understanding of how to use it. With the power to democratise financial literacy, it can bring people from every stratum of society onto a level playing field. However, as technology evolves, so must we to enjoy the benefits of its advancement. This is a crucial step not just for society but also for our personal and financial well-being.

(The writer is a MD at StoxBox; views are personal)



YUVRAJ A THAKKAR

Gender rights and reality: Bridging the gap

Gender equality in India remains a distant dream, as deep-rooted gender norms continue to impede the nation's progress towards women emancipation

Gender equality is not just a fundamental human right but a crucial component of a peaceful, cohesive, and sustainable world. It demands equal opportunities, treatment, and access to resources for all individuals, regardless of gender. Historically, women have faced discrimination on multiple fronts, from limited educational opportunities to restricted participation in decision-making processes. However, after years of struggle, women today have made significant strides, becoming prominent members of the workforce and key decision-makers in various fields. This progress aligns with the goals set by 193 countries that signed the Beijing Platform for Action, the most comprehensive global plan to eliminate systemic barriers and achieve women's human rights across social, economic, political, and environmental domains. Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform, much has been achieved. Women now serve as heads of state, entrepreneurs, educators, scientists, judges, and administrators, excelling in many unconventional careers. This paints a promising picture of the progress toward gender equality. However, a closer examination of statistics from government reports, non-governmental organizations, and local surveys reveals a grim reality: significant challenges remain. This is particularly true in India, a country where women have historically been revered as goddesses and have played crucial roles as scholars, rulers, and warriors. Despite this rich history, modern India continues to struggle with deeply entrenched gender inequalities. India, in the 21st century, is a country with progressive laws and robust institutions rooted in its Constitution. The Indian Constitution, one of the world's finest legal documents, guarantees equal rights for men and women. Rights such as personal liberty, freedom of speech and expression, free movement and association, and the freedom to choose one's residence and occupation all imply that Indian women, like



men, have the right to make decisions about their personal and professional lives. However, these constitutional rights do not always translate into practice, especially in rural areas, where customary and religious laws often override legal protections. In rural India, where a significant percentage of the population resides, gender equality remains elusive. Here, rigid customary practices contribute to a skewed sex ratio, early marriages, and limited educational opportunities for women. Women are often married off at a young age, without receiving proper education or being informed about their rights. Even when they are aware of their rights, they frequently lack access to opportunities for personal and professional growth. Legislation like the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act has helped improve the sex ratio in India, but the harsh reality remains that many women face discrimination in basic survival needs. In many families, women and girls eat last and least, while boys and men are given nutritionally rich diets. Women who cook for their families often do not cook for themselves, and from a young age, they are conditioned to prioritize the needs and preferences of men. The average age at which an Indian woman

ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF PERSONAL FREEDOM IS THE ABILITY TO EXERCISE CONTROL OVER ONE'S BODY AND SEXUALITY. SADLY, THE RIGHT TO MAKE CHOICES ABOUT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS, WHETHER OR WHEN TO HAVE A CHILD, AND THE USE OF CONTRACEPTION IS STILL DENIED TO MANY WOMEN IN INDIA

has her first child is 22 years, but in rural areas, this age is often much lower, with many girls married off before they turn 18. These young women are not physically or mentally prepared to handle the responsibilities of marriage and family life, making them vulnerable to physical, sexual, and verbal abuse for perceived failures in their duties. In urban households, gender stereotypes are beginning to shift, with men taking on more household chores. However, they are not held to the same standards of diligence and regularity as women. Most women, regardless of age, class, caste, or community, remain vulnerable to domestic violence for reasons as trivial as poorly prepared meals or wearing a dress of their choice—issues that men rarely face. One of the most fundamental aspects of personal freedom is the ability to exercise control over one's body and sexuality. Sadly, the right to make choices about intimate relationships, whether or when to have a child, and the use of contraception is still denied to many women in India. According to a survey, a significant percentage of women aged 18-49 have experienced forced sex or sexual abuse at least once in their lives. This gendered expression of power has severe consequences for the mental

and emotional well-being of women, who are often reluctant to share their ordeals. Despite advancements in healthcare, many Indian women do not enjoy the right to health. In conservative settings, cultural norms discourage men from addressing the health needs of their female family members, and women themselves often do not recognize or report health issues. The presence of male doctors in rural areas further restricts women from undergoing necessary examinations and checkups. The literacy gap between men and women in India remains significant, particularly in rural areas where deeply entrenched gender norms discourage girls from pursuing education. Girls are often pushed into work at a much earlier age than boys, with little or no control over their earnings. Even in urban settings, working women are often not financially independent, either bearing the burden of family expenses or having no say in how their money is spent. Achieving gender equality in India requires a fundamental shift in attitudes among both men and women. Only through such changes can the goal of true gender equality be realized. (The writer is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, DU; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A COURT IS A COURT

Madam — The special feature of Indian judiciary is the relative non-interference in its functioning from either the executive or the legislature. Also, the hierarchical system of judiciary has ensured that no litigant goes unsatisfied with a particular court's verdict. The Supreme Court has time and again reiterated that no court in the country is above another. Besides, the SC has made it clear that although its judgments are binding on every court in India under Article 141 of the Constitution, the High Courts are in no way inferior to it because the former's administrative control is independent of the top court. SC has consistently refused to direct High Courts to clear cases in a time bound manner for the same reason. Justice Abhay Oka of the SC, during the course of a hearing, had succinctly remarked that "a court is a court". Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, in 2022, had decried the tendency to refer to the district courts as subordinate judiciary because there was no definition of the word "subordinate" although the world is frequently used in the Constitution.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

VINESH PHOGAT HAS BEEN WRONGED

Madam— In an unfortunate turn of events, Vinesh was disqualified from a crucial Olympic match due to a minor weight discrepancy, sparking outrage and disappointment across the nation. This incident, which resulted in the loss of a potential medal for India, raises serious questions about the handling and management of the situation by the coaches and officials. Vinesh Phogat, who had successfully won three bouts in a single day, found herself disqualified just 24 hours after her semi-final victory. The controversy stems from the fact that it is highly improbable for an experienced athlete like Vinesh to gain 100 grams of weight in such a short period, leading many to suspect foul play. This suspicion casts a shadow over the transparency and fairness of the Olympic Games, prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Economics should not be politicised



This refers to the editorial "Finance Minister yields" (Aug 8). Facing a backlash from the people, Members within NDA and the Opposition over changes to the property transaction taxation, the Finance Minister has given some concession to home owners, by way of two options. The tax payers can now choose to calculate their tax on long term capital gains either at 12.5% without indexation under the new scheme or at 20% with indexation under the old scheme. This is akin to income tax options. She

also stated in her speech on reduction in the income tax on annual income of Rs. 15 lakh. But the budget is not only taxes, it deals with development of the people as well as the country. People are burdened with high GST rates and fuel prices, no relief in them as they have cascading effect on overall inflation, which affects the poor most. On one hand government provides free ration & electricity to poor, on the other hand they are burdened with high taxes which nullify the former. FM did not mention about decreasing the fiscal deficit, decreasing the borrowings, increasing foreign investment in the country, boosting employment generation, rationalizing the freebies & subsidies that are affecting economy etc. which are equally important components of a budget. Development of the country should be the high priority in the budget and it should not be compromised by keeping people happy.

Dr O Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

to urge the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President, P.T. Usha, to explore every possible avenue to ensure that justice is served for Vinesh. There is also a need to investigate whether Vinesh was unknowingly given a weight-gain substance during the 24 hours between the semi-final and the final weigh-in, as a similar incident reportedly happened to another wrestler from a different country. These concerns raise serious questions about the integrity and transparency of the Olympic Games' management. While human error is possible in such a vast sporting event, the circumstances surrounding Vinesh Phogat's disqualification do not appear to fall into the category of innocent mistakes. If it is determined that Vinesh was wronged, India should strongly consider appealing the decision

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

BANGLADESH: A WARNING FOR INDIA

Madam — Bangladesh, which had seemed politically stable for the past 15 years under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, is now showing signs of distress. Hasina's extended

tenure, while initially successful, has led to growing concerns about her increasingly autocratic behavior. This shift has resulted in the imprisonment of political opponents and numerous legal battles against figures like Nobel laureate Mohammad Yunus, who gained significant popularity for his work with Grameen Bank. Could similar public discontent emerge in India? The government's actions, particularly over the past two terms, have shown tendencies toward authoritarianism. This has been evident in the public backlash against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), prolonged farmer protests against agricultural reforms, and discontent among youth over the Agniveer recruitment scheme. Rising inflation, unemployment, and corruption, coupled with selective legal actions against opposition members, contribute to a growing sense of frustration.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

DO NOT LET SKY BE YOUR LIMIT


Stay resilient in the face of adversity, and you'll find that there's no limit to what you can achieve



RACHNA LAKHPAT

In the realm of corporate success, there is a fundamental truth: the sky is not your limit, but merely the starting point. With a powerful drive and unwavering determination, ambition propels you to surpass all perceived boundaries. Just like a high-performance engine, achieving your dreams requires proper focus and direction. Today, we all have unique goals and dreams, both in our personal lives and careers. Nevertheless, the journey from having a vision to making it a reality can be challenging and draining. It calls for unwavering dedication, relentless effort, and occasionally, the need to ignore those who doubt you. In our business environment, having a strong drive and steadfast determination is not just a cliché, but a crucial factor in setting ambitious goals and relentlessly striving for excellence. We must connect these grand aspirations to careful planning, unwavering commitment, and consistent hard work. Only then will the aspiration reveal its magic. Many times, the biggest obstacles we face are a result of the actions of others.

There will always be those who view our dreams as unattainable or doubt our abilities. It's crucial to remember that our potentials are not defined by external voices. Throughout history, countless individuals have faced ridicule and scepticism, only to prove their doubters wrong ultimately. The proper environment can truly make a difference in our pursuit of success. It is an environment that fosters growth by providing opportunities to use our skills and allow-



ing for energetic and unwelcome ambition, which drives change and advancement. Surround yourself with mentors and peers who share your vision and are there to support you on your journey. Embrace growth opportunities and always value the feedback of others to refine your approach. Equally crucial is the art of expressing our goals. Make sure to communicate your goals and progress with both supervisors and colleagues. It's important to keep everyone in the loop and stay motivated.

When you openly express your aspirations and the steps you're taking to achieve them, not only do you attract valuable encouragement, but you also establish a sense of personal responsibility. However, the true basis of ambition stems from the constant trust within oneself. It is important to have a strong belief in your abilities and to acknowledge the unique qualities that you bring to the table. Recognising and celebrating the small victories along your journey to greater success is crucial. Embrace challenges as chances to grow and learn.

Stay resilient in the face of setbacks. Ambition is a potent force. When properly harnessed, it has the potential to unlock remarkable outcomes. Despite facing obstacles and encountering negativity, you will always choose to embrace a positive mindset. And getting encouragement from prominent individuals will help you hugely achieve your goals.

After all, everyone deserves a chance to shine. So set the bar high, work, and let the ambition catapult you to new heights. The sky is not the limit in the corporate world; it is just the beginning of your journey toward success.

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

Bangladesh: Uncertainty and chaos grip the nation

As the nation grapples with a rising wave of Islamist extremism and escalating violence, the future of its democracy and regional stability hangs in the balance



The turmoil in Bangladesh, which led to Sheikh Hasina's resignation as prime minister and departure to India, raises two questions. Why could she not prevent it? What lies ahead for Bangladesh and India? She should have reached out to the students-trying to win over the bulk of them who are moderates, and isolating the Islamist fundamentalist extremists--before their Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement (ADSM), had snowballed. She could have argued that her government did away with 30 per cent reservation for the descendants of the freedom fighters of the 1971 liberation war in 2018, which was their demand to start with. Bangladesh's High Court restored it following a petition by several descendants. Indeed, her government had appealed to the Supreme Court against the High Court's order.

In fact, the appellate division of the Supreme Court had, on July 21, 2024, ordered the allocation of 93% of government jobs on the basis of merit, reserving five per cent for freedom fighters and their descendants, and one per cent each for tribes, the differentially abled and sexual minorities. There could have been two reasons for the agitation continuing even after that. First, the rancour created by the government's harsh response to the agitation, which had led to a large number of deaths of students and others, was too great for the students to call a halt. They now wanted Sheikh Hasina's resignation. Second, Islamist terrorist organisations like Ansar al-Islam, linked to Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-continent (AQIS) and Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), as well as the Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami (BJI) and its students' wing, Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir (BICS), closely tied to them, had joined the movement and tried to steer it to serve their own agenda--ousting Hasina and the Awami League Government, and installing a fundamentalist Islamist and pathologically anti-India dispensation in its place.

Sheikh Hasina knew all this, and should also have known the convulsive impact students' movement has in Bangladesh on at least four occasions. The first was the language



STUDENTS ALSO PLAYED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE AGAINST PAKISTAN'S COLONIAL RULE, WHICH EXPLAINS THE PAKISTAN ARMY'S SAVAGE ATTACKS ON THE CAMPUS AND HOSTELS OF DHAKA AND OTHER UNIVERSITIES ON THE NIGHT OF ITS NOTORIOUS CRACKDOWN

movement which demanded that Bengali along with Urdu, and not the latter alone, should become Pakistan's official language, and not Urdu alone, which Pakistan's ruling establishment, based in West Pakistan, wanted. Defying police repression, the movement peaked on February, 21, 1952, when there was a country-wide general strike. Police firing led to the deaths of four students, whose names--Rafiq, Barkat, Jabbar and Salam--shine prominently in Bangladesh's martyrs' pantheon. The movement continued to swell and compelled Pakistan's acceptance of both Bengali and Urdu as the country's official language. Again, students were at the forefront of the movement against General Ayub Khan's coup in 1958 and establishment of a military dictatorship, whose character could not be disguised by the fraudulent representative government introduced on March 23, 1962.

Students also played a prominent role in the liberation struggle against Pakistan's colonial rule, which explains the Pakistan Army's savage attacks on the campus and hostels of Dhaka and other universities on the night of its notorious crackdown, codenamed Operation Searchlight, killing hundreds of students, on the night of March 25, 1971. Finally, there was the massive Shahbag Square movement in Dhaka (February-May 2013) demanding death penalty to the war criminals of 1971. The government agreed to move the International Crimes Tribunal, set up by an amendment in 2009 to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, to investigate and prosecute personnel of the Pakistan Army and Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams, accused of committing genocide during the 1971 liberation war.

Given all this, Hasina should have

tried to diffuse the latest movement at the beginning. Be that as it may, what now in Bangladesh? What should India do now? Things do not look good. Hindu temples, including the emblematic Dhakeshwari temple, from which Dhaka derives its name, have been attacked and vandalised. Hindus shops, business establishments and homes, have been attacked, a Hindu municipal councillor aligned with the Awami League, has been killed. Many have been injured. Women have been assaulted. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statues have been pulled down and/or vandalised. Awami League ministers, leaders and activists are under attack, as are many of their homes and establishments. In Khulna, three persons, including an Awami League functionary, Mohsin Reza, have been lynched. Film producer Selim Khan, who made a movie on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's life, has been murdered along with his son, Shanto Khan. A hotel owned by an Awami League politician was set ablaze, causing 24 deaths, in Jashore. The house of Mashrafe Mortaza, Awami League MP and former Bangladesh test cricketer, has been destroyed.

These are just a few instances indicating the kind of open season that has been declared on the minorities, supporters of the Awami League and civil society elements opposed to Islamist fundamentalists. The question is whether things will improve or become worse. Much would depend on whether the interim government, headed by Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus, is able to establish order, or whether supporters of the BJI, BICS and Ansar al-Islam, who are behind the current violence along with sections of Begum Khaleda Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), are contained or allowed to escalate their campaign of vio-

lence and terror.

Yunus is neither a fundamentalist nor known for his pathological hatred for India. The backgrounds of some of his colleagues, however, raise questions. The Army's role is of critical importance. The report that it is being purged of those perceived to be pro-Sheikh Hasina, should worry those who want a peaceful, democratic and tolerant Bangladesh. Looking beyond the interim government, of critical importance is how free and fair are the parliamentary elections, that would have to be held now that Bangladesh's national parliament has been dissolved.

New Delhi is rightly watchful. The BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government ruling Bangladesh from 2001 to 2006, was pathologically hostile to India and actively sheltered and armed the secessionist groups active in the north-eastern parts of this country. A hostile Bangladesh, engaged in a repeat performance, is not what New Delhi wants.

Meanwhile, External Affairs' Minister, S. Jaishankar, has said that he does not rule out the machinations of a foreign hand behind the Bangladesh developments. Given his official position, he has to be circumspect with his words. But it is prima facie clear that Pakistan's ISI, and perhaps even China, have been involved.

Pakistan, which is having serious problems with the Taliban which it had once wet-nursed, and China, which has its troubles with Islamists, should remember William S. Baring-Gould's limerick, "There was a young lady of Rigla/ Who went for a ride on a tiger/ They returned from the ride/ With the lady inside/ And a smile on the face of the tiger."

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

Integrative health approaches for mental wellbeing

The road to mental well being doesn't have to be paved with pills alone; sometimes, it is as simple as finding our breath and practicing Yoga



ISHAN SHIVANAND

There is enough scientific evidence to validate that the mind, body, and soul are interconnected on a subtle level. This connection influences our thoughts and emotions, hence, our physical reality and our physical state impact our mental health and processes.

True health is signified by a harmonious balance between mind and body. Even a minor imbalance can lead to a range of issues, from physical illnesses and mental health challenges to a sense of unfulfillment with oneself and life. As per the WHO, nearly 80% of mental health cases arise in low- and middle-income countries. Conditions like depression and anxiety affect approximately 9% of the world's pop-

ulation and account for over 10% of years lived with disabilities.

The Drawbacks of Traditional Approaches

Pharmaceutical treatments have long been a cornerstone of mental healthcare, aiding in the management of severe cases and stabilisation. These targeted therapies address specific disease mechanisms based on biomarkers, leading to more personalised treatment.

Medical technology advancements enhance the efficacy of these treatments and improve patient outcomes. However, the reliance on medication alone often overlooks the holistic nature of mental well-being.

Embracing Integrative Health Approaches

Integrative health approaches, particularly those rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems such as yogic modalities, offer a promising complement to traditional pharmaceutical treatments.

A combination of breathwork and meditative protocols helps individuals penetrate a heightened state of non-judgemental awareness. They enable a physiological state of rest and digestion or relaxation, which is opposite to the flight-or-flight



ing. A positive mind-state accelerates healing, while a negative mind-state can prolong it.

The Science Behind the Practice: A consistent yogic practice has been shown to alleviate depression, leading to significant increases in serotonin levels and decreases in monoamine oxidase, an enzyme that breaks down neurotransmitters and cortisol. Yoga-based interventions also

help manage depressive disorders, stress, and anxiety by inhibiting the sympathetic area of the hypothalamus. This inhibition optimizes the body's responses to stressful stimuli and restores autonomic regulatory reflex mechanisms associated with stress. Moreover, yogic practices inhibit areas responsible for fear, aggressiveness, and rage, while stimulating the pleasure centres in the brain, resulting in a state of bliss and reduced anxiety. Regular practitioners of yoga and meditation experience lower heart rates, respiratory rates, blood pressure, and cardiac output.

Broader Health Benefits: Beyond mental well-being, yogic protocols improve cardiorespiratory performance, psychological profiles, and

plasma melatonin levels. It significantly reduces systolic and diastolic blood pressure, mean arterial pressure, and orthostatic tolerance. Yoga also enhances cardiovascular efficiency and homeostatic control, leading to better autonomic balance, respiratory performance, and overall well-being. Studies have shown that yoga-based lifestyle modifications can even aid in the regression of coronary lesions and improve myocardial perfusion in patients with coronary artery disease (CAD).

Integrating Yoga into Modern Healthcare: An integrated approach to mental health care leverages insights from traditional Indian knowledge systems, combining pharmaceutical treatments with non-pharmaceutical medita-

tive practices. This synergy not only addresses the immediate symptoms but also promotes long-term recovery and well-being. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, it's crucial to embrace the wisdom of ancient practices. By integrating yoga and other non-invasive approaches into our mental health toolkit, we can achieve a balanced state where the mind and body work in harmony. The road to mental well-being doesn't have to be paved with pills alone; sometimes, it's as simple as finding our breath and grounding ourselves in practices that connect us to our core.

(The writer is mental health researcher and the founder of Yoga of Immortals (YOI) meditative program; views are personal)

DECCAN
Chronicle

10 AUGUST 2024

As Yunus takes charge, Modi flags anxiety over minorities

A huge change has come about in Dhaka where an interim government, headed by the microfinance banker to the poor Muhammad Yunus assuming charge and, predictably, platitudinous commitments to uphold, support and protect the constitution have been expressed.

Diplomatic courtesy was extended in India wishing the senior Bangladesh public figure who nearly started a political party years ago at the behest of the Army and was later hounded by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who is currently in India awaiting a passage to a sanctum in Europe.

In welcoming Mr Yunus to Dhaka's seat of power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressed that the safety of the Hindus, facing attacks in places all over Bangladesh, and of other minority communities be ensured. This statement, with the emphasis on Hindus, had to be made as huge concerns have arisen over the well-being of the members of minority communities, particularly the Hindus, because Bangladesh was in the throes of limitless violence.

Awami League members have been primarily targeted with some of them meeting a horrible fate like being done to death by arson set off by the mobs. But it is the Hindus who may be facing the probability of a continued pogrom carried out by extreme radical elements like the Islamic party Jamaat even after conditions settle down once the interim government takes control and restores law and order.

Conspiracy theories may abound about which world powers, or their proxies, were behind the student movement snowballing into an uncontrollable stir led by a rampaging mob ready to strike down the Prime Minister at her home. The fact remains that Sheikh Hasina fled for fear of her life, with family members pressuring her not to stay and risk the fate that befell her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who liberated Bangladesh from Pakistan, and many of his family members.

The major challenge ahead for the interim government is to ensure that killings of Awami League members and the minorities do not keep occurring. While the adviser and head of the 17-member Cabinet may have immediately ascribed the killing of members of the minority communities to a conspiracy, restoring public order with the help of the Army, the police forces and student volunteers is the first task he must address as the world frets over loss of lives.

Evidence is emerging that an emboldened Jamaat, sidelined by Sheikh Hasina in her push for a state leaning to the secular as opposed to a religion-dominated society like Pakistan, stepped into the chaos of student protests focussed on job quotas, along with members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to further mobilise the popular movement against her.

A poll cannot be far away and the prospect of the return of BNP, led by her son Tarique Rahman as an ageing Khaleda Zia may not be able to return to the centre of Bangladesh politics, is not to be ruled out. India, which had committed itself fully to Sheikh Hasina's rule as she was historically a close ally in the region, may have to reset ties with a not insignificant trading partner country while ensuring that it can handle the possible security threats posed by radical elements.

Bail for Sisodia long overdue

The granting of bail by the Supreme Court to Manish Sisodia, former deputy CM of Delhi, is to be welcomed even if such an order seemed long overdue. That he was released on the same day soon after the bail order was given mitigates somewhat a curiously long incarceration with several appeals for bail.

Even if the accusation that he was one of the principal conspirators in corruption and money laundering cases is granted, it stood to reason that he had to be given bail and asked to stand trial when charges were brought against him.

The fact that the ED and CBI failed to start trials against him in court in 17 months betrayed the fact that the process of imprisonment, in the absence of a speedy trial in the Delhi excise scam case relating to a changed policy that was later abandoned, was being used for persecution.

It must be said that a person being jailed for such a long period without the courts following through on the oft stated principle that bail should be the norm and not jail, despite multiple appeals in various courts, meant that the speed of justice delivery does not appear to be quick either.

The provisions of the PMLA Act may be strict, even draconian, in the matter of the accused having to prove he is not guilty. Even so, there is a place for courts to grant bail and ask the prosecuting agencies to speed up the process by bringing the cases to trial.

The whole process of investigating financial scams must be more thorough and forensically credible rather than being fishing expeditions based on "he said" and "she said" kind of evidence that will barely stand scrutiny in a court of law. The court said as much while stressing that it would be a travesty of justice if the investigating agencies try to take the Sisodia matter back to trial court.

Given the nature of the crime alluded to and the alleged conspirators being prominent political leaders, may we be emboldened to suggest that the Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal also be enlarged on regular bail. His continuing presence in jail is another blot on a dispensation that apparently targets political opponents.

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Subhani



No mangal in this dangal:
How India blew it in Paris



Shobhaa's Take

The *kadwa* Paris Olympics *daal* has left an unpleasant after-taste... *quel dommage!*

The fiasco of started with the washed-out opening ceremony, which had several French Can-Can knickers in a twist. First off, grey Parisian skies rained on the parade, as a galaxy of glittering rain-soaked global athletes floated down the Seine on barges. The Indian contingent stood out, looking depressingly drab, dressed in ill-fitting shabby outfits that screamed "Third World". Personally, I loved how daring, risqué and imaginative the French were, when they dramatically broke all the previous opening ceremony rules. *Merci beaucoup* for doing away with the standard (and very boring) marchpast of athletes strolling casually inside a stadium, idly waving national flags. But once the watching world was done with bitching out the crazy elements of the presentation (excuse me, folks, but that wasn't a parody of Da Vinci's iconic *Last Supper*, but a tableau of a Greek bacchanalian scene with Dionysus, the god of wine, at a "feast of the gods"). Alas, the creative French effort turned into a real-life Greek tragedy.

By then, the cauldron of bouillon was bubbling over, as nitpickers found fault with everything!

For us back home, the *asli* Greek tragedy revolved around 100 grams of heart-break as Vinesh Phogat was disqualified at the nth hour from fighting for a gold in her wrestling event finals, despite all efforts by her vigilant team. India went into deep shock, as disheartened fans looked for convincing explanations. Conspiracy theories were widely circulated by those insisting Vinesh was

victimised by her own countrymen, for taking on her politically well-connected tormentor, Brij Bhushan, who controls the dark, dirty, dangerous and highly lucrative world of wrestling. Vinesh became a *desi* Joan of Arc as a hyper-emotional nation made her an overnight superhero, a martyr. Thank God for the sobriety, wisdom and dignity of her uncle and coach Mahavir Phogat, who silenced critics and reduced many to tears when he declared he would prepare his niece for the next Olympics. Her emotional retirement speech ("*Kushti won, I lost*") will reverberate for years to come. She has got a permanent place in history as a powerful symbol of immense courage. For millions of her supporters in India, the missed medal only added to her aura. Vinesh's "worth" far exceeds 100 kg of gold in our hearts. Those *maamuli* 100 grams that changed her destiny will be suitably avenged.

The closing ceremony on Sunday may spring more shocks than surprises. The French have had the time to fix major cultural faux pas, as the Games shift to Los Angeles in 2028. But this is as good a time as any for the IOA to review all that is amiss and has gone awry in Paris this year.

Similarly, India would do well to undertake a detailed exercise examining why a country of 1.4 billion cannot bring back more than a paltry five medals! We have remarkable athletes, an entire roster of potential medal-winners. And yet, despite enjoying world-class training facilities, we cannot deliver: killer instinct is *lapataaa*. In the old days our excuse was a lack of funds. It's not so today. While I vehemently disagree with Prakash Padukone belittling Lakshya Sen's perfor-

India would do well to undertake a detailed exercise examining why a country of 1.4 billion cannot bring back more than a paltry five medals! We have an entire roster of potential medal-winners.

mance, Padukone did make a few valid points about the far superior conditions today's athletes enjoy. There's no paucity of funds! Then it must be a paucity of sound policies that derails us, what with pompous, mediocre, power-crazed officials in their comfortable offices, lording it over athletes sweating it out in the sporting arena. I remember my tweet on "*khaali haat*" and "selfies" during the Rio Olympics, when India struggled to win two medals despite sending 118 players. I was massacred and slammed by those who assumed my tweet was aimed at our hard-working, committed athletes! It was not! I was in attack mode against the bloated number of babus, freeloaders, pile-ons, who are always a part of the Indian contingent. What role do these people play? Do we need them? How brazenly they jump on to the bandwagon and treat the Olympics like a paid picnic. *Besharams!*

Whether it's Vinesh or Neeraj Chopra, it's easy for us, sitting in India, to damn those competing fiercely thousands of miles away. Critics who've never run 20 meters in their lives are the first to diss athletes when they lose. The most gracious voice from India is Saroj Devi's, when she applauded the golden throw by a Pakistani construction worker's son, who beat Neeraj, her own son, saying: "Arshad Nadeem is also our child".

Vinesh has appealed against her disqualification and demanded a silver. This is only fair! The CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sport) verdict is awaited, at the time of writing. If it's a silver, so be it. Vinesh has sweated blood for it.

Strange. The heart-rending story of a female grappler being denied a shot at winning gold swept aside every other Breaking News — including the carnage in Bangladesh. Even the meme factory swiftly shifted from "*Ek Hasina Thi... Ek Diwana*" jokes, to focus on Vinesh and express support, the exciting live Olympics coverage on Jio Cinema ensured bloody wars in Gaza and Ukraine took a back seat as we remained glued to a different sort of action in Paris. That's how "deep" or "shallow" our concerns are.

Back to Bangladesh... India has never read the neighbourhood right. As we approach yet another Independence Day on August 15, perhaps we can brutally examine why we antagonize everyone. The Bangladeshis don't like us. They don't trust us. We share a 4,096-km border with Bangladesh. But India's Big Bully attitude has always backfired. While Hasina cools her heels as our *mehmaan*, let's see how warmly the shrewd Muhammad Yunus negotiates future engagements with Delhi, given our *thanda* relationship over the years. Yunus is a master tactician, more than capable of juggling the Chinese, Americans and Pakistanis, while pretending to get into bed with India. Very few political watchers are buying into the story of infuriated students toppling Hasina's government all on their own. The deadly mob violence unleashed appears to have been masterminded by ace international agencies intent on keeping the region on the boil.

Till peace and order are fully restored, Dhaka and New Delhi can figure out a working relationship, with less empty *bak bak* and more constructive talk. Meanwhile, S. Jaishankarji... do consider a longish *chai* break. Let the 84-year-old Nobel laureate next door do his job, without a meddlesome Big Brother interfering. His country. His people. His rules.

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe; Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

VINESH MUST FIGHT ON

Vinesh Phogat was disqualified from the Paris Olympics because she was overweight by 100 grams. Now she has announced her retirement from wrestling, which is shocking. She had put in a tremendous effort to reach the final. Her disqualification is unfortunate. But her efforts should not go in vain. She should reconsider her decision and gift India with a gold medal in the 2028 LA Olympics as revenge.

N. R. Ramachandran
Chennai

WEIGHT THROWS PHOGAT

Haryana's courageous daughter Vinesh Phogat gave a brilliant performance in the Olympics and reached the finals which she could not contest but she is a champion for all of us. The Haryana government has taken a decision that she will receive all honour like a medallist. According to the government's sports policy, Rs 6 crore is given to Olympic gold medallists, silver medallists are given Rs 4 crore, and bronze medal winners receive Rs 2.5 crore.

CK Subramaniam
Chennai

SIMPLE LIVING

An ardent patriot, brilliant orator and able organiser, besides being a gifted writer and poet, the late leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharya epitomised the principles of simple living, high thinking and wide reading. Bhattacharya who was entrusted with onerous task of continuing the Jyoti Basu legacy was a practitioner of pragmatic politics who reshaped the image of CPI(M) from its traditional Stalinist moorings to ideological flexibility. As a CM, he was focused on economic reforms based on an investor-friendly approach and seeking to attract capital to the state. Like Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, he was a victim of the very reforms he unleashed.

B. Suresh Kumar
Coimbatore

Mail your letters to chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"O Bachchoo, where did it all go wrong?
When you thought you were justified all the way along?
Beholders, though, have different eyes and thoughts
And fantasies they say they can even prove in courts!
— A million protests done — nothing more to say
— And now it's dusk, the trees deserted, the crows have flown away!
Who fear the dark will now kneel down and pray
O, Bachchoo yes, your dark hair has gradually turned grey..."

— From *Insaaniyat*, by Bachchoo

Mobs rampage in UK after murder of 3 kids: But why talk of 'civil war'?

Three children, the youngest just six years old, were brutally murdered, eight more and their two guardians injured at a dance class featuring the music of Taylor Swift. The killer was a 17-year-old wielding a scimitar in the residential street of the northern English town of Southport.

Purportedly in reaction, from the Midlands, Yorkshire, Lancashire and even Belfast in Northern Ireland, gangs of rioters have caused havoc — minor when viewed *sub specie aeternitatis* — but nasty — and, in their specific focus, even "un-British".

The Southport slaughter was the work of a young black man born in the UK whose parents were legal refugees from Rwanda. Though the police had identified him, they didn't publicly state that

he was a Muslim.

His motive for murdering the three young girls at a dance class — if such a deed can even have what we classify as a "motive" — has not been declared. There is some evidence that he was in some way associated with the Taylor Swift dance class.

Gentle reader, there is no response appropriate to the atrocity. The city of Southport mourned the loss of these utter, utter innocents. And then the nasty forces that have lain mostly dormant in Britain's rat-holes emerged.

In 10 or so cities, mobs of a few hundred attacked mosques and attempted to set fire to them. In Tamworth and Rotherham, the mobs gathered outside low-cost hotels which the government has requisitioned to house asylum seekers, smashing their windows, attempting to set fire to the buildings and even to enter them with, undoubtedly, sinister purpose.

In several incidents, isolated individuals were picked on by these mobs for appearing to have brown skin. In Hull in north-west England, a car with three Asian-looking men was cornered, the occupants pulled out and assaulted.

Mosques? Asylum-seekers' refugees? Brown skins? Yes, gentle reader, you've gathered the fact that these mobs were people who were determinedly attacking Muslims, Muslim communities and asylum-seeking migrants or refugees.

The police confronted these mobs in every city where they gathered and encountered them as they burnt cars, dustbins and attacked police cor-

dons with bottles, stones and sticks. The police controlled the mobs. They have made 400 arrests — and counting.

Prime Minister Keirji, home secretary Yvette Cooper and other Cabinet members are watching the situation and are confident that the police have it in hand.

Nevertheless, an American fellow, a billionaire called Elon Musk, who owns Twitter, has used that platform to say that Britain is "on the brink of civil war!"

I wonder if this Musk has an Amazon book account. I'm sure he can read and should catch up on the American "Civil War" and maybe even Cromwell's British "civil war". The only reason I allude to Musk's illiterate nonsense is because Sir Keir Starmer's office has condescended to respond, in some small way, to it.

It has, incidentally, made me wonder about the distinction between revolutions and "civil wars". The Bolsheviks and Mao's putsch were revolutions as they overthrew regimes. Cromwell chopped off Stuart's head and was a revolution, though it's historically known as a civil war. Abraham Lincoln's fight with the southern states in America to abolish slavery is probably most appropriately called a civil war. So, get reading Elon!

The mobs causing fringe mayhem in Britain's cities today are not aiming to replace the Labour government. No revolution, no civil war.

These are foolish, some Nazi-saluting, "far-right" delusionists, sheep who have been shepherded into rioting by social media calls to attack British

Muslims and asylum-seekers because some of them have been sold the myth, through right-wing "influencers", that the presence of Muslims and asylum-seekers on British soil led to the murder of the innocents.

So, who is propagating this social media instigation to riot? One culprit is a convicted right-winger called Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who calls himself "Tommy Robinson" and is at present living safely in Cyprus. He led a "fascistic" group called the English Defence League and is now certainly (yes, I have proof! And he makes no secret of it) in the pay of the Israeli state. He has urged his few British thousand-or-more supporters to launch the riots against Muslims.

Some of these supporters are just pathetic, deluded poor — (victims of 14 years of Tory rule?) looking for people other than those who control social and economic policy, to blame. The rest are dedicated right-wingers who haven't understood that British history indicates that they've never won.

Think Oswald Mosley, who made headlines and fell into oblivion? Then Enoch Powell, who concocted a racial platform and was exiled to Northern Ireland when no significant populace joined him on it. And even now, check noisy Nigel Farage — a virtual loser with his xenophobic game.

Even with my brown skin (er... *khaki*!) I shall boldly walk the streets.

I've heard the fellow Musk wants to start intergalactic travel — so, good luck on Mars, Elon dear — and... er... stay there?

Missing the mark

After Paris disappointment, the question is whether India can raise the bar to excel in the Olympics before hosting it

L'AFFAIRE VINESH PHOGAT — who was denied a silver or gold in wrestling as she was 100 grams overweight — should not deflect attention from India's disappointing performance at the Olympics in Paris. With a clutch of bronze medals and a solitary silver so far, our 117-strong contingent has not built on the gains in Tokyo in 2020 or London in 2012. In Paris, there have been more fourth-spot finishes than ever before. A good share of the bronzes was in shooting, thanks to Manu Bhaker who won two of them. Perhaps the biggest disappointment was in badminton in which our world-class shuttlers drew a blank despite being in winning positions. This provoked former champion Prakash Padukone to lash out that it was high time players learnt to withstand pressure, became accountable, and started delivering results. The boxers, too, failed considering their tremendous talent and technique. India has no doubt regained its erstwhile supremacy in its traditional bastion of hockey. Although it secured a bronze, it fought hard and won against storied teams in the run-up to the medal-winning match.

India's Olympic dreams cannot soar unless it registers its presence in track and field, which really is the core discipline in such sporting events. Although the winning feeling surfaced with its triumphs in the Asian and Commonwealth Games, it has a long way to go in the Olympics in which it has won only four track and field medals out of the total of 40 since 1900. Two of these are back-to-back gold and silver medals of Neeraj Chopra in javelin, while the others were won way back in 1900 for the men's 200 metres and 200 metres hurdles.

In Paris, India's medal hopes in the 3,000 metres steeplechase faded with Avinash Sable managing a lowly 11th position in the finals. If India is keen on developing its athletic prowess, it must set an aspirational objective to develop sprinters who can one day challenge US and Jamaican dominance and Africans in middle- and long-distance running, besides leaping, jumping, and hurling the discus to record-breaking levels in future editions of the world's greatest summer sporting event. With India's lacklustre show in Paris, does it make much sense to consider hosting the event in 2036? Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pitch is that India is well placed to staging the Olympics as it will be one of the foremost economic powers with the necessary infrastructure in place in the next 12 years. Besides the criticism that the costs far outweigh the benefits, the bigger question is whether we can raise the bar to excel in these games. To ensure that our athletes attain world-class standards, a mission-mode drive no doubt is already in place with the flagship Khelo India scheme — together with help from India Inc. — to pick potential stars from catchment areas extending to the nooks and crannies of rural and small town India.

Allocations must be stepped up manifold to provide state-of-the-art training and coaching. There is a warrant for taking best practices like the lottery-funded UK Sport which works with partner organisations to lead sport in the country to world-class success. Even France has taken a leaf out of the UK's experience to ensure that it reaches the top five among the medal-winning nations. India, too, can follow suit to improve its dismal medal tally while counting on the home-field advantage if it succeeds in hosting the Olympics.

Welcome to the 'yes, but' cycle of rate cuts

THREE DECADES AGO, economics underwent a revolution that doesn't get sufficient credit. Instead of shrouding policy shifts in secrecy, central banks began shouting hikes or reductions in interest rates from the rooftops. Moving by stealth in markets was out. Press releases were in. By amplifying their message, officials hoped to steer the public toward their view. With luck, they could also minimise financial ructions.

Today's crop of policymakers could use some of the same clarity of purpose. The global economy is on the cusp of a sustained easing, though not necessarily a dramatic sequence of rate cuts. Growth is slowing, but there's no crisis. Critically, price gains are abating significantly and inflation targets are within sight. This ought to be great news, but officials are having trouble embracing the moment. The legacy of "transitory", the now infamous word the Federal Reserve used to play down inflation's climb in 2021, is wreaking havoc. Almost every monetary authority used similar terms.

In a revealing moment during a recent Reserve Bank of Australia media conference, Governor Michele Bullock was asked to compare the RBA's hawkish stance with peer institutions that had trimmed rates. What were they seeing that the RBA, which refuses to countenance an easing, wasn't? Bullock was defensive. The Bank of Canada, for instance, wasn't really dovish, merely less hawkish. "They are sort of easing their tightening," The answer was easily caricatured as hair splitting. Bullock was onto something, nonetheless: It's very tough to identify turning points. Ease too soon and the risk is that inflation reignites; delay too long and the desired slowdown can become something more sinister.

The reticence is understandable. After the missteps of late 2021, who wants to be the person to pronounce inflation beat? Bullock reiterated the excessive caution in a speech on Thursday. "I know this is not what people want to hear," she said. "The alternative of persistently high inflation is worse. It hurts everyone." However, the longer she waits to switch to even a neutral stance, the greater the danger Bullock makes a mistake.

Sadly, the last war is still being fought. The wariness was on display at the Bank of England, whose policy panel lowered rates last week in a 5-4 vote. Unusually, the BOE's chief economist was on the losing side; Huw Pill cited progress on inflation, but warned "it's not yet job done."

But surely close enough to warrant some loosening? Inflation is back at the bank's 2% target after reaching double digits in 2022 and 2023. Governor Andrew Bailey, who cast the deciding ballot, appeared uncomfortable with the victory. There's no rush for more relief, he stressed.

Even the outliers are stepping on their narrative. In late July, the Bank of Japan surprised by lifting its main rate alongside a plan to halve its bond purchases. Governor Kazuo Ueda came across as hawkish, contributing to a slump in Japanese stocks and a surge in the yen. The upheaval prompted Ueda's deputy to walk back at least the tone, if not the substance, of the decision just days later. A summary of the bank's deliberations released on Thursday shows officials didn't consider their actions a tightening. That works on one level: policy is still very accommodative by global standards. Nuance can get lost amid shock, however.

So we have rate cutters who emphasise how tight they really are, and hikers who stress how loose things really are. Both can be true in a narrow sense while obscuring broader trends. Economists are confident the Fed will cut in September and are almost daily adding to the extent of the reductions likely to take place. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand, which openly conceded a recession was required to bring inflation to heel, may act as soon as next week. The Bank of Korea is unlikely to be far behind. Borrowing costs have been coming down in Latin America for some time. Expect hawkish language to accompany these pivots. We aren't sounding the all clear, vigilance is required, and so on.

Hopefully, it won't take a global recession for officials to jettison their inhibitions. For now, let's call it a "yes, but" easing cycle. If subterfuge is necessary to sell what's required, so be it. I'll take that in preference to the alternative.

DANCING WITH THE DRAGON

THE ECONOMIC SURVEY HAS SIMPLY PROPOSED AN ECONOMICALLY EFFECTIVE OPTION FOR INDIA

Much ado about Chinese FDI

THE LATEST ECONOMIC Survey of the ministry of finance suggests: "As the US and Europe shift their immediate sourcing away from China, it is more effective to have Chinese companies invest in India and then export the products to these markets rather than importing from China, adding minimal value, and then re-exporting them."

The suggestion has stirred storms in teacups and generated debate about whether the government intends to invite more Chinese investments into India and the implications of such a move.

On April 17, 2020, soon after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, India amended its inward foreign direct investment (FDI) policy by expanding the scope of restrictions applicable on investments from countries it has land borders with. The FDI policy in vogue, till then, was announced on August 28, 2017. Paragraph 3.1.1 of the FDI policy, while describing the scope of non-resident entities and individuals for investing in India, outlined the restrictions for investors from Bangladesh and Pakistan. The press note 3 of the ministry of commerce and industry, issued on April 17, 2020, expanded the restrictions to include investors from all countries that share "land border with India". This brought China into the scope of restrictions. The ostensible reason mentioned by the press note for the amendment was to stop "opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions" of Indian companies during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Consolidated FDI Policy that became effective from October 15, 2020, has retained the restrictions.

No country having land borders with India, except China, has the economic muscle for taking over Indian companies. The restriction, therefore, was clearly meant for achieving a specific goal: stopping potential takeover by Chinese investors of some Indian companies

AMITENDU PALIT

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forced into economic distress during Covid-19. While this was the explicit goal, a broader implicit objective was preventing greater control of Chinese investors over domestic business and corporate assets. The inclination was undoubtedly motivated by security concerns arising from unprecedented hostilities with China on the border along with fears over China's coercive economic tendencies arising from its command over vital supply chains, critical materials, and industrial inputs.

Notwithstanding these concerns, India never banned Chinese investments outright. Investments from China remained eligible for entering India under the government route. This requires investments taking prior permissions from the Government and operating according to the conditions specified in their approvals. However, unlike investments from almost all other countries, Chinese investments are not eligible for entering India through the automatic route, i.e. without taking prior permission.

Given this background, it is difficult to figure out what exactly has the Economic Survey suggested that has led to the fresh angst and concern on Chinese investments. The Survey has not asked for a rethink on the existing FDI policy and the restrictions it imposes on investments from countries that have land borders with India. It has also not

suggested that India should openly solicit investments from China. It has simply proposed an economically effective option for India for taking advantage of the economic impacts caused by the shifts in global geopolitics.

The US and the European Union's (EU) plans to discourage imports from China by increasing tariffs, and amplifying a China+1 strategy by diversifying sourcing, have led to a significant reconfiguration in global capital flows. Chinese investments are moving to countries from where exporting to the US and the EU are free and easy. Mexico is an important beneficiary of the relocation, as are Morocco, Vietnam, Indonesia, Poland, and Hungary. These emerging market economies are spearheading a new phase of re-globalisation. They are drawing significant Chinese investments, thereby digging deeper into Chinese supply chains.

The current re-globalisation is witnessing emerging market economies competing for attracting "tariff-jumping" FDI. High US and EU tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) are encouraging several economies to create enabling conditions for attracting Chinese investments and creating local EV manufacturing capacities. Hungary, while being a part of the EU, and going by the latter's decision to impose countervailing duties on Chinese EVs, has

Emerging market economies are able to take effective advantage of the shift for increasing local production capacities

Building infra at the core of Viksit Bharat



SOURYABRATA MOHAPATRA SANJIB POHIT

The writers are faculty members at NCAER in New Delhi

Key challenges are efficient utilisation of allocated funds, timely completion of projects, and a balance between urban and rural development

INDIA'S AMBITIOUS VISION to achieve developed nation status by 2047 hinges on a transformative journey through infrastructure development. This journey is not merely about constructing highways or erecting skyscrapers; it is about building the backbone that will support sustainable, climate-resilient, and inclusive growth. With an allocation of 3.3% of GDP for infrastructure in 2024, amounting to ₹11.11 trillion, India is making a significant bet on its future. But is this enough to address the myriad challenges and leverage the opportunities that lie ahead?

The 2024-25 Union Budget outlines a comprehensive plan with a focus on transport and logistics, critical to the Viksit Bharat vision. The goals are lofty: a national highway grid of 2 lakh kilometres by 2025, increasing the number of airports to 220, and operationalising 23 waterways by 2030. This plan is supported by a budgetary increase from ₹3.7 trillion in 2023 to ₹5 trillion in 2024, signalling vast opportunities for private-sector investment through public-private partnerships (PPPs).

PPPs are already transforming India's infrastructure landscape. From the construction of airports and ports to highways and logistics parks, private sector involvement is crucial. The PM Gatishakti National Master Plan, launched in 2021, aims to enhance multimodal connectivity across economic zones. With 15,580 projects valued at \$2,388.93 billion, the plan is as ambitious as it is necessary. The National Logistics Policy further aims to

develop integrated infrastructure and improve service efficiency, reducing logistics costs from 13% of GDP to the global average of 8% by 2030.

India's infrastructure initiatives are showing promising results. The Bharatmala Pariyojana, aiming to develop 34,800 km of national highways, is in full swing. The UDAN initiative has enhanced air connectivity, launching 425 routes and revitalising 58 airports since 2016. Indian Railways has electrified 61,508 km of its broad gauge network and introduced 35 Vande Bharat Express trains, with more to come.

In ports, the Sagarmala scheme has reduced turnaround time to 0.9 days, outperforming countries like the US and Singapore. Plans are underway to increase port capacity from 2,600 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) to over 10,000 MTPA by 2047.

As India urbanises, with 40% of its population expected to live in cities by 2030, managing this growth becomes crucial. The Smart Cities Mission is pivotal, with 6,753 projects completed out of 7,991. Concurrently, rural areas are becoming increasingly connected, with 56% of new internet users by 2025 expected from these regions.

India's infrastructure growth must be sustainable to ensure long-term prosperity. The National Infrastructure Pipeline targets completing projects worth \$1.4 trillion by 2025, with 21% investment

from the private sector. This includes green infrastructure, renewable energy (RE) projects, and sustainable urban mobility solutions.

Transportation, a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, is a primary focus. India is adopting sustainable practices, such as constructing highways using waste plastic and integrating pre-cast material to reduce emissions. Airports are transitioning to green energy, with the Airports Authority of India aiming for net-zero emissions by 2030.

Railways are also making strides towards sustainability, with plans to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030 through electrification and the introduction of bio-toilets in passenger coaches. Ports are increasing use of RE, with a goal of 90% by 2047, and developing green hydrogen bunkering services.

The Budget's 11.1% increase in infrastructure spending, along with projections indicating a rise in capital expenditure to ₹49.58 trillion by 2047, underscores the government's vision for a prosperous India. This aligns with the goal of a \$5-trillion economy by 2025.

However, the road ahead is fraught with challenges. Effective implementation, overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, and ensuring equitable growth across regions will require persistent effort and innovation. India's success will ultimately depend on its ability to build not just infrastructure but a resilient, inclusive, and sus-

tainable future for all citizens.

Key challenges include ensuring efficient utilisation of allocated funds, timely completion of projects, and a balance between urban and rural development. The government must also address environmental impacts, land acquisition issues, and the need for skilled labour to drive projects.

But one must ask: Are these targets achievable, or are they just another set of lofty goals?

The concept of Viksit Bharat is deeply interwoven with India's infrastructure ambitions as laid out in the Budget. Such a transformation is not just about economic growth but also social equity, environmental sustainability, and technological advancement.

The integration of sustainable practices, digital connectivity, and private sector participation are pivotal. As India marches towards 2047, its infrastructure development will be a cornerstone of its vision for Viksit Bharat.

Is this vision achievable, or is it just another budget proposal? The numbers are promising, and the intent is clear. However, the real test will be in the execution. The momentum added by the 2024-25 Budget is a step in the right direction, but continuous effort, innovation, and collaboration will be key.

Are we ready to tackle the challenges head-on? Only time will tell, but one thing is certain: the path to Viksit Bharat is as much about vision as it is about action. And now, more than ever, India needs both.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Elusive gold in Paris

Although superstar Neeraj Chopra signed off with a silver, bested by Pakistan's Olympic record-breaking Arshad Nadeem in the men's javelin throw, and the hockey team delivered a much-anticipated bronze to add to our overall tally, India is almost certain to end up without a gold in the ongoing Olympics. The most populous nation in the world winning

just 5 medals needs a serious introspection. Detailed planning, efficient training, and investing in sports with the best medal prospects, and thoroughly professionalising sports management are the true ingredients for success. Apart from international exposure, pro leagues in men's and women's hockey along with a vibrant tournament circuit in individual sports will make the difference between being on the

podium or not. More jobs for sports persons must be created. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Eating one's cake

Apropos of "Playing with a straight bat" (FE, August 9), so far, advertisers of liquor brands have been able to get around the ban on direct liquor advertising. The government seems to want to put an end to all this as new curbs are being proposed. We are a

strange society. Alcohol consumption is steadily increasing, even though it is regarded as a grave sin. Looking at the popularity of the religious preachers who say so, it would be natural to suppose the people would follow their teachings. But this is not happening. It's like having one's cake and eating it too. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Subsidised canteens need facelift, image upgrade

Providing food has been considered to be the ultimate service in more ways than one in Indian society. Irrespective of religion, one has heard how people have selflessly served the poor and the needy all across the nation, often spending their own resources and time to keep the 'seva' going across generations.

While such individual initiatives have been recognised, it has not always been scalable given the huge gap in demand and supply. Mercifully, for its own self-serving reasons, governments have played the welfare role and stepped in into this zone, opening subsidised canteens and attempting to give a decent meal for those who need it but cannot always afford it. In

south India, with the midday meal scheme for school children taking off in Tamil Nadu and Andhra and replicated across the other states, this process was set in motion.

For the adult clientele who also need to be served, there have been Amma canteens and Anna canteens, with Indira canteens too serving the purpose in Karnataka. Telangana has an existing scheme in partnership with Akshaya Patra which has outlets in many parts of Hyderabad serving food for Rs 5, with the government subsidising a considerable part of the expenses.

Politics has often interfered in the continuity of such much-needed schemes with opposing

parties scrapping or renaming it whenever it is their turn to rule. In Tamil Nadu, in a rare act of generosity, the DMK government had agreed to continue the Amma canteens launched by their political rival, J Jayalithaa when she was alive.

News is that the TDP-led NDA government in Andhra Pradesh will open 100 'Anna' canteens on August 15 as per a recent announcement. 100 canteens would be set up in 33 municipalities across the state and they would provide meals for Rs 5. The 204 Anna canteens were shut by the previous government of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) led by Jagan Mohan Reddy, established between 2014 and 2019 to provide meals

at Rs 5 to the poor and the middle class, on alleged corruption charges. At a few places, the YSRCP re-opened the canteens after renaming them as 'Rajanna', as the late chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR) was fondly called.

One hopes that the canteens maintain a reasonable standard in hygiene and food varieties and given the tech-savvy nature of the present CM, Chandrababu Naidu adopt digital technology to scale up its operations.

Karnataka has its Indira canteens which are being reopened and if latest reports are to be believed the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is planning to implement digital ordering system in Indira can-

teens like hotels and restaurants. Food quality, customer demand, shortfalls are to be analysed through this digital system.

It sounds incredible but not impossible if the government really aims at fulfilling a basic need of a majority of its citizens, who are still beyond the range as far as availability of quality food goes for the budget they can afford. After all, the success of any innovation or tech knowhow attains its peak level when it serves a large section of people in this hugely populated country. Breaking free from it being just a 'poor man's hangout' and making it attractive for all can also be possible when technology is deployed to blend food and the delivery model it adopts.

Efforts on to change social media algorithms shrouded in secrecy



DANIEL ANGUS
BRISBANE

OVER the past 20 years, social media has transformed how we communicate, share information and form social connections. A federal parliamentary committee is currently trying to come to grips with these changes, and work out what to do about them. The social media platforms where we spend so much time are powered by algorithms that exercise significant control over what content each user sees. But researchers know little specific detail about how they work, and how users experience them. This is because social media companies closely guard information about their algorithms and operations. However, in recent weeks my colleagues and I announced a new national infrastructure project to help us find out what they are up to. Our project, the Australian Internet Observatory, will investigate how social media users interact and the content on their feeds. But the federal government can also help by forcing tech companies to let some light in to the closed black boxes that power their business.

Resistance to data access: To understand the impact of social media, we need to first understand its inner workings. This requires observing the content shared by users and the algorithms that control what content is visible and recommended. We must also observe how users interact with these platforms in an everyday setting. This is important because social media is personal and increasingly ephemeral. Content differs for every user and quickly disappears from feeds. This makes it challenging to draw general conclusions about the experiences of users and the broader impact of social media on society. But the companies behind social media platforms refuse to let the public peer under the hood. They often cite privacy concerns and competitive interests as reasons for limiting data access. These concerns are possibly valid. But they are often cynically deployed. And they should not preclude the possibility of more transparent and ethical research data access. As a result, my colleagues and I have had to be inventive to gain insights into the inner workings of social media.

We use methods such as scraping public data, platform audits and other forensic methods. However, these methods are often limited and fraught with legal risk.

The Australian Internet Observatory: In the absence of direct platform data access, we are also using other methods, such as data donation, to understand how social media platforms operate. Data donation enables people to voluntarily share specific parts of their social media experience for independent study conducted under strict ethical guidelines. This provides invaluable insights while respecting user privacy and autonomy. Two data donation projects have already improved our understanding of internet search and targeted advertising in Australia. Over the next four years we will rapidly expand the scope of data donation through the new Australian Internet Observatory. This research infrastructure will collect and analyse the data of users of social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and YouTube. This will shed new light not just on how people interact on social media platforms but also on what content they see and how it is distributed. This enhanced visibility will improve our knowledge of the algorithms that power social media platforms - and their impact on society. For example, since its launch in 2021, the Australian Ad Observatory has amassed nearly 800,000 Facebook ad donations from over 2,100 ordinary Australians. This significant corpus of Facebook advertising data has allowed us to uncover illegal gambling advertising and track the prevalence of scam ads. We have also used this evidence to inform inquiries into unhealthy food advertising and "green washing". More than just being able to uncover what forms of advertising are prevalent and to whom they are targeted, this work has also helped us uncover details about the algorithmic targeting process itself. The Australian Internet Observatory aims to further deepen our understanding of this and similar processes across many more platforms. We will soon be inviting members of the public to donate data from their social media platforms to help us achieve this.

(The Conversation)

Slump in parliamentary decorum: It's time for stakeholders to introspect



THE developments one has been seeing in the last few days in Rajya Sabha where the Chairman and vice president Jagdeep Dhankhar walked out of the House with a "heavy heart" and an article by the Speaker of Lok Sabha Om Birla which calls for the need to maintain discipline and decorum and in legislatures calls for introspection by all political parties both at the national and state level.

In fact, it would be good if a seminar or workshop of all members of parliament is convened to discuss these developments and see that such instances do not take place in future. May be the Lok Sabha Speaker may consider inviting the presiding officers of state legislatures and floor leaders as well for the exclusive discussion so that politics and ethics can be welded into a unit.

The Speaker Om Birla in his article had rightly said that "elected members are looked up to by people of this country specially youth, as their role models. Therefore the conduct of the legislators should be dignified, orderly, exemplary and beyond reproach. He also observed that legislators should be dignified, orderly exemplary and beyond reproach. Upholding parliamentary decorum is critical for the edifice of parliamentary democracy and it's supreme democratic institution. Parliamentarians and legislators are, thus, bound by the spirit of the Constitution to maintain high standards of conduct in the houses of legislature."

The opposition parties have a crucial role to play in a democracy. But at the same time, they cannot try to be rough in their approach. They have a greater role to play in proper conduct of the business of the house and health of democracy. At the same time the ruling party too has to be considerate and accommodative of the views and reasonable demands of the opposition and facilitate a healthy discussion.

The opposition should not resort to disruptions and it should not become a regular feature. Members have some immunity while speaking in legislatures but then the rules say that they should not criticise the chair. Though the rules and procedures do not specify what the conduct of a member should be, as they are supposed to be honorable members and are expected to display high level of decency and decorum, discuss and debate based on the facts and figures and give concrete suggestions to the government.

Body language of a member or even a minister plays a very important role. It

should be pleasant. Every issue need not be looked from political angle because they get elected to resolve people's issues not to settle political scores. The big question is are we working in that direction? Shouting at each other, trying to score political points by taking jibes at each other seems to be dominating the proceedings. It is not only the Government who are the trustees of public money; even opposition too should consider themselves as trustees.

All these issues assume greater urgency and importance in the wake certain incidents that had taken place where the Chairman of Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankhar felt offended and insulted. In December 2023, he expressed his anguish and pain saying saying that he felt hurt by the targeting of his farmer and Jat background.

Taking on the former

But Dhankhar interjected and said nothing will go on record. Opposition raised loud protests and Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien was heard raising an issue, to which Dhankhar retorted that he was "shouting at the Chair."

"You are shouting at the chair. Your conduct is ugliest in the House. I condemn your actions. Next time I will show you the door. How dare you shout at the chair? And senior leaders are not saying anything," he said to O'Brien. Opposition then staged a walkout.

When the opposition members returned after some time, Dhankhar said that the opposition's conduct shows that they are a "law unto themselves" and only "their hearts bleed" for Phogat. The Chairman said that "The entire nation is in pain because of the girl. Everyone is sharing the situation but

the floor. When I give the floor it is watched by 1.4 billion people," he said.

But then it did not end here. On Friday it again witnessed heated face off between the Chairman Dhankhar and Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan. When Dhankhar invited her to speak and said: "Jaya Amitabh Bachchan is the last speaker on this point." This apparently left Jaya Bachchan miffed as she questioned the chair's tone and termed it 'unacceptable'.

"I, Jaya Amitabh Bachchan, want to say that I am an artist and I understand body language and expression. I am sorry to say that but your tone ... is not acceptable," she said.

To this, Jagdeep Dhankhar erupted in anger, asked her to take the seat and advised everyone to follow the House decorum irrespective of anyone's stature." You may



Though the rules and procedures do not specify what the conduct of a member should be, as they are supposed to be honorable members and are expected to display high level of decency and decorum, discuss and debate based on the facts and figures and give concrete suggestions to the government. Body language of a member or even a minister plays a very important role. It should be pleasant.

union minister P Chidambaram he said, "Imagine what must be going through my heart when your senior leader (Rahul Gandhi) video graphs a Member of Parliament (Kalyan Bannerjee) mocking the Institution of Chairman, as an individual take on me". A senior member of Parliament is videotaping another member... for what?"

He further added, "Mr. Chidambaram, your party posted a video which was withdrawn later on. That was a shame to me. You used the official twitter handle of the spokesperson (of the party) to demean me, insult me, insult my background as a farmer, insult my position as a Jat, insult my position as a Chairman."

On August 8, he walked out of the House with a "heavy heart." The opposition demanded a discussion on Phogat's disqualification.

to monetise it, politicise it, which is the greatest disrespect to that girl. The chair has been challenged in recent days and he did not find it suitable to sit in the House. "For some time I am not finding myself in a position to sit here," he added and left the house.

He also made some critical remarks that they think they are all wise. They think they are the only ones whose hearts are bleeding," he said. Dhankhar said that he had asked Kharge to send him in writing about the issue he wishes to raise. "And the response that I got from him, 'I want to raise an issue of urgent public importance'. Do I make anything out of it? Do I know the subject and urgency? In the process, the leader of the opposition has an idea of the chair that the chair is a rubber stamp or just a post office to send the communication to give

be a celebrity but everyone has to follow the decorum. Never carry an impression that only you have reputation," he remarked. Dhankhar said that he has 'highest respect' for fellow Parliamentarians but this doesn't give somebody a 'license' to hurl accusations at the Chair."

Well the issue here is not who is right and who is at fault. The issue is what should be done to prevent any such face off in the future. That is where perhaps a daylong seminar or workshop should be organised and a consensus should be arrived to protect the decency of the Parliament and legislatures. If need be new rules could be framed to ensure that in no situation should the authority of the chair be questioned or his instructions disregarded. Chair should be regarded as supreme institution not as an individual.



LETTERS

Act as impartial Chairperson of RS

GIVEN Rajya Sabha Chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar's inability to suppress his proclivities for siding with the government, the heated exchange between him and Jaya Bachchan was something waiting to happen. It is observable that Dhankhar speaks to Opposition members in an unpleasant tone of voice while there is no need to take that tone with them. He erred in thinking that Jaya Bachchan and other members in the Opposition benches do not understand body language and expressions. Minding one's tone of voice is no less important than minding one's language. It was most unfortunate that he did not think the Opposition's demand for a discussion on the circumstances surrounding the disqualification of Vinesh Phogat from the Paris Olympic Games legitimate and important enough to accede to. More often than not, Dhankhar talks like a Headmaster while MPs are his colleagues and not school kids to be schooled by him. Significantly, the Rajya Sabha is also called the House of Elders. The use of words like 'nuisance' and 'buddhiheen' in a pejorative sense by him are inappropriate and avoidable. He has not yet found a way to stop the mike being switched off when Opposition MPs speak what the government does not like to hear. As the presiding officer, Dhankhar is supposed, in fact obligated, to be neutral and impartial and conduct the proceedings of the House in a non-partisan manner

G. David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

JPC for Waqf Bill a right move

THE proposed amendments to Waqf Act, is rightly referred to Joint Parliamentary Committee. The provision to have Women and Non-Muslim members on Waqf Committee is intrusive, whereas to have Government nominee as the Chief Executive Officer and a survey of Waqf lands is appropriate and akin to the Hindu Temples regulated by Endowment Act and under supervision of Government. The Waqf properties are misappropriated by politicians, viz. many Waqf prime lands in Manikonda have purportedly disappeared. The proposed survey will also determine the genuineness of ownership of land donors that created Waqf lands. Transparency and equitability between religions is the true essence of secularism.

P R Ravinder, Malkajgiri, Hyderabad

Caste Census: Gaining electoral edge is the key

PROPOS 'Caste census: An opportunistic politics for Congress', it would be foolish to expect any party not to take any advantage of any policy which they may think would help them to gain electoral advantage. The BJP used religion to ride to power and keep them there. Similarly the Congress is doing the same with caste to dislodge the BJP from power. We would be extremely foolish to believe political parties do what is in the best interests of the country. They would first think which stand on any issue would endear them to the voters. Caste is a very sensitive issue and needs to be carefully handled. There is no doubt the backward classes have suffered at the hands of the so called upper castes. In many pockets of India this attitude yet persists. The resentment of the lower castes against their tormentors is real and needs to be recognised.

Anthony Henriques, Mumbai

Phogat's retirement shocking

THE decision of retirement taken by Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat is shocking as no one could expect a player with positive enthusiasm and sportsman's spirit could do so. The Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat on Thursday announced her retirement from wrestling in a post on social media platform. This decision comes a day after Phogat was disqualified from Paris Olympics 2024 before her gold medal bout in 50 kg wrestling championship due to overweight reasons. After a brilliant run at the 2024 Olympics, Vinesh was just moments away from scripting history for herself, for her family, and India. However, fate had different plans as she was found 100 grams overweight during the weigh-in. But retirement is not the solution she should fight for herself and her medal till last.

Dimple Wadhawan, Kanpur Nagar

Indian hockey on historic high with Olympic bronze

KUDOS to the Indian Hockey team for 'retaining' the Olympic Bronze, though as an ardent fan I would dream for the team to win Gold Medal and regain it's past glory. More importantly, the contribution of the goalkeeper P R Sreejesh is the key factor in the success of the Indian Hockey team in Paris Olympics, 2024. This is an indication of the Indian Hockey coming of age and performing well with "consistency", only it can climb up the ladder from here onwards. This is where the Indian Hockey Federation could do the right thing by promoting local talent and training them to realising the dreams of millions of Indian hockey enthusiasts. India has abundant talent not only in hockey but many other sports and games, but what we lack is unearthing the same for training to glory.

Govardhana Mynedu, Vijayawada

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Digital touch for Indira Canteens, trial run underway

BENGALURU: The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is now ready to give a digital touch to Indira Canteen, which has been started by the government with the dream of providing snacks and meals at low prices. BBMP is planning to implement digital ordering system in Indira canteens like hotels and restaurants. Food quality, customer demand, shortfalls are thought to be analysed through digital system. The Corporation is gearing up to implement the digital system in 169 Indira canteens in Bangalore and is now conducting a trial in RR Nagar area to gather information about the pros and cons. Tenders are all set to be called soon for implementation of digital system in Indira canteens in Bengaluru. What are the benefits of digital touch? Indira canteens performance aids data collection. If the customer places an order, the order information is sent to the head office. Allow ordering through digital technology helps in gathering food demand, quality, customer feedback and help for information about deficiencies.

Read more at
<https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

In games of power, death by milk and honey



PAST PARTICIPLE
MANU S PILLAI

Historically, treason anywhere in the world was often punished with death. But some cultures got rather creative in how they dished out the end.

The ancient Persians, for instance, developed a very sweet method. To start with, the person being eliminated was laid in a boat, while another sealed him from above, leaving only the head exposed. This wooden trap would then be covered with clay, looking on the face of it, like some species of spa treatment. Except that what followed was torture, not therapy. It would begin with the individual being fed all kinds of things, including milk and honey. A lot of the latter was slathered over the head as well. The result was twofold: inside, copious quantities of diarrhoeal waste would collect, inviting rodents and worms, while outside, insects feasted on the convict's helpless, rotting face. Death took weeks to arrive. And when it did, it was to snatch away not a living human but a putrid, shivering mass of flesh.

For those engaged in games of power, political violence necessarily had to be spectacular. Order could not be threatened, and if it were, the threat had to be quashed in style. Our own ancestors had prescriptions for this. The *Arthashastra*, for instance, frowns on challenges to authority. Anyone who foments revolts, attempts to snatch power, or to instigate disaffection is, it tells us, to be burnt alive "from head to foot". This is for non-Brahmins, though; Brahmins were to be drowned. For those disclosing



Gosain Narain taking poison in the presence of Mughal emperor Jahangir.

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secrets to enemies, meanwhile, the punishment was to be "torn to pieces". Of course, in practice it was possible to switch procedures. As late as the 19th century, a rebel leader in Kerala found his legs tied to elephants, which were thereafter prodded to run in opposite directions. The only reassuring detail about the episode is that the man was brave: asked by his snarky executioner how he was feeling just as the ripping began, he replied that it was like reposing in a velvet bed.

Power was imperilled not just by external enemies but also rivals within. Muhammad bin Tughlaq in 14th cen-

tury Delhi, for example, had a cousin who challenged his succession. It took a while, but when this kinsman fell into the sultan's hands, he was reportedly flayed. His flesh was cooked into biryani and sent to his wife and children, with another portion reserved for the imperial elephants. (It is said they rejected the meal—the elephants, that is.)

In 15th century Vijayanagara, similarly, Devaraya II found a relative coveting the throne. The latter had organised a house-warming party, inviting the king and his court. The court attended, and were killed, their screams concealed by loud music. Devaraya himself

did not show, however, so his frustrated cousin took a dagger to him. Luckily, the emperor survived; and carrying his would-be successor's severed head, he mounted a horse and rode up and down the capital. It was a dramatic display of the fate awaiting all who wished the monarch ill.

Violence, though, could also be employed without death, as a signature move to inspire dread. Seventeenth century armies serving the Wadiyars of Mysore were widely feared, thus, due to a "predilection", as the scholar Caleb Simmons put it, "for nose-cutting". In some accounts, it was during battle that

they chopped off noses, leaving their opponents mutilated for life. A 1649 Kannada text, on the other hand, suggests that it was after the enemy was defeated that its troops were lined up for nose-extraction. But the goal was the same: spreading fear of Mysore soldiers. Among Islamic rulers, meanwhile, blinding was popular. Potential claimants for the throne, if they survived contests for succession, were deprived of their eyes—and with this, of any right to the crown. Early in his reign, for instance, the Mughal emperor Jahangir blinded his son for trying to bypass him as king. Among the Bahmani sultans, even a nine-year-old lost his eyes—though not an immediate threat, he had the misfortune of being considered a prospective one.

Then there was violence by surprise and subterfuge. The Akkadian king Rimush was a grand conqueror and all that, until murdered by "killer scribes" in what was, to quote British historian Simon Sebag Montefiore, "the first death by bureaucracy" some 4,500 years ago.

Closer to our own time and place, a sultan in Bijapur was murdered by "handsome eunuchs" who had "excited his perverse attention". Where the man—a poet, bibliophile, and warrior—went in hoping for a good time, he ended the night in a bloody puddle. Poison too was deployed. Legend has it that a Gujarati sultan was, from infancy, given micro-doses by mummy to build up immunity and protect against plotters. And in the 1870s, a widowed and pregnant *maharani* of Baroda found her fruits injected with nefarious substances by a conniving brother-in-law. The man was charged later—unconvincingly though—with seeking to also get rid of a hectoring British official by mixing diamond dust and arsenic into the white man's sherbet.

Punishment for domestic indiscipline in political settings could also be

ugly. In Jahangir's day, foreigners reported the case of a woman caught in flagrante with a court eunuch—a breach of harem rules. She was buried until the armpits and left to die in the heat, but only after being made to watch her lover's execution. Sometimes, though, things went awry. In 18th century Ikkeri, a childless royal couple adopted an heir. When the king died, his widowed queen took a slave-lover. As the adoptee resented this, the *rani* sensed a threat, moving to preempt it. The new ruler was put to death either by strangulation during his bath or buried alive by a toilet attendant-cum-assassin. The widow moved on and adopted a second heir. This time, though, she shrewdly kept power with herself. It is a different matter that soon Hyder Ali of Mysore annexed the state. And some say the lady's life came to an end when she attempted to murder her captor next.

The past, then, was a breathtakingly violent place, particularly in proximity to power. One day you could be living a life of luxury, only to find yourself sewn into animal skin the next, and left to suffocate. You might be a minister, with a track record going back decades, until suddenly you upset your patron and are sentenced to drown with a sack of rocks at your neck. (Or if you lived in Rome, be thrown in a sack yourself, with monkeys and snakes for company as you flail and sink.) In fraught times, if you were unlucky enough to pick the losing side—yet lucky enough to be spared your head—you might still be made to slice off your genitals. But that was precisely it: to play in the high leagues one had to be prepared for risks. And the seductions of power are such that to this day, many enter the game with complete willingness.

Manu S. Pillai is a historian and author, most recently, of False Allies: India's Maharajahs in the Age of Ravi Varma.

A journey through a magical mangivorous world

Sopan Joshi's life-affirming biography of the subcontinent's much-beloved fruit, the mango, is a classic of its kind

Chandrabas Choudhury

For the first time in my life, this year the mango became something more than just a (admittedly very exciting and consoling and sensuous) gustatory experience, such that I almost ceased to regard it as an object of consumption.

My teacher was a mango tree, planted in the 1980s in the small yard outside the house that my parents built in Bhubaneswar. Over the years I had come and gone many times without ever paying much heed to the parallel universe that it had created and sustained within its boughs. But now that I had a small library on the rooftop, every morning began with a few minutes within its aura, somehow both serene and ecstatic. I took to reading with its long green leaves gently rustling in the wind: fine music for the mornings. In January, thousands of small green flowers, packed into conical panicles, burgeoned on its branches. Slowly, their stalks turned a *sindoori* red—the colour of creativity and passion, revealing just why Kama is said to choose mango flowers for his arrows. Squirrels, birds, chameleons, bees, ants and spiders buzzed within its canopy, a small society of ardent arboreals.

When I plucked a tiny subsection of flowers and pressed down on it with my fingernail, the ethereal tart fragrance of *kachchi kairi* rose to my nose. A few weeks later, tiny green fruit began to appear on the stalks. Whenever I left for a few days and returned, they had plumped out a bit more, dangling in small clusters, fed by fragrant sap running up from roots 70ft away.

Slowly they began to ripen. Their sun-facing sides turned yellow first: a daily demonstration of how heat and light from a faraway star metamorphose into life and colour and taste here on earth. In April and May, after three months of fruition, they became ripe and began to fall all around the house to the great delight of passersby. Their heads and shoulders were stained by sap. I only ate a few. I didn't want to. Watery and much less complex than the best mango varieties, they had nevertheless proved to be a revelation of all the wonders of life.

Perhaps the only way to make the entire cycle more mangivorous would have been to spend those mornings reading *Mangifera Indica*, Sopan Joshi's exuberant and magisterial survey of the influence of the mango over Indian life and thought.



Mangifera Indica: A Biography of the Mango: By Sopan Joshi, Aleph Book Company, 408 pages, ₹799.

Joshi's basic thesis, which he illustrates with infectious verve and detail, is that to us subcontinentals, the mango is much more than a fruit, it is an entire culture: a path back to childhood, an emblem of longing and desire and ecstasy, a non-verbal code of civilisation and culture, a road-way into myth and history.

Despite being so deeply embedded in our imaginations for millennia, there is something mysterious and elusive about the mango. For instance, there is the unpredictable way in which it propagates.

Mangoes grown from seed, or *beji* mangoes, are very rarely "true to type"—the seed of a *gulab khas* or *imam pasand* does not yield a tree that has the same kind of fruit—and need the aid of "*kalmi*" or grafting for mass-scale production for a consumer base as large as India's. Again, there is the frequent disjunction between looks and taste: many of the best varieties are nondescript to the eye. There is a sense of insufficiency associated with mangoes, even when we can eat as many as we like. India is too big a country and the fruit too mercurial a personality for it to travel to distant markets. There will always be more varieties that we haven't tasted than those that we have.

Among the lovely details that Joshi offers is that just like Indians themselves, south Indian varieties often do well when transplanted to the north, but the reverse is rarely true. Joshi sprinkles many such charming facts and references along his rambling journey (he drives a Harley Davidson to many far-flung mango orchards). In the seventh century CE, the Chinese traveller Hsüan Tsang travelled



Many of the best varieties of mango are nondescript to the eye

GETTY IMAGES

to Sarnath, where he mentions visiting a large *vihara* with a golden figure of a mango above the roof. "Buddha's concerns were universal and existential," glosses Joshi. "He needed the kind of metaphors that turn abstract ideas into imaginable forms."

In Jharkhand's Chaibasa, Joshi meets Kunwar Singh Janko, a tribal in search of the land holdings of his ancestors in the sal forest. Two ways of identifying such lands are tombstones and old mango trees. Even Gandhi, who resisted the call of sensuality and temptation all his mature life, strug-

gled to eliminate mangoes from his diet. "We must get used to not treating it with so much affection," he writes sternly in a letter from 1941. Mirza Ghalib would never have agreed. More than 35 kinds of mango are cited in his own letters.

The mango also has an extensive literature of its own. Much of it is throwaway journalism; another large part comprises highly technical and dry scientific papers. So it's worth focusing on where Joshi breaks new ground. Most writers on the mango (myself included) have only situated the mango within a human-centric

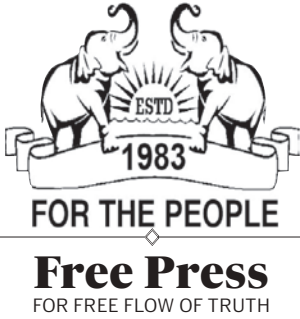
Despite being so deeply embedded in our imaginations for millennia, there is something mysterious and elusive about the mango

history of taste; Joshi opens out the frame to locate it within a history of life itself. "The influence of fruit (on life) is very deep," he writes, as he shows how plants and animals and human beings have co-evolved over tens of thousands of years. In this view of things, primates (the genus of living creatures which includes apes and human beings) developed colour vision to find the brightly coloured fruits of the tropical rainforest, the seeds of which in turn we dispersed far and wide—sometimes across entire continents. (On my first morning in Brazil a few years ago, I came across a mango lying broken open on a stone pathway on the island of Itaparica. I picked it up and it smelled like no mango that had ever come my way—it had become Brazilian.)

"We do not like to see ourselves as primates shaped by fruiting trees," Joshi writes. We would rather believe today that it is we humans who have shaped and ordered the world of the mango. But the long-historical record proves otherwise. "It was the plants that began hitting on animals," Joshi writes—a fact we still acknowledge when we raise a mango to our noses to detect whether it is ripe. Thinking about mangoes in the widest possible frame requires that we "lift ourselves out of human solipsism and join biology's dance to the music of deep time." At moments like this, Joshi's writing approaches the ecstatic tremors found in the work of Stephen Jay Gould, David Quammen and Timothy Ferriss.

The other noteworthy aspect of Joshi's book is his insightful survey, based on extensive legwork and discussions with mango growers and traders (whom he allows to speak in their own voice), of the problems that plague the Indian mango industry. Most mango orchards in India, he notes, are not tended by their owners; many were acquired in the years after independence as a way of evading the strictures of the Land Ceiling Act. Today they are given out on contract, but an indifferent landlord never made for productive and well-tended land. In contrast, the passion and sense of purpose and awareness of tradition found in the best mango growers is truly life-affirming. It is always a big claim to say of a book that it will still be read in a hundred years. But it is hard to imagine that there will ever be a better literary companion to the mango than *Mangifera Indica*.

Chandrabas Choudhury is the author of four books, including the novels Clouds and Days of My China Dragon.



Uddhav and Congress, a rocky bond

Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray, heading his faction of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, travelled to New Delhi this week, something he is not given to do often. There, he met political leaders including former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, among others. Thackeray is believed to have brought up the thorny issue of a serious lack of proper coordination between the two parties, especially between his and Maharashtra unit of the Congress. This is the right time to address lingering issues that could derail the Maha Vikas Ag-hadi alliance of the Congress, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party, and Thackeray's Sena. The MVA will need all its might and every ounce of support, logistical and financial, to take on the Mahayuti alliance that holds power now. This comprises the Bharatiya Janata Party, Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party.

The Lok Sabha elections in April-May saw the MVA parties contest together for the first time given that the alliance was formed post-elections in 2019. In a charged atmosphere that saw the opposition INDIA bloc parties take on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, the MVA parties pulled their weight in most of the state's 48 LS constituencies to bag 31. It was widely considered as a 'semi-final' before the state Assembly elections due in October.

However, Thackeray, who gave it his all during the campaign even campaigning hard for Congress candidates like Varsha Gaikwad in Mumbai, expressed disappointment on two counts. One, that the coordination between leaders of the state unit of the Congress left much to be desired, and two, that the Congress rank and file did not work for his party's candidates as much as Sena's did for the Congress.

If he could take these to the Gandhis and have them intervene, it would stand the MVA in good stead as the state elections draw near. Despite his camaraderie at the leadership level, the rank and file of both parties hardly see eye to eye, let alone align politically and collaborate. How can they? Both parties have been at each other's throats for well over five decades with the late Bal Thackeray spewing venom against the Congress and Gandhis at every opportunity. This election is a make-or-break one for his son who shook hands with the 'other' for survival. The relationship cannot be anything but rocky, but it is a necessary one for Uddhav Thackeray.

Laapataa Ladies rock at the SC

Fridays are traditionally film release days in India. This Friday, judges of the Supreme Court of India along with their spouses and officers of the registry settled down for a film that has not stopped drawing laughter and appreciation wherever it has travelled to. *Laapataa Ladies* was screened in the Supreme Court auditorium after which director Kiran Rao and its producer Aamir Khan interacted with those present. The occasion, according to the SC registrar, was the 75th year of the establishment of the court and the film was an ode to gender equality. Many paths of inquiry open up here just like they did in the film which weaves together parallel stories of two young brides who lose their way (and husbands) in a train and end up finding their core selves, all in a happy ending.

The film, small-budget and small in scale, has touched hearts with its seemingly simple story, new faces and lilting music. Beneath the languid movement on the screen, the film packs a punch which lands superbly — about women learning to hold their own, different kinds of women in rural areas, the need for women's education, and so on. *Laapataa Ladies*, a non-Bollywood film for the most part, drives home its feminism gently. And shows the power of good storytelling on socially significant issues. That the SC decided to screen it is a surprise but the film's message presumably landed well with the esteemed set. Gender equality is still sorely missing in its honourable gallery of judges but, within its hallowed portals, women of India have mostly been heard except on occasions when a former Chief Justice of India was accused of sexual harassment by a court staffer. Yet, it was hopefully a Friday afternoon well spent for the bench.

Both parties have been at each other's throats for well over five decades. This election is a make-or-break one for the late Bal Thackeray's son who shook hands with the 'other' for survival



Neighbourly Eye

K C SINGH

The Bangladesh saga has already been much analysed and debated. The reservation of government jobs for descendants of freedom fighters, in Bangladesh's 1971 war of liberation, was withdrawn by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in 2018, after public criticism. The controversy was revived by the High Court restoring them in June 2024, triggering student protests.

The first phase of protests was during July 15-21. Bangladesh's Supreme Court on July 21 reduced reservations to 7%, including 5% for freedom fighters' progeny. On July 14, at a press conference on returning from China, PM Hasina dubbed protesters as "Razakars". It is a word used for anti-national elements who collaborated with Pakistan during Bangladesh's freedom struggle. This further infuriated the students. She still believed her security forces would quell the sporadic protests. Apparently in Delhi too no alarm bells rang.

The protests transmuted exceedingly quickly into a mass movement against the government, indicating

politicisation. It was presumed her 15-year rule had enabled PM Hasina to hone authoritarian control to an art form. Her deposing by street rallies was ruled out. Thus a crucial historical lesson was ignored that with all political dissent blocked the pressure within the polity makes a sudden explosion inevitable. In 1990, President Lt Gen H M Ershad's military rule ended when the Awami League, Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, the three main political parties, issued a multiparty declaration, causing the street protests to mushroom.

This has happened in other nations also. Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, was deposed in 1979 after extensive protests and despite extreme force used by security agencies. Iran has a tradition, dating to the 19th century, of men and women taking to the streets to protest against the ruler and then intruding into diplomatic compounds for protection. This, in Persian, is called "Bast" or sanctuary until negotiations produced a compromise. Similarly "Arab Spring", which began in December 2010 in Tunisia, led to popular revolts that overthrew the authoritarian leaders of

Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Sheikh Hasina and her friends abroad, especially in India, ignored this. The January 2024 election won by Sheikh Hasina elicited no critique from India, despite loud protests by the Pposition over alleged rigging. Though the US labelled the election as neither free nor fair, China joined India in lauding Sheikh Hasina winning a fourth consecutive term of five years.

Autocratic governance becomes less tolerable if economic news is dismal. Despite making Bangladesh a garment-export hub and boosting women's participation in the formal economy and improving health metrics of school children, post-Covid period brought dropping exports, inflation and higher unemployment, especially amongst youth, doubling since 2010. Once protests started even remittances fell from \$2.54 billion in June to \$1.9 in July.

India must now salvage a difficult situation created by proximity to an authoritarian ruler, ousted by popular uprising. The public ire, especially over 300 deaths caused by brute force, would also target India. What then are the Indian options? Prime Minister Narendra Modi

has wisely congratulated Muhammad Yunus, heading the interim government. The army chief Lt Gen Waker uz Zaman, related to Sheikh Hasina, not only managed to peacefully exfiltrate her but assured that "justice will be served against every death and crime". Yunus' selection is at the behest of student leaders leading the protests. The Army thus is trying to deflate their ire. Sheikh Hasina had called him a "blood-sucker of the poor". He in turn in 2015 had advocated "benevolent dictatorship". It is unclear whether he has the political and governance skills to restore democratic functioning and institutional integrity. The related question, is how long will the interim arrangement last?

The BNP wants fresh elections quickly, considering the parliament stands dissolved. The army would probably quietly oversee the interim rule, though — considering Yunus' popularity and stature as a Nobel laureate and microfinance innovator — controlling him may be difficult. Lt Gen Waker uz Zaman is also handicapped by being a relative of Sheikh Hasina. Bangladesh's army has a history of revolt from within and attempted

assassination of higher echelons.

For the Chinese, the student protests uprooting a regime revives the unpleasant memory of Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, which China broke up using armed forces. They want Bangladesh to "restore social stability soon", particularly because it is a "comprehensive strategic partner".

India also would like peace and order restored, and targeting of minorities and Awami League cadres to end. India fears that if the BNP-Jamaat alliance wins next election, a government favouring the Pakistan-China axis is inevitable. The US, which some allege to be manoeuvring the Bangladesh developments, would also oppose Chinese entrenchment in Dhaka. If anything, Indo-US strategic partnership requires close coordination in this regard. But the people of Bangladesh may worry more about exorcising the ghost of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the influence of his family — at least in the foreseeable future.

KC Singh is former secretary, Ministry of External Affairs

The rupee has weakened again, how does this affect the economy?

The advantages and disadvantages of having a stronger currency will depend on the way the country manages its economic policies



Analysis

VIDHUSHI KARNANI

Currency and money, while often used interchangeably, have different meanings. Money is a term that refers to the intangible system of value allowing for trading to take place. Whereas, currency is the tangible form of money. It is a medium of exchange for goods and services.

What does it mean to have a strong currency?

A strong currency is a globally traded currency that serves as a reliable and stable source of value. These currencies are safe havens since strong currencies are likely to remain more resilient in the face of political or economic turmoil or instability. Currency strength is measured using exchange rates, which suggest the value of one currency compared to another. This is also referred to as the exchange rate. Another way of determining the market value of a currency is by looking at the purchasing power parity (PPP), which compares the relative cost of a standardised basket of goods between countries. Exchange rates provide a snapshot of market value, while PPP assesses long-term equilibrium.

The rupee, over the years: The strength of the Indian rupee has conventionally been measured against the US dollar since the USD is the most traded currency globally making it extremely powerful. Before

1947 as the British colonised India, the rupee was directly influenced by the economic conditions in Britain. When the great depression hit the US and then rocked the entire world in 1930, it shattered the world economy. India, which was a British colony, faced double the impact. However, after gaining independence from 1947 to March 1993, the government adopted the fixed exchange rate system which was aimed to stabilise international trade but failed to let the currency adjust to changing economic conditions. The wars between Pakistan and China and the Gulf wars strained the Indian rupee leading the exchange rate to rise from Rs 3.30 in 1947 to Rs 17.01 in 1991. On the contrary, from 1991 to 2000 India went through significant reforms, and shifted from a fixed exchange rate system to a more flexible one.

However, by 2000 the exchange rate had risen to Rs 45 per USD due to India's need to attract foreign capital and address trade imbalances. Furthermore, the Asian financial crisis and Indian efforts to modernise the economy were key factors that led to this depreciation. Even though India has been experiencing rapid economic growth, global events like the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have influenced exchange rates worldwide resulting in \$1 being equal to Rs 83.

This raises the question of whether a strong currency is beneficial. The exchange rate of a currency has im-

mense economic implications: Firstly, a strong currency makes a country's goods more expensive in the international market, reducing exports as they fail to match competitive prices. However, a strong currency allows for more imports from other countries because the citizens of the importing country find them cheap. This brings sellers to the doorstep of the country with a strong currency.

A weak currency makes imports very expensive. It also finds that it has to export a larger volume of goods to make the same amount of money it earned earlier because its goods fetch little foreign currency.

When imports become expensive and the larger volume of exports does not earn much foreign currency, inflation is more likely. That is why countries with weaker currencies suffer from inflationary pressures.

Countries with a weaker currency have to find niche areas where they can charge higher prices because few countries offer those specific goods and services. Export-driven sectors, such as textiles and IT services, benefit from a weak currency as foreign buyers are attracted to the lower prices, enhancing competitiveness and increasing market share globally. On the other hand, import-driven sectors, like pharmaceuticals and manufacturing, face challenges as the cost of imported raw materials rises, increasing production costs and consumer prices. Therefore, balancing currency strength is crucial for maxi-

mising economic benefits across different sectors.

Secondly, a strong currency impacts inflation by having more purchasing power, allowing it to buy more foreign goods for the same amount of domestic currency. This reduces import costs, lowering overall price levels and helping to keep inflation low. It is important for India to have a strong currency since it imports a substantial amount of energy and raw materials. Lower import costs can reduce inflationary pressures, leading to a more stable economic environment.

Thirdly, the strength of the currency can significantly impact foreign investment. If the Indian rupee strengthens, one unit of foreign currency would buy fewer rupees. If the rupee appreciates from Rs 75 to Rs 70, then a US investor will need more of the dollar to buy the same amount of Indian rupees.

The increased cost of purchasing Indian assets can result in a lower attractiveness of investing in India since investments become more expensive. Investors often demand higher returns to justify the increased cost which leads to more selective investment decisions reducing the foreign direct investment. Between 1991 and 2000, there were many economic reforms in India making the economy more liberalised. Despite the rupee's depreciation during the 1990s, the reforms and liberalisation measures improved investor confidence and

market stability, leading to increased foreign investment. The cheaper rupee made Indian assets more attractive to foreign investors, who could invest more capital at a lower cost.

The strength of the Indian rupee significantly impacts the economy and daily life in India. A strong rupee boosts the purchasing power of consumers, making imports and international travel more affordable, while influencing job creation differently across sectors. Export-driven industries benefit from a weaker rupee, enhancing competitiveness and employment, whereas import-dependent sectors gain from a stronger rupee, reducing costs and supporting job growth. However it is important to note that the advantages and disadvantages of having a stronger currency will depend on the way the country manages its economic policies.

Balancing the rupee's strength is crucial. The period from 1991 to 2000 showed that effective currency management, alongside economic reforms, can attract foreign investment and ensure economic stability. As India continues to grow, maintaining this balance will be key to sustaining a robust and inclusive economy.

Vidhushi Karnani, a 17-year-old student at Bombay International School, is a passionate and eager learner, with a particular interest in economics

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cancer of nation and society If a judge is lured for corruption, if the officials of anti-corruption bureau fall for money, if the vigilant and investigating authorities cannot resist corruption, it is nothing but the fence eating the crops.

The cancer of corruption has pervaded every nook and corner of every government department. Corruption in judiciary is not unheard-of. Copy of judgments or interim orders will not be available to the stakeholders without greasing the palm of the

concerned clerks. Corruption is open-secret. Action is initiated when the level of corruption reaches "beyond tolerable limits.". Corruption breeds corruption. Corruption at higher levels has assumed enormous proportions. When Covid was at its

MIKA'S MATRIX



peak, hospitals and medical staff minted money. Undoubtedly there was huge demand for beds in hospital. But many hospitals and personnel took undue advantage of the situation and created artificial scarcity of beds. Beds were available to those who could grease the palms of the concerned. While Covid days were hell to the patients and their family members, others could earn "handsome money". Rise in corruption is linked to price rise or inflationary spiral. Cash for questions to be raised in Parliament or the Assembly is another face of money-making through unfair means. Question papers are leaked throwing the future of hard working students into turmoil. Leakage of questions is not done for free. Students paying money for knowing questions well before the start of the examinations are laying the foundation for corruption in their own life.

KV Seetharamaiah



Treat mentally ill patients better

Mentally ill patients with some unusual symptoms are often taken to be manifestations of evil spirits and instead of taking them to some psychiatrist, the family is more likely to take the patient to some rather dodgy baba or tantrik in the neighbourhood. Abuse of mentally ill patients at a dargah in Buldhana has once again highlighted the need for a close investigation of

how such places function, not just in Buldhana but all over the nation. Illiteracy and superstition are the prime reason why faith healers continue to flourish in the nation. Most of them would be harmless but some could make the condition of the patient worse. The inability of the family to take care of the patient is usually the reason why they are taken to places where patients are tortured in these ways.

Anthony Henriques

Bangladesh on the boil

India has to be watchful

There's never a dull moment on the Indian subcontinent. The latest excitement has been over the extraordinary developments in Bangladesh last week which led to its long serving prime minister Sheikh Hasina, to flee the country, and a Nobel laureate without a political base, to become the chief adviser to an interim government this week, equivalent to prime minister.

There are two aspects to what's happened. One is internal to Bangladesh. The other is how these changes affect India. The internal aspects can be clearly identified. Bangladesh could well become a country run by the military and the Islamists, or by one of them. Whatever happens, one thing is certain: the secular, democratic approach of the country's founder, Mujibur Rehman, is now not the preferred option. This option could revive of course, as it has done twice in the last 54 years. But that will take some time.

It's what happens in the meantime that brings up the second aspect, namely, how it will all affect India. There are economic factors that even a politically anti-India government in Bangladesh will have to be mindful of (Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives came to realise this). The most important of this is the impact on bilateral trade, which was \$13 billion in FY24 — mostly petroleum, chemicals, cotton, iron and steel and vehicles exports from India and textiles and garment imports from Bangladesh, with a trade surplus of nearly \$10 billion in India's favour. The two countries have also been discussing a Free Trade Agreement. There is also a bilateral plan to promote infrastructure connectivity — physical, energy and digital — not to mention the three lines of credit amounting to \$8 billion extended by India. So, it could well be business as usual after the interim government gives way to a properly elected one. The Bangladesh constitution requires this to happen in three months.

That said, it's also true that the new elected government will cater to the optics and demands of the anti-Indian mood in the country. This could take two forms, both of which increase Bangladesh's nuisance value. One is the level of protection afforded to the minorities, namely the Hindus and Christians. The former, in particular, are bound to feel very vulnerable if the government is lackadaisical in its approach. The second is the export of terrorism across the border to the eastern states. Prime Minister Hasina had protected the minorities and stamped out terrorist training camps. India will have to work hard at ensuring that the new government continues with her policies. There could well be another fallout, this time for the politics of West Bengal. This would happen if there is a huge inflow of Hindu refugees into the state. The new citizenship law requires India to admit persecuted minorities from some neighbouring countries, of which Bangladesh is one. Finally, the role of the US, China and Pakistan will be an important determinant of Bangladesh's policy towards India.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



KRIS GOPALAKRISHNAN
VARUN AGGARWAL

Indian gross domestic expenditure on research and experimental development (GERD) is 0.6 per cent, of which the Indian industry contributes only 0.2 per cent. The Indian industrial contribution to GERD is low compared to advanced economies, such as the US at 2.7 per cent, South Korea at 3.9 per cent and Japan at 2.6 per cent.

There is a consensus that R&D investment needs to be significantly increased for the industry to go up the global value chain, decrease high-complexity imports by indigenisation and boost exports.

While industry GERD is a useful indicator, it is a monolith providing little insight and is arguably suspect, given India's lack of proper R&D expense reporting.

A recent report on the State of Industry R&D in India by FAST India and IIFL Securities remedies some of these issues. They consider the top 10 companies in six sectors and compare them with their global peers on four parameters: R&D inputs, R&D intensity (i.e. R&D expenditure by revenue), the proportion of PhD qualified employees, and outputs, patents and publications per USD billion revenue.

This provides a robust picture of industry R&D. Firms and managements must use these ready numbers to benchmark themselves with Indian and global peers in their sector on various measures of R&D activity and plan corrective steps.

Boards are used to benchmarking their firms on various parameters and R&D indicators should be a welcome addition — once measured (ranked), there will be incentives to improve them.

The report finds that the median R&D intensity, ratio of R&D expenses to revenue, of top global firms was 2.9x Indian firms. Indian firms must increase and earmark spending for R&D-led product innovation and set targets for

revenue growth based on such innovation. This should be done through mission-driven R&D with clear product goals and the right combination of R&D and engineering.

We have seen several successful global examples such as Tesla electric cars, the creation of Covid-19 vaccines and the recent invention of LLM-based chatbots based on missions.

INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA LINK

A recipe is to have research labs in Indian corporates working closely with products at end and with academic institutions at the other. Such research labs need to closely work with product and business to create a line of sight of revenue growth.

Global research labs have created sophisticated working models, where research managers intermediate conversations between product and research teams to produce striking research-led products and features. For example, Microsoft Excel's flagship FlashFill feature was built under an R&D project at Microsoft Research.

Lack of such collaboration in India is indicated by the second R&D input parameter — global firms documented 3.7x employees with PhD as a proportion of total employees compared to Indian firms.

There must be a concerted effort to employ PhDs in industry. At one end, the quality of PhDs programs has been questionable, while on the other, the lack of employment opportunities make PhD a low-aspiration career. This could be rectified by the industry working more closely with academic institutions and PhD students, like they did for management and engineering programmes. It will enhance student aspirations for doing a PhD, improve incoming talent and create a pipeline for the industry.

The industry and academia should leverage new technologies such as AI and

Boards are used to benchmarking their firms on various parameters and R&D indicators should be a welcome addition

GenAI to fundamentally transform research. Take, for instance, the recent collaboration between Microsoft and the US Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, where they developed novel battery materials that are entirely new and not found in nature.

Joint research projects with academia help test bold ideas at lower risk. A speaker at the Indian Science Festival highlighted successful development of Sodium-ion battery and Hydrogen production technology indigenously by working closely with Indian academia. However, they faced bureaucratic hurdles related to contracts, procurement, and technology transfers.

Incidentally, the Ease of Doing Science Index, 2023 also rated the ease of commercialisation of research in top Indian academic institutions at 55 out of 100. As industry takes up working closer to academia, the government and institutions need to do their part in easing the process.

The IIT Madras Research Park model of "credit point system" for incentivising industrial research has been successful. For instance, Saint Gobain Research India has undertaken 22 R&D projects that have resulted in the launch of over 20 new products and 5 per cent of their patents. There is also an opportunity for the industry to work with the growing deeptech start-up ecosystem. It can be a win-win, where industry can tap into small, focussed teams with great talent and entrepreneurs can get go-to-market support in complex industrial ecosystems. This can be facilitated through industry-led funds and accelerators.

RESEARCH OUTPUT

Regarding output R&D indicators, global firms published 1.3x research articles as compared to Indian firms and 13.1x more patents than Indian firms when normalised by revenue. While the difference in patents is large, India has seen 63.4 per cent increase in the number of patents filed and a 123.3 per cent increase in the number of patents granted between FY19 and FY23. These are very encouraging trends; however, the final test lies in shaping R&D-led product innovation for creating

best-in-class products from India and boosting exports. The itihaasa Research and Digital reports on the Indian R&D landscape in AI/ML, Brain Science and Quantum Technologies identify how industry and academia can synergise their strengths to foster translational research develop an Indian capability in strategically important emerging technology domains.

For example, we need to identify national priority use-cases upfront to enlist industry partners from the initial stages of defining applications.

The government also has an important role to play. A ₹1 lakh crore fund to boost private investment in sunrise technologies announced recently by the government is a welcome step. This can be designed to lend debt to corporations to do a mix of building indigenous capacity and technology acquisition to go up the value chain quickly.

Some proportion of the fund could also be modelled as a demand side incentive, an extension of product-linked incentives (PLIs), where value-added products are subsidised, or bulk procured. The newly announced ANRF also has a big target to raise from the industry. The government must allow CSR money to be given to ANRF and government research institutions under ANRF rules.

In summary, Indian firms must invest in mission-style R&D-led product innovation programmes and create research labs that work with academia to enable this. Government must incentivise industry R&D and innovation and simplify the bureaucratic hurdles firms face in working with academic institutions.

The current macroeconomic conditions in India — including a large economy, thriving start-up ecosystem, large local markets and a network of research institutions are favourable for the industry to get high returns on their R&D investments. The Indian industry, government and academic institutions can come together to make India an innovation economy. The time is now.

Gopalakrishnan is Co-founder of Infosys, President of the Infosys Science Foundation and Chairman of Axilor Ventures; Aggarwal is Founder at FAST India and The Change Engine

Travails of women who are not quite women

It will take India decades before empathy and understanding about transgenders becomes the norm

Sathya Saran

They entered the first class compartment of the local, flying in like birds of bright plumage, to settle down on the floor of the vestibule. Dressed as they were in bright, well cut Indian clothes which were colourful, and tastefully put together, it was obvious they were off on a outing.

In sharp contrast to the women who were seated inside the compartment, each of whom was immersed in her mobile phone, these women were in high spirits; their voices ringing out as they talked animatedly among themselves.

It was only their voices, deep, and manly that gave away the fact that they were transgenders.

When the crowds in the compartment thinned as the train approached South Mumbai, they came in to take their seats. It was heartening to see how carefully each of them had put her look together. The make-up was clever, applied with almost a professional touch of

invisibility, only the glow on their skins gave away any intimation of artifice. The hair was in place, neat and stylishly cut.

There was an obvious pride in the way they carried themselves, women who had freed themselves of a body that did not belong to them, and found their true persona. Often they would let the dupatta that they wore float away, and let the deep neckline of their clothes display ample cleavage.

HARSH TRUTH

Yet behind all the blandishments of their freed state, the truth could not be denied. Of a harsh childhood, of coming to terms with their sexuality, of having to swim against the current of moral policing and societal norms. What battles must each of them have fought, battles both emotional and physical, to reach where she was today, able to dress as she pleased, and flaunt the body that she had gained after who know what travails.

And then there is the fact that as women, who are not quite women, for



TRANSGENDERS. Quest for equality

motherhood is an impossibility; their hearts must yearn for a nest to live, nurture and be nurtured in. Even as they give in to sexual abuse by the very society that sidesteps them in the open, pretending they can have no common cause with them.

Neither education nor activism can guarantee them a good life. Nor is a marriage of love any insurance against abuse and abandonment. Not long ago,

Dr Akkai Padmashali, a transgender who married for love, adopted a child and built a home in Karnataka, where her marriage was registered, walked out of her marriage where abuse had become the norm. Like any woman, she suffered silently at first.

The very man who had wooed her, and married her with mangalsutra, ring, and by saying qubool thrice, to respect all religions, assaulted her when drunk, harassed her for dowry, and physically hurt the child they had adopted. Though an activist, Padmashali put up with it as long as she could because she had experienced the 'brutality of the system' and did not want to risk going to police authorities in a small town where prejudices were stronger than in cities.

Despite awareness, the change towards acceptance is slow. And it will take India decades before empathy and understanding about transgenders becomes the norm. Till then, despite their self-assurance and their bravado, trapped between rigid gender walls, they travel sitting in the vestibule of life.

● **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Chinese investments

The article "Should we open doors to Chinese investments?" (August 9), presents a valid case with lucid analysis to counter the argument to open doors to Chinese investments on the guise of reining in trade deficit. Factoring in the lessons from history it is always prudent to tread with caution in dealing with Chinese investments, despite the Economic Survey and a section of economists favouring it. Given the prevailing tensions on the border, retaining the case-by-case approval on merit is the best option.

Jose Abraham
Kattiparambil (Kerala)

Allow China FDI

Apropos "Should we open doors to Chinese investments?" (August 8). No doubt Chinese economic prowess is much stronger than India's. Decision to block FDI appears more political, a fallout of the border tensions. Although government has been promoting FDI from other countries, focus on exports is a must since China too plays a major role which cannot be neglected; any restriction only widens the rift.

Rajiv Magal
Halekere Village (Karnataka)

Waqf Act Amendments

Apropos of the Waqf Act Amendment Bill laid in Lok Sabha and reference to Joint Parliamentary Committee, it is apparent that Modi Govt is fully aware of the sensitivity of the issue and is in no haste. Various sects of Muslims like Shia, Ahmadiyya and Bohra complained of irregularities and discriminations under Waqf Boards. Lack of transparency, misappropriation of Waqf properties and income, monopolies on mosques and mausoleums necessitated amendments in Waqf Act and Waqf Boards and identification of the illegally

occupied properties. The protests to the amendments by the Opposition parties should be borne on the facts and reality. It would have been better if such irregularities, complaints of misappropriation of Waqf properties, diversion of income and illegal claims on properties of Hindu temples, should have been exposed and some investigations should have been ordered before introducing the Waqf Amendment Bill.

Vinod Johri
New Delhi

Out of sync

Quarterly results of listed companies

show a tepid topline growth since the past few quarters. So why are the markets rising consistently? FMCG growth of 3.8 per cent for June quarter indicates that consumption is low because people have no money in their hands to buy. People are shifting money from banks to the stock markets in search of better returns. But with earnings not in step with the stock prices has sent PE ratios through the roof. This is unhealthy for the economy of the nation. Sooner or later reality is going to hit and send markets tumbling down.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai



Reign of chaos

Yunus should end the violence against minorities in Bangladesh

The first appeal to the public from Mohammad Yunus, Nobel laureate and the head of Bangladesh's interim government, after he landed in Dhaka from Paris on Thursday, was to “save the country from chaos and violence”. The octogenarian pioneer of microfinance is taking charge of the country at one of its most tumultuous phases. Days after former Prime Minister and Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina resigned and left amid violent mass protests, the nation of 170 million people remains on edge as violence refuses to recede. Law enforcement officials are missing and the state bureaucracy has become non-functional in the absence of a government. Extremist sections have used the chaos to target Hindus, Ahmedis, a minority sect in Islam, and Awami League functionaries. According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the houses and shops of minorities were looted in several districts. Offices of the Awami League were vandalised and dozens of party functionaries and supporters were killed. Mr. Yunus, who was sworn in on Thursday, condemned the violence and appealed for calm. As the banker begins his role as an administrator, his challenge would be to bring Bangladesh back from the brink and restore the rule of law.

By appointing Mr. Yunus, someone who is acceptable to the student protesters and the political opposition, the military and Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin have shown signs of reconciliation. At a time when there is much hostility among political parties, an interim government headed by a technocrat is a pragmatic first step. But Mr. Yunus does not have the political machinery to back him up and will have to be dependent on the mainstream parties or the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. He also faces three critical medium-term challenges. First, he has to make sure that the military stays in the barracks. The military has an infamous past and it took years of mass movement, led by Ms. Hasina and Khaleda Zia, the BNP leader, to bring the dictatorship to an end in 1990. Second, Mr. Yunus has to build at least temporary peace in Bangladesh's polity. Ms. Hasina's fall has empowered the Jamaat and the BNP. Jamaat, a majoritarian Islamist group, has had a particularly bloodied past, while the years the BNP was in power were marked by political violence and vendetta. Lastly, Mr. Yunus's administration should facilitate free and fair elections at the earliest. Only an elected government with popular legitimacy can steer the country out of the troubles it is in today. The success of Bangladesh's uprising is dependent on the will and the ability of the country's new rulers to tackle these challenges.

Reassuring resolve

Growth can only be tenuous if retail inflation is unchecked

The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has for a ninth straight meeting chosen to keep benchmark interest rates unchanged as it continues to battle retail inflation that has stubbornly stayed above its medium-term target of 4% for 57 months and is beginning to undermine consumer confidence. Laying out the rationale, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das was emphatic that there was no room for complacency given the risks that persistently elevated food price pressures posed to households' inflation expectations and broader monetary policy credibility. Elevated food prices, he stressed, had not only slowed disinflation in the April-June quarter but had also extended their momentum into July with high frequency food price data pointing to sizeable month-on-month increases in key vegetable prices. Citing Department of Consumer Affairs data, he said tomato prices had surged 62% sequentially, while onion had become almost 23% costlier than in June and potato prices had increased 18%. Food prices, with a weight of about 46% in the overall Consumer Price Index, could not afford to be overlooked, not just for their impact on headline inflation but far more significantly because consumers related the most to the impact food prices had on monthly household budgets. He indicated, without explicitly referencing it, that a suggestion in the Economic Survey urging policymakers to consider delinking food prices from the inflation targeting framework made little sense in the circumstances.

The MPC, which voted by a 4-2 majority to hold interest rates and keep the policy stance focused on the withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation aligns to the target, also raised its projection for headline retail inflation in the July-September quarter to 4.4%, 60 basis points higher than the 3.8% pace projected in June. The rate panel also posited slightly faster inflation in the third fiscal quarter than it had forecast previously, lifting the projection by 10 basis points to 4.7%, in a clear sign that the near-term inflation outlook appears less reassuring than it did just two months ago. And while Mr. Das noted that, in June, vegetable prices had contributed about 35% to headline inflation, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, in an analysis, forecast price pressures in vegetables to 'sustain well into the festive season through till early November', adding pressure on retail headline inflation. Core inflation may also have bottomed out according to the MPC, which flagged the risks of spillover from food prices, as well as the impact mobile tariff revisions may have on broader non-food inflation. Policymakers hearteningly reiterated the truism that without ensuring enduring price stability, growth may at best be tenuous.

Refugee rights, the gendered nature of displacement

Armed conflict, violence, human rights abuses, and persecution compel millions across the world to flee their homes and homelands for survival, and become 'displaced people' in the process. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2023, 11.73 crore people, worldwide, had been forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. Among them, 3.76 crore were refugees. With the Israel-Hamas war having escalated since then, the Ukraine-Russia war continuing, and Rohingyas facing fresh threats in Myanmar, the number of refugees worldwide is only expected to multiply significantly.

Female face to refugee demographics

India has historically been perceived as a 'refugee-receiving' nation having hosted over 2,00,000, diverse refugee groups since its independence. As of January 31, 2022, 46,000 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR India. 46% of this population is comprised of women and girls, a disproportionately burdened and vulnerable group. They are made solely accountable for children, are often the last to flee, are saddled with gendered care-giving responsibility for both the old and the young, and are often required to single-handedly bear responsibility for the family's sustenance.

The United Nations Population Fund has acknowledged that “the face of displacement is female”. The gendered nature of displacement impacts women's physical and mental health as well as their well-being. Refugee women are affected by a multitude of stressors spanning deaths of partners and children, hardships of camp life, complex alterations in family dynamics, limited access to community networks, and reduced safety. Prolonged conflict, post-conflict gender role shifts, a breakdown of traditional social support systems, and socio-economic challenges associated with displacement collectively expose refugee women to increased risks of gender-based abuse, including practices such as transactional sex.

The enhanced exposure to physical and sexual violations renders them unduly susceptible to psychological and psychosocial conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder and depression. Displaced women are twice as likely to exhibit symptoms of PTSD and over four times as likely to exhibit depression, as compared to their male counterparts. A study in Darfur, Sudan showed that 72% of displaced women were affected with conditions such as PTSD and general distress due to traumatic events and living conditions in camps. Evidence indicates that female refugees are at a greater risk of developing diagnosable mental health-related illnesses when compared to their male



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counterparts. Social and gender inequalities, especially when refugee populations belong to patriarchal societies, lead to the experiences and testimonies of displaced women being dismissed. This epistemic injustice results in their conditions often going unnoticed. Displaced women with psychological vulnerabilities also end up being stigmatised and isolated. Given their limited financial resources, refugee families tend to prioritise physical over mental health, and the health of men over women. Consequently, it is not surprising that displaced women with psychosocial disabilities rarely, if ever, receive necessary support. Mental health service use has been reported to be lower among refugees than local populations and among women than men. The situation is worse when the host society is also traditionally patriarchal, as is the case with India. In India, community participation is predominantly male-dominated, leaving refugee women isolated in a foreign land without a platform to voice their concerns. Further, the pervasive stigma surrounding psychosocial disabilities restricts their access to information. The mental health services then available to them are typically either in government hospitals that have extended wait times or through support services by (unregulated) non-governmental organisations. These services are often only sought, after issues have severely escalated. In seeking these limited options as well, refugee women encounter challenges such as stigma, feelings of shame, communication barriers, and limited mental health literacy and awareness of available services.

Conventions, rights and India's role

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), recognises ‘long-term mental or intellectual impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder full and effective participation in society’ as ‘psychosocial disability’; it guarantees a plethora of rights to the affected persons. The UNCRPD also recognises that ‘women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination’ and mandates measures to ensure ‘full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (Article 6). These guarantees are required to be secured to all without any discrimination (Article 5).

India ratified the UNCRPD and, subsequently, enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWDA) which provides corresponding guarantees to persons with disabilities. While the term ‘psychosocial disability’ is not yet a part of the country's legislative parlance, “mental illness” is used to describe ‘a substantial disorder of thinking, mood, perception, orientation or memory that grossly impairs judgement, behaviour, capacity to recognise reality or ability to meet the ordinary demands of life...’ Persons with ‘mental illness’, as a category of persons with disabilities, are

Refugee women, especially those with disabilities are guaranteed certain rights but are seldom able to realise them given the multitude of barriers they face

No population Census — in the dark without vital data

The Indian decadal Census has been delayed by more than three years now despite several concerns having been raised about the consequences of not having a Census. In fact, there is an overwhelming misconception among officials on substituting the Census with alternative ways and means of counting the population.

The Census is not limited to offer a population count. It includes a wide range of locational, familial and individual information that serves to understand the changing population dynamic in its entirety. The first and foremost limitation of avoiding a Census lies in the reliability of all our large-scale surveys such as National Family Health Survey and Periodic Labour Force Survey carried out on a Census frame that is one and a half decades old.

The need to understand many changes

Further, this decade-and-a-half has been a period of potential transformation not only in population count and its composition but also on many other features relating to education, occupation, employment, health (COVID-19) and livelihoods. Considering the significance of examining these features, delaying the Census sounds most irresponsible. To think of an alternative to the Census is naive. However, there is universal echo on conducting a caste Census to serve political ends more than development planning, which undoubtedly reveals the limited understanding on the utility of a Census and its relevance for course correction in many presumed strategies for human welfare.

Missing the 2021 Census can never be an excuse given that a general election was conducted in the midst of all uncertainties. The machinery needed for a Census exercise is perhaps quite comparable to that of an election. Therefore, it feels like the Census is being avoided more than being delayed, with undue reasons.



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The Census is not limited to being a mere population count; it includes a wide range of crucial locational, familial and individual information

However, opinions are not scarce on evaluating government schemes and programmes in terms of their coverage and consequential impact. Unfortunately, without a proper denominator, monitoring the success of any programme will be misleading.

The urgency of having a population Census and not delaying it any more has numerous grounds of reasoning, particularly a rapid demographic transition and the resultant demographic dividend. A population Census is more than necessary to reveal these changes along with familial structures, locational distribution and occupational composition. Further, in the absence of a Census frame, the surveys carried out will be less reliable and representative which has been the basis of generating a whole host of SDG indicators. And the measure of progress in the SDG claimed, based on these indicators, may well be under scrutiny given their statistical inadequacies.

The world population prospects reveal unique features of population change and good demographic data, which will be of great significance for population giants such as India and China more than for other regions of the world. Given that the world population scenario is greatly influenced by Indian population features, it is essential to have the reality of its population features obtained in the Census rather than presuming estimated values based on past trends that depend on projections and extrapolations. Rendering the Census exercise to be a mere population count is a misnomer that needs to be reiterated for a wider audience.

In the prevailing SDG environment, there has been an obsession with regard to the generation of a wide range of indicators with disaggregation below the sub-national level. Such indicators pertain to many dimensions that need a standardisation by population count (not only aggregate but also its segmented count by age,

guaranteed a host of rights under the RPWDA, including the right to health care, encompassing free and barrier-free access besides priority in attendance and treatment (Section 25). The RPWDA also mandates the state to ensure that women with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others (Section 4).

However, simply by virtue of their not being Indian nationals, refugee women with psychosocial disabilities are filtered out from the implementation of this guarantee. This is attributable to factors such as the legal and administrative framework's oversight of non-nationals in distribution of rights and services, social stigma and discrimination, lack of awareness, language barriers and financial constraints.

The Supreme Court of India has consistently affirmed refugees' inherent right to life under Article 21, encompassing the right to health. However, refugees' access to health-care services is extremely limited and predominantly restricted to government hospitals. They are excluded from most public health and nutrition programmes available to citizens, and given their limited means, private hospitals are prohibitively expensive. Consequently, in the absence of any express guarantees extending the purview of the RPWDA to refugees with disabilities or safeguarding their interests as per the UNCRPD (Articles 6, 11 and 18), refugee women with ‘psychosocial disability’ or ‘mental illness’ despite being guaranteed the right to health remain unable to realise it. The ensuing violation of their right to life not only contradicts the express directives of the Court but also renders the mandate of the UNCRPD hollow and nugatory.

Filling up the structural gap

India is neither a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, nor does it have any specific domestic legislation pertaining to refugees, let alone refugees with disabilities. Given the vast refugee population in the country, it is imperative to establish a uniform, codified framework that provides adequate language for implementing India's international commitments. This is also necessitated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasises empowering vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities and refugees.

To secure the implementation of the aforesaid guarantees, it is crucial to integrate refugees with disabilities into relevant policies and programmes in an accessible manner. Effective policy-making also depends on collection of disaggregated data on their health conditions, necessitating swift and systematic identification and registration processes.

What remains to be seen is how and when this is done. Until then, the pressing question is, whether they must continue to endure, or, lose hope and give up.

sex and many other attributes), that is compromised in the absence of a Census. Approximated numbers or survey-based estimates are quite insufficient to represent changing realities.

The caste Census cry

While the urgency and the immediacy of a Census exercise does not appear to be on the horizon, political masters are engaged in raising the need for a caste Census to serve their purposes. In fact, a caste auditing in India at a time when we claim everything to be rosy seems to be out of place.

The history of the Census exercise makes it clear that such an auditing was made in its initial phases, and that its discontinuation must have a reason. No one should be misled that a caste auditing is backed by a genuine intent of reading inclusion of different caste groups. It is largely to establish differential entitlements citing a lack of representation and deprivation. However, tangible endowments are perhaps a limited way to diagnose deprivation rather than making an assessment of the intangible domains such as education and occupation. Unfortunately, there is a complete absence of any systematic assessment of mobility in the said domains of education and occupation against the axis of caste despite sustained affirmative action for so long.

Finally keeping the Census at bay is perhaps in the interest of the state to claim progress and betterment basing on numerators alone without its appropriate denominator in the computation of indicators. Hence, the scientific community should convey the need for a Census without any further delay to get out of the illusion that surveys and many other administrative statistics are a replacement for the Census. So the key apprehension remains: has the Census been delayed? Or is there a convincing attempt to avoid the Census?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bidding time?

It is a bit amusing to have former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, saying that his mother would be back in Dhaka as soon as democracy is restored ('World' page, August 9). Ms. Hasina would not have left Bangladesh had the

spirit of democracy prevailed during her regime. **C.G. Kuriakose**, Kothamangalam, Kerala

India and the Olympics

Neeraj Chopra has again proven his exceptional talent on the world stage. Let us also acknowledge the outstanding achievement of Arshad Nadeem. While

celebrating Neeraj's success, it is essential to recognise the spirit of sportsmanship and commend the efforts of all athletes ('Sport' page, "Arshad's 92.97m dethrones Neeraj", August 9). **Sanjit Pal Singh**, Ichhapur, West Bengal

For a nation that had to undergo the agony and

trauma of disqualification of ace wrestler Vinesh Phogat, the sparkling victories secured by Neeraj Chopra in javelin and the Indian hockey team at Paris, should indeed be soothing and refreshing. Neeraj Chopra's well-deserved victory is a perfect tribute to his grit and determination, and

relentless hard work. **B. Suresh Kumar**, Coimbatore

It is clear from the full-page data-graphic that not only has India's performance in the Olympics been sad but it is evident that we do not have much potential in the Olympics as such (Opinion page, "A widening Olympic

quest", August 9). With a population of over 1.4 billion, it is unfortunate that we have a meagre presence in most international events. In contrast, China has marched ahead in the medal tally. It is high time we realise that sport is part of a nation's evolution. **Raghunath Menon**, Hyderabad

GROUND ZERO



Change makers Drone footage of the Bangladesh Parliament House in Dhaka, when Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has resigned after weeks of unrest and an interim government would be formed to run the country. EPA-EFE

The making of the Bangladesh revolt

How students took down an elected government prone to authoritarianism. **Rabiul Alam** reports on the developments from July 1, when images coming out of the country showed a movement driven by both anger and courage. University representatives are now part of the country's interim government

As dawn approached on Saturday morning of July 20, a disturbing scene unfolded in Monsur Nagar Housing Estate in Savar upazila, on the outskirts of Dhaka. Some eight to 10 plainclothes men identifying themselves as being from the detective branch (DB) of Bangladesh Police, surrounded the home of Abul Khair, a 70-year-old, who had fought in the 1971 war for freedom. The officers, armed and aggressive, began shouting and demanded that Khair open the gate, threatening to break it down if he did not. Soon, they forcefully entered, seized the family's phones and detained Khair's two sons, Arif Sohel, 27, and Mohammad Ali Jewel.

While Jewel was released, Sohel went missing for the next 36 hours. No police station the family approached denied his detention; nor did they show his arrest, says the family. He was allegedly beaten up and not given food. For this brief spell, the family says Sohel was another victim of 'enforced disappearance', a common tactic the people of Bangladesh say the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government used, to suppress dissent. Then, he was officially shown as arrested and placed on a seven-day remand in a case his family says is fabricated. Sohel's father says, "The behavior of the law enforcement agencies was similar to that of the Pakistani military during the Liberation War."

Sohel is a student and convener of the Jahangir Nagar University of Students Against Discrimination movement that swept the country from July 1. The students were protesting the June 5 Dhaka Supreme Court ruling to reinstate a 30% government job quota for descendants of 1971 independence war veterans (the quota had been withdrawn in 2018).

Student unrest

Like many other movements across the world, including India's Mandal Commission and China's Tiananmen square, students across Bangladesh took to the streets in the thousands. They demanded the abolition of the quota and the establishment of a merit-based system instead. Underlying the anti-quota protests though, was the fear that members of the Awami League, the political party that led Bangladesh's independence movement against Pakistan, would benefit.

The student protests were met with a brutal reaction from the government. Citizens went through raids, in which thousands of students, opposition leaders, and others were arrested for their alleged involvement in the Students Against Discrimination movement. A curfew was imposed on the midnight of July 19. Images of the army and police firing on students came out of the country, with India saying this was Bangladesh's "internal matter", the same way that Hasina's government had described India's Citizenship Amendment Act in 2022. In fact, Hasina was the first state guest to visit India after the Bharatiya



"India is effectively Bangladesh's only neighbour. It is also a very major trade partner. It makes no sense for Bangladesh not to have a cordial relationship with India

SHAHIDUL ALAM
Human rights activist and photographer

Janata Party government came to power for a third term this year.

When violence broke out, about 300 Indian students who had been pursuing MBBS degrees, returned home. The internet was cut, and it was difficult to reach friends and relatives. So far, 439 people have died in the violence, as per Prothom Alo, a leading newspaper in Bangladesh.

Under pressure from students, the Supreme Court scaled back the quota on July 21 to 5%, with an additional 2% for ethnic minorities. Sifat Hasan Sakib, one of the organisers from Dhaka's government-run Jagannath University, says, "We fought against discrimination, and students won the fight, even at the cost of lives. We want a peaceful environment on university campuses, which has been absent for a long time due to the student wing of the Awami League, Bangladesh Chhatra League. Regular students' union elections can play a crucial role in protecting the rights of students."

Students say the Bangladesh Chhatra League dominates student life on campus, doling out privileges only to its members, and capturing posts that no other student organisation was allowed to hold. Abdullah Al Mamun, a recent graduate from the English Department of Dhaka College, expressed his frustration, saying, "There was no alternative but to take to the streets in protest.... Sheikh Hasina would often boast about economic development, but at the same time, she allowed Chhatra League to dismantle the education system in Bangladesh."

He says the integrity of job examinations was severely compromised. "It was common for exam paper leaks. Moreover, the viva boards were biased, often favoring candidates affiliated with Chhatra League. This left general students with little hope of securing a job. The system was rigged against us."

Bangladesh's tipping point

Similar to how the 1857 uprising was sparked by a long history of disenchantment with British op-

pression, the students' movement emerged from deep-seated political and social angst against authoritarianism and human rights violations. Thousands joined from across the country, and it was so strong it compelled Hasina to resign in the presence of the three service chiefs and flee the country, on August 5 this year. The former Prime Minister, elected for the fifth time in January this year, arrived in India and continues to be here, her future plans uncertain.

When she left her official residence, Ganabhaban, the public stormed its lavish premises. The world saw images of people making off with suitcases and deep freezers, but also goats, fish, and a German Shepherd pup. Statues of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina's father, considered the founding father of Bangladesh, were vandalised, the video going viral.

The army chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, called for peace, and on August 6 it was announced that Muhammad Yunus, the 84-year-old pioneer of microfinance who won the Nobel prize in 2006, would lead an interim government, with 16 advisers, including two student representatives. The Hasina government had filed over 200 cases against the Grameen Bank founder, for corruption.

It wasn't just student politics that brought the Hasina government down. According to Bangladesh human rights organisations, security forces have committed over 600 enforced disappearances since 2009. While some people were later released, produced in court, or said to have died during an armed exchange with security forces, nearly 100 people remain missing, they say.



There was no alternative but to take to the streets in protest.... Sheikh Hasina...allowed Chhatra League to dismantle the education system in Bangladesh

ABDULLAH AL MAMUN
Graduate from the English Department, Dhaka College

These actions angered people. For instance, Brigadier General (suspended) Abdullahil Amaan Azmi was released from the detention centre known as Aynaghar (House of Mirrors), after eight years of captivity in the early hours of August 6. Azmi is the son of late Ghulam Azam, the former *ameer* (chief) of the Jamaat-e-Islami, a religion-based political party that was started in 1941 and has its roots in present-day Pakistan. He was allegedly forcibly picked up from his residence on August 23, 2016, and had since been missing. The Hasina government had repeatedly denied the existence of Aynaghar and 23 other detention camps, where political opponents were allegedly kept.

The Hasina government had, on August 1, banned the Jamaat-e-Islami, saying it was a threat to public security. The Jamaat is a key ally of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), who was then in jail on charges of corruption, but now released. "They (Jamaat and BNP) just used the students as their shield," Hasina had said, when Italian Ambassador Antonio Alessandro called on her, news agency PTI reported.

The Jamaat's central executive committee member and the party's media and publicity secretary, Matiur Rahman Akanda, calls the 2024 election a "dummy election".

After the fall of the Hasina regime, families of political prisoners secretly jailed under her rule have gathered in front of Director General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) headquarters. Sanjida Islam Tulee, co-founder of Mayer Dak, an organization of the families of the victims of 'enforced

disappearances', says, "We have learnt from recently released former army officer Brigadier General Abdullahil Aman Azmi that there are many others in that Aynaghar. We went to the DGFI office to find out who is detained there and to talk about the issue." They demand that the prisoners be released together instead of separately.

Media strangulation

The Bangladeshi media have often accused the government of stifling freedom of speech and assembly. According to a research paper by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), at least 451 journalists were sued under the Digital Security Act (DSA) since its inception and 255 of them were sued for their journalistic reports. Among the accused, 209 journalists are associated with national-level Bangladesh media and 197 with regional media outlets. The CGS found that at least 4,520 people have been charged in 1,436 cases filed between October 2018 and September 2023.

Raihan Hossain, a journalist from Jago News, an online news outlet in Bangladesh, says journalists in Bangladesh have faced huge challenges, particularly when reporting on sensitive issues like the extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, and the corruptions.

He says, "Journalists who dared to investigate and report on these issues often faced severe threats. The powers-that-be would go to great lengths to silence us, using intimidation and fear to prevent any negative coverage. It was a constant battle, and many of us were put in positions where our safety was at risk simply for trying to do our jobs."

He adds that the situation was further complicated by the government's blatant 'favouritism' for certain media outlets. "Newspapers that aligned with the government's agenda were granted numerous facilities and privileges, while those that attempted to maintain journalistic integrity were often deprived of essential resources. This made it increasingly difficult for independent journalism to thrive, as the government's influence over the media landscape created an environment where only the voices that supported the official narrative could prosper."

A rise in minority violence

After Hasina's fall, there has also been a rise in violence against the Hindu minority. According to Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), 200-300 Hindu homes and businesses were vandalized, and 15-20 temples were damaged. Many have been injured.


Rana Dasgupta, the general secretary of the BHBCUC Oikya Parishad says, "Some of those whose homes were attacked may be directly involved in Awami League politics, but 98% are Hindus not involved in political activity." He hopes the interim government will restore stability and protect minorities. Student and Jamaat leaders have put out statements asking supporters to guard temples and churches as diplomats and rights groups expressed concerns over reports of attacks on minority groups.

Monzurul Islam, president of the Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, says they do not consider any group a minority or majority in the country: "Everyone is equal," he says, despite the group's belief that the reason for Hasina's political dominance in the country was India. Hindus, who form 8% of the population of over 17 crore, were traditionally Awami League supporters.

Photographer and human rights activist Shahidul Alam says, "India is effectively Bangladesh's only neighbour. It is also a major trade partner. It makes no sense for Bangladesh not to have a cordial relationship with India." He hopes though that a future relationship will be based on equality, rather than that of a 'big brother'.



Smoke billows near a burnt Awami League party office as anti-government protesters set fire to it in Dhaka on August 6, 2024. AFP



A thought for today
Howsoever serious a crime may be, an accused has a right to speedy trial as enshrined under the Constitution of India
SUPREME COURT

Bail, Under Any Law

SC's Sisodia order should be a widely followed precedent

The points on which Supreme Court granted Sisodia bail in the Delhi liquor policy case mark a precedent for bail not only in cases under PMLA, but also for those laws where application of bail is limited, such as anti-terror law UAPA.

Jail without bail | Yesterday, SC reiterated the principle of bail not jail, saying a long time behind bars – almost 18 months in Sisodia's case – before conviction shouldn't become "punishment without trial". For context, earlier this week Parliament was told that in the last decade, 5,297 cases were filed under PMLA, conviction secured in 40 – that's less than 1%.



Policy & quid pro quo | SC queried investigators on how they "per se infer" conspiracy from the mere fact that a policy benefited certain wholesalers. SC asked, "Where do you draw the line between policy and criminality?"

Delay in trial | The key point: SC said both trial court and HC should have noted top court's Oct 2023 judgment that "prolonged incarceration" and "delay in trial" should be read into bail provisions in both criminal code CrPC and PMLA. SC had said that a speedy trial is an accused's "basic right". That, when trial isn't proceeding "for reasons not attributable to the accused, court...may grant bail. This would be truer where the trial would take years."

Denied bail last year, SC had allowed Sisodia to re-apply if "trial...proceeds at a snail's pace in next three months". Yesterday, SC referenced investigators' claim from Oct 2023 that trial would be completed in "6 to 8 months". Investigators, SC said, were unprepared to start trial. From Elgar Parishad cases to those on Delhi riots, and several PMLA cases, securing bail is often process as punishment. It is this that SC's Sisodia order can put a stop to.

Mind Your Meds

Foreign drugs can be sold minus trial, but carefully

Govt decision to waive clinical trials for breakthrough therapies cleared in a few developed countries like US, UK, Canada and Japan is a significant development. In all, five categories of drugs will be impacted by the move. There's a lot to be said in favour of the decision. There's no doubt that developed countries have better regulatory standards than the rest of the world. Insisting on local trials has seen the launch of cutting-edge drugs being delayed by years in India. Availability of the latest drugs for cancer and rare diseases will not just medically help patients but also reduce their healthcare costs.

Yet, some caution would be in order here. The approval for any such drug launch must happen on a case-by-case basis, as has been promised. For, as a *British Medical Journal* probe found, institutional corruption is rampant among drug regulators even in developed countries. New drugs having "significant therapeutic advances over the current standard care" form one category in govt's list. What this means must be defined clearly. Pharma companies in the West regularly make incremental changes to their formulations, get approvals and raise prices. Would all these pass muster? The bottom line is that access to cutting-edge drugs must not become a free-for-all. Our regulatory processes matter, as do clinical trials, in some cases, that keep in mind genetic, metabolic and other differences in India's population while assessing drugs.

Can Men & Women Be Equal In Love?

It's tough. Male domination is built into idea of romance

The personal is the political. And nothing is more personal than a romantic relationship. **Reinventing Love: How the Patriarchy Sabotages Heterosexual Relations** by French feminist **Mona Chollet** explores the dynamics of romantic love in the context of gender inequality.

Men and women are methodically socialised not to understand each other. The whole drama of our novels and pop culture and romcoms involves conventions of domination and submission. In our romantic representations, the woman is inferior in some way. Even minor things like a woman being taller, or earning more than a man, would be a buzzkill – Carla Bruni routinely posed on a step below her shorter husband Nicolas Sarkozy, pictures of Prince Charles were contrived to make him look taller than his then wife Diana. Women smile, practise being pleasant, are careful not to be 'too much', too loud or powerful. Athletes like Serena Williams have been disciplined through derision. To be desirable, women must diminish themselves.

Love is cast as a woman's main business. We condition girls to seek love through a man, rather than a healthy consideration for themselves. Female selflessness and masculine detachment are part of our relationship schema. And yet, the most elementary emotional needs of women are stigmatised, cast as needy and desperate. Meanwhile, boys are also taught to amputate their relational needs.

The book analyses the many manifestations of this inequality, drawing on literature, pop culture and the media discourse. It looks at conjugal violence, why women make excuses for men who hurt them, because they are trained to be empathetic to an extreme, rather

ment, but an ensemble of actions, it is what we do for the person we love. For women, this calls for an internal emancipation, to not be afraid to be alone, to change terms one does not like.

It is possible to have a more equal love story. Heterosexual love is not just a patriarchal con: men are not only oppressors, women are more than merely oppressed. But their tie is poisoned by domination, and we must see this dysfunction clearly. The edifice of conventional love must be dismantled to reconstruct another one. To peel off our masks, to question our own learned reflexes, that is the adventure and heroism of real love.

mindfield
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



Five Ways To Read Paris 2024

Bad luck hurt Team India. There were a few cases of consistent performance, individual excellence. Clearly, sporting infra has improved. But politicking sporting federations are a huge handicap

Rudraneil Sengupta



Paris may be the city of light and love, but for many in the Indian Olympic contingent, Paris will be remembered as the city of misfortune. Down from the seven medals won just three years back at the Tokyo Games, and no gold to boast of, this seems like an obvious setback for Indian sports. But there's much more to it than that simple calculation. Here are five takeaways.

First | Vinesh Phogat sitting on the floor in her grey sweatsuit, head down, eyes downcast, lost in thought – it's as defining an image for India from Paris 2024 as PR Sreejesh sitting alone astride the frame of his goal. Phogat had done it all – defeated the Japanese Yui Susaki, a wrestler unbeaten in the last decade, the Tokyo gold medalist and a four-time world champion, in her opening match, before destroying the rest of the field to take her place in the final, only to be disqualified on the morning of the gold medal bout for being over the weight limit by a mere 100gm. No one could have predicted this, and no one could have prevented this. It was pure bad luck.

Those who say that this has never happened before at an Olympics are missing a crucial perspective – wrestlers have needed to weigh-in twice (once on their first match day, and again the day after if they make the medal rounds) since only the Tokyo Games. Before that, wrestling was a strictly one-day affair at the Olympics, which meant fighters only had to lose weight once (as Vinesh had successfully done on the first day of her fight). Her ordeal has united the wrestling world to call for a rule change.

Meanwhile, fellow wrestler Nisha Dahiya was leading by as much as six points in her quarterfinal match when she tore a muscle in her arm; she carried on the fight in excruciating pain, but there was no way for her to win. Boxer Nikhat Zareen went in as the double world-champion in her category, but a political fallout between boxing's world body and International Olympic Committee (IOC) resulted in her being left unseeded in Paris, which, in turn, meant that she had to face the World No.1 in just her second bout, a fight she lost. If Zareen was seeded, she would have most probably met this boxer in the final. A similar fate kept Lovlina Borgohain away from the medal rounds.

And what else but bad luck explains the spate of fourth place finishes? India had six athletes who finished fourth.

Second | Despite the dip in medal numbers, the Paris experience has not been too different from Tokyo's, which is our best-ever performance at an Olympics.

Almost the same number of athletes made the cut from India for Tokyo (121) and Paris (117), most of the deficit accounted for by the shock failure of the women's hockey team to qualify. The consistency was impressive too – five of the seven medallists from Tokyo returned to Paris, and two – Neeraj Chopra and the Indian men's hockey team – managed to win medals again.

Third | Neeraj's second Olympic medal, a silver to follow his gold from Tokyo, makes him India's finest Olympian in an individual sport. This, along with the Indian hockey team's resurgence, are the two great success stories in Indian sports now. Neeraj did not need this Olympics to establish himself as one of the global stars of track & field. Back-to-back Olympic medals simply added another layer of aura to the tale of India's most extraordinary athlete. India's men's hockey team may have returned with the same medal as they won in Tokyo, a bronze, but there's a big difference. In Tokyo, India were the unfancied underdogs. This time, India were visibly as good as any hockey team in the world, even beating their bogey team Australia. If the Tokyo bronze was a glimmer of hope for Indian hockey, the performance in Paris is cause for all-out excitement.

Fourth | The sporting ecosystem in India has improved, whether the Paris results reflect it or not. India can now boast of some world-class infra, courtesy some state initiatives, but

mostly private centres that work closely with Olympic athletes, and lots of academies and sports science facilities run by former Olympians like Abhinav Bindra, Gagan Narang, Pulela Gopichand, Prakash Padukone etc. This has only happened over the past decade, and is still gathering steam. So what we have seen in Tokyo and Paris is just the tip of what's possible if we can continue providing the right environment for athletes.

Fifth | The biggest stumbling block in our sporting development remains the politicisation of our sports federations. The Indian women's hockey team did not qualify for Paris partly because the federation was embroiled in a power shift, which resulted in a fallout with the women's coach. The boxing federation changed coaches four times between Tokyo and Paris. The archery federation has long held the reputation of being one of the worst. Its president had not changed in 44 years before the body was suspended and new elections held

in 2020. Of the eight high-priority disciplines in sports that get high funding from govt, archery is the only one yet to bring back an Olympic medal. And finally, to understand the usual fiasco that is Indian sporting administration, look no further than what has gone on with Wrestling Federation of India over the past one-and-a-half years.

The writer is a sports journalist

In Praise Of Vinesh & All Other 'Difficult' Women

Wrestlers' sexual harassment case grinds on. #MeToo helped. But speaking up is still hard for women as they continue to be disbelieved, unless they are demanding & obstinate

Himanshi.Dhawan@timesofindia.com



"We don't know how to get justice in our country...I want to tell future generations they will have to fight for themselves." It was May 2023 and an exhausted Vinesh Phogat spoke to the media holding back her tears. She and the other wrestlers had tried everything to draw attention to the allegations of sexual harassment against then Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) boss Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh – street protests, complaints and memorandums to ministers and bureaucrats, relinquishing hard-earned awards and honours, being manhandled by police. Yet fairplay, which is supposed to be the cornerstone of any sport, if not politics, proved elusive.

In Jan 2023, Phogat, along with fellow Olympians Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia, had begun protests against Singh's alleged abuses and the administration's inaction. Over the following months, the WFI management was dissolved and a new election held. The harassment case is now being heard by Delhi HC.

But as the wheels of justice ground slowly, Phogat missed the opportunity to try out for her preferred Olympic category of 53kg. Fearing her only chance would be stymied by a hostile administration, she chose 50kg instead – and has had to pay the price in priceless metal. Never has the weight of a 100gm – that's just two eggs or 100 paper clips – felt so unbearable.

In hindsight, it is easy to sit in judgment on the decisions she made. But why did she have to make them? Why was she at Jantar Mantar for weeks on end rather than training for the Olympics like other athletes? In an interview with the Sport & Rights Alliance, an athlete rights organisation, she said, "Who will listen? If such great athletes did not get justice or if they struggled so much to be heard, how can a normal person feel safe?"

Over a decade after the Sexual Harassment of

Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, Redressal) Act or POSH law was enacted, research by Ashoka University's CEDA found that only a handful of companies bothered to report the complaints they had received despite mandatory disclosure. Of the 200 human resource persons interviewed, 59% said their companies had not set up an internal complaints committee. In 2022-23, only 1,160 complaints had been reported by the 300 companies surveyed.

That is not surprising news for any woman. The creepy hand on the shoulder, the side-eye when a lewd joke is cracked, or the suggestion that 'quality time' could mean an improvement in your career or a salary hike, are all familiar experiences for women at work. Often speaking up means taking on the establishment, which few can.

As journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey wrote in *She Said*, a behind-the-scenes account of their investigation of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, "All too often, women are sexually harassed with impunity...Women who spoke up were frequently dismissed or denigrated. Victims are often hidden and isolated from one another...Harassers are often accepted, even cheered, as mischievous bad boys. Serious consequences are rare."

The #MeToo movement, where women spoke up against the harassment they had endured silently over years, broke that dam somewhat but women continue to be disbelieved and labelled "difficult". Meanwhile

Trump can go on to fight another election.

Closer home, IAS officer Rupam Deol Bajaj (now retired) discovered the limits of her power when Punjab's top cop KPS Gill, who was convicted for molestation, not only continued to be lauded for his work but was let off with less than a rap on his knuckles, after his three-month jail sentence was reduced to a year of probation. Speaking about the case to *BBC*, she said, "The entire focus was on me. Why have I registered a case? There must be something wrong with me." This was nearly three decades ago, and progress has been painfully slow.

How we raise boys and how we treat women cannot be changed just by organising workshops in offices.

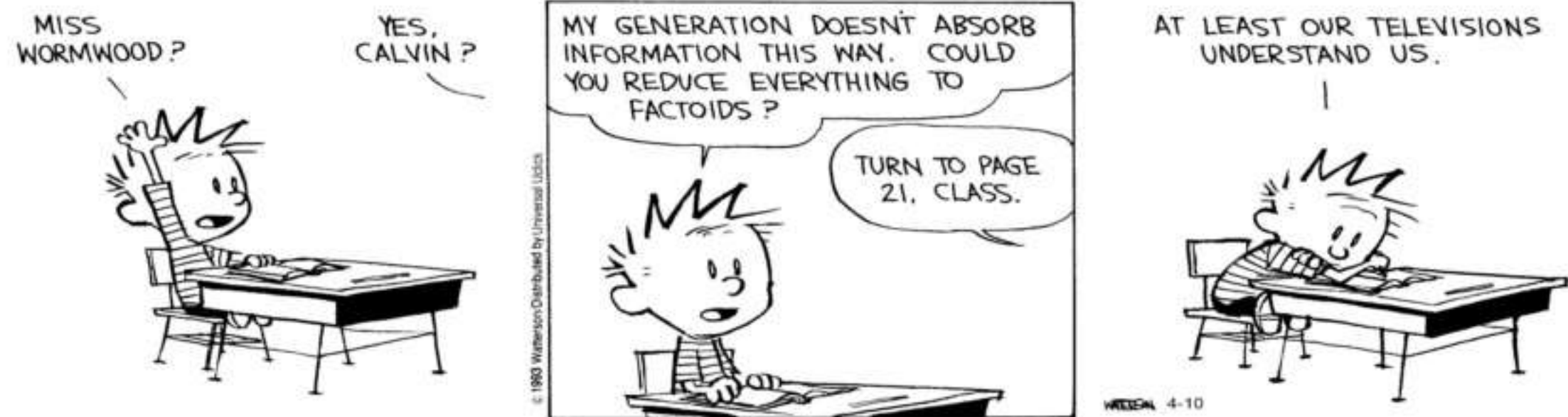
This has to begin at home, at the playground, in school, in businesses and companies where the effort to create an environment of safety should rank at least as high as turning a profit. Women must speak up, even at the expense of being dismissed as troublesome and difficult.

In *Difficult Women: A History of Feminism in 11 Fights*, Helen Lewis charts out a manifesto: "The Difficult Woman is not rude, petty or mean. She is simply willing to be awkward, if the situation demands it; demanding, if the occasion requires it; and obstinate, if someone tries to fob her off...Together, Difficult Women

can change the world."

Vinesh Phogat is a difficult woman – messy, obstinate, and true to herself. We could all learn a couple of *dau-peh* (tips) from her.

Calvin & Hobbes



Nothing Must Stand In The Way Of Psychic Presence

James Anderson

There is a flower deep inside each of us which yearns to bloom. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being, a term unique to his yoga. The psychic is the evolving soul, which is the key to all individual growth and evolution. Over innumerable lifetimes, if the being keeps moving upwards, the psychic edges forward, becoming more perceptible and eventually forms a 'conscious sheath' around the soul. And thus, 'identified with the Divine, it becomes the perfect instrument in the world.' Realising the psychic being is a supreme objective of Integral Yoga. Words cannot convey the knowledge of the psychic. This knowledge can only be encapsulated by experience.

The psychic being is the inimitable godhead that resides inside us all. Its influence is unmistakable. It carries the certitude of Truth and the fragrance of

Love. It is the true home of unconditional love, the adoring child of the Divine Mother. This 'Rose of God' is a portion of the Divine. It is like touching a spring we discover to be limitless. Whenever we call the Mother, we treat this entity to step forward. Whenever we consciously surrender to Her, we yield more and more to its presence.

The psychic being is the Soul Personality who maps out our destiny and expresses our unique Truth. Everything must be centred on this Truth. From the beginning, it secretly charts the 'main lines' and circumstances of our life. It is our inner teacher; its growth and emergence mark the level of spiritual evolution that each one of us has reached.

The psychic being is fully awake; it never hides. It is only we who need to

awaken to it. Presently, it is buried beneath the folds of our nature. It is veiled by the surface ego consciousness. It can only be accessed by re-orienting our consciousness and aligning within. It resides inside the heart-centre but exists in a different dimension, far beyond the clutch of our three-dimensional senses.

Initially, of course, we must deploy them and only aspiration can take us there. We have to work assiduously on ourselves to identify with the psychic being. We only need to open and allow it to radiate through us. But resistance is present. With conscious practice, the personal effort succumbs gradually to a loving surrender. We give ourselves and pray to the Mother to lead us to this sublime presence.

The work on this path of purification helps bring the psychic forward. We identify and invoke its help. The psychic

being alone has the capacity for true integration; it works dynamically, aligning and harmonising everything in the being around itself. It is our truest instrument for self-mastery and change. It manifests Oneness in all the multiplicity of our nature, a prerequisite for transformation. Only by collaborating with the psychic can we realise it. It is not a static process. When we engage, it becomes a Supreme Force for progress and transformation.

One does not climb to get there; it is a horizontal process. It dwells in the depths not the heights. Any portal of our nature can be chosen: mind, life or body. We choose whatever way resonates with us. The important thing is, we set our means and stick to it. Nothing should stand in the way of the psychic presence. Set your sights on this goal and find it.

The writer is coordinating editor of *NAMAH, the Journal of Integral Health*

Sacredspace



You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.

Maya Angelou

Let a Thousand Self Driving Cars Zoom

China may zoom ahead of the US – and drivers

Self-driving cars being tested in China and the US could be at the forefront of job destruction through AI. In the line of fire stand millions of taxi drivers. Depending on how robotaxi trials play out, they are threatening livelihoods that are low down in the job hierarchy for ride-hailing services. China has reason to push the pedal on autonomous vehicles as it falls off the population cliff. However, a bigger disruption is likely to emerge in the US as companies like Tesla make progress from fuel-less to driver-less cars. Going beyond taxis, personal vehicles that can be summoned from remote parking lots to ferry people around are more revolutionary.

Naturally, the pace of testing is being tightly regulated. In the US, the emphasis is on safety, which tends to slow things down. China sees an opportunity here, and its robotaxi firms are closer to profitability as US automobile and technology companies struggle with the higher safety bar. Either way, the tech is available, it needs to become more robust. Its development is controlled by restrictions the US has imposed on the use of Chinese data to run trials on American automobiles. It is a new arms race in personal mobility.

Other nations would be tempted to follow the US in trying to slow Chinese innovation in self-driving cars. Their reasons may differ—from safety to job losses—but it would be an expensive mistake. China has taken the lead in reimagining the automobile as a technology product. The world's automobile makers, including US firms, are queuing up to gain access to Chinese data and know-how on making cars smarter. This complements China's natural endowments, giving it an edge in battery tech. Self-driving cars running on rechargeable lithium ions could be the biggest breakthrough in global emissions reduction in the foreseeable future. This is one revolution China should not have difficulty exporting to the world.

A Mutating Marxist's Lesson For India Inc

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee wasn't a name that would pop up in corporate boardrooms—except, perhaps, in the Tata's—for the right reasons. Bhattacharjee was double-hobbled in this respect: he was the long-standing CM of a state held antonymous with business and industry; and his being a key figure in a party called Communist Party of India (Marxist) couldn't have helped. And, yet, during his stint as CM, he attempted to swivel the Left ship towards capital creation, a prime criterion for the 'political' purpose of capital distribution. His failings—whether to establish a Tata Nano factory in Singur, or set up a Jindal Group steel plant in Salboni, or Indonesian Salim Group's petrochemical hub in Nandigram—strangely mirror challenges India Inc faces today.

Bhattacharjee's biggest mistake in his attempt to become a Deng Xiaoping was that he blithely expected The Party to swivel out of 'party discipline'. As in any company boardroom, such a swivel requires taking the board along, convincing stakeholders with their own interests and holding gradualism over forcing the agenda, especially if it's a radical one. Whether introducing AI, pushing through diversification or M&A plans, the well-entrenched CEO, like the established CM attempting to push through reforms, is best suited for such a job.

Bhattacharjee's impeccable credentials as a communist earned the CPI(M) record votes in the 2006 state election, prior to the one in 2011 where the ultra-Left in anti-Left clothing took over. It also should have given him the credibility to pilot Bengal into the economic 21st century. Instead, the mutating Marxist leaves us with the lesson for the absolute need for consensus-building, in the company or party, when undertaking a Great Swivel.



JUST IN JEST

Want to lose weight? Try this new hydration schedule

Don't Stress, Just Lift a Few Glasses

We live in a world so complicated that even staying hydrated—simply put, drinking water—comes with a 10-step guide. And losing weight? Ah, that's a different ballgame altogether. There are so many methods in the market that you'll gain extra kilos just from sitting on the couch, reading the options and trying to decide which one to try. Kid you not, one online fitness coach even claims that daily affirmations like 'I want to lose weight' can help you shed some inches. Apparently, talking to yourself is the new cardio. (Psychotherapists, beware.)

Even sipping warm water to boost your metabolism, a tried and tested path, is no longer enough, says a new weight-loss method. Now, you need to drink water *correctly* to shed those stubborn kilos. The water regimen goes like this: after waking up, two glasses of warm water. One hour before a workout, two glasses of water. Thirty minutes after your workout, two more glasses.... You get the drift. Or at least the trickle. In total, that's about eight hours of your day dedicated to the fine art of hydration that is probably explained in a YouTube video. At this rate, we're looking at a future when filling a glass of water, lifting it, drinking from it, and then walking in and out of the loo will be seen as the hottest new fitness regime. No more sweaty gyms. Raise your glasses, folks. Slowly.

US 'democracy promoters' seem to be unable to see India's Bangladesh security concerns

EK HASINA, NO DIWANE



Seema Sirohi

Sheikh Hasina is gone and 'democracy' is back in Bangladesh. Jamaat-e-Islami and its armed student wing, Chhatra Shibir, celebrated in their own style—arson, looting, attacks on minorities, and erasing history by demolishing statues and burning archives. More than 200 people have died since the government fell.

Washington's satisfaction at Hasina's departure is palpable. A section of the US establishment is 'gloating' that India failed in its project. They were right and the Indians were wrong. Two sentiments underline the comments—'Told you so' and 'comeuppance' for sticking it in the eye of the West with smart comments about world problems and leadership of the Global South. Of course, official messaging is about welcoming the interim government, hope and faith in Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate the Americans, including Hillary Clinton, have promoted over the years.

Over in London, Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman, sentenced in 2023 for his role in a plot to assassinate Hasina in 2004, wants elections fast, while his 'India out' campaign is hot. Incidentally, Rashed Chowdhury, an army officer and part of the coup that killed Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1975, lives in the US after he got asylum in 1996.

The US and Britain may genuinely believe that Hasina's departure ushers in a new era. Distance from the scene affords them the luxury of playing the chessboard. Democracy is recommended and,



Will the cancel spread?

indeed, pushed on some, while it's casually ignored for others—in the same neighbourhood.

For India, the developments in Bangladesh are not explorations on democracy but tangible threats to security. There is no distance, only dangerous proximity. Chief ministers in bordering states are already having nightmares about the future and who else may come with the refugees.

India and the US—and, by proxy, Britain—have never agreed on Bangladesh right from 1971 when Indira Gandhi helped liberate the country despite American threats. The initial reaction of 'how-dare-India' led to deep distrust, which over the years turned into studied indifference to New Delhi's arguments on Bangladesh. The Americans listened but never agreed.

The need to keep radical elements (pro-Pakistan Jamaat) at bay didn't move them to the extent one might expect given 9/11, the 'democracy project' in Iraq and the Arab Spring. The strate-



LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

gic dissonance over Bangladesh has been sharp at times and muted at others, but always present despite a sea change in India's relations with the US.

The latest turn of events will add to the baggage. Some worry about 'far-reaching consequences' for India-US relations. Lately, an element of mistrust about American goals has crept in. Delhi's national security establishment. For India, a secular government in Dhaka has always been the topmost priority. When BNP ruled, Bangladesh became a 'sponge' for Indian insurgents in the northeast and an open door for Pakistan's ISI to send jihadists. Hasina cracked down on both, allowing for peace accords to be signed and the northeast to breathe.

But US diplomats are unable—or unwilling—to give full weight to India's security concerns. Talking of diplomats, Peter Haas, who recently returned as US ambassador to Bangladesh, drove an already shaky relationship with Hasina to such a place that the White House woke up. First, Joe Biden wrote a letter on February 6 after Hasina won a controversial fourth term, expressing his 'sincere desire' to continue 'our work together on regional and global security' and other issues.

Second, a large, high-level delegation led by National Security Council's senior director for South Asia

Washington's satisfaction at Hasina's departure is palpable. A section of the US establishment is 'gloating' that India failed in its project

Developing Our Skiller Instinct



Dhanendra Kumar

To strengthen linkage with industry, the latest budget announced a comprehensive internship scheme earmarking ₹63,000 cr. It aims to provide internship opportunities at 500 top companies to 10 mn youth over the next five years, exposing them for 12 months to 'real-life business environments, varied professions, and employment opportunities'. An allowance of ₹5 a month along with a one-time ₹6k will be provided, with companies expected to bear the training cost and 10% of internship cost from their CSR funds.

Additionally, 1,000 ITIs are planned to be upgraded at ₹30k cr in hub-and-spoke arrangements over the next five years, direct benefit transfer of a month's salary in three instalments for first-time employees registered in EPFO, and higher participation of women in workforce with working women's hostels in collaboration with industry. This is an ambitious plan.

According to a 2024 TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship study, manufacturing is projected to generate 6.5 mn jobs this year, at a growth of 18.4%. Here, one hopes the announced employment-linked incentive (ELI) scheme will create 8 mn jobs over next three years. There are favourable factors. They include increased investments under PLI schemes and global supply chains favouring India. The sectors in focus are automobile, electronics, infrastructure, construction, textiles and engineering.

The role of MSMEs and startups in this job growth is also significant. 96% of India's industrial units belong to these small companies. With 63.4 mn units spread across the country, MSME sector contributes 6.11% and 24.63% of manufacturing and services GDP, respectively. As of May 2024, the MSME sector employs around 19 cr people, which amounts to 33.6% of the total 56.5 cr workforce of India, making MSMEs the second-largest employer in India, second only to agriculture.

India has emerged as the third-largest ecosystem for startups globally. Between FY16 and FY23, startups contributed 10-15% to India's GDP growth. The ecommerce industry is expected to surpass the US to become the second-largest ecommerce



Take a leaf out of their book

market in the world behind China by 2034, projected to reach \$300 bn by 2030 backed by over 936.16 mn internet subscribers.

5-6 lakh people are being hired every month in the blue-collar commerce space. There is increased demand for 'prompt engineers' with special understanding of AI model's architecture, who can act as an interface between human intent and machine output.

The role of startups and MSMEs in India has been extending beyond job creation. Some have been acting as 'gurus' in skilling their employees with enhanced employability.

Urban Company invests heavily in skilling of their 'service partners'. These cover a wide range of skills, from technical expertise to customer service and business management. The company engages industry experts in designing training modules that include

hands-on workshops, online courses and certification. All this has been reflected in their enhanced profitability.

Flipkart has launched several skilling initiatives under its Flipkart Academy. Their initiatives focus on training employees in various aspects of ecommerce operations, including supply chain management, data analytics, customer service and marketing. Their activities cover remote areas, including women, artisans and craftsmen.

Zomato offers a comprehensive training programme for its delivery partners, covering areas such as navigation, customer service and safety protocols, along with food safety standards and hygiene practices.

In her budget, Nirmala Sitharaman laid great emphasis on skilling, allocating ₹1.48 lakh cr for education, employment and skilling. This integrated approach, in partnership with industry and government, underscores India's newfound commitment to employment and skilling, aimed at equipping the workforce with skills needed to meet industry demands and contribute to employment, productivity and accelerated economic growth.

The writer is former chairman, CCI. Inputs by Varun Singh



THE SPEAKING TREE

Giving Thanks To Rivers

NARAYANI GANESH

The Tamil month of Adi that falls during the rainy season, is when the faithful offer prayers of gratitude to all the rivers that begin to get replenished with rainwater. Swelling with fresh water, the rivers are believed to be 'pregnant' and offerings are made, charities are given and prayers are offered, propitiating the river goddess. The Cauvery, Tamirabarani, Vaigai and Palair rivers are all revered and invoked during the monsoon season. For harvests and abundance are not possible without the grace of the river goddess. The Cauvery, originating in the beautiful Western Ghats, is often called Dakshina Ganga, the Ganga of the South. On full-moon days, local people in the region flock to its sandy banks to enjoy picnics and frolic in its waters.

The source of the River Cauvery is in Kodagu, in the hills of Coorg, now in Karnataka, rich in flora and water bodies and nestled in the salubrious environs of the Western Ghats knows for its rich biodiversity. It was here, at Thalai Cauvery, that the 69th pontiff of the mutt at Kanchi, Shankaracharya Sri Jayendra Saraswati, took silent refuge when he 'disappeared' for three days from Kanchipuram to spend time in self-reflection. One of the stories related to the origin of this river is that it is named after Lopamudra or Kaveri, who was sent by the gods to relieve the woes of a region parched for water. Another story is that she is the wife of Sage Agastya, who carried her in a container as water, and let her flow in the southern region to bring abundance.



The Long Goodbye

A man and his wife are at a restaurant, and the husband keeps staring at a drunken lady swigging her gin at a nearby table.

His wife asks, 'Do you know her?'

'Yes,' sighs the husband.

'She's my ex-wife. She took to drinking right after we

divorced seven years ago, and I hear she hasn't been sober since.'

'My God!' says the wife. 'Who would think a person could go on celebrating that long?'

It Ain't the Paint

A businessman went into the office and found an inexperienced handyman painting the walls. The handyman was wearing two heavy coats on a hot Delhi summer day.

Thinking this was a little strange, the businessman asked the handyman why he was wearing the coats on such a hot day. The handyman showed him the instructions on the can of paint. They read: 'For best results, put on two coats.'

Chat Room

Industrious Zeal For Industries

Apropos 'Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, CPM Leader Known For Industrial Push, Dead' by Jayatri Nag (Aug 9), Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was a communist with a difference; he seriously tried to move his state away from the failing returns of agriculture and push for industrialisation, deviating from the Left cause. West Bengal was second in industrialisation till the mid-1960s, and he wanted to bring that era back. Bandhs called by labour unions were a common feature in West Bengal in those days, but he wanted his party to create a positive working culture by discouraging the bandhs. Frills of the office had no charm for him as he gracefully entered into retirement after the 2011 loss. In his book Phire Dekha, Bhattacharjee accepted his mistake of mishandling the Singur crisis and termed Tatas moving out as irreparable damage.

BAL GOVIND Noida

Inconspicuous Consumption, HNIs?



Kiran Somvanshi

Unacademy CEO Gaurav Munjal's wearing a \$400 Burberry T-shirt while announcing there would be no appraisals for employees this year was construed in bad taste. To many, the gesture reeked of insensitivity and lack of empathy. Reliance Industries' decision to cut 42,000 employees from its workforce in FY24—a year marked by a gala family wedding—is receiving similar reactions.

There's a popular view doing the rounds about how the rich are okay spending so much at a time when those financially dependent on them are either losing jobs or not getting pay hikes.

Conspicuous consumption of the rich is not a problem per se. HNIs and business owners are entitled to spend their hard-earned money whichever way they like. Not everyone should be expected to be frugal and very wealthy like, say, Warren Buffett or Narayana Murthy. However, the issue is about the time, context and semblance. It's about conspicuous consumption—otherwise appreciated and welcomed for economic growth—when employ-

ees or businesses are going through an economically tough time.

It is about the affluent business class being conscious about the timing and context of such spending in line with their business conditions. Failure to do so at an optical or strategic level—irrespective of ethics—can be damaging in a world where perception matters. The images of Vijay 'King of Good Times' Mallya in London and the fate of Kingfisher Airlines members of staff are still jarring.

In Hindu philosophy, there is the concept of 'Desh, Kaal, Patra'—'Place, time, object'. It urges one to act according to one's location in space and time, and qualities. We live in the time of social media proliferation, resulting in amplified public scrutiny, where the rich and famous are bound to be judged for



Quiet spending is classy

their conduct.

This is not just about being morally tone-deaf, but about it being bad business branding strategy. Besides, at a time when companies are cost-cutting and rationalising, promoters, founders or top management flaunting their wealth is dissonant.

To get the timing right, it's essential to understand conspicuous consumption first. In his classic 1899 work, The Theory of the Leisure Class, Thorstein Veblen introduced the concept of conspicuous consumption.

Veblen argued that in a society stratified by class, the leisure class—those who do not need to work for a living—uses visible consumption to demonstrate their social position and to differentiate themselves from the working class. This behaviour is driven by pecuniary emulation, where individuals aspire to the lifestyles of those above them in the social hierarchy, often leading to wasteful spending and a focus on status rather than substance.

Wasteful consumption is not the only side-effect. In his 2004 book, Status Anxiety, Alain de Botton explored how people seek status through material goods, and the resulting anxiety when they fail to achieve it.

Conspicuous consumption can also sometimes be a symptom of larger issues related to business practices of such consumers. For instance, in 2022, Byju's roped in

Lionel Messi as its global brand ambassador one month after the company announced layoffs of close to 2,500 employees. In less than two years, the company and its founder are fighting legal battles to stave off bankruptcy.

At a time when companies are spending big on reputation management, ensuring that the overt consumption of founders or top management is not tangential to the company's business practices would result in the right messaging. If leadership means to lead by example, affluent leaders are setting aspirational lifestyle targets for their employees to emulate—at a time when most of them have limited means of achieving them if they continue to remain so employed.

For the affluent, this does not mean the need to rationalise consumption, or to not live according to one's means. De Botton reveals many ingenious ways in which individuals can overcome their status anxieties by reassessing values, appreciating art, focusing on inner virtues, exploring alternative lifestyles and cultivating humour.

However, the solution can be even simpler—inconspicuous consumption. Consuming in private during economically challenging times (for others) may not be such a bad idea. Maybe it's time to bring it back into fashion.

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Welcome to the ‘yes, but’ cycle of rate cuts



DANIEL MOSS

Three decades ago, economics underwent a revolution that doesn't get sufficient credit. Instead of shrouding policy shifts in secrecy, central banks began shouting hikes or reductions in interest rates from the rooftops. Moving by stealth in markets was out. Press releases were in. By amplifying

their message, officials hoped to steer the public toward their view. With luck, they could also minimise financial ructions. Today's crop of policymakers could use some of the same clarity of purpose. The global economy is on the cusp of a sustained easing, though not necessarily a dramatic sequence of rate cuts. Growth is slowing, but there's no crisis. Critically, price gains are abating significantly and inflation targets are within sight. This ought to be great news, but officials are having trouble embracing the moment. The legacy of "transitory," the now infamous word the Federal Reserve used to play down inflation's climb in 2021, is wreaking havoc. Almost every monetary authority used similar terms. In a revealing moment during a recent Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) media

conference, Governor Michele Bullock was asked to compare the RBA's hawkish stance with peer institutions that had trimmed rates. What were they seeing that the RBA, which refuses to countenance an easing, wasn't? Bullock was defensive. The Bank of Canada, for instance, wasn't really dovish, merely less hawkish. "They are sort of easing their tightening." The answer was easily caricatured as hair splitting. Bullock was onto something, nonetheless: It's very tough to identify turning points. Ease too soon and the risk is that inflation reignites; delay too long and the desired slowdown can become something more sinister. The reticence is understandable. After the missteps of late 2021, who wants to be the person to pronounce inflation beat? Bullock reiterated the

excessive caution in a speech on Thursday. "I know this is not what people want to hear," she said. "The alternative of persistently high inflation is worse. It hurts everyone." However, the longer she waits to switch to even a neutral stance, the greater the danger Bullock makes a mistake. Sadly, the last war is still being fought. The wariness was on display at the Bank of England (BoE), whose policy panel lowered rates last week in a 5-4 vote. Unusually, the BoE's chief economist was on the losing side; Huw Pill cited progress on inflation, but warned "it's not yet job done." But surely close enough to warrant some loosening? Inflation is back at the bank's 2 per cent target after reaching double digits in 2022 and 2023. Governor Andrew Bailey, who cast the

deciding ballot, appeared uncomfortable with the victory. There's no rush for more relief, he stressed. Even the outliers are stepping on their narrative. In late July, the Bank of Japan surprised by lifting its main rate alongside a plan to halve its bond purchases. Governor Kazuo Ueda came across as hawkish, contributing to a slump in Japanese stocks and a surge in the yen. The upheaval prompted Ueda's deputy to walk back at least the tone, if not the substance, of the decision just days later. A summary of the bank's deliberations released on Thursday shows officials didn't consider their actions a tightening. That works on one level: Policy is still very accommodative by global standards. Nuance can get lost amid shock, however. So we have rate cutters who emphasise how tight they really are, and hikers who stress how loose things really are. Both can be true in a narrow sense while

obscuring broader trends. Economists are confident the Fed will cut in September and are almost daily adding to the extent of the reductions likely to take place. The Reserve Bank of New Zealand, which openly conceded a recession was required to bring inflation to heel, may act as soon as next week. The Bank of Korea is unlikely to be far behind. Borrowing costs have been coming down in Latin America for some time. Expect hawkish language to accompany these pivots. We aren't sounding the all clear, vigilance is required, and so on. Hopefully, it won't take a global recession for officials to jettison their inhibitions. For now, let's call it a "yes, but" easing cycle. If subterfuge is necessary to sell what's required, so be it. I'll take that in preference to the alternative.

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ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Bangladesh's gamble



VIEWPOINT
DEVANGSHU DATTA

Recent events in Bangladesh will inevitably spill over to the rest of the subcontinent. Guessing how things will turn out in the world's eighth-most populous nation will occupy many commentators. Bangladesh's last government was authoritarian. The ousted government "won" extremely flawed elections after Opposition leaders were jailed, and the nation's constitution, which asked for an impartial interim government to conduct national elections, was ignored. Much blood was spilt in the last few weeks, as the government tried unsuccessfully to ride out public protests. But it would be wrong to claim the government was an absolute failure. It provided a stable macro-environment and delivered strong growth for many years. Indeed, it delivered enough growth to arguably bring about an economic miracle in an impoverished country. It wasn't entirely undemocratic either, in that it afforded a measure of protection to minorities. The Awami League's unspoken bargain with the Bangla electorate was that the government would be repressive, but it would deliver prosperity. Very few governments have actually been able to keep that particular bargain. The maps of Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin

America and the former Soviet Union are dotted with authoritarian regimes, many of them resource-rich, which have delivered repression, without growth. In the last 80 years, only a handful of undemocratic East Asian "tiger" economies have managed to deliver growth. Most have, with the exception of India's northern neighbour and Vietnam, also graduated to becoming full-fledged democracies. The resource-rich nations of West Asia have also prospered, though growth remains uneven there. This brings us to one of the most common fallacies of political science: Democracy is often decried as antithetical to development. It isn't. An authoritarian regime can deliver growth if ruled by an enlightened despot. But very few authoritarian regimes actually do deliver prosperity. Democracies have a higher strike rate. The richest nations in the world are democracies. The fallacy arises from the few shining examples mentioned above, while all the many counter-examples of repressive regimes, which did not deliver growth, are conveniently ignored. Another reason why this fallacy is perpetuated is that repressive regimes are easier to negotiate with, particularly for corporations and even other governments. It is easier to bribe one strongman (or woman as the case may be) and gain favours than to convince an entire smorgasbord of politicians to give concessions. Multinational corporations therefore have an incentive to support authoritarian regimes and propagate the myth. If we delve further back into history, it's the same story. The absolute monarchies of earlier eras equate to the authoritarian regimes of today. In the era of absolute monarchies, very few kingdoms enjoyed sustainable

growth. One member of a dynasty would improve the lot of the subjects but the next three rulers would dissipate the gains. The Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution came to fruition in places that were relatively democratic. The most gains in productivity and prosperity were seen in those nations. The most striking example is perhaps Japan. The Emperor became a constitutional monarch in 1868 and Japan industrialised at warp speed. Similar things happened in Europe. While many nations of Western and Northern Europe remain titular monarchies, most of those countries adopted democratic models early. And, of course, the United States saw innovation and breakneck industrialisation. One concern for Bangladesh-watchers is that undemocratic regimes are often replaced by regimes that are even worse, or by civil wars. Quite apart from the former Soviet Republics, we could look at Iran, Libya, Egypt, and other hotspots for such examples. The other learning from Bangladesh is that prosperity is often not enough to keep a repressed populace happy. If there's a slight blip in growth, dissatisfaction spills over into the streets because there is no recourse to the ballot. Even the People's Republic has seen its share of protests, including a rather large one in 1989. In South Korea and Taiwan, the transition to democracy came without too many tremors. In other nations like Indonesia and the Philippines and Thailand, the movement towards democracy has been less smooth. There are lessons here for India as well, with some indicators showing that growth has really been K-shaped.

When underdog pushes top dog

The third Modi govt has quickly moved away from dismissing all Congress ideas as unimaginative and is now implementing several of them. Think poll-bound Haryana and Maharashtra

We often use situations and metaphors from cricket to explain political complexities. This, however, is the season of the Olympics and the Euro, so football and hockey would be more contextual. Therefore, let's go ahead and see how a typical turn in a hockey or football game applies to the way national politics has moved, as indicated at the end of this Monsoon/Budget Session of Parliament. Take your mind back to the hockey quarter-final where India played with 10 men against Great Britain for 42 minutes. Taking advantage of this, Great Britain attacked relentlessly as India struggled to put men in front. But on the odd occasion that they did, the game seemed dramatically altered. This is called a counter after having been on the defensive, pushed to the wall (in this case, the magnificent P R Sreejesh) for a long time. This is precisely what is playing out in national politics.

That the 2024 general election has rebalanced national politics has been known since June 4. The entire Opposition, pushed to the wall and hopeless for a decade, found a well-earned opening for a counter. It's just that it wasn't widely expected that the counter would be so strong and effective as to force the winner to alter their own plans and strategy. In the process, Rahul Gandhi, the politician more mocked and ridiculed than any in our history, is now seen in an entirely different light. See objectively, however, what is happening now. Here's a list of ideas and campaign points that came up in the election manifesto of the Congress:

- Joblessness among the youth and subsidies to create more employment and an internship plan.
- Cash giveaways to the poor, the jobless and farmers.
- Legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for all major crops and loan waivers for farmers.
- Questions over the Agnipath scheme.
- A nationwide caste census and then reallocation of government benefits and spoils according to each section's numerical strength.

Many of these were simply dismissed by the

BJP as falsehoods. All caste issues were ducked, and generally countered with even stronger appeals to Hindu opinion. In fact, the Congress approach to distributive socialism following a caste census was dismissed contemptuously as *revdis*. In simpler English, the argument was that the Congress wanted to buy votes by distributing free candy. Now, we need to also list what's been happening lately.

The third Modi government has quickly moved away from its dismissal of all the Rahul/Congress ideas as unimaginative and useless jokes. It is now implementing several of them. Take for example:

- This Budget makes sizeable allocations and promises to directly address the unemployment challenge. There are incentives for companies to hire more, and a plan for 10 million internships over five years.
- BJP state governments, especially those heading for elections, are already expanding agricultural MSP. The Haryana government, for example, has extended MSP to all 24 major crops from the previous 14.
- If you check out the full-page advertisements in newspapers these days, you also read a plethora of other freebies in Haryana: LPG cylinders at just ₹500 to 4.6 million families. A free milk scheme for schoolgirls, and the waiver of canal water cess.
- Then, there is free bus travel for all members of families with incomes of up to ₹1 lakh for up to 1,000 kilometres a month. The BJP had been ridiculing similar schemes in Delhi, Karnataka and Telangana. This was the definition of *revdi*.
- The state has also raised the creamy layer income limit for OBCs to ₹8 lakh from ₹6 lakh.

It is even more worthwhile to look at Maharashtra. It has already rolled out *revdis* that will cost it at least ₹96,000 crore per year. Here are some highlights:

- Women, youths, senior citizens below an income level, as well as the unique sect of Warkaris (casteless, Bhakti cult followers, about 1.6 million in number) will all get cash handouts and subsidies. The Warkaris will get subsidies for their annual Pandharpur pilgrimage, too. Wait till Yogiji unveils something similar for the

Kanwariyas before UP elections in 2027.

- A monthly stipend of ₹1,500 to women in the 21-65 age group with an annual income below ₹2.5 lakh. Just the cost of this is ₹46,000 crore.
- Six-month stipends for Class 12 pass (₹6,000), diploma-holders (₹8,000) and graduates (₹10,000) to help them train and reskill.
- Each family of five will get three free LPG cylinders per year.

I would think that all of this adds up to sufficient evidence that it's the Opposition, which had cowered in defence for a decade, that's setting the agenda at this point. From mocking such distribution, the BJP itself has become a *revdis*-for-votes party. The underdog is repositioning the top dog.

Just in case you are inclined to dismiss all this as mere election-eve profligacy, we can move to a more substantive, durable—in fact eternally so—ideological issue in our politics. See if the same logic, the dominant team falling back on defence applies there. Since 1989, one binary has determined who will rule India: Can you employ caste to divide what religion united? Or can you use religion to re-unite what caste divided. We've often said that for the first 25 years, caste won. The rise of Narendra Modi saw the unification of the larger Hindu vote cutting across the caste divides. This is when the epoch of religion, or Hindutva began. This was challenged again by Rahul Gandhi with his caste census slogan. He brought it up again in Parliament and asserted that his party will ensure a caste census "from this Parliament." The BJP has struggled to find an answer. It is because of a paucity of ideas on the caste issue that the BJP is doubling down on religion. The new Waqf Bill, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's talk of "land jihad", Yogi's proposed law amendment to bring life imprisonment for "love jihad", Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma accusing one community of not controlling its population are instinctive, defensive moves. I call it confusion because the same approach was used in the general election but it did not work. The BJP is struggling with the caste issue again. Forget caste census, it isn't even talking of holding the normal decennial census delayed since 2021. The BJP itself talked of sub-categorisation of backward castes and set up a commission under retired Delhi High Court chief justice G Rohini to examine it, but is sitting on that report. If it moves towards sub-categorisation, a caste census will become imperative, handing another victory to Rahul Gandhi. If it doesn't, the redivision of Hindu vote along caste lines will gather pace. The Opposition can sit back and watch as it does not rule any Hindi state. The BJP cannot even whisper the thought of amending the Constitution, given how big an issue it was in the campaign. It is still like a team in the lead, but thrown on the defensive and searching for ideas to break out, with the challenger in full press.

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Studying the self

EYE CULTURE
VEENU SANDHU

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when the world was black and white, a reclusive nanny walked the streets of New York and Chicago. There was nothing unusual about her, except that she always carried a camera, a Rolleiflex, with her. A keen observer of the world, she would consistently capture its transient moments on film. It was a hobby she pursued during her outings with the children in her charge. At times, she would take off on longer excursions, travelling around the world, camera in hand: India, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Lebanon, Italy, Switzerland, France, Los Angeles. Though she created a humongous body of work, she never exhibited it and seldom showed it to anyone. It remained a private passion. Turns out, she rarely even developed the negatives. The nanny, Vivian Maier, who died on April 21, 2009 aged 83, today has a kind of cult following for her black-and-white street photography, her enigmatic life adding to her legend. The Fotografiska museum in New York has put up a major exhibition of her photographs, "Vivian Maier: Unseen Work". It is the first retrospective of such scale in the United States and is on until September 29. There is also an Oscar-nominated documentary, *Finding Vivian Maier* (2014), besides other documentaries, that tries to piece together her mysterious life. Recognition came posthumously after a real-estate agent, a history buff,

found her photographs in a locker she had rented but had stopped paying for. Astonished by this unexpected discovery, he then scouted for more of her work, and ended up with over 130,000 negatives, prints and slides, which have since been exhibited in several countries. Through her photographs, one can almost picture her at work, like a fly on the wall, clicking away unnoticed. Sometimes, though, the subjects of her interest caught her framing them. Some of them smiled, some frowned, a few looked back inquisitively or surprised. On rare occasions, some even became willing participants and posed for her. Curiously, the photographer who chose to stay away from the flashlight also filmed herself in the world she focused her lens on. There is a whole series of self-portraits, always taken in a manner to create a dramatic effect. In some, she is a hazy reflection in a shop or café window, caught between the scene inside and the world outside. In one, she is seen smiling uncharacteristically into a looking glass that a workman is carrying in a street. There are also several photographs with fragmented images of her captured in a single frame. For example, in one, her face is reflected in one mirror, while her hands that hold the camera are visible in another. It's as though she is trying to put bits of her life together or attempting to grasp its multiple realities. Sometimes she is simply a shadow on a pavement or on the wall of a tall building. These self-studies are among Maier's most fascinating works. They speak of an observer observing herself, and even revealing herself so that those who may one day see her photographs would see not just the world as she saw

it but also her in it. Perhaps that was the idea. Or perhaps it wasn't all that profound. Perhaps it was simply a woman with a camera taking unusual, but very creative, pictures of herself the way we all do today, turning the gaze on the self through selfies. Why, though, do we indulge in selfies? Why, for that matter, do artists create self-portraits? Capturing the self has for centuries been a human occupation, with the world's first self-portrait believed to have been painted as far back as 1433: "Portrait of a Man" by Netherlandish artist Jan van Eyck. Better quality mirrors and their easy accessibility only furthered this art of self-depiction. Vincent van Gogh, Amrita Sher-Gil, Frida Kahlo, and many others, have all been the subjects of their art — Kahlo arguably the most. With 55 of her 143 paintings being self-portraits, it's no wonder that Kahlo is known as the master of self-portraits. Unlike the selfie, though, self-portraits are celebrated as works of art, and the two are rarely spoken of in the same breath? An interesting study by German psychologist Claus-Christian Carbon, however, ventures into this tricky territory and asks: "Is the typical selfie-photographer's intuition-based spontaneity really so different from the artist's well-planned behaviour?" He places the contemporary selfie, a mass phenomenon scorned upon as narcissistic, in historic context. Studying self-portraits over more than five centuries, back to the Renaissance, he draws parallels to establish that selfies "aim to provide similar messages and show similar types of expression as self-portraits from the domain of artistic painting". And that it all boils down to *Conditio humana* — the human condition.



TICKER
MIHIR S SHARMA

With hindsight, there was far too much complacency about deposed Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's hold on power. The apparent disarray of the official Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party — whose leader, Ms Hasina's long-time rival Khaleda Zia, was sentenced to 17 years in jail in 2018, and has been ill for some time — meant that the Awami League appeared unsailable. The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami retained many committed activists, but it also seemed to carry too much historical and ideological baggage to be seen as a credible replacement for the BNP as an effective Opposition. Given the lack of any organised political challenge, it seemed that Ms Hasina would stay in power as long as she willed it. We now know how untrue that belief was. The unceremonious exit of the world's longest-serving female head of government followed weeks of intensifying protests led by students from Dhaka University;

but it also followed serious missteps by Ms Hasina's government and party, most especially the attempt to use street violence to confront the protestors. Too many died in that confrontation for Ms Hasina's government to survive. Governments, even autocratic ones, are best placed to survive protests if they do not attempt to crush protestors with violence. If they do, they must be certain that force will be overwhelming and sustained, and completely backed by the military. In Kyiv a decade ago, during the Maidan Square protests, the breaking point for the Moscow-backed government of Viktor Yanukovich came when over 100 people died in clashes with special riot police. But Mr Yanukovich could not count on his military to reinforce the paramilitary, and had to flee. The difference with June 4, 1989, when the People's Liberation Army happily followed order to mow down students in Tiananmen Square, thereby cementing the Communist Party in power, is stark. Ms Hasina had to leave only when she pushed her military too far. She may have tried to buy them off over the past decade. But that is a double-edged sword. You cannot permanently buy a military's loyalty, merely rent its acquiescence. The first priority of armies in authoritarian states is always to preserve their position and privileges. To do that, they will

turn on — or refuse to support — their benefactors if necessary. Even in the most terrifying of totalitarian regimes, ultimate power rests with the army. Armando Janucci's The Death of Stalin does not pretend to historical accuracy — but it is certainly true, as depicted in the movie, that Marshal Georgy Zhukov's support was essential to the deposition, after the dictator's death, of the Stalinist clique led by his spymaster Lavrenti Beria. Bangladesh's tentative steps after Sheikh Hasina, therefore, must be carefully watched to try and understand the degree to which the army feels empowered to impose a successor regime. In a best-case scenario, the caretaker government under Mohammed Yunus serves as similar regimes did in the 2000s, long enough to recreate "normal" politics and hold a free and fair election. Whoever takes over then could have the authority to ensure the army stays in its barracks. But, even then, they will have to achieve some sort of concord with the military leadership, including the preservation of its business interests. In Bangladesh, as in Pakistan and in Egypt, leaders desperate to keep middle-level and senior officers on their side have allowed the army to expand their participation in the non-military economy. This may appear cheap and sensible in the short term as a way of shoring up support. But, in the long term, it is clearly

destabilising, as Sheikh Hasina is only the latest deposed leader to discover. We all hope the best-case scenario comes about. Certainly, that is what Mr Yunus likely believes he can achieve. But, objectively, the prognosis for Bangladesh politics is not good. The army may not be truly desirous of wielding political power, but it can feel it needs to do so in order to defend its interests. Or it may do so if it fears the alternative is chaos, continuing disorder, or the rise of political Islamism; this is what has happened in Egypt under Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The most complacent actors in this drama have been, unquestionably, in New Delhi and Washington. New Delhi — which has had a disastrous neighbourhood policy that has alienated almost all the states with which it has a land or sea border — seemed to be unwilling over the past years to even consider that its unquestioning support of Sheikh Hasina was painting it into a corner. As for Washington, it has had an ambassador to Dhaka for the past two years who merely ensured that the Awami League government grew to distrust America without sowing any seeds of responsible governance or respect for liberal values in the Opposition. Authoritarians and their supporters can never afford to be complacent. The people may always rise up to remove you — and succeed if the men with the big guns agree.



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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

REACH OUT TO DHAKA

Delhi must lend support to Yunus, review how government agencies turned a blind eye to gathering storm in Bangladesh

THAT THE INDIAN ambassador to Dhaka, Pranay Verma, attended the swearing-in ceremony of Muhammad Yunus, the head of the interim government, should send a positive signal to the people of Bangladesh and calm the over-the-top strands in the discourse in Delhi about the tumultuous developments next door. India should reinforce the message with a clear statement of continuing support for Yunus and the armed forces towards restoring order and protecting the life, liberty and property of its citizens. The Indian leadership has rightly pointed to the importance of safeguarding the rights of minorities amidst widespread violence, especially against the Hindu community, in Bangladesh. But Delhi should resist the temptation of focusing exclusively on the plight of the Hindu minority in a way that could complicate the extraordinary challenges at hand in Bangladesh and cloud the prospects for relations between India and the new regime.

Amidst the political chaos and informational fog that predictably envelops the regime collapse in Dhaka, Yunus and the army leadership appear to be doing their best to prevent violence and secure the vulnerable state structures — like the police — that are crucial for the maintenance of peace. India's explicit support to the new leadership in Dhaka is critical to prevent the situation from getting worse. Its perspective of the new dynamic in Dhaka is being unfortunately shadowed by a toxic domestic discourse that is ready to blame everyone else in the world — from America's CIA to Pakistan's ISI and the Islamists led by Jamaat to the Chinese Communist Party. That Delhi did not or could not foresee the approaching political tsunami in Dhaka and that it allowed a total identification of India with an increasingly unpopular and autocratic government next door is a cause for critical self-reflection and urgent course correction.

Delhi must focus on understanding the sources of the revolution led by the student movement in Bangladesh. It needs to reach out to the leaders of the student movement, get a sense of what they hope to achieve. At the same time, the government must order an internal review on why and how the government agencies turned a blind eye to the gathering political storm in Bangladesh. Corrective action is needed to prevent future failures in regional policy. Meanwhile, the overly grandiose but ill-informed sections of public discourse on foreign policy in India must recognise that Bangladesh "is not India's to lose". Illusions in Delhi about India's regional hegemony that have gained ground in recent years were not rooted in a realistic assessment of the ground conditions. Delhi must view Bangladesh and, more broadly, the neighbourhood as "India's to win" through sensible economic policies, political dispute resolution, and hard diplomatic work to build wider constituencies of support. At the same time, there is no reason for doom and gloom about India's future in Bangladesh. Delhi should be confident that the relationship with Dhaka has acquired sufficient resilience over the last decade and has the potential to survive the current turbulence. Official Delhi's strategic patience and civil society's genuine empathy for the Bangla student leaders' aspirations for positive change, hold the key for navigating a major regional crisis in the Subcontinent.

SOARING HIGH

Neeraj Chopra bagging medals in successive Olympics is a feat — and his best is yet to be

NEERAJ CHOPRA COULDN'T recreate his gold-medal winning feat of Tokyo in Paris. A silver it turned out to be, despite his season-best hurl. Silver might not glow as brightly as gold, but by bagging medals in successive Olympics, Chopra showed why he can lay claim to being arguably the greatest track and field athlete the country has produced. Only two others, among a billion people, could manage medals in consecutive Games — wrestler Sushil Kumar and PV Sindhu. That the silver was greeted with an underwhelming response — as was the bronze of the hockey team, which after several false dawns is showing genuine signs of a re-emergence — points to the weight of expectations on his shoulders, comparable to Sachin Tendulkar in the '90s. Like the virtuoso batsman, Chopra made a nation hold its breath, its heartbeat raised and its hopes soaring, when he ambled onto the track.

Even Chopra's worst days are better than the great days of several other sportspersons. Two months before the Paris Olympics, he pulled out of an important event because of adductor muscle stiffness. A groin injury, the unkindest cut of all for throwers, that he sustained during the World Championships two years ago, kept recurring. The pain came back after the fourth throw in Paris, and he couldn't go full pelt in his last two attempts. To manage a medal while playing through pain reflects Chopra's tenacity. His best is yet to be.

Chopra is only 26, on the threshold of his peak years. He has a clear target and a tough competitor to beat — his infield adversary from the village of Mian Chunnun in Pakistan's Punjab province. Arshad Nadeem scaled an Olympic record of 92.97. Chopra would say that his immediate aspiration is to breach the 90m mark, his personal best being 89.94. Everything is on his side to achieve it — age, drive, talent, and expertise. Nadeem and bronze medalist Anderson Peters from Granada will offer him stiff competition, until at least the next Olympics. At a time when rivalry between the two nations in other sports has dissipated — cricketers duel only in continental tournaments, and the disparity is huge in hockey and racquet sports — a fascinating competition is brewing between Nadeem and Chopra, who call each other *bhai jaan*. Like Imran Khan and Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar and Wasim Akram in cricket, and Sohail Abbas and Dhanraj Pillay in hockey, Nadeem and Chopra can be the greatest track and field athletes of their countries.

ZERO-GRAVITY LIFE

Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore's space odyssey, despite the delay, will mark another chapter in an awe-inspiring saga

FIRST, A CLARIFICATION: Unlike in *Gravity*, the 2013 film about two astronauts left adrift after space debris damages their shuttle, Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore are not stuck in space. NASA assures that the two astronauts who blasted off aboard the Boeing Starliner on June 5 for what was supposed to be an eight-day mission will simply return to Earth a little later than expected. This will likely be in February 2025 with a SpaceX Crew Dragon craft that is scheduled for a mission at the time.

In interviews from the International Space Station (ISS), both Williams and Wilmore have indicated that they are busy enough with tests and maintenance work that the next few months are likely to pass quickly. If there is an excruciatingly long wait, it is for those on Earth who are fantasising about regular commercial space flights for tourists taking off within the next decade or so. Long before Yuri Gagarin shot off into space aboard the Vostok 1 in 1961, dreams of exploring the vast blue beyond have haunted the human imagination. Yet, the persistent hitches that have delayed the return of Williams and Wilmore — glitchy thrusters and helium leaks — indicate that while space travel technology has made great strides since then, the average traveller's dreams of spacewalking at teatime and catching sight of a sunrise every 90 minutes aboard the ISS are still a long way from coming true.

Meanwhile, Williams and Wilmore will adjust to zero-gravity life, carrying out experiments — like how to care for plants in space — and participating in chores like cleaning toilets. Their journey to space and back, with all its problems and mundaneness, will become not a sensation-creating headline, but yet another chapter in the ultimate human endeavour. A small step, maybe, but also a big leap, as another famous astronaut once said.



OPENING ARGUMENT

BY MENAKA GURUSWAMY

THE SUPREME COURT granted bail to Manish Sisodia, Delhi's former deputy Chief Minister, on August 9. Sisodia was arrested on February 26, 2023, by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and then subsequently by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 9, 2023. He has been in jail for almost a year-and-a-half without being convicted of any offence and was still awaiting trial. The Supreme Court was hearing the appeal against an order passed by the Delhi High Court in May 2024 denying him bail.

Justices B R Gavi and K V Viswanathan heard the case, *Manish Sisodia v Directorate of Enforcement* (judgment dated August 9). This judgment is notable for three reasons. First, it reaffirms and reminds all courts in the country of the age-old principle that bail is the norm and jail, the exception. Second, the right to speedy trial must be respected and that keeping an accused behind bars for an unlimited period of time while awaiting trial violates his or her right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. Finally, the right to bail in cases of delay coupled with incarceration for a long period should be read into the bail provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1972 (CrPC) and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).

Let us first examine how the Supreme Court examined the issue of how other courts have disregarded the principle of bail being the norm while jail as an exception. The judgment captures incisively the troubles with the lack of grant of bail by the various courts, which has become the practice now. This passage merits being reproduced. The Court says: "...that over a period of time, the trial courts and the High Courts have forgotten a very well-established principle of law that bail is not to be withheld as a punishment. From our experience, we can say that it appears that the trial courts and the High Court attempt to play safe in mat-

Against unfreedom

Supreme Court verdict on Manish Sisodia's incarceration upholds bail as norm and importance of timely justice

This judgment is notable for three reasons. First, it reaffirms and reminds all courts in the country of the age-old principle that bail is the norm and jail, the exception. Second, the right to speedy trial must be respected and that keeping an accused behind bars for an unlimited period of time while awaiting trial violates his or her right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. Finally, the right to bail in cases of delay coupled with incarceration for a long period should be read into the bail provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1972 and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.



RINKU GHOSH

WHEN STUDENTS in Dhaka brought down the Sheikh Hasina regime for riding roughshod over democracy, one song seemed to tug at their heartstrings. They collectively sang poet-lyricist Dwijendralal Roy's song, "*Dhono dhanno pushpe bhora/amader ei boshundhora/Tahar majhe ache desh ek shokol desher shera/O shey shopno diye toirise desh smriti diye ghera...*" (Blessed is Mother Earth with its wealth and grains/In its midst lies a land most beautiful/It is created by dreams, bound by memories). It is a song written in the early 1900s by a litterateur from this side of the border to inspire the youth against the British Raj. They remembered a shared past at the time it was threatened the most.

On a day when a statue of the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was vandalised, there's hope that a part of his legacy may last. One that has not been hammered down in a brutal rewrite of history. Will the new "dream" that students, technocrats and opposition parties envisage for themselves be "bound by memories" of the shared Bengali culture and identity that Mujibur advocated, becoming the "Bangabandhu"? "Banga" is the key word here, not the ancient kingdom but a civilisational construct. While he fought for the territorial sovereignty of Bangladesh, tied down by borders, he became the thought leader of a united Bengali consciousness, a borderless world of ideas and arts.

MAPPING A SHARING

Bengal and Bangladesh are bound together by more than just language

For many of us growing up in Kolkata, his bust figured alongside literary greats to remind us that he championed a movement around the language we were born into, its emotions and associations, and its riverine flow of shared traditions that defied both politics and religion. It is true that the Bangladesh Bhasha Andolan or Language Movement began primarily as an assertion of the right to reinstate Bengali culture and language as the official credo of a new nation. It was not just about the strategic comfort of geopolitics from India's point of view, it was about the importance of linguistic diversity and preservation worldwide. That's why February 21 — which is marked as the Language Movement Day in Bangladesh — was recognised in 1999 by UNESCO as the International Mother Language Day.

Mujibur's nationalism was more cultural, ethno-linguistic and about the right of people to live with their heritage. That's why the appeal of the Language Movement extended much beyond its immediate political outcomes or sub-nationalism. When Mujibur Rehman chose Rabindranath Tagore's composition 'Amar Sonar Bangla' for the new nation's anthem — a song that was written to protest the British Partition of Bengal in 1905 — and invited Kazi Nazrul Islam to move to Bangladesh and become its poet laureate, he liberated cultural legacy from being a hostage to politics. He embraced what they embodied, a love for their roots and a liberal, secular spirit.

Rivers and waterways have been the connective tissue of both nations. This has led to a riverine culture where customs, rituals, nature worship and even festivals like Durga Puja are shared by communities on both sides of the border, regardless of religion and geography. If anything, the river is the binding force that has inculcated the accommodative spirit among people. Durga Puja, which emerged as a symbol of the Swadeshi movement and Bengali identity, is as much a popular art and cultural event in Bangladesh. Bonbibi, the guardian spirit of the Sundarban deltas, believed to protect fishermen from tiger attacks, is worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims. Her worship has become a sub-culture so strong that it featured in a song on Coke Studio.

Bangladeshi actors, writers and poets continue to be feted and people-to-people contact has only thrived in a safe space. But by beheading the statue of Bangabandhu, attacking an Indian cultural centre and claiming August 5 as their real Independence Day, neo-patriots are snapping the umbilical cord of shared origins and "unseeing" history. Perhaps now people with radical opinions, like Mainul Ahsan Noble, a runner-up in *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Bangla* who questioned the use of Tagore's composition as Bangladesh's national anthem, will weigh in. Are the DNA strands untwining on their own or being forced apart?

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AUGUST 10, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

BOMB BLAST PROBE

THE MINISTER FOR Tourism and Civil Aviation, Khurshed Alam Khan, admitted that some senior airport and police officials at Meenambakkam airport had prima facie not responded to the bomb blast threat on August 2 with the seriousness it warranted. Very useful clues have been found in the bomb blast at the airport that killed 29 people and injured 38, he added.

SCUFFLE IN SOUTHALL

SLOGAN-SHOUTING "KHALISTANIS" ran for their lives when the hosts at an Indian-dominated Southall restaurant challenged them

to a confrontation saying that they would not cancel the dinner arranged to welcome a prominent editor of an English daily in Punjab. There was a brief scuffle between the protestors and the guests in which T S Toor, a prominent Indian community leader of Southall, suffered some injury. The police arrived and arrested one of the demonstrators.

PM ON BHINDRANWALE

THE GOVERNMENT ONCE again deplored the propaganda being carried out by Pakistani media against India. In this connection, the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, scotched all rumours of terrorists and in the Pakistani media that Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was

alive. "I can assure the House that he is dead. His body was identified," Mrs Gandhi said, in the Rajya Sabha. She told Maimoona Sultan that if Bhindranwale could be resurrected, other people who have died in Pakistan could also be resurrected.

P T USHA MISSES MEDAL

INDIA MISSED WINNING an athletics bronze medal by one-hundredth of a second when P T Usha finished fourth in the 400 metre hurdles at the Los Angeles Olympic Games. Usha clocked a career-best 55.43 seconds to finish behind Nawal El Moutawakel of Morocco, Judi Brown of the United States and Cristiana Cojocaru of Romania.

Sub-quota red herrings

We need to set aside misconceived criticisms to confront some real apprehensions raised by the apex court verdict on sub-classification of SCs/STs



YOGENDRA YADAV,
PRANNV DHAWAN AND
SHIVAM MOGHA

THE SUB-QUOTA debate has begun on a false note. Instead of addressing some real problems and genuine apprehensions with the Supreme Court judgment, the debate has been distracted by red herrings. It needs more light than heat.

The biggest problem is that many supporters of social justice have assumed, wrongly, that the Supreme Court verdict is about diluting the existing system of reservation. A plain reading of the majority judgment authored by the Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud, and the judgment by Justice BR Gavai makes it clear that this verdict is very much in line with the legacy of progressive jurisprudence on social justice that upholds caste-sensitive affirmative action. If anything, the apex court has deepened the quest for justice by foregrounding the concerns of the least advantaged and most stigmatised communities, placed at the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy. CJI Chandrachud's elaboration of the principle of "substantive equality" takes forward the legacy of the *NM Thomas* judgment and would act as a bulwark against any future attempt to dismantle affirmative action in the name of merit.

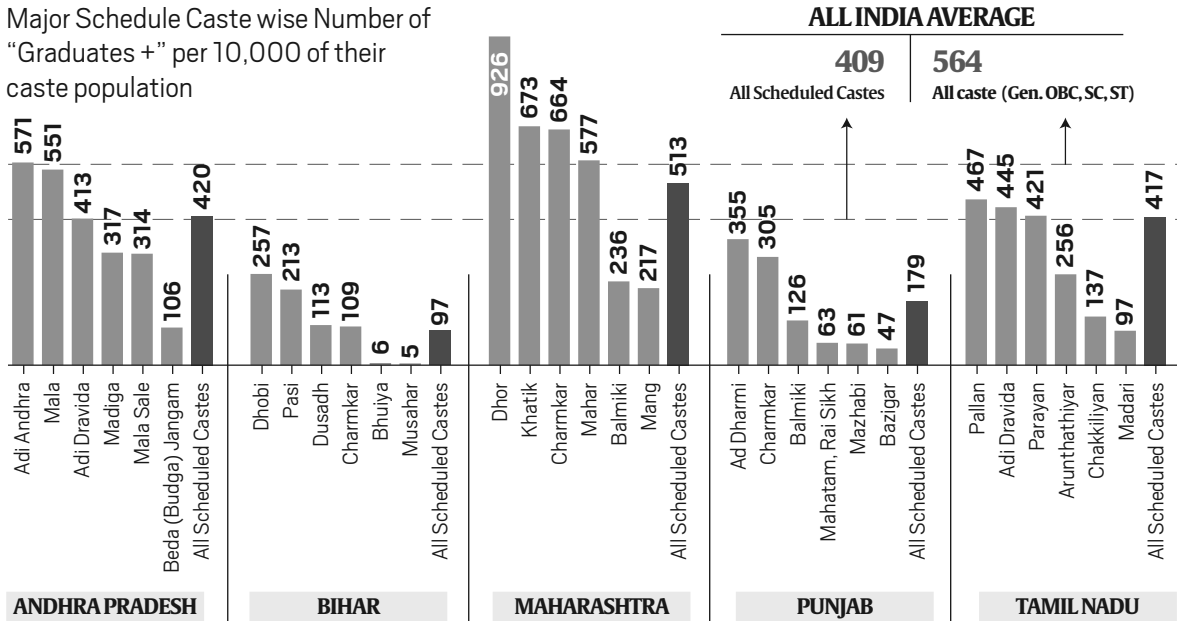
Besides this generic but mistaken impression, there are some specific but equally misplaced criticisms. First, there is a legal-constitutional objection that the court has usurped the domain of Parliament. This reiteration of formal legalism reminiscent of *EV Chinmiah* judgment is deeply flawed. The court has neither carried out the sub-division nor even mandated it. Whether and how the sub-division will take place is for the legislatures to decide and for the governments to implement. The apex constitutional court has done what only the judiciary could have done, namely clarified that such an exercise is permissible under Article 341 of the Constitution.

The second criticism, about the SC passing such a major order without authentic empirical evidence, is factually incorrect. The Census of India provides authentic and granular data not just of the head count, but also of the occupation, family assets and educational attainments of each of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (but not for the rest of the population) at every administrative level. The accompanying chart presents a glimpse of this data from the latest census of 2011 for the proportion of "graduates or above" (per 10,000 rather than per cent) within each SC community for a few states.

The conclusion is evident: There is nothing homogeneous about the educational disadvantage of Dalits communities. Take Punjab, the state that gave rise to this legal case: The level of graduates among Mazhabi Sikhs (61) is less than half of Hindu Balmikis (126) whose level is less than half of the Ravidasi (305). Just look at the numbers for Bhuiya (just 6) and Musahar (just 5) in Bihar, Madari (97) and Chakkilian (137) in Tamil Nadu, Jangam (106) in united Andhra Pradesh, Balmiki (115) and Pasi (145) in Uttar Pradesh, Madiga (209) in Karnataka and Mang (217) in Maharashtra. Compare these numbers with those of other SC communities within that state and you

WHY SUB-QUOTAS ARE JUSTIFIED:

Major Schedule Caste wise Number of "Graduates +" per 10,000 of their caste population



1. Graduate+ refers to degrees that include both undergraduate (bachelor's) and postgraduate (master's and above) levels of education; 2. Andhra Pradesh's data includes Telangana; 3. We have selected states where the demand for sub-categorisation of reservations has been or is prominent. The selection of castes is based on illustrating disparities; although these castes may not have large populations, they still have a high proportion of individuals with graduation or higher degrees; 4. Source: Census 2011, data on educational levels (Scheduled Castes)

would understand why it may be grossly unfair for these castes to compete with the rest. To be sure, this inequality is not because of any oppression or discrimination by the relatively less disadvantaged Dalit communities, but it needs a redressal anyway.

Finally, there is the political objection, that sub-classification would create political rift within Dalits. Frankly, the ground reality is that the social life and political expression of diverse SC *jatis* is already fragmented and fractured. In fact, the only way to create unity within and between categories is by creating broad, consociational arrangements. This can be done if voices from the relatively less disadvantaged communities within Dalits would acknowledge the agency of the most disadvantaged SC communities who have won a hard-fought legal fight. Unfortunately, the insinuation of social division at this stage echoes the anti-reservationist rhetoric of the "upper" caste elite.

Once we set aside these misconceived criticisms, we can confront some real apprehensions and difficulties that need to be dealt with. First, there is a real possibility that the licence to sub-classify may be used as a tool of political expediency, if not as a weapon to punish the communities not aligned with the ruling party. The BJP has already misused OBC sub-classification in some states for this purpose. The verdict provides some safeguards against this possibility, as it requires evidence driven classification. It would be necessary to specify the nature of this evidence. Besides the census and economic census data that is already available, it would be necessary to have a nationwide caste census of all organised sector jobs and higher educational institutions.

Second, we cannot rule out the possibility of sub-classification being used as a ploy to reduce the number of eligible candidates for higher jobs and using the "Not Found Suitable" route to first keep the positions vacant and then transfer them to the "unreserved" category. This can be remedied by a rule that any unfilled post in the sub-category of SC/ST may be transferred to another sub-category of SC or ST, but cannot be transferred to Unreserved.

Third, there are multiple problems with the sudden application of the "creamy layer" doc-

We cannot rule out the possibility of sub-classification being used as a ploy to reduce the number of eligible candidates for higher jobs and using the 'Not Found Suitable' route to first keep the positions vacant and then transfer them to the 'unreserved' category. This can be remedied by a rule that any unfilled post in the sub-category of SC/ST may be transferred to another sub-category of SC or ST, but cannot be transferred to Unreserved.

trine to the SC and ST. One, the issue of "creamy layer" was not framed by the court and the litigants did not get a fair chance to contest this point. The CJI has wisely kept quiet on this issue, as he was not required to address it. Two, while there are drops of "creamy" individuals and families among Dalits, there is no sociological evidence that the SC communities have already formed a "creamy layer" — which requires inter-generational transfer of privileges, assured social status and stable social networks. Three, the exclusion of "creamy layer" would reduce the pool of eligible candidates even further and open the way for transferring posts to the unreserved category. While it is true that the exclusion of "creamy layer" is not an operational direction in this judgment, there is a real fear that observations by four judges in a seven-member bench could be used to challenge any sub-quota policy that may not use the "creamy layer" criterion. If this issue is not clarified in a judicial review, Parliament may need to step in to remove this confusion.

Finally, there is the issue of the impact of this verdict on the Scheduled Tribes, while the case was argued substantively on the social reality of the Scheduled Castes. In one sense this was unavoidable: There cannot be two different interpretations of Article 341 and 342, one for SCs and another for STs. But the fact remains that the nature of internal differences and the very logic of reservation are substantially different in the case of STs. It may be prudent to hold back the substantive application of this verdict in the case of STs till the apex court finds an opportunity to get into the specifics of the reservation for Scheduled Tribes.

Instead of protesting against the idea of the sub-quota, the politics and policies of social justice should focus on correcting some flaws in the present judgment and move on to the real long-term issues: Enhancing SC/ST reservation as per the current population of SCs and STs, removal of the 50 per cent ceiling and deepening and broadening of the social justice apparatus beyond public sector jobs.

Yadav is member, Swaraj India, Dhawan is a Delhi-based advocate and legal researcher and Mogha is a PHD scholar at CSSS, JNU

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Since the Gaza carnage began, Israel has violated the sovereignty of several Muslim states. These provocative actions have brought the region to the brink of war... The international community should know that if hostilities expand in the region, their impact will be felt across the globe."

—DAWN, PAKISTAN

Social injustice

SC judgment on Scheduled Caste sub-quotas is deeply problematic, could undo gains made by reservation policy



ABDUL KHALIQ

THE SUPREME COURT verdict permitting sub-classification within the same class of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and also calling for the creamy layer among Dalits to be taken out of the purview of reservation is deeply flawed. It may be used to dilute affirmative action and pave the way to do away with reservation. Let me explain.

The judgment is deeply problematic and ignores grim social realities. For a large swathe of Dalits in the country whose lives are "poor, nasty, brutish and short", the issue of reservation has no meaning. Trapped in the daily struggle for survival, they neither have the wherewithal nor the luxury of educating themselves enough to benefit from reservation. Giving them a slice of the hypothetical reservation quota will not change their lives in any way. The brutal fact is that an infinitesimal percentage of Dalits is eligible to compete for the reservation quota.

In the last 10 years, there has been a fog of secrecy around the filling of posts of SCs/STs in various government ministries. According to a report submitted to Parliament in March 2021, 50 per cent of the posts reserved for OBCs, SCs and STs across 10 Union ministries were lying vacant. Similarly, faculty positions for SCs and STs remain unoccupied in prestigious higher education institutions, including central universities, IITs and IIMs. Importantly, one of the reasons cited for these vacancies is the absence of suitable candidates. Using this as a pretext, the UGC recently issued guidelines outlining the circumstances in which reserved posts could be "dereserved" but hurriedly retracted it when there was a public outcry. The Supreme Court has ignored these crucial facts while passing a judgment that, in the name of distributive justice, will only exacerbate the problem of filling up SC/ST vacancies.

The argument that the creamy-layer concept is applicable to OBCs and hence should logically be extended to Dalit communities is akin to equating chalk with cheese. The OBCs, as a group, are in a different stratosphere, way above the SCs/STs on the economic ladder, and more particularly, in social standing. Today, the Dalit, stuck at the bottom of our iniquitous social hierarchy, would gladly exchange places with a member of any other group. Eliminating the creamy layer from the purview of reservation will only make matters worse for Dalits.

It is bizarre that in a country riddled with the most flagrant and inhuman inequalities, only the alleged inequality within the most vulnerable group — the Dalit community — is being targeted for correction. Splitting of the SC/ST reservation quotas will only benefit vested interests seeking leverage in the fragmentation of these groups. It will shatter whatever sol-

idity exists among the SCs. The Supreme Court has, in effect, decreed that the long-suffering victims of the caste system should themselves be compartmentalised into different subsets, creating another hierarchy and caste system. This will drive a wedge between the different sub-groups.

Caste is still deeply embedded in our culture. The Court verdict ignores the complexities and rationale behind reservation for SCs/STs. The raison d'être for granting reservation is not merely economic backwardness or inadequate representation in the "services of the State" as seemingly imputed by the Court (poverty exists across castes and communities) but untouchability and its unremitting grip on our society.

So ingrained is caste that the Dalit, irrespective of economic advancement or a government job, is still socially handicapped on account of his origins, the so-called "creamy layer" included. It makes no sense to disrupt the fragile homogeneity among Dalits by discriminating between them based on tenuous criteria to be drawn up by the state to "establish that the inadequacy of representation of a caste/group is because of its backwardness". The highest court has cautioned that the criteria should not be based on "whims and political expediency". But these are precisely the factors that will determine them.

The judgment's language befuddles the issue, stressing the need to determine if a particular class is a "homogeneous integrated class" or not before deciding on the grant of sub-classification. By adjudicating without adequate justification that the "Scheduled Castes are a socially heterogeneous class", the Court has overlooked the crucial, commonly shared social stigma of "camouflaged untouchability" that still plagues Dalits irrespective of their economic status. This crippling handicap was the primary justification for our founding fathers to mandate reservation for SCs in the first place.

The judgment violates Article 341 of the Constitution, which authorises the President to issue the notification specifying the caste categories deemed to be Scheduled Castes. Article 341(2) allows Parliament to amend by law such notification to include or exclude any caste or group within any caste, with the crystal clear caveat that "save as aforesaid, a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification." By permitting the states to tamper with and modify the notification and by allowing sub-classification and "varied" treatment within the same class of Scheduled Castes notified under Article 341, the judgment is unquestionably unconstitutional.

Article 46 of the Constitution categorically enjoins upon the state the imperative "to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and in particular of the SCs and STs and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." This is an absolute condition enshrined in the Constitution.

The writer, a former civil servant, is secretary-general of the IJP (RV). Views are personal



RAM RAJYA
BY RAM MADHAV

A time for healing

Muhammad Yunus must work on building a modern, secular Bangladesh

A WEEK AGO, nobody would have imagined that the world's longest-serving woman prime minister, a leader who was once described as the Iron Lady of South Asia and credited with building a modern and secular Bangladesh during her record 15-year rule, Sheikh Hasina, would be forced to become a fugitive. Hasina presided over the spectacular rise of the eighth-largest country in the world from an underdeveloped economy to the shining star of South Asia. During her last three terms as prime minister, Bangladesh's economy grew from \$155 billion in 2010 to \$450 billion in 2023. She fought back against Islamic radicals and came down heavily on the terror infrastructure. Her dispensation often came to the rescue of the country's minority population including Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists.

Hasina's current plight may seem incongruous to many. Some may blame groups like Jamaat-e-Islami or the opposition BNP for the situation, while others may see a "foreign hand" in it. But it would be a mistake to miss the reality that this agitation by millions of youngsters was the manifestation of deep-rooted anger. Hasina's good work must be acknowledged. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that resentment was brewing among ordinary citizens, especially in the aftermath of the growing economic travails after the Covid pandemic and elections in January.

Prosperity grew in Bangladesh, but together with economic inequality. One estimate suggested that over 30 per cent of the country's GDP went into the coffers of top 5 per cent households, while the bottom 50 per cent witnessed their share decreasing to 19 per cent. Unemployment and inflation also plagued this country with a massive young population. Eighty-three per cent of the unemployed are within the age group of 15 to 29 years.

The spark to this combustible situation came when the High Court in Dhaka reinstated quotas in government jobs in early June. Bangladesh had a complex quota system in which around 56 per cent jobs were reserved — 30 per cent for the descendants of *mukhti joddhas*, families of those who fought for the country's independence in 1971, 10 per cent each for backward districts and women, 5 per cent for minorities and 1 per cent for the physically challenged. This quota system, introduced in 1972 by Mujibur Rahman, triggered several agitations. The major resentment was against quota for the families of *mukhti joddhas*, which was seen as a reward for Awami League cadres.

Protests against this quota system have broken out at least twice in the last decade. In July 2013, Bangladesh Civil Services aspirants launched protests that quickly spread to other cities resulting in the government deciding not to apply quotas that year. In 2018 again, protests

led to several deaths, forcing the Hasina government to withdraw quotas. Their restoration by the High Court in June triggered the youth revolt this time.

Casting this outburst of the students as "terrorism" or pejoratively describing them as "razakars" — a term used for pro-Pakistan paramilitary forces during the liberation war — and deploying the ruling party's student wing to counter the agitation were all ill-conceived moves, which aggravated the situation. The excessive use of force by security forces was uncalled for. The government's failure to seize the opportunity when students decided to suspend the agitation after the Supreme Court's order of annulling quotas on July 21 is inexplicable. After all, it was the same youth force that had helped Sheikh Hasina come to power before. In 1990, Bangladesh saw a similar uprising by students, workers, teachers, and professionals against the military rule of General Ershad that forced the army's retreat into the barracks and brought democracy back.

The challenge now is to ensure that the gains of the last few decades are not frittered away. So far, the student leaders have demonstrated maturity. Bringing a Nobel laureate and a highly respected leader, Muhammad Yunus, to head the interim government is one such move. Bangladesh needed a leader who can heal and unite. Yunus commands respect

among the masses. Bringing order and peace to the country will naturally be his top priority. During such periods of unrest in the past, fundamentalist forces have exploited the situation to subject the country's minorities, especially Hindus, to atrocities. The Hindus of Bangladesh stood by their Muslim brethren during the fight for liberation and were subjected to the worst atrocities by the Pakistan army. They remained proud Bengali citizens of the country after its creation in 1971. Yet, the very forces that sided with the Pakistan army during the liberation war continued their atrocities against the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian minorities in the last five decades.

Yunus, a *mukhti joddha* who mobilised support for the liberation war in America, would understand the mission of Bangabandhu in building a modern, secular and democratic Bangladesh. Despite his differences with Hasina, he would appreciate the strong relationship between Bangladesh and India.

Regime change is Bangladesh's internal matter. But as Yunus himself pointed out a few days ago, "if there is a fire in the brother's house, how can I say it is an internal affair"? Bangladesh's peaceful rise is important for all in the region, especially India.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS. Views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUDDHADEB'S LEGACY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Tragic reformer' (IE, August 9). Had Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee not lost the assembly elections in 2011, the story of industrial growth in Bengal would be different. His assertion in Jakarta on "reform or perish" during his tour to Indonesia and Singapore created disquiet in his own party. At a time when "reforms" was a word that the left parties disliked, his approach did not go down well with the party. His government lost the vital projects of Nano car of Tata Group and Salim Group of Indonesia. This resulted in the untimely death of his reformist agenda and left parties lost ground in Bengal.

Manoj Parashar, Ghaziabad

NEED FOR UPGRADE

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Silver and bronze' (IE, August 9). Although Neeraj Chopra signed off with a silver and the hockey team a bronze, the country is almost certain to end up without a gold in the Paris Games. The fact that India, the most populous nation in the world, has so far won just five medals, requires serious introspection. Detailed planning, efficient training, investment in sports and thoroughly professionalising sports management are the tools for success. Apart from international exposure, a vibrant tournament circuit in individual sports, will make a huge difference.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

A SPORTING LEGEND

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'We are Vinesh' (IE, August 9). Despite a year of challenges, Vinesh Phogat fought relentlessly. The loss of a medal is heartbreaking. The IOA has rightly planned to express strong objections to technical shortcomings in the rules and regulations of UWW. The country extends its support to Vinesh. Her case needs to be presented at UWW by the Modi government. Her retirement announcement has left Indian sport poorer while we await the verdict of her appeal for a joint silver medal.

SS Paul, Nadia

EDUCATE & EMPOWER

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Generation of broken dreams' (IE, August 8). From a young age, we try to ensure that children learn from every challenge. The true meaning of being a student is to be curious lifelong, so why do parents and institutions allow competition to get to children's heads? Every student has talent for something and teaching them to discover and explore that part of themselves is what education should be about. Teaching them to be better than themselves and competing with themselves is what education is about. Is a child's life worth the pressure of performance?

Debjani Saha, Mumbai

SHUBHRA GUPTA

THE SEQUEL to the 2021 *Haseen Dillruba* manages to hit all the marks that the original fumbled at: it is atmospheric, deliciously squelchy, overrun with characters who revel in using love, sex and *dhokha* as means to their dubious ends. It's been a while since I've had this much fun with a Hindi film which goes full-tilt at grown-up, amoral romance territory.

Phir Aayi Haseen Dillruba, this time with an extra 's' in *Haseen*, loses no time in telling us just how unsettled our lovers-on-the-lam Rani (Taapsee Pannu) and Rishu (Vikrant Massey) continue to be: their Agra hide-out may be at some distance from the town they ran from, but their nemesis, in the shape of dogged cop (Aditya Srivastava), is still hot on their heels.

And this time around, they have a stronger, smarter foe, in the shape of investigating officer Mrityunjay (Jimmy Sheirgill) who labels himself a *kadhpodwa* (woodpecker) in a terrific scene, making knocking gestures with his hand. He will keep pecking away till he nails the duo, who he knows were responsible for the death of a loved one.

There are a couple more additions in the cast this time around, and both add flavour. The mild-mannered Abhimanyu (Sunny Kaushal) is a local compounder whose being smitten with Rani is no secret. What he keeps under wraps are his other skills, which is knowing exactly how deep the waters of the Yamuna run, and how vicious the crocodiles that swarm the river are. The other is a wily woman (Bhumika Dube) who weaponises her disability to get to her target: it matters little that the man she has set her eyes on is patently not into her. She was a stand-out in the feminist romp, *Cheepatakadumka* (2021); here she is as impactful.

Props to writer Kanika Dhillon for infusing the characters with empathy, that quality which is necessary for us to go on rooting for them despite themselves. They can go to any lengths, even murder, to attain the object of their desire, but they are not inherently evil. They do what they do for love, especially as it is depicted in those grubby paperbacks with such titles as *Khooni Ishq* and *Pyaar Ka Darinda*, mention of said *upanyas*, as in the earlier film, adding the right hint of luridness here.

Niggles do exist. No one but Bollywood units use that exact spot behind the Taj Mahal, or a boat ride on the filthy Yamuna, to ex-

Cuts Like an Angel

PHIR AAYI HASSEEN DILLRUBA ★★★

Director: Jayprad Desai Cast: Taapsee Pannu, Vikrant Massey, Sunny Kaushal, Bhumika Dube, Jimmy Sheirgill, Aditya Srivastava



change sweet nothings. Some deaths are just the most obvious red herrings: we know that the dead will arise. Some dialogues are so on the nose that you wince: why explain when you can nudge and wink? And one scene, featuring a posse of cops landing up at a suspect's doorstep and meekly having to wait their turn, makes you groan.

But these kinds of contrivances are an intrinsic part of pulpy, trashy fiction which Hindi fiction writers used to churn out with such felicity in the '60s and '70s; the surprises that this film manages to throw out, despite the expected 'yeh-laash-usski-ho-hi-nahin-sakti' scenes, are enough to keep us going.

The trio of Taapsee Pannu as the scheming Rani, whose stringy blouses never quite manage to hide a tender beating heart, Vikrant Massey who valiantly stays the course for his one true love, and Sunny Kaushal who makes the well-trodden role of a *mar-mitne-wala-aashiq* his own, are all spot on, the latter stealing every scene he is

in. As is Sheirgill, except you wish he would stay consistent: Rishu or Rissu?

I am a sucker for *manohar kahaanis*, where right and wrong are not easily coded, and which know how to push the right buttons, switching up lust and danger. And this one does it right. Can we please have some more?

Out of Depth

GYAARAH GYAARAH

★★

Director: Umesh Bist Cast: Kritika Kamra, Raghav Juyal, Dhairya Karwa, Harsh Chhaya, Gautami Kapoor, Nitesh Pandey, Purnendu Bhattacharya

SHUBHRA GUPTA

BASED ON the 2016 Korean web series, *Signal*, *Gyaarah Gyaarah* gives us an Uttarakhand-based police procedural featuring characters overlapping in parallel storylines about unsolved murders unfolding over two eras, connected through a supernatural boost.

In a Dussehra *mela* in Dehradun, a young girl goes missing. Her distraught mother (Gautami Kapoor) never lets the local police forget: 15 years later, there are no signs of her husband — who behaved like a fumbling extra, unsure of how he needs to act — and she is still waiting to understand exactly what happened that fateful night. But with no leads in sight, the case has long since gone cold.

In the best traditions of the genre, a fresh infusion of blood is required to blow off dust. The stasis, which has senior cop Vamika Rawat (Kritika Kamra) and her reluctant older colleagues in its grip, is broken by newbie psychological profiler Yug Arya (Raghav Juyal) who is left gobsmacked when a funnel opens up between him and an investigative cop Shaurya Anthwal (Dhairya Karwa), clearly operating in the past.

Err what? Yeah, exactly. An antique instrument crackles to life at exactly 11.11, becoming the conduit for an exchange of crucial information, and sets things in mo-



tion. Skeletons come tumbling out. The forensic team is given additional ammo, and the long-awaited breakthrough occurs. As it does in other baffling mouldering cases the 'cold case' team takes up: ding dong, it is *gyaarah gyaarah*.

The original, a middling 16-part show, is condensed into eight episodes in the desi adaptation (directed by Umesh Bist and written by Sunjoy Shekhar and Puja Banerji), but it doesn't quite lead to the brisk pace which a series like this should aim for. Which makes the whole thing a stretch. The plot-line cannot help but become convoluted in the way it keeps zigging-and-zagging through past and present, and some characters stay single note even after we come upon them 15 years later, remarkably untouched by time — no wrinkles, grey hair, or bulky midriffs.

The performances are all serviceable, but you wish these characters were given more leeway through smarter writing. Kamra is at her best in the scenes she shares with an elderly time-keeper (Purnendu Bhattacharya), when she doesn't have to bark instructions or orders at

her subordinates, who seem to be at loggerheads for no good reason.

Both Juyal, just coming off an explosive turn in *Kill*, and Karwa, who left an impact in '83, do their jobs well enough. You wonder why the writers thought it fit not to give poor Harsh Chhaya even a single line without an expletive. The late Nitesh Pandey, a wonderful actor, gets even shorter shrift: in the first episode, large hints are dropped that he is on the take, the angle which is never explored in subsequent episodes. Poof, gone.

The biggest problem the series has is being unable to conjure up enough fear or menace, give or take a sequence or two. While we do get a sense of the outside — bus stops from where a serial killer gets on, water bodies where the dead give up their secrets, aerial shots of the hills — a lot of this show never shakes off the feeling that it was constructed on sets. There's also the problem of the wailing-violin background music which belongs strictly to mouldy movies. It has no space in a web series meant to get past old practices. When will this tiresome melodrama be deep-sixed?



Boxed In

BORDERLANDS ★★★

Director: Eli Roth Cast: Cate Blanchett, Kevin Hart, Jamie Lee Curtis, Edgar Ramirez, Jack Black, Ariana Greenblatt

SHALINI LANGER

THERE IS a galaxy that was once ruled by a species called the 'Eridians', who had the kind of powers the world fights over. The Eridians are long gone now, with pieces of the powers they had scattered across a planet called Pandora. In the consequent years of struggle for those powers, particularly the big one lying inside 'The Vault', Pandora has been reduced to a planet full of monsters, piss, scrap, garbage and some angrily mad people, in no particular order.

But the search continues for 'The Vault', which can be opened with only a daughter of an Eridian, plus one other key that looks nothing like a key.

You may feel you have heard all that before — you won't be wrong. And you may

feel you have seen it all before — just recently in *Deadpool* and *Wolverine*, in fact.

However, have you seen Cate Blanchett do the hunting, sporting shocking red hair and eyecatchingly coloured ensembles? With Jamie Lee Curtis for an audience?

These two great women can save many a film, so what's a planet or two to stop them? However, this Eli Roth adaptation of a video game is just too generic, too familiar, and too incapable of raising either laughs or emotions (one whole group is just known as 'psychos', while another is 'those people who are too psycho for even psychos'), and too unclear about what is at stake for any of this to matter.

Making Jack Black a robot called Claptrap perhaps doesn't help, even as Kevin Hart struggles to infuse any charisma into his significant presence. The standout, besides Blanchett, who can hardly ever do anything wrong, is Greenblatt. She is as bratty and as batty as they get, with a pinning heart and a sad backstory to boot.

As long as the hunt is about catching the girl, or saving her, and her getting the better of those trying to do either — with some wicked toys — *Borderlands* is on the right planet.

Lost in Translation

IT ENDS WITH US ★★

Director: Justin Baldoni

Cast: Blake Lively, Justin Baldoni, Brandon Sklenar, Jenny Slate, Hasan Minhaj

SHALINI LANGER

THE SURPRISE bestseller by Colleen Hoover on which this film is based, and named, actually held very few surprises.

Nice, kind girl meets a homeless, groovily blue-eyed boy, and backyard access and an open window do the rest. Nice, kind girl grows up into Blake Lively and meets a rich, hot neurosurgeon, when some remarkably scrawny flowers and copious, copulating flirtation do the rest.

There was the matter of domestic abuse that set this standard template apart, but Hoover's book and now this film are so concentrated on the romances and the sex that

this serious subject is never treated with any amount of complexity.

It's also contentious whether Lively, she of the perpetually wistful look, look-at-me smiles and golden-girl aura, is the right actor to play Lily and do the switch between the girl who sneaks homeless boys into her home (Atlas, played as older man by Sklenar), to the woman who has rich, successful and supposedly gorgeous men like Ryle (Baldoni) pining for her, to the woman who must make some very hard decisions while running a business that, for really no sane reason at all, is an instant hit.

And all this while, making some very rich friends very, very quickly — yeah, because that's how rich people are. Thankfully, though,



the rich couple she befriends are played by the ever-great Jenny Slate and Minhaj (who has little to do). To be fair to the film, directed by Baldoni — who gives himself a lot of screen

time but not the kind of breaks the book offers Ryle — it gives us some idea of the kind of confusion an incident of violence from someone you love can leave you with.

Despite the experience of her own abusive father, Lily buries the details of these incidents deep into her mind.

But then the film chooses to skim through a lot of that horror, and a lot of the day after. Which is what makes *It Ends With Us* such a copout and a pretence when it comes to domestic abuse. It gives us no sense of the strengths of the loves that bind us, the loves that hold us back, the loves we can't leave behind, the loves we need not, and the loves that set us free.

The book at least gave us a glimpse of what a rare, uncomplicated love can be, in the shape of teenagers Atlas and Lily (played by actors who unfortunately look older), who are two lost kids who find each other.

Atlas is a bland bystander in the film in comparison and, as played by the indifferent Skelander with a hand perpetually covering his mouth, even more so.

When he tells Lily, "If you can find in your heart someone to love again, fall in love with me", you don't even skip a heartbeat. Or believe, yeah, it ends with them.

STREAMING WATCH LIST

BY ALAKA SAHANI



LOST MIGRATIONS

MUBI

Exploring the untold stories of the Partition of 1947, *Lost Migrations* is a three-part animated series presented by UK-based non-profit Project Dastaan and animation studios Spitting Image, Bengaluru and Puffball Studios, Lahore. The first episode, *Rest In Paper* by Haseeb Rehman, draws upon the true story of India-born Ghulam Ali who is rendered stateless between India and Pakistan in the elusive search for a proof of identity. *Seabirds* by Sawera Jahan shows the ripples of Partition far from the subcontinent's borderlands on the Chettiar diaspora, connected by shared memories of food. Directed by Sandhya Visvanathan, Aniruddh Menon, Shoumik Biswas and Aditya Bharadwaj, *Sultana's Dream* is inspired by Rokeya Sakhawat.



CHANDU CHAMPION

PRIME VIDEO

DIRECTED BY Kabir Khan, this biographical sports drama features Kartik Aaryan as Murlikant Petkar, India's first Paralympics gold medalist. This movie chronicles the setbacks and triumphs of Petkar, who served as a soldier in the 1965 Indo-Pak War and sustained injuries that left him physically impaired. Yet, Petkar went on to become a champion sportsman across several disciplines.



ULLOZHUKKU

PRIME VIDEO

Directed by Christo Tomy, *Ullozhukku* (*Undercurrent*) is an unusual tale of sisterhood and hope. Powered by the talented duo Urvasi and Parvathy Thiruvothu, *Ullozhukku* explores the relationship between a young widow and her doting mother-in-law following the death of her husband. Shot extensively in Kuttanad, the story explores the family dynamics as they, trapped in monsoon flood, wait for the waters to recede to hold the funeral.



BOYHOOD

NETFLIX

Richard Linklater-directed *Boyhood*, filmed over 12 years with the same cast, is considered to be a remarkable cinematic achievement. Shot in Linklater's native Houston, the movie follows the story of growing up as seen through the eyes of Mason (Ellar Coltrane) — from the time he was six to 18. The film features Ethan Hawke and Patricia Arquette as Mason's parents, who are divorced, and Lorelei Linklater as his sister Samantha. *Boyhood*, whose filming started without a completed script, presents vignettes of a childhood that's impacted by parents' divorce. Imbued with nostalgia, it presents a moving account of growing up and parenting.



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Path ahead for Yunus and India

Bangladesh's interim government needs to bring back order and mitigate polarisation urgently. New Delhi must assist it in doing this

The violence that has marked the power vacuum after the ouster of former Bangladesh prime minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina certainly doesn't augur well for the neighbourhood, especially at a time when the situation in Myanmar has taken a turn for the worse. More than 200 people have been killed after the Hasina regime fell. This puts the total number of deaths in Bangladesh since the student protests that drove Hasina out of power began at more than 500. The attacks this week largely targeted leaders and supporters of Hasina's Awami League party. But the country's minority communities have faced violence, too. This prompted PM Narendra Modi to call Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, the head of the new interim government in Dhaka, and urge protection of Hindus and other minorities.

Bangladesh has had caretaker governments in the past, many short-lived, and the precedent of one in 2007, headed by Fakhruddin Ahmed, who, like Yunus, was an economist of international standing. But the challenges before Yunus are decidedly more daunting. The first task will be restoring order after weeks of chaos that disrupted normal life and economic activity and resulted in immense loss of life and property. It is significant that Yunus's first message — even before taking oath — was focused squarely on peace and reconciliation. He said nothing can be done without tackling the disorder and that he would quit if the attacks didn't stop immediately. The interim council backing Yunus inspires confidence, with its mix of technocrats, women, representatives of the students' movement, and members of ethnic and religious minorities.

The caretaker setup must tackle the deep polarisation along political lines as it prepares the grounds for holding fresh elections, though there is still no certainty on when polls will be held. The restructuring of the police force, widely perceived as acting at the behest of the Awami League, and ending the violence that threatens to spiral will be another priority. Next, Yunus has to work on reviving Bangladesh's economy, which never really recovered from the double whammy of Covid-19 and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and on generating jobs, especially at a time when there is unprecedented unemployment. This fuelled discontent in recent months, and Yunus will surely be aware that the anti-Hasina protest started as one against a controversial quota in government jobs.

He also must focus on undoing the politicisation of institutions such as the judiciary, civil service, and security establishment, as Hasina stuffed these with her loyalists. Space for freedom of expression and dissent, rendered non-existent under the previous regime, needs to be created afresh. This will help ensure free and fair elections, which can return the country to its democratic moorings and put it on course for graduation from Least Developed Country status by 2026.

India has already signalled that the interests of the people of Bangladesh are paramount, and that New Delhi is committed to working with Dhaka for peace, security and development. However, it will need to address Yunus's disappointment about engaging solely with the Awami League, to the exclusion of other players. This will also help New Delhi regain the trust of the ecosystem in Dhaka. Given that Yunus has American backing, this can also help align Indian and US interests in the country.

The nationalistic underpinnings of Olympic quests

Over the past decade, sport has also become a part of India's efforts to achieve national glory, great power status and a bid to host the Olympics in future

Every four years, India wakes up to the intricacies of shooting and the differences between pistol, rifle, trap and skeet. It's not because of its love for the sport of shooting but due to the hope placed on shooters to bring back a scarce commodity: Olympic medals. The interest in somewhat marginal sports — with due respect to disciplines like shooting — is largely fuelled by the prospects of Olympic success and national glory. That holds true for most nations, particularly those like China, and in an earlier era, the erstwhile Soviet Union, that made sporting success a pillar of their nationalism and place in the world.

The connection between sport and nationalism is an old one and runs counter to Olympic founder Pierre de Coubertin's mantra about competing and not necessarily winning. George Orwell might have been exaggerating when, in the context of the Cold War, he labelled sport as "war minus the shooting." However, Eric Hobsbawm got it right when he wrote that the "imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people."

In the first few Olympics, there were participants who did not necessarily represent their nation, but this soon became the norm. Alan Bairner, a sports historian, has written that sport "facilitates flag-waving and the playing of national anthems" more than any other social activity. This is especially true for the Olympics which, as Mukul Kesavan notes, has pioneered a "non-stop identification of sport and the nation."

This was quite apparent in the badminton men's doubles finals in the ongoing Olympics when a pair from Taiwan — which competes under the banner of Chinese Taipei to assuage China — was pitted against the Chinese. The

venue itself was a teeming mass of flag-waving spectators, unsurprisingly dominated by supporters of China. Supporters of Taiwan were, however, not allowed to carry their national flag but only the specially created Chinese Taipei Olympic flag. Those who tried to the contrary were either ejected or had their flags confiscated. After the Chinese Taipei pair won the finals, the victory was interpreted by many Taiwanese as an affirmation of Taiwan's international status. The Taiwanese president also later posted on social media that the win had "united" the nation. Such examples of victories being interpreted in nationalist terms and outright political acts abound in the history of the Olympics. The tit-for-tat Cold War-era boycotts during the 1980 Moscow and the 1984 Los Angeles Games are prime examples of the politics around the Games.

Well before the boycott-hit games, there were several examples of the intersection of the Olympics with nationalism and politics. One of the more notable ones was the 'blood in the water' water polo match between Hungary and the Soviet Union in the 1956 Olympics in the backdrop of the Hungarian Revolution. And who can forget the iconic black salute by Tommie Smith and John Carlos in 1968 to protest discrimination against African Americans, for which their sporting careers were destroyed?

The desire of most nations, including India, to bolster its medal tally is largely driven by nationalistic instincts and a desire to make an impact on the global stage. In an earlier era, the Soviet Union and some members of the Soviet

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SPORT AND NATIONALISM IS AN OLD ONE AND RUNS COUNTER TO OLYMPIC FOUNDER PIERRE DE COUBERTIN'S MANTRA ABOUT COMPETING AND NOT NECESSARILY WINNING



Ronojoy Sen



In India's recent focus on sports, there are shades of China's policy of medal harvesting without the coercive system

bloc had done so methodically, even resorting to illegal means to achieve sporting glory. In the contemporary period, China has shown the way.

Unlike India, which won hockey gold before Independence, China won its first gold in the 1984 Games when it re-entered the Olympic fold. Since then, it has risen meteorically to win 48 gold medals in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, placing it ahead of its closest competitor, the US, and has vied with the US for the top spot in subsequent Olympics. Mao Zedong had always made a connection between sport and nationalism. It was only in 2001 after Beijing was chosen to host the 2008 Games, that China began in earnest to chase medals. The Chinese government's Project 119, so named because it targeted the then 119 medals in water sports and athletics, pumped billions of dollars into its 3,000-plus academies to groom children into champions. As two Chinese historians have noted, China's "morbid appetite for gold medals placed a heavy political burden upon Chinese athletes, whose mission was to improve China's international image and satisfy the people's expectations for national revival."

India had taken a different approach towards sports in the early years of Independence. Indeed, Jawaharlal Nehru's message for the assembled athletes during the 1951 Delhi Asian Games echoed de Coubertin's ideals when he said "athletic contests are good for developing friendly rivalry" and each athlete must "must

play his part gracefully" and "enter into the spirit of the games."

Since then, much has changed. In recent years, the Indian State and corporates have heavily invested in improving India's abysmal showing in international competitions. There are shades of China's policy of medal harvesting without the coercive system. This has not always translated into more sporting infrastructure at the grassroots levels and better access to sports and health facilities for children but has paid dividends in terms of high-level performance, if not always in medals.

Over the past decade, sport has also become a part of India's efforts to achieve national glory, great power status and a bid to host the Olympics in future. Hence the feverish desire this year to better India's best-ever performance of seven medals in the 2020 Tokyo Games. This has led to self-congratulation at any success and national heartburn over the near medal misses, including the unfortunate disqualification of wrestler Vinesh Phogat before her final match. Indeed, the reaction in India to Phogat's disqualification and seeing it as a national disaster is a metaphor for both the state of Indian sport and the connection between nationalism and the Olympics.

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Sports broadcasting rights: The case for sub-licensing

Be it the ongoing Olympics or the recent T20 World Cup, will these be sporting galas without their broadcast audiences? Watching sports has evolved into an immersive, interactive experience, and it is evident that sports productions are now as elaborate as any other category of content.

The journey of Olympic broadcasts has been remarkable. The first Olympic broadcasts were via closed-circuit televisions in a dozen viewing halls in Germany in 1936. The BBC first broadcast the Summer Olympics in 1948, mainly in the London area. Today, we have come a long way. Sports fans now have access to high-definition TV feeds, can stream behind-the-scenes action, and chat with fellow enthusiasts. They can watch live content on the go, listen to podcasts, access specialised statistics, play sports video games, and even create fantasy teams to test their sports knowledge in a competitive setting.

Despite the ubiquity of sports content, private broadcasters in India are required to share live feeds of sports deemed to be of 'national importance' with Prasar Bharati, allowing the public broadcaster to retransmit these free-to-air. This regime, established under the Sports Broadcasting Signals (Mandatory Sharing with Prasar Bharati) Act, was catalysed by the 2007 Cricket World Cup. At that time, India had

around 110 million TV households, but only 60 million had private cable and satellite feeds. Doordarshan was the dominant broadcaster, and private channels were only emerging.

However, the Indian content ecosystem has evolved significantly since then. The country now boasts around 900 TV channels, up from approximately 300 in 2007, with 65% of viewers paying for TV. Moreover, smartphones have put free sports content in the hands of over 650 million users. A milestone was reached during the October 2023 India-Pakistan cricket World Cup game, which saw more digital viewers than TV for the first time. Some 173 million people watched the game on TV, while 225 million watched digitally. Similarly, JioCinema is streaming the Olympics in 4K. The mandatory sharing regime doesn't align with the realities of multihoming and disincentivises private sector investments in quality production.

India should look to global best practices that preserve private rights while enhancing public access. For instance, Warner Bros. Discovery holds the rights to broadcast the Olympics in Europe. It has sub-licensed these rights to Europe's public broadcasters since the International Olympic Committee requires that basic coverage be made free-to-air. In the United Kingdom (UK), this means the BBC has one live linear feed and one live streamed feed.



Vivan Sharan



Srishti Joshi



Watching sports has evolved into an immersive, interactive experience

The UK also mandates that certain listed sporting events be broadcast free-to-air. However, it recognises the value of privately held broadcasting rights, which fuel the development of the British sporting ecosystem, much like in India. The BBC and private broadcasters consistently work collaboratively to negotiate sub-licensing deals where private broadcasters share rights with the public broadcaster.

A free-market approach is also possible. In the United States, there is no mandatory sharing of rights, as intellectual property is strictly protected. Consequently, American sports leagues are among the most well-resourced in the world and are often the first to adopt technologies like cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence, and the Internet of Things to improve both sporting performance and viewing experiences.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) exemplifies how private entities can innovate to increase accessibility for viewers. The NBA League Pass is a streaming service that allows fans from across the globe to watch live and on-demand NBA games. The Association has also partnered with Meta to offer immersive virtual reality experiences, putting fans virtually courtside. The NBA continuously explores new ways to engage fans, shaping the future of sports viewing globally.

In any case, public broadcasters cannot hope to keep up with the scale, speed, and ingenuity of the private sector. India must explore regimes that recognise this paradigm and respect commercial rights. While there is a case to be made that every Indian should be able to watch the Olympics, this argument doesn't necessarily extend to each notified sporting event, a list that belies our cricket obsession covering all one-day, test, and T20 matches featuring India. And would public interest be harmed if Prasar Bharati were given feeds with a delay of a few hours? This would at least allow private broadcasters to maintain primacy over their intellectual property — a practice prevalent before 2007.

The Sports Broadcasting Signals Act was intended to develop sports, cultivate interest, and enhance accessibility. Since the private sector has filled all gaps in accessibility, public resources are better spent on building sports infrastructure, developing school curriculums, and empowering administrators. These are also the kinds of investments that help countries excel in the Olympics.

Vivan Sharan and Srishti Joshi are public policy experts working with Koan Advisory, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

Our city planning must preserve built-heritage

An article in these pages, 'Trim the monuments list' (August 6), takes one back to an issue highlighted in the report titled 'Monuments of National Importance: An Urgent Need for Rationalisation', published in January 2023. The report was from the PM's Economic Advisory Committee, of which one of the authors of the article mentioned here is a member (incidentally, there is no archaeologist or historian in the committee, so the hope is at least some were consulted). Half of the article is anecdotes surrounding the notorious General John Nicholson, an East India Company officer who captured



Narayani Gupta

Delhi in September 1857, died near Mori Gate, buried there and commemorated with a statue. Why flog this dead rider? To draw attention to the anomalies in the listing of protected sites. Once designated as "protected", it is impossible to remove their names from the list, even if (as with statues) they have migrated overseas (Edward VII's to Canada, Nicholson's to Ireland, and so on).

The authors were glad to report progress. In July 2024, Nicholson's absent statue was, at long last, delisted. In March 2024, the Archaeological Survey of India daringly delisted 18 monuments "that have not been found despite years of effort".

They believe "the removal of several missing monuments can be expected soon" (perhaps meaning 'the removal of the names of several missing monuments...').

This is actually a relatively minor issue. The more significant one has to do with "monuments that are unworthy of being deemed of national importance". The article does not specify these, but the 2023 report did. Monuments which are small and/or anonymous must prepare for the worst. *Kos minars* are small, and there are 'too many' of them (37, too many for India to hold!). So, they are on the hit list. The authors have forgotten the magic of Sher Shah's Grand Trunk Road, the descriptions in *Kim*. Have you noticed how visitors to Lodi Garden stop at the entrance to look at the *kos minar* there? These mystifying creations are being put up as street furniture. Can't a *kos minar* be integrated into cityscapes? Another structure the committee sternly disapproves of is Chhoti Gumti on the bund-road to Delhi's Hauz Khas. All the people I spoke to found it attractive, tidied up and softly illuminated

from the time of the Commonwealth Games of 2010 — a break on a long, straight road. Its fault: We don't know the name of the person buried there! So, now graveyards are also targets (all these unknown people). Anticipating this, the British and Indian governments had, in 1977, set up the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia. Would it not be good manners to bring them into the discussion? And to work out ways to preserve them as quiet green spaces, as is done in Britain. Why are articulate and talented planners and architects not consulted about "built heritage" in cities? More and more Indians are travelling to many parts of the world. Surely they can be inspired to support or sponsor attractive public spaces where the present coexists in harmony with the past? "Rationalisation" is a fashionable term now, whether for school textbooks or for architectural heritage. It is worth trying to figure out the real intent.

Narayani Gupta is a historian of Delhi. The views expressed are personal

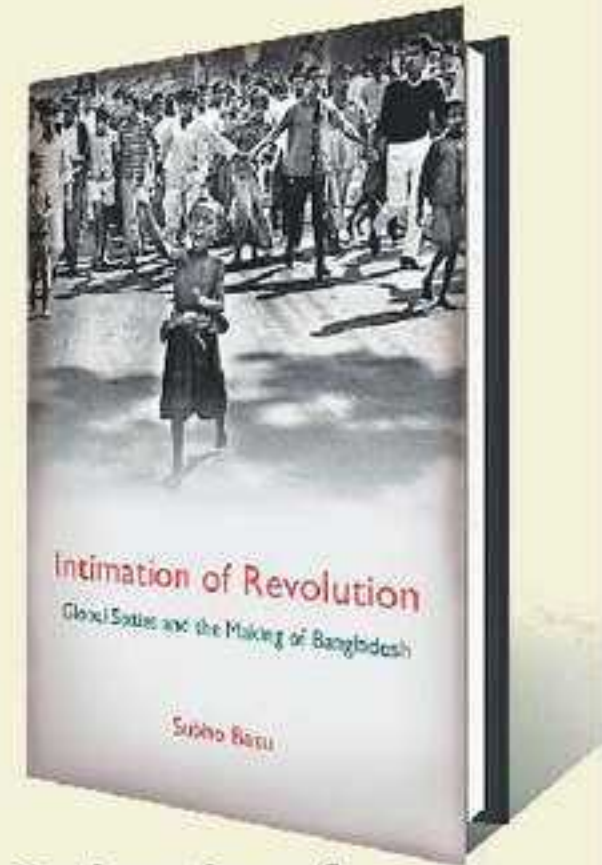
{ EDITOR'S PICK }

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

BANGLADESH'S HISTORY OF REVOLT

The power vacuum in Bangladesh after Sheikh Hasina's ouster following weeks of student-led protests was remedied quickly, with Muhammad Yunus taking oath as the head of the caretaker government on Thursday. Against the backdrop of the recent turmoil, Bangladesh's political history merits attention.

This week, we recommend *Intimation of Revolution: Global Sixties and the Making of Bangladesh* by Subho Basu. The book weaves together the global currents of the 1960s — revolutionary fervour, anti-colonial struggles, and youth activism — and Bangladesh's (then East Pakistan) hunger for autonomy. Basu's analysis highlights the interplay between local aspirations and global ideologies, offering a nuanced understanding of the Bangladeshi independence movement. As the country faces new political challenges, *Intimation of Revolution* serves as a reminder of the nation's revolutionary roots and the enduring relevance of its founding ideals.



Intimation of Revolution: Subho Basu
Year: 2023

THOROUGH PROBE MUST ON HOW VINESH WAS DISQUALIFIED

MISSED by a mere 100 gm! The disqualification of wrestler Vinesh Phogat from the final bout in the 50-kg category was a big blow for India's Olympic campaign. What could have been a gold medal was reduced to naught overnight, with the country waking up to the heartbreaking news. The rules were clear and it's not that stakeholders did not know about them. But the fracas, which robbed Vinesh of the medal she has been chasing for a decade, demands swift action to ensure such incidents never recur.

A few rushed to take credit when the 29-year-old wrestler stormed into the final, but all of them disappeared into thin air as soon as the news of disqualification broke. They, along with the Indian Olympic Association, Sports Authority of India (SAI) and Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), must reveal where things went wrong. It was SAI that sanctioned a posse of support staff, including a nutritionist and a psychologist, for the grappler, while IOA is the custodian of the Indian contingent in Paris; WFI looks after the sport in the country. What seems baffling is that in national competitions, the federation does not fully follow Olympic and world championship rules. The national events do not have two-day bouts; so Indian wrestlers are not well versed with the two-day weigh-in that eventually led to Vinesh's disqualification.

Wrestlers shedding extra weight is a norm and one can see hordes of them sweating out before the weigh-in. A wrestler usually gains about 1.5 kg, but in Vinesh's case it went beyond 2.5 kg. How and when that happened should be investigated. It's also quite clear that women wrestlers get affected more by weight management, which once again calls for a separate rule for them. But there is a section that believes it can be avoided if wrestlers compete in their normal weight categories and avoid the lure of lower weight categories where they get an edge.

Vinesh and Co have appealed against the disqualification at the Court of Arbitration for Sport and the decision of its appointed sole arbitrator is likely to come in a few days. Whether she is awarded a silver medal or not, it's heartrending that Vinesh has decided to hang her gloves saying, "Wrestling has won and I lost."

IT'S CRUCIAL TO IMPROVE HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS RATE

AFTER a brief slip, household savings behaviour is returning to normalcy, according to the Reserve Bank. This is a welcome development and should help regain the trendline growth rate. In 2022-23, household savings hit a record low at 5.2 percent of the gross national disposable income, while debt rose to an all-time high at 5.7 percent. It all began with the pandemic, when households saved higher proportions in financial assets like mutual funds and equities, which has now partly shifted to physical assets like real estate even if it's translating to higher borrowings. The proportion of physical assets peaked at 12.9 percent of GDP in 2022-23, while the share of net financial savings in total household savings fell from an average of 39.8 percent during 2013-2022 to 28.5 percent in 2022-23. Within financial assets, what is concerning is the diversification of financial products from traditional bank deposits to riskier assets like equities.

None other than RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das raised red flags in June, indicating that derivatives market volumes might have exceeded India's nominal GDP and took up the matter with markets regulator Sebi for appropriate action. A recent Sebi study also found that of the 92.5 lakh retail traders in the derivatives market, only 14.22 lakh made a net profit. In other words, about 85 out of every 100 traders incurred losses. An alarmed Sebi wasted no time to raise the minimum contract size for futures and options (F&O) to ₹20 lakh and limit weekly options contracts. It may take a while for things to subside. But on Thursday, the RBI clarified that not all household savings were being funnelled into the F&O segment, and that equity growth does not necessarily correlate with falling household savings.

That said, the central bank maintained that alternative investments remain attractive to retail customers, due to which banks were facing funding challenges with deposits trailing loan growth. The widening gap between deposits and credit growth could lead to asset liability or liquidity management challenges for banks, who may be forced to take greater recourse to short-term, non-retail deposits and other instruments to meet the credit demand. So Das urged banks to focus on mobilising household savings through innovative products and by leveraging their branch networks. Households account for over 61 percent of the gross domestic savings. Hence it's crucial to sustain the savings momentum.

QUICK TAKE

HOPE FOR THALASSEMIA PATIENTS

THALASSEMIA patients in England are being offered a "life-changing" gene therapy through the country's National Health Service. While there are about 2,300 people in England who suffer from the inherited disorder in which too little haemoglobin is produced by the body, India, with 42 million carriers of beta thalassemia, has the largest number of children in the world living with the trait. Though hospitals have official and unofficial donor groups to make blood available for the transfusions such patients require, it puts enormous strain on families and the healthcare system. Indian authorities should closely follow the English experiment and try to make the therapy available across the country.

NO budget will ever satisfy everyone. In particular, no budget has ever satisfied opposition parties. The 'dream budget' of 1997, which brought in a slew of reforms including reduction of tax rates, liberalised import, greater freedom for foreign investors, voluntary disclosure of undeclared income and the beginning of disinvestment in the public sector, is considered to be a pinnacle of performance for a finance minister. Stocks went up 6.5 percent a day after it was presented.

Years later, I was appointed revenue secretary in the finance ministry and learned that it had taken two years to recover from the dream budget.

In the words of Pranab Mukherjee in his book, "Unfortunately, the dream budget did not remain so. Though it did not exactly morph into a nightmare, in the course of the year, it was found that many projections of revenue receipts and expenditures were off the mark and did not conform to targets that were taken into account while preparing budgetary calculations. Consequently, there was a decline in the rate of growth and employment generation, coupled with rising inflation."

The budget for 2024-25 has to be considered similarly, as one with some good points and some weaknesses. I am not an economist, but have assisted with preparing six budgets, three with the Kerala government and three with the Centre. I studied economics at college. I am, therefore, probably at a slightly better vantage point than many others.

Nirmala Sitharaman's budget philosophy has remained constant. Fiscal rectitude is essential to her, and this is reflected in her full budget for 2024-25. She is determined to move resolutely towards the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act's target of a 3 percent fiscal deficit, which is good for maintaining the economy's strength and reputation in financial markets.

The budget has several other good features. Investment in infrastructure remains high. Public expenditure on investment is necessary to offset the relatively low levels of private investment. Extending the guarantee scheme to term lending in the small enterprises sector is a good move, although it would have been better had it been extended to Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency Bank loans taken by new start-ups.

Another point has been her gradual attempts to simplify tax laws and procedures without pain to taxpayers, giving

The latest budget focuses mostly on the supply side. The *sine qua non* for sustained growth is demand. Without more benefits to lower income groups, demand will not grow

WHY NOT TO FOCUS ON TRICKLE-DOWN ECONOMICS

K M CHANDRASEKHAR

Former Cabinet and Revenue Secretary, and author of *As Good as My Word: A Memoir*



SOURAV ROY

them the option to change or not. We saw this in corporate taxes, where companies were given the choice of lower tax rates if they opted for a simpler tax regime with fewer exemptions. We saw the same principle extended to personal income tax.

This year, she has simplified and consolidated the exemptions given to charitable societies, trusts, associations of persons and the like. She has also indicated her resolve to streamline and codify direct tax laws. This has been attempted many times in the past, and the finance minister will benefit from a great deal of paperwork done to make direct tax laws less onerous. The joke in the revenue department is that each time an attempt is made to revise direct tax laws, the government falls.

The weakness in the current budget is it remains firmly on the supply side, as has been this government's policy hitherto. This was seen before the pandemic, when growth remained sluggish due to low demand. Nothing particular was done to revive and strengthen demand. The economy was in a free fall during the pandemic, but the finance minister remained committed to supply-side economics. She seems to be firmly of the conviction that the road to growth lies in making companies more profitable and the poor will rise from poverty only if the wealth of the very rich trickles down little by little. She cut corporate taxes in 2019 as a stimulus but made no change in personal IT rates. Incidentally, the infamous farm laws also came disguised as pandemic stimulus

measures, but were widely perceived as anti-farmer and pro-corporate.

The Indian economy recovered relatively rapidly after the pandemic, mainly because of the expression of suppressed demand and the availability of cheaper bank loans. Much of the credit for the bounce-back of the economy should go to the policies adopted by the Reserve Bank. The economy looks good today, with a GDP growth rate of 7-8 percent and high corporate profits. The question is whether the economy has enough energy to sustain these figures until we reach the projected Valhalla in 2047.

We do not see enough horsepower to sustain these rates in the long term, perhaps not even in the medium term. GDP growth rates can only be maintained if there is steady investment. Investment would be sufficient only if investors believe their product will be sold.

The *sine qua non* for sustained growth is supporting demand. Even though the GDP growth rate may look high—primarily because of the base effect of low growth during the pandemic—the consumption growth rate remains low at 3-4 percent. As a result, even though company profits are high and stocks are mostly booming, capacity utilisation in the corporate sector remains at 75 percent, which is insufficient to induce investment. Add to this the pain caused by the closure of thousands of medium and small enterprises during the pandemic. This is also reflected in high levels of unemployment. The immensity of this problem is concealed in what Joan Robinson called 'disguised unemployment', as indicated in a 3-4 percent rise each in agricultural and casual labour.

Here is where the budget fails. Without more benefits to the middle class and lower income groups, demand will not grow, and without this, production and investment cannot grow. This weakness may show even in the medium term. In the long term, our investment rate may be affected by other factors, primarily the abysmally low rate of investment of 0.6 percent of GDP in R&D and inadequate investment in education and public health.

The government may have to pay a heavy price for its adamant refusal to look at the demand side, particularly the fall in incomes of the lower three-quarters of the pyramid. They have already paid for it by losing their majority in the Lok Sabha, and further retribution may be at hand.

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

LEVELLING THE OLYMPIC PLAYING FIELD FOR ALL

AN elephant joke comes to mind as I look at the twists and vaults at the Paris Olympics and the role technology and categorisation plays in deciding winners. Question: What did the elephant say to the ant? Answer: Pick on someone your own size. Seriously, the elephant has a point. The pachyderm may well lose out if the game was about getting into a narrow alley.

There's also Aesop's fable about the fox and the stork, symbolic of how playing fields can be manipulated. As the story goes, the fox invites the stork to a meal and the long-beaked bird misses dinner as it cannot drink from a bowl. The return offer from the stork sees the fox in a fix as the host offers the meal in a narrow-necked vessel. The story can be an early lesson for kids in warfare—and its milder versions, politics and sports.

George Orwell described competitive sport as "war minus the shooting". Talking of shooting, Turkish Olympian Yusuf Dikec is a perfect muse for longtime watchers of sports, technology, and politics, and their fascinating interplay. Dikec sparked viral memes as he wore only an ear plug to the shooting range, unlike most shooters who wear visors, ear-defenders and special lenses with a blinder to improve focus. Dikec won an Olympic silver and an unofficial gold from netizens for being casually cool—featuring grey hair, an intense gaze, t-shirt and plain specs.

India's own darling, Vinesh Phogat, won a moral gold from her supporters at home, especially those who saw her wrestling with powerful men in a sexual harassment scandal. But she missed her stab at an Olympic gold because she was 100 gm overweight in the 50 kg category just ahead of the final bout. This is truly heartbreaking.

Should we have a points system where minor category-linked flaws can be adjusted? What about having a shooting category for those like Dikec who do not sport artificial props?

As a sports-loving kid, I heard with equal fascination and dismay tales of how technology enhanced games and also played spoilsport. Helmets made a stealthy entry into cricket fields in the 1970s, about 100 years after crotch guards and 120 years after gloves. We now have arm, thigh and abdomen guards too. As far as I can see, such things have enhanced the sport by reducing mortal fear.



MADHAVAN NARAYANAN

Senior Journalist

REVERSE SWING

But hockey is another story altogether. Stars like Dhyan Chand and K D Singh 'Babu' played barefoot on the grass and displayed dazzling dribbling skills before India's golden run ended. Between Amsterdam 1928 and Tokyo 1964, we won seven golds and one silver: As hockey shifted from natural grass to synthetic



Should we have more categories to level international playing fields? If India's past performance in Olympic hockey is any indication, Barefoot Olympics may turn the table on richer countries. We may also consider a points system in boxing and wrestling that doesn't disqualify for minor weight discrepancies

AstroTurf surfaces a decade later, the game steadily slipped out of India's grip. Dribbling gave way to long passes.

Athletics has a similar tale. At the Rome Olympics, Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia ran the marathon barefoot to set a new world record after discovering that the official gear supplier, Adidas, had run out of shoes his size. India's Shivan Singh, who ran with taped feet and no shoes, won a 5,000-metre gold at the Teheran Asian Games in 1974.

Should we reverse-swing sports and have separate games for groups separated by culture, training and technology? Is there a hidden kind of cultural imperialism in which the rich West resembles

the cunning fox in Aesop's fable? Perhaps not, but proper segregation is a good thing. You only have to look at wrestling, boxing and gender to get my point.

I covered the Commonwealth Games at Kuala Lumpur in 1998. Though deputed to mainly cover cricket, my task included interviewing boxers, who included a rather frail Canadian kid. Boxers and wrestlers need not all be heavyweight.

Cricket, too, can stretch for five days, or be only 50 or 20 overs long. Why not pepper up other games with similar categories? We could host a Barefoot Olympics to give Westerners an idea of how the field can be levelled. We did some of that in cricket when India's spinners used to excel on the turning pitches of Kolkata and Chennai before Bharat started producing its own battery of excellent fast bowlers.

We may have to take a fresh look at gender classification as well if the Paris Olympics is any indication. Even against the backdrop of a growing LG-BTQ rights movements, some mistook Algerian woman boxer Imane Khelif for a transgender and raised an ugly controversy over testing and testosterone. Khelif had failed a questionable gender test by the International Boxing Association in 2023, but the International Olympic Committee declared her fit for Paris. She became a target of disinformation after she won against Italian Angela Carini. The international boxing and Olympic associations are having a heavyweight bout over this issue.

I don't quite know who will deliver the knockout punch. I am certainly not an expert at testing testosterone. However, I do know that categories work better than controversies. Some futuristic fiction may categorise someone as part-female or give minus points if someone's weight is only mildly off the category.

Most of all, I think we need to separate the men from the boys and the elephants from the ants.

(Views are personal)
(On X @madversity)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Wayanad wisdom

Ref: *Learning the right lessons from the walls of Wayanad* (Aug 9). The author rightly points out the callousness on the part of authorities concerned to do follow-up work after a disaster in order to prevent similar incidents in future. We should learn the right lessons from Wayanad and move towards on-ground sensor grids capable of anticipating landslides.
M Haneef, Kottayam

School compulsions

Ref: *Take legal routes to curb steep fee hikes in private schools* (Aug 9). Apart from annual fee hikes, most schools force parents to buy everything afresh every year. Even if a child's bag is new and the shoes fit, we have no other option but to buy them again. More than the money we spend on this, I am worried about the resources being wasted.
Vishnuvardhan Ravindrakumar, Karur

Chinese pivot

Ref: *Is India ready to welcome Chinese capital again?* (Aug 9). Welcoming Chinese trade is not an ideology-related decision but a compulsion-induced one. Even economic and industrial giants are not able to do away with China. 'Make in India' is a slogan, not a solution yet.
A G Rajmohan, Anantapur

Bangladesh normalcy

Ref: *Yunus-led govt takes oath in Bangladesh* (Aug 9). It is a good sign that the overall situation in Bangladesh is fast returning to normalcy with Muhammad Yunus assuming office as the head of the interim government. Hopefully, India-Bangladesh relations will be as smooth as earlier.
V K Kumar, Thiruvananthapuram

Buddhadeb era

Ref: *Buddhadeb Bhattacharya: A marxist morpheus who dreamt a different future* (Aug 9). Former West Bengal CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya's passing marks the end of an era in the state's politics. Known as a reformist among the left, the veteran communist leader was responsible for bringing industrialisation to the state. His contributions will continue to be studied and debated in the context of India's political evolution.
R Sivakumar, Chennai

Accrediting internships

Ref: *Bringing educational gaps with internships* (Aug 8). The accreditation process should supersede the three crucial factors of duration, motivational practices and degree of formalisation to complete the internship ecosystem. The manufacturing sector needs a big push to accommodate interns for their huge employability outcomes.
Katragadda Sarveswara Rao, Bhubaneswar

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Sisodia's bail

A turning point in politico-legal battle

THE granting of bail to Manish Sisodia in the Delhi excise policy scam on Friday marks a significant moment in India's legal and political arena. The arrest of Sisodia, a key lieutenant of AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, had sent shockwaves through political circles. The court's decision underscores the principle that even in high-stakes cases, the right to liberty cannot be overshadowed by prolonged judicial custody and upholds the principle of bail being the norm and jail an exception. Sisodia has been in custody for 17 months without the commencement of proceedings, depriving him of his right to a speedy trial. The stance also resonates with the broader discourse on personal liberty in India's legal system.

The Supreme Court's emphasis that bail should not be withheld as a punishment also highlights the complex interplay between politics and the judicial process. This case raises critical questions about the use of investigative agencies in politically sensitive cases. The timing of Sisodia's arrest and the subsequent media frenzy suggested a possible political motive, a concern echoed by many in the Opposition. The judiciary's role in balancing these pressures while upholding the rule of law is pivotal. It has, notably, intervened even in stringent UAPA cases, ensuring that the law is not weaponised to silence opposition. In 2021, the Bombay High Court granted bail to activist Sudha Bharadwaj after she had spent over three years in custody without trial. Similarly, a Delhi University professor, GN Saibaba, was acquitted in 2022 due to procedural lapses and a lack of evidence.

Meanwhile, Sisodia's bail also marks a crucial moment for the Aam Aadmi Party, which has maintained that the charges were politically motivated. It gives the party hope that its other leaders, including Kejriwal and Satyendar Jain, who are also embroiled in legal battles, will receive similar justice.

Bittersweet Olympics

Hockey team, Neeraj lift the gloom

IT has been a rollercoaster Olympics for India in Paris. Medals have been few and far between, rather like the deficient rainfall in the northern plains this monsoon. An eight-day-long drought — which seemed like an eternity — ended when India won the bronze in men's hockey. A podium for the second time in a row: this had earlier happened over five decades ago, when the majority of the Indians alive today were not even born. With PR Sreejesh — who will join double bronze-winning shooter Manu Bhaker as India's flag-bearer at the closing ceremony — solid as a rock between the goalposts, the team proved that its impressive show in Tokyo three years ago was no fluke. Even though Sreejesh has called time on a glittering career, the plucky boys are here to stay. Hopefully, they will keep raising the bar.

Having scaled 'Mount Everest' in Tokyo, javelin juggernaut Neeraj Chopra could have easily rested on his laurels and lapped up all the adulation and moolah that were showered on him. But he is made of sterner stuff. Not letting success go to his head, the champion battled an injury to finish second this time. Had he not run into a Pakistani hurricane named Arshad Nadeem, he might even have clinched the gold again. The big thing is that this amazing athlete has become an icon in a cricket-crazy nation which worships its Tendulkars, Dhonis and Kohlis.

Let's face it: India is far behind the Asian sporting troika — China, Japan and South Korea — which is giving Western nations a run for their money. The whole nation was gutted when Vinesh Phogat was disqualified, not only because of the unfortunate circumstances but also due to the fact that we have so few players capable of winning Olympic gold medals. Make the most of the demographic dividend — it's as simple as that. We need dozens of Neerajs to become a powerhouse in sports.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 1924

The reforms enquiry

THE examination of the very first witness who appeared before the Reforms Enquiry Committee conclusively showed the utter impossibility of confining the enquiry within the four walls of "the structure, the policy and the purposes of the Government of India". That this was partly due to the character of the witness who describe himself in reply to a question as a whole-hogger is probably true, but it is much more largely due to the very nature of the case. The examination of the witness by several members showed that it was impossible to avoid putting questions on the main issue, the issue of a vital modification of the Constitution. Or to shut out replies urging such modification. Even the President, who by his training and experience, as well as by his close association with the Government point of view, might have been expected to adhere strictly to the scope of the enquiry as defined in the Government of India's communiqué, was not able to avoid putting such questions himself or to prevent the witness from giving such replies. Referring, for instance, to the statement made by the witness in his memorandum that the difficulties experienced in the Central Provinces could be removed only by the grant of full responsibility, he asked whether "under the existing narrow electorate representatives of proper calibre to protect the interests of all classes could be returned." This was going down to the real issue, and the reply which the witness gave was equally pointed. "Although," he said, "non-co-operation had robbed the old Council of full representative character, the new Council contained the best men from the Province."

OPINION

Dacca-Dhaka/1975-2024

Events are leavened not just by the memory of August 15, 1975, but also coloured by fate of things to come



THE GREAT GAME
JYOTI MALHOTRA

RONEN Sen was a young diplomat in 1974 when he was posted to Dacca (Dhaka), Bangladesh, still new after the 1971 Liberation War and still ruled by the conquering democrat-hero Mujibur Rahman. Within a year, Mujib and his family — including his youngest son Russel, barely 10 years old — were massacred in the wee hours of August 15, 1975, in their home at Dhanmondi in the heart of the capital. (I've visited that home, which later became a memorial, several times and the memory of the fading blood splatter on the staircase as some of Mujib's family members sought to escape, in hindsight, is a testimony to the bloody rollercoaster of Bangladesh's history.)

The way Sen tells the story, with characteristic understatement, about how the message of Mujib's assassination was sent to Indira Gandhi, from Dacca to Delhi that morning — all kinds of transport were employed, it seems, including a motorbike — and how it barely reached her, just as she was climbing the ramparts of the Red Fort to deliver the PM's address to the nation. Mujib was dead. A young nation's promise had been brutally cut short.

As he thinks back on that strange morning, Sen says, he is filled with a sense of déjà vu. What were the forces that had carried out those murders 49 years ago? And who is responsible for the revolution in Bangladesh this past week?

As we celebrate another Independence Day in India, the events in Bangladesh are leavened not



ENIGMA: What is it about Naya Bangladesh that has made them want to deface their own history today? REUTERS

just by the memory of 1975, but surely coloured by the fate of things to come. As a 17-member interim government has been sworn in under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, there are reports that the BSF is stopping Bangladeshis from entering India via the land borders. Seems the BJP is in a dilemma — let the people, not long ago described by Home Minister Amit Shah as 'termites', in, or keep them out, like the BJP chief ministers of Assam and Tripura are demanding. Moreover, should only Bangladeshi Hindus be allowed in — remember that citizenship under the CAA is applicable only to 'minorities' in South Asia — or should India open its doors to all Bangladeshis, including those secular Awami Leaguers believed to be hiding near the airport in the hope they can soon make a dash and catch a plane to safety?

Some of Sen's déjà vu need not be 49 years old. Many remember another August 15 only three years ago, in 2021, when then Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul with three close aides and suitcases full of cash — the aides have long resettled in parts of the Western world, while Ghani

As the Modi govt
contemplates a
realigning South Asia,
it must ask itself what
it really wants its
'Neighbourhood First'
policy to look like.

cools his heels in Abu Dhabi. Like in Bangladesh, India had firmly shut the entry of all Afghans into the country — they are still not allowed in.

The similarity with Sheikh Hasina ends there. Five days after the former Bangladesh PM fled Dhaka and landed at the Hindon airbase, she is still awaiting permission to enter the UK. It's likely the British are waiting for the Americans to say yes — everyone knows about the bad blood between Hasina and the Americans as well as London's deferential ties with Washington DC — and highly likely that the

latter are keeping Hasina on hold in order to send her a message.

The incredible irony is that if Hasina is allowed into London, she will likely take the place of another Bangladeshi exile who has lived there for more than 15 years and is probably wending his way back home — Tarique Rahman, also known as Tino, the son of Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Khaleda Zia. Mother Khaleda, a former Prime Minister and the wife of former martial law dictator Gen Ziaur Rahman, is more ill than well. When Tino returns to Dhaka from London, which is supposed to be fairly soon, he will be the power on or behind the throne.

The next few weeks will be interesting to watch — certainly, everyone will watch how the relationship between Chief Adviser Yunus and the Bangladesh army unfolds. Army chief Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman was supposed to visit Delhi this month — Delhi should encourage that the visit take place sooner than later. We know by now that 48 hours before Hasina fled, persuaded by her son in the US to stand down — it seems she refused to entertain even her sister Rehana's plea to do so —

army officers had resolved not to fire into the crowds of student protesters. There is this tradition of loyalty to people that the Bangladesh army abides by — thousands of whose soldiers gave their lives in the Liberation War — even if the temptation to wield power behind the throne is a strong one.

As the Modi government contemplates a realigning South Asia, it must ask itself what it really wants its 'Neighbourhood First' policy to look like — especially when it seems likely that Pakistan's ISI will now happily splash in the waters of the Bay of Bengal. The truth is that the Indian subcontinent is different from relationships with the US or Russia or China because India's ties with its neighbours are deeply embedded in culture, religion, ethnicity, language — all of them seeping into each other, creating a pulsating palimpsest of cultures on your doorstep. That's why it's imperative to constantly talk to everyone, including those that don't like you — or especially those that don't like you — in order to know what, when and why they think as they do.

Equally, it is true that India supported Hasina to the hilt, in the face of severe criticism by the Americans, across two elections. But as things deteriorated, perhaps Prime Minister Modi or External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar could have called her and given her "brotherly advice", like Pranab Mukherjee used to do. Perhaps, if they had metaphorically held Hasina's hand and persuaded her to stand down in time, they could have averted this twisted turn of fate.

For now, as India watches pictures of the smouldering remains of Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman's home in Dhanmondi, where he and his family were cruelly felled, the only thought that comes to mind is that even in 1975, the murderers didn't touch Bangabandhu's home. What is it about Naya Bangladesh that has made them want to deface their own history today?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every revolutionary ends up either by becoming an oppressor or a heretic. — Albert Camus

Let's not press the hate button

RAMA KASHYAP

THANKFULLY, this year's Nuh Shobha Yatra concluded peacefully amid an Internet ban and tight security. Last year, when communal clashes took place during the procession, I was in Gurugram with my son. Tension spread through several districts of south Haryana, impacting the lives of people belonging to various communities. Living in a gated residential society, we were under no threat, but fear of another kind gripped us. As the tension spread, shops closed down. Home delivery was suspended, educational institutions were shut and most officegoers worked from home. Residents stayed within the safe environs of the society; nevertheless, there was an upheaval as maids and domestic help belonging to both communities, living in shanties nearby, remained absent.

When the news of riots broke out, my daughter-in-law got a phone call from Noor, our domestic help, seeking permission to stay overnight at our place. There was fear and anxiety writ large over her face when Noor came carrying nothing but a few important documents. She was in a state of shock. While her husband stayed back at his place of work, Noor spent the night with us but could barely have a wink of sleep. However, she was not the only one to have a sleepless night; there were many belonging to her community living in the slums facing extreme fear and uncertainty.

In the tense atmosphere, Noor's husband and many others headed home. Those who stayed back were in a dilemma whether to stay put or return to their native place. While the poor domestic help was mulling over the idea of going back, the middle-class dependent upon the maids was feeling jittery about the prospect of losing their help. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, we were worried that our little one's nanny would go back to her native place.

Thankfully, the situation was brought under control within a few days. However, so long as it lasted, it kept everyone on their tenterhooks. The epicentre of the trouble might have been elsewhere but the tremors were felt far and wide. In fact, disturbance anywhere is a threat to peace everywhere. Of course, the poor are the most vulnerable in any conflict, but the fact is no one remains unaffected in a disturbed scenario.

The leaders who whip up communal sentiments don't realise the harm they cause to the community they claim to represent. The situation worsens as anti-social elements fish in troubled waters. Social media adds fuel to the fire by spreading negative news, authentic or fake. The emotional impact of the spiralling negative messages and images is dangerous. As responsible citizens, we must act wisely, pause and think before forwarding any message. Sitting in our comfort zone, when we share a hate message, we don't realise we are playing with fire, jeopardising the lives and livelihood of people, not only causing untold misery to others but also harming our own interests.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bail, not jail

The Supreme Court's decision to grant bail to former Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia — almost 18 months after he was arrested in connection with the liquor policy case — is laudable. Unfortunately, he had to spend over a year and a half behind bars. It is common knowledge that Indian jails are overcrowded. The apex court has reiterated several times that bail should be the rule and jail an exception. Ideally, there should be no delay in granting relief to an accused. Lower courts must heed the SC's words.

AJAY BAGGA, HOSHIARPUR

Ensure safety of Indians in B'desh

With reference to the editorial 'Yunus steps in', the recent attacks on Indians, Hindus and members of other minority groups in Bangladesh are a matter of grave concern. PM Narendra Modi has done well to call for the protection of those being targeted by mobs in the neighbouring country. Muhammad Yunus, who has taken over the reins of the newly formed interim government in Bangladesh, must make sure that every Indian national on Bangladeshi soil feels safe. The onus is on Yunus to placate the agitators and set things in order as soon as possible.

THARCIOUS S FERNANDO, CHENNAI

Nation has lost an upright leader

Refer to the editorial "Tenacious leader"; with the death of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee — the last Marxist CM of West Bengal — the nation has lost an upright leader who had a pragmatic outlook. His demise marks the end of an era in the political and cultural landscape of West Bengal. He had hoped to attract industrial investment in the predominantly agrarian state to ameliorate the plight of the destitute. Though his liberal views did not jell with the rigid ideology of his party, his vision for a more prosperous West Bengal was well known.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

India's lacklustre show

It is commendable that our players have earned India a silver medal and four bronze. However, it is not an impressive showing for such a big and highly populated country. Team India is lagging behind. This should

prompt the Union and state sports ministries to reflect on the reasons behind India's lacklustre performance in the Games. Why have the enormous allocations in budgets to the sporting sector failed to yield the desired results? The need of the hour is to set up a panel led by eminent sportspersons to explore comprehensive strategies and set up mechanisms to scout for promising sportspersons and groom them.

RAVI BHUSHAN, KURUKSHETRA

Phogat proved her mettle

Wrestler Vinesh Phogat was sadly disqualified from the 50-kg category ahead of the final for being overweight by a hundred grams. The euphoria in India over the Haryana girl's victory over Cuba's Yusneylys Guzman in the semifinals to breeze into the gold bout died down fast. The news of her disqualification broke a billion hearts. The International Olympic Committee must consider awarding the silver medal to Vinesh. But whether or not that happens, one thing is clear: Vinesh does not need a medal. She has already proved her mettle. She is a role model for millions of budding sportspersons.

SK DADHWAL, KANGRA

Don't let men into women's sports

The recent bout between Italian boxer Angela Carini and Algerian pugilist Imane Khelif at the Paris Olympics has sparked a massive controversy. It is telling that Carini chose to leave the ring merely 46 seconds into the match and broke down in tears after taking two blows from the Algerian. Notably, Khelif is one of the two boxers who have been allowed to participate in the Games despite being disqualified from the women's world championships last year for failing the gender eligibility tests. The International Boxing Association has clearly stated that Khelif is a biological male. Factors like sex and weight are taken into consideration while organising sporting events to ensure fairness in the competition. Khelif clearly had an unfair advantage over Carini. It is imperative to ensure sex-based segregation in sports to provide athletes with a level playing field.

AMISHA, JALANDHAR

Don't make some 'unequals' more equal than others



ZOIA HASAN
PROFESSOR EMERITA, CENTRE
FOR POLITICAL STUDIES, JNU

EVEN as the Opposition, led by Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha, continues its focus on social justice and a caste count, the Supreme Court has adjudicated the constitutional issue of sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in *State of Punjab vs Davinder Singh*, permitting sub-classification among SCs/STs for the purpose of reservation. The central question pertained to the constitutionality of the Punjab Scheduled Caste and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006, where SCs were sub-classified to provide Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs first preference in the state reservation policy for SCs. Extending the principle from the OBCs to the SCs/STs, the court overruled the 2004 verdict in *EV Chinniah vs State of Andhra Pradesh* to allow state governments to carve out sub-quotas within the SC category. By doing this, "it rejects homogeneity in the backwardness of SCs and promotes homogeneity in the forwardness of SCs," argues Asang Wankhede, a Dalit

scholar at the University of Oxford in a recent article. Three issues have dominated policy debates on reservation since Independence. The first is whether backward classes should be caste groupings or whether these would be identified by economic and occupational criteria. The second is whether listing and preference for these groups are to be undertaken on an all-India basis or by state governments. The third concern is the exclusion of other disadvantaged groups from this framework and whether more complex criteria of caste, class, religious community and gender should form the basis of entitlement than the caste-based reservation because, in actual practice and interpretation, backward classes have come to be synonymous with backward-caste Hindus. Pressures have arisen from time to time to introduce changes in official categories to recognise economic and social mobility within caste groupings, especially OBCs. But it has been difficult to apply this differentiation measure to OBCs, and rather difficult, if not impossible, to take hard decisions 'to put out of the benefit system' communities with political and economic clout. It will not be easy to do the same for SCs. However, the question of economic differentiation within castes and communities needs to be addressed. The sub-classification debate addresses this by taking on



LANDMARK: Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy (centre) and other leaders rejoice after the Supreme Court verdict on sub-classification of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. PTI

board the question of whether SCs are a homogenous class in their composition. The court weighed in on the side of heterogeneity to classify and give preferential treatment to the more backward among them with the aim of furthering substantive equality. It is based on a clear recognition that SCs are not a homogenous category anymore as there are differences in the extent of backwardness and the levels of advancement among them. The reservation policy, from the start, was conceptualised as a policy of compensatory discrimination emanating from the traditional caste hierarchy. It was a remedial measure for handicaps faced by individuals and groups due to social discrimination. However,

The question of economic differentiation within castes and communities needs to be addressed.

the 103rd Amendment Act in 2019 changed the rationale of reservation by creating provisions for 10 per cent reservation for the EWS (Economically Weaker Section) in higher education institutions and government jobs for those who are not beneficiaries of existing reservation. The focus now shifts to economic backwardness, divested of historic injustices to which the lower castes have been subjected. The judicial approach in this case appears to follow the same line of reasoning and considers SCs and OBCs as equally situated within the constitutional scheme, although there are significant differences. The distinctions between the SCs, who are historically discriminated, and OBCs falling under the cate-

gory of socially and educationally backward classes are significant. The OBCs constitute a heterogeneous category, more varied and diverse than the SCs and STs. Moreover, reservation for OBCs was designed to provide for power-sharing, whereas reservation for the SCs and STs aimed to reverse social discrimination and to increase equality of opportunity. The former aimed to change the balance of power while the latter sought to achieve greater equality. The bulk of the OBCs were disadvantaged but their experience is vastly different from the other two categories. The court recognises the difference between OBC and SCs, yet, it argues for the need to acknowledge and address the intense inequality within the latter to bring deeper equality. While the jurisprudence of affirmative action has been evolving constantly from a notion of formal equality to substantive equality, many new questions have come to the fore after the latest apex court verdict—how are the levels of backwardness or forwardness of SCs to be determined and what will be the doctrinal philosophy and design of preferential policies of state governments from here onwards? Sub-classification for SCs in the absence of a comprehensive census of the empirical realities of SCs to indicate the status of backwardness and contradictions within them will be a big chal-

lenge. Evidence is required on socio-economic disparities to show that those who are relatively economically advanced are not suffering from social discrimination. But the Union Government is generally reluctant to release data on income, wealth and employment, leave alone caste-specific data on disparities, unless it favours the official narrative. Even the 2021 decadal census has been inexplicably postponed. Lack of reliable information on the socio-economic status of various groups is likely to be a major impediment in policy-making, including in the sub-classification of castes. This information is a crucial prerequisite for sub-classification. While it is important to streamline reservation policies and deepen benefits to make them reach those who need them the most, this should not diminish reservation in terms of the social cost it imposes on SCs by pressing for graded inequality among them. We must not conflate social and economic discrimination, which can end up ignoring the rationale for quotas, which is social discrimination, not economic discrimination. Economic inequalities can be addressed by a greater focus on education, health-care and social safety measures that have helped bridge inequality in many countries. Indian affirmative action policies were designed to make 'unequals' equal and not to provide reservation on every demand for preference by all or any community.

Killing of Haniyeh, Shukr can trigger wider war in West Asia



YOGESH GUPTA
FORMER AMBASSADOR

THE recent assassinations of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Hezbollah leader Fuad Shukr in Beirut, reportedly by Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, have upset US President Joe Biden. He was not expecting one of America's closest allies, Israel, to create a geopolitical crisis entangling the US armed forces into a full-blown war less than 100 days before the presidential election. This was confirmed by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken when he said on July 31 that Israel had not even informed the US about its plan to kill Haniyeh. The Hamas leader's slaying came at a time when the US was actively involved in negotiations for a ceasefire in Gaza, the release of hostages (including some Americans) from the Hamas' custody and preventing a regional conflict. It showed that there was no agreement between Israeli PM Benjamin

Netanyahu and the Biden administration on the objectives of the war and the terms for stopping it. Netanyahu seems to be in no mood to bring an end to the Gaza war—which has resulted in more than 40,000 civilian deaths and injuries to about one lakh people—until his aim of destroying the Hamas is achieved to regain the 'strategic deterrence'. The US, on the other hand, believes that a fight to the finish would do more harm than good, radicalise more Palestinians and provoke a wider war, alienating other allies and resulting in huge human casualties and losses to the global economy, trade and environment. Also, Israel does not have the capability to win such a regional war and would perforce drag the US into this conflict, which Washington does not want. America is also worried that even if its closest ally shows such little faith in it, how would it convince Iran, the Arabs and the other allies of its cause? But the pressure on President Biden from the Jewish lobby at home is such that he still can't abandon Israel in this war, and Netanyahu knows it. The Islamic regime in Iran is livid with Israel's audacious behaviour. Haniyeh's killing reveals gaping holes in the security of the Iranian state and



BAD TIMING: Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh's assassination came amid America's active involvement in negotiations for a ceasefire in Gaza. REUTERS

its inability to protect its guests at the time of the inauguration of its new President, Masoud Pezeshkian, when there was the highest level of security. And Israel's ability to take out numerous Iranian nuclear scientists and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders in and outside Iran with relative ease conveys a message that no one in Iran is outside its reach. According to one estimate, Israel has killed about 40 commanders or senior members of the

PM Netanyahu is adamant about destroying the Hamas and dealing a crushing blow to Iran and its proxies.

Iranian security services, including its proxies, since October 7 last year. The Iranian leadership feels humiliated. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has vowed to avenge Haniyeh's death and ordered 'harsh' punishment for Israel. Tehran's response would have to be much bigger this time than that in April if it is to retain its credibility. According to Iranian sources, it would lead the initial attack with the involvement of Iraqi, Yemeni and Syrian proxies, targeting Israeli military

objectives. It will be followed by a second wave of attacks by the Hezbollah in Lebanon. Areas deep inside Israel, such as Tel Aviv and Haifa, will be attacked. The residences of Israeli officials and the US forces in Iraq and Syria will also be targeted. The Israelis are expecting the attacks by or after August 17. The US has urged its allies, like Jordan, to talk to the Iranians to calm their anger. Russian President Vladimir Putin has also asked the Supreme Leader of Iran to restrain his response against Israel and avoid attacking Israeli civilians to prevent a wider war in West Asia. Comfortable with political, economic and military support from the US, the Netanyahu government remains undeterred. It is willing to take risks. Netanyahu is adamant about destroying the Hamas and dealing a crushing blow to Iran and its proxies. The war strengthens Netanyahu's otherwise weak position at home, as he is seen as a strong leader who can stand up to Israel's enemies as well as the US. If an opportunity arises, Netanyahu would be happy to order a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, which have become anathema to Israel and others. He thinks the Americans are not doing enough about it. The gov-

ernments of several countries intervening between Iran and Israel have informed Tehran that they would shoot down any incoming Iranian missile for their own security. So far, Iran's proxies in Iraq and Lebanon have launched limited rocket and drone strikes against Israel and American targets in the Golan Heights and the US base in Iraq, causing some fatalities and injuries. Israel has struck some Hezbollah targets in south Lebanon, mainly in border areas. Since Iran cannot take on the US military, it is expected to continue a prolonged but controlled conflict (some kind of guerrilla war) that hurts its adversaries but does not escalate into a full-blown regional war. The ceasefire agreement that the US was trying to broker to secure the release of hostages or bring peace in the region appears elusive now. The assassinations ordered by Israel have brought the region closer to the brink of a wider war with devastating consequences for West Asia and the world at large. It is bad news for America to get ensnared in this conflict when its priority is the Indo-Pacific and it is already supporting a full-scale war in Ukraine. It remains to be seen if the US will be able to prevail upon a recalcitrant Netanyahu to agree to its peace terms.

QUICK CROSSWORD

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

27 28 29 30

ACROSS

1 Be very specific in explaining (5,2,3)

6 Roman god of war (4)

10 Deadly (5)

11 Undue readiness to believe (9)

12 See (8)

13 Hard to chew (5)

15 Crippling (7)

17 One way or another (7)

19 Induced to do wrong (7)

21 Seafarer (7)

22 Racing rowing crew (5)

24 Compare to highlight differences (8)

27 Stubbornness (9)

28 Combat (5)

29 Deceive (4)

30 Law no longer observed (4,6)

DOWN

1 Smooth in texture (4)

2 Fanatical political doctrine (9)

3 A flowering shrub (5)

4 Purposeful procedure (7)

5 Unavailing (7)

7 Farewell (5)

8 Give the order to act (3,3,4)

9 Patron (8)

14 Acknowledged as total loss (7,3)

16 Leave behind (8)

18 Wisdom after the event (9)

20 Lay down authoritatively (7)

21 Wealthy (7)

23 Enthusiasm (5)

25 A firearm (5)

26 Play the leading role (4)

Yesterday's solution

ACROSS: 1 Crack-up, 5 Strip, 8 Talk out of, 9 Cut, 10 Hoot, 12 Nonsense, 14 Extent, 15 Cogent, 17 Go public, 18 Arch, 21 Oak, 22 Elbowroom, 24 Sunny, 25 Egghead.

DOWN: 1 Catch, 2 Ail, 3 Knot, 4 Pathos, 5 Soft spot, 6 Raconteur, 7 Patient, 11 Outspoken, 13 Snobbery, 14 Engross, 16 Viable, 19 Humid, 20 Swag, 23 One.

SU DO KU

6 1 9 7 2 5

7 4 8 3

7 9 4 8

2 1 5 1

5 9 6 8

3 2 5 8

HARD

FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

9 3 1 4 5 7 6 2 8

7 5 8 1 2 6 4 9 3

2 6 4 8 9 3 5 7 1

4 7 9 6 3 5 8 1 2

5 2 3 9 1 8 7 6 4

8 1 6 2 7 4 9 3 5

3 9 5 7 8 2 1 4 6

6 8 7 3 4 1 2 5 9

1 4 2 5 6 9 3 8 7

CALENDAR

AUGUST 10, 2024, SATURDAY

■ Shaka Samvat 1946

■ Shravan Shaka 19

■ Shravan Parvishte 26

■ Hijari 1446

■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 6, up to 5.46 am

■ Sadhya Yoga up to 2.52 pm

■ Chitra Nakshatra up to 5.49 am

■ Moon enters Libra sign 4.18 pm

SUNSET: 19:08 HRS

SUNRISE: 05:48 HRS

SATURDAY

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	28
New Delhi	33	27
Amritsar	35	27
Bathinda	35	27
Jalandhar	35	27
Ludhiana	35	27
Bhiwani	33	26
Hisar	34	26
Sirsa	35	29
Dharamsala	25	20
Manali	24	19
Shimla	24	16
Srinagar	30	20
Jammu	32	26
Kargil	34	17
Leh	29	15
Dehradun	32	23
Mussoorie	22	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C

FUTURE OF THE PAST

Nationhood is often the outcome of a vision. The most reliable manifestation of such a vision is the values that guide nations in the course of their journeys as republics. There is a line of thinking — perhaps an idealistic, innocent line of thinking — which believes that the foundational vision and the values that are associated with it ought to be inviolable. That somehow, they will withstand, even defy, the currents of time as well as survive the changes in political regime. The history of the subcontinent in the post-colonial years, however, has proved that such

the nation may have turned another corner in recent weeks was conveyed by the image of a joyous crowd toppling the statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: there could not have been a more potent symbol of contemporary Bangladesh's indifference, even antipathy, towards everything Mr Rahman stood and fought for. Does this mean that the future of a secular, liberal and democratic Bangladesh is in peril? The answer lies with Muhammad Yunus and his new interim government. Of course, Bangladesh is not the only country to have faced accusations of turning a blind eye towards its formative values. New India's rulers seem to have jettisoned pluralism and inclusivity, two tenets in the republic's original charter of values, from their scheme of things, leading to widespread concern and dissent.

Bangladesh, or for that matter India, must find ways to democratise its foundational values

Bangladesh, which is now trying to return gingerly to some sort of normalcy after tumultuous weeks that saw a spirited protest by students causing the fall of the Sheikh Hasina Wajed government, has shown that the foundational principles of nation states need not remain constant. In fact, Bangladesh's birth was the consequence of a violent contest between two conflicting ideological frameworks. While West Pakistan was in favour of an Islamic State in Bangladesh that would accord Urdu the pride of place, Bangladesh's people rose in unison demanding the replacement of this template with one that prioritised democracy, secularism, socialism and Bengali, the nation's mother tongue. Since its inception, the tension between these two mutually exclusive templates has left its mark on Bangladesh's body politic that has, consequently, been a witness to numerous changes in guard. That

the question really is this: what leads to the erosion of the roots that ought to bind a nation to its original commitments? In the hands of unimaginative minders, ideals often remain trapped in their own halos, preventing their assimilation into the fabric of a nation. This leads to a distancing between a concept and its praxis in national life. Secularism's vulnerability, in both India and Bangladesh, could be cited as a case in point. The need of the hour then is a renewed, collective pledge to democratise a nation's foundational tenets by cementing their ownership and practice in the public realm. This could replenish a country's compact with the national charter. That democracies need to liberate ideals from the gatekeepers of power and knowledge is an irony that must not go unnoticed.

SCRIPSI

'Anyone whose goal is 'something higher' must expect someday to suffer vertigo. What is vertigo? Fear of falling?... No, vertigo is something other than fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.'

MILAN KUNDERA

“Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past,” runs one of the most famous lines in George Orwell's novel, *1984*. Orwell had the Russia of Stalin in mind here, but his aphorism is true, to lesser or greater degree, of all authoritarian regimes where the ruling party and the leader in charge seek to impose their version of history on every member of the population, whether young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, gay or straight. In a relatively open society, no single version of history can be foisted upon the citizenry as a whole. In the United States of America, for example, when the Republicans are in power, they may try to impose their view of what race relations were or should be like, but this will be vigorously contested by those who understand the phenomenon very differently.

Even in flawed or partial democracies such as India, State-sponsored perspectives on the past are the subject of intense debates. For example, the Narendra Modi government has tried, with all the resources at its command, to present a particular (and particularly tendentious) picture of Hindu-Muslim relations. It has also sought assiduously to diminish the contributions to the Republic of the country's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Yet there remain websites, publishing houses, YouTube channels and even the odd newspaper where the regime's writ does not run, where those who understand these issues differently can articulate their views in public. It is to seek to tame these independent voices that a new broadcasting bill is now being proposed by the Modi government.

In contemporary times, no organisation has sought so strenuously to control how the people think — and do not think — as the Communist Party of China. In its presentation of the country's past, present, and future, the CPC outlines, and defends, four core propositions.

First, that the Party is always right and infallible and that the Leader (once Mao Zedong, now Xi Jinping) is always right and infallible too;

Second, that the cadres and officials of the Party and, above all, the Great Leader are unceasingly devoted, day and night, spring, summer, autumn and winter, to the uplift of China, to making the nation secure and strong and its people happy and prosperous;

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The underground historians of China

POLITICS AND PLAY
RAMACHANDRA GUHA

Third, that those who criticise the Party, its policies or its practices, in public or in private, are enemies of the nation, acting at the behest of foreign powers;

Fourth, if the Party does not firmly and swiftly quell these criticisms — and dispose of these critics — then China will revert to the dark period before the communists took power in 1949 when it was crippled by division, conflict and civil war and in the grip of malign Western powers.

Dissent from the party view of history is far harder in China than in India — let alone the US. Ever since 1949, speaking or writing against the regime runs the risk of being dismissed from one's job, or arrested, or tortured, or even killed. Yet, as a recent book demonstrates, some exemplary individuals still dare to run these risks in presenting to their fellow citizens the truth about modern Chinese history and about the history of the communist party in particular.

The book is called *Sparks: China's Underground Historians and Their Battle for the Future*. Its author, Ian Johnson, spent many years as a reporter in China before being expelled by the regime. By then he had travelled to most parts of the country and interviewed a vast cross-section of its people, among them essayists, reporters, bloggers, and documentary film-makers on whom his book is based. Along the way, Johnson introduces the reader to the diversity of Chinese landscapes, urban and rural, to the depth of its cultural and civilisational history, and to its rich artistic, literary and philosophical traditions. His narrative reveals to us a China beyond Communism that might yet serve to inspire a China after Communism too.

Johnson writes unsparingly of the cruelties inflicted on Chinese people by Mao Zedong who was in power from 1949 until his death in 1976. Mao needed enemies, and so he found them everywhere — in farm and factory, town and country, even within the communist party itself. Millions of upright and hardworking Chinese citizens who had never remotely committed any crime at all were designated by Mao's goons as 'counter-revolutionaries' or as 'enemies of the people'. If they were lucky, they were merely dispossessed of their homes or assigned menial jobs; if not so lucky, jailed or killed.

Mao was a peculiar blend of whimsy and murderous intent. In 1956, he called for people to speak their



Jiang Xue

mind, saying “May a hundred flowers bloom.” When citizens took him at his word, he retracted his call, launching an ‘Anti-Rightist Campaign’ which resulted in a wholesale purge of writers, teachers, students, lawyers, managers, civil servants, and scientists, indeed, of anyone with the remotest ability or training to think for themselves. In the process, writes Johnson, “universities, high schools, research institutes, and government offices were gutted. Hundreds of thousands were sent to labor camps. Those who remained were cowed, trying to avoid the same fate by following the party's every whim to the letter.”

Several of the “underground historians” profiled by Johnson are children or siblings of those who were jailed or killed by the State, their personal suffering animating them to alert a wider public about the dark side of communist rule in China. Through their work, they seek to tell the truth about the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the ravaging of Tibet, and other destructive projects that the so-called ‘Great Helmsman’ conceived and oversaw.

Many of the dissidents Johnson writes about operated in the first decade of the 21st century, “a period of unusual openness”. They were encouraged by the growth of the internet, which allowed them to more freely circulate their writings and their films. Others got their start in the 1960s, also a time of relative artistic and intellectual freedom, ended by the Tiananmen massacre of June 1989. However, Johnson also talks of earlier precedents; such as a mimeographed magazine carrying articles and poems critical of the Party that circulated in small quantities in the late 1950s.

These underground historians, writes Johnson, aim “to challenge, destabilize, and contest the state's version of reality.” Through their work, these non-State and often anti-State writers and film-makers hope to represent “an open, humane China that has always existed and for which people have always struggled.”

The work of these independent historians has become harder after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. Early in his term, Xi unveiled an ambitious programme for presenting the history of the CPC in the best possible light. A vast group of historians employed by the State were commanded with celebrating the party's “great victories and brilliant achievements”. They were instructed to ensure that the gullible younger generations were properly acquainted with the heroism and self-sacrifice of the party and its leaders down the decades. At the same time, these *sarkari* scribes were urged to “resolutely oppose any wrong tendencies to distort and vilify the party's history”.

The odds against them may have increased, but, just as in Mao's time, in Xi's time too some individuals will continue to battle bravely against the grain. For, as Johnson writes, “the fact is that independent thought lives in China. It has not been crushed. Some writers, journalists, artist and film-makers will continue to show that ‘the party does not always win.’”

Reading about the individuals in this book, I was struck not only by their moral and physical courage but also by their intellectual clarity. A woman writer, Jiang Xue, has this to say about the practice of history in communist China: “Mao. He said we should rewrite history. But history has happened. If it's a novel, you can rewrite it. But if it's history, how can you rewrite it? Anyone with a conscience will reject rewritten history.”

Another character, a male journalist named Zhang Shihe, said he writes as he does “because I'm one of those people who gets really angry when he sees something, I have to speak up.” A third, the academic, Chen Hongguo, ironically asks: “Are the politics of our era ‘when madmen lead the blind?’”

And finally, here is Jiang Xue again, responding to a friend who told her that her work was pointless and irrelevant and could have no impact in a tightly-controlled dictatorship such as communist China: “But I disagree. It matters if you try. I want to be a normal person in an abnormal society. I want to be able to say truthful things and express what's in my heart.”

To survive killer heat

SANJAY SETH
SHABNAM BASSI

Climate change is upon us and its escalating impacts are manifesting in the form of unprecedented heat waves sweeping across the globe. Following record-breaking global temperatures in 2023, India, once again, grappled with severe heatwaves, with the India Meteorological Department having forecasted an unusually high number of heat-wave days from April to June. Recently, northern India's resilience was put to the test as temperatures soared above 46 degrees Celsius.

The built environment, comprising the infrastructure and the spaces where people live, work and interact, is particularly vulnerable. From triggering public health emergencies to disrupting food supply chains, lowering productivity and declining our quality of life, the ramifications of these extreme heat events are far-reaching and severe. Rapid urbanisation exacerbates the issue through the urban heat island effect — a phenomenon characterised by fewer green spaces, high population density, limited access to cooling, and dense building concentration — that renders urban areas significantly warmer than their rural counterparts. It becomes crucial to take urgent action to address these vulnerabilities by mitigating the causes of the warmer climate and by adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Beyond global targets like the Paris Agreement, India has set ambitious goals to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2070. Towards the same, a comprehensive and transformational approach in the planning, design and management of the built environment is the need of the hour. Reactive planning alone is inadequate; we must proactively embed resilience into the very fabric of our urban landscapes.

A pivotal solution lies in enriching urban greenery through strategic planning and development. This involves expanding parks, gardens

and green roofs throughout our cityscapes. Urban forestry, which focuses on nurturing trees and vegetation within urban areas, is important for reducing ambient temperatures. By increasing greenery along streets, in parks, and, most importantly, integrating buildings with green roofs and vertical gardens, we can provide much-needed shade and evapotranspiration — a natural cooling process. The combination of these transformative approaches not only effectively combats the urban heat island effect but also curtails our reliance on mechanical cooling.

Parallel efforts must re-evaluate our construction materials and techniques. Conventional materials like asphalt and concrete absorb and retain heat, significantly increasing temperatures. Conversely, cool roofs and pavements with high-reflective materials/coatings are designed to deflect sunlight and minimise heat absorption. Enforcing the use of these materials through updated building codes can lead to substantial transformations, reshaping the essence of our urban landscapes. Passive strategies in building design can no longer be ignored. The major strategies include sufficient insulation to keep out external heat, the use of thermal mass in walls to reduce heat gain, strategic window placement to minimise direct sunlight and effective shading techniques using greenery, *chajjas* or louvers. These methods ensure sustained thermal comfort without heavy reliance on energy-intensive cooling systems. Furthermore, leveraging rooftop solar panels presents a dual opportunity: harvesting renewable energy while mitigating heat absorption. Buildings must be designed and constructed to withstand climate change and reduce carbon emissions, breaking the cycle of rising heat and energy demand.

These solutions, while not novel, are gaining momentum through policy integration and robust implementation as seen in government initiatives like the Heat Action Plans,



the India Cooling Action Plan, and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation. To propel these efforts, capacity building and integrated research are imperative with independent research organisations such as The Energy and Resources Institute. As part of the Smart Surfaces Coalition, TERI is developing a tool to help city administrations assess the viability of various solutions for mitigating urban heat island effects. Additionally, in collaboration with Mahindra, the institute has established a Centre of Excellence equipped with international-standard material testing facilities, providing valuable insights to enhance the passive performance of building products. These examples, among others, highlight the importance of community engagement and participation in advancing sustainability and resilience.

In the collective pursuit of a climate-resilient and a sustainable built environment, partnerships emerge as a cornerstone of progress. Synergistic collaboration among governments, civil society, the private sector, research institutions and communities is necessary for the successful execution and embedding of innovative strategies.

Community engagement lies at the core of this pursuit. Empowering communities to develop and imple-

ment strategies boosts their ability to withstand climate shocks and raises awareness. Concepts such as the Urban Living Labs, pioneered by TERI in India, exemplify how community participation can catalyse that. These ULLs, established in Panjim and now in Visakhapatnam, are tackling climate challenge head-on by co-creating and testing solutions in real-life settings together with the community, local government, academia, non-governmental organisations, and businesses, ultimately scaling them up city-wide.

Furthermore, measuring the impacts of decarbonisation of the building and construction sector is an imperative: the green building rating systems by the Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment Council play a vital role. GRIHA Council's Jan Awas Nirman GRIHA certification aligns with Government of India initiatives — Mission LIFE and Panchamrit-2070 targets — aiming to spread sustainability at the grassroots level through awareness and promoting conscious alternatives among the masses while constructing their buildings. Apart from building materials and designs, it encompasses aspects like water conservation, rainwater harvesting, waste management, sustainable lifestyles, and enhancing circularity within buildings. The certification empowers the end user to indulge in informed decision-making and facilitate enhanced living standards at low cost, whilst nurturing the co-benefits of lower operational bills, increased energy savings and reduced carbon emissions.

In its journey of becoming Viksit Bharat, India has a prime opportunity to showcase sustainable and resilient national development. With a significant portion of building stock yet to be constructed by 2047, the infrastructure built or renovated today will be in use for centuries, presenting numerous opportunities to advance climate-resilient development pathways. The time is now to foster a conducive environment for the adoption of innovative practices in the built environment. By doing so, India can not only propel its green nation development agenda but also bolster its resilience in the face of climate change.

Unusual gesture

■ Sir — Some say that sacrifice is the most perfect form of love. But how far can one go for a partner's happiness? In an unusual incident, a man from a remote district in Bihar helped his wife get married to her childhood lover after her affair was discovered by her in-laws. The

incident has parallels with the Hindi film, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, in which the protagonist took his wife to Italy to search for her lover. But this is easier to do in reel rather than in real life. The man from Bihar thus deserves credit for breaking social norms and prioritising his partner's desires even at the cost of his own familial life.

Debabriya Seal,
North 24 Parganas

Cruel fate

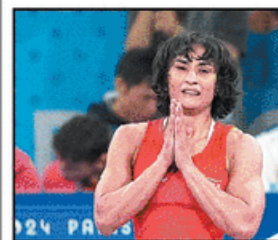
■ Sir — One of the most heartbreaking moments in the history of Indian sports is Vinesh Phogat's disqualification from the Paris Olympics (“Unbearable burden of 100 grams”, Aug 8). While Phogat became the first woman from India to make it to an Olympic wrestling final, she was disqualified before the 50-kilogramme gold medal bout for being overweight by 100 grams. Weight management is crucial in certain sports like wrestling and boxing and the rules should be the same for everyone. But Phogat deserves to be lauded for defeating the world number one to reach the finals.

The 29-year-old has not only silenced her critics but also become an inspiration for young athletes. Her relentless battle against systemic challenges and personal adversities reveals her indomitable spirit. Even though her Olympic run might end without a medal, Phogat's story reminds us that real battles are often those fought off the mat.

Mahajan Rohan,
Jammu

■ Sir — Vinesh Phogat must be congratulated for her outstanding achievement at the Olympics. Phogat made a

remarkable effort to reduce her weight from her natural 56-57 kg to 50 kg, demonstrating her perseverance. It is heartbreaking that she was disqualified for being overweight by only 100 grams.

Jakir Hussain,
Kampur

Fateful exit

■ Sir — The prime minister, Narendra Modi, has feted most of Vinesh Phogat's success in the past. He has, once again, hailed Phogat's achievement at the Paris Olympics and has asked the authorities to challenge her disqualification. Yet, he did not have words of sympathy for Phogat and other wrestlers when they protested on the streets for months against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the former Wrestling Federation of India president, who has been accused of sexual harassment. The prime minister's U-turn and his way of taking the route

most convenient for him are inexplicable.

Avinash Godbole,
Dewas, Madhya Pradesh

■ Sir — It is shocking that Vinesh Phogat has announced her retirement. After a brilliant run at the Olympics, defeating several world champions, Phogat was hours away from scripting history. But fate seems to have had other plans.

Dimple Wadhawan,
Kampur

■ Sir — The hope of an Olympic gold in wrestling for India had gained ground when Vinesh Phogat took down the defending champion, Yui Susaki, in the semi-finals to face Sarah Ann Hildebrandt in the finals. That dream has been shattered. Hearteningly, the WFI has filed an appeal with United Women's Wrestling to reconsider Phogat's case. The rules regarding weight in wrestling need reform.

Haran Chandra Mandal,
Calcutta

Flawed analysis

■ Sir — Devi Kar's article, “The courage to change” (Aug 6), needs an appraisal. The underlying theme of ‘courage to change’ ought also to be seen through the prism of mysticism and spiritualism. While change is the law of nature, human beings do not have the power to effect change since they are pre-destined.

P.K. Sharma,
Barnala, Punjab

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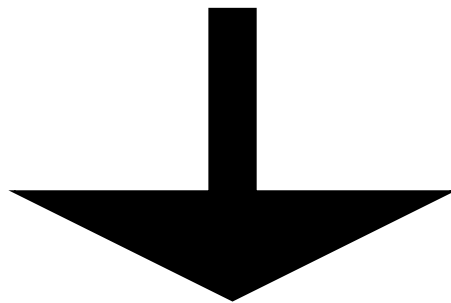
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