THE HINDU



### To abide or not

Corruption charges need credible probe, not actions tainted by politics

he decision of Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot to grant approval to a private complainant to open an investigation and prosecute Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on corruption charges raises familiar politico-legal questions. Foremost is the constitutional question whether a Governor can use his role as a sanctioning authority for prosecution against a serving Chief Minister in a manner contrary to the advice of the Council of Ministers. And in political terms, one may ask whether the Governor's action against a Chief Minister is desirable in a time of increasing conflict between the two offices. In his writ petition challenging the order, Mr. Siddaramaiah has sought to highlight that the Governor was bound to abide by the advice given to him – to refuse sanction in this case. Some judicial precedents say a Governor may arrive at an independent conclusion if the Council demonstrates bias or fails to consider relevant material. However, political realities would suggest the possibility of Governors being selective in pursuing this course of action. Amidst the Opposition's demands for Mr. Siddaramaiah's resignation, the Karnataka High Court has asked the trial court to defer any precipitate action until it hears his challenge to the Governor's order. The allotment of sites by the Mysore Urban Development Authority to landowners who had lost their land in the course of acquisition may or may not involve corruption, and allegations in this regard will require a thorough investigation.

The State government believes that the judicial inquiry it has ordered is enough for now, a step the Governor thinks is inadequate. The Chief Minister's wife was given 38,284 square feet of land in lieu of an extent of 1,48,104 sq.ft she had lost. However, whether it amounts to any illegality would depend on whether Mr. Siddaramaiah had anything to do with the decision. He vehemently denies being involved in any way and has repeatedly said that the sites were sanctioned when the BJP was in power in the State. Private complainants have obtained sanction for prosecution of public servants in the past, but whether it can be given to them after the Prevention of Corruption Act was amended in 2018 has to be considered. Section 17A was introduced then as a filtering mechanism to deter vexatious complaints. It bars police officers from opening a probe without approval from the appropriate authority, making it reasonable to suggest that private parties cannot be given such approval. Public discourse on corruption in the last few decades has hovered between a hankering for punishing political leaders involved in it and deep suspicion over the motives of regimes and agencies that seek to prosecute them. Any criminal process will have to be credible and independent, but contemporary events, politically tainted as they are, contain little evidence of independence or credibility.

### Good, not ugly

Film awards regained some prestige by sticking with good cinema

he National Film Awards appeared to be facing a credibility crisis in recent years following some questionable choices and glaring omissions. For instance, last year, the award for 'Best Feature Film on National Integration', for The Kashmir Files, encapsulated the general political thrust of the awards, where, during the screenings, cinema theatres became platforms for communal sloganeering. Thus, the 70th National Film Awards, declared earlier this week, came as a sort of surprise, somewhat redeeming the prestige associated with the highest cinematic honours. Malayalam film Aattam, directed by debutant Anand Ekarshi, became an interesting choice for the Best Feature Film, Best Screenplay and Best Editing winner, especially in the era of the #MeToo movement. Without ever slipping into preachiness, the film-maker uses the subtle chamber drama to analyse male behaviour after a woman raises an allegation of sexual abuse within a theatre group. The award also comes at a time when protests and debates are roiling the country after the rape and murder of a doctor in Kolkata. Kannada film Kantara, which won Best Popular Film, and also fetched its director Rishab Shetty the Best Actor Award, taps into folk traditions to raise contemporary environmental concerns. Bhoota Kola, a tribal ritualistic performance from coastal Karnataka, is the centrepiece, with Shetty's frenzied interpretation in the climax going a long way towards the film's success as well as getting him the national award.

One commonality between these films is the lack of a formula, especially the kind dictated by corporate studios. Aattam, in fact, originated from a theatre group, giving its working-class members a chance at cinema; they play themselves in the film. Nithya Menen's Best Actress award is also an unconventional choice - as the effervescent Shobhana in Thiruchitrambalam, hers is not a typical award-bait role. Yet, within the film's scheme, it was a stunning performance which raised its overall effect by several notches. The awards reinforce the recent trend of South Indian cinema surpassing Bollywood, which, despite its humongous budgets, has been finding it hard to match the consistent quality of content from regional industries. It is also heartening that the juries and the larger public have started discovering more meaningful content from the southern industries. The National Awards in the 70th edition seem to have fulfilled, to an extent, the purpose for which they were instituted: to celebrate good cinema.

### The 'livery of India's freedom' is under threat

he Prime Minister's renewed call for a 'Har Ghar Tiranga' campaign in the week leading up to our Independence Day (August 9-15) offers us an opportunity to collectively introspect on our national flag and its significance to the country. His moral duplicity in paying deference to the national flag while pledging allegiance to an organisation that has remained, indifferent to it, is one matter. The rampant adoption of machine-manufactured polyester flags, with raw materials often imported from China and elsewhere, is another.

#### An attack on the khadi industry

The Flag Code of India has historically required the national flag to be made of "hand spun and hand-woven wool/cotton/silk khadi bunting". Khadi, that coarse but versatile and sturdy fabric which the Mahatma himself spun and wove in his leadership of the national movement, is imbued with a special meaning in our historical and cultural memory. Khadi is at once a symbol of our storied past, and an icon of Indian modernity and economic vitality.

When India was under foreign rule, khadi was an instrument to locate sovereignty and self-sufficiency in the individual. In sovereign India, khadi has been a commitment to the ongoing journey of national integration and revitalisation. It was in deference to this eternal symbolism that the tricolour once bore the Mahatma's charkha as its centrepiece, and that the modern-day Indian flag used to insist on khadi as its sole fabric.

In 2022, on the auspicious occasion of the 75th anniversary of our Independence, the Government amended the code ("vide its order dated 30.12.2021") to include "machine made...polyester ... bunting" and simultaneously exempted polyester flags from the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Thereby, it put them on the same tax footing as khadi flags. At a time when it would have been appropriate to bind ourselves afresh to the service of our country's national symbols, the Government chose to set them aside



Sonia Gandhi

The

Government

has failed to

build a global

audience for

handlooms;

even the

Mahatma's

denied its

identity

what is worse,

khadi is being

Indian

Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), is Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party



resort to an indefinite strike to call attention to the state-sponsored murder of India's khadi industry.

This decision came at a time when India, far from its glory days as a global hub for polyester manufacturing, became a net importer of polyester yarn in 2023 and 2024. We thus have the real misfortune of importing polyester yarn, primarily from China, and then weaving this imported yarn to produce cloth for our national flag. This shameful inversion of our national pride occurred at the time of grave encroachments by the Chinese armed forces on our borders, and at the peak of the Prime Minister's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' spectacle. The hollowness and inadequacy of the Government's vision has had direct and calamitous consequences for the Mahatma's foremost legatees - our khadi spinners and weavers.

#### The GST burden

The case of our national flag is not an exception. Rather, it is a vividly poignant illustration of this Government's general disinterest in cultivating India's storied handloom and handicraft traditions - khadi or otherwise. Since 2014, the Government has led a consistent effort to support big corporate interests and oligopolisation, and structurally dismantle our nation's micro, small and medium enterprises sector, home to our handloom industries. Demonetisation, a punitive GST, and the unplanned COVID-19 lockdown saw thousands of our handloom workers quit their professions. Our handloom traditions, a material testament to our shared history as a society and polity, have been unravelled by the high-handedness of this uncaring government.

GST continues to be a burden on our handloom workers, with tax having been introduced on the final product as well as on raw materials (yarns, dyes, and chemicals). Our workers' consistent demands to exempt handlooms from GST have fallen on unsympathetic ears, even as surging costs, particularly of electricity and cotton fibre, squeeze them out.

The recently launched Vishwakarma Yoiana. itself deficient on multiple accounts, fully excludes handloom spinners and weavers from its ambit. Meanwhile, in a perversion of the Mahatma's vision, the Government has taken no effort to empower our khadi spinners and weavers to form their own cooperatives outside of existing khadi Institutions to market and sell their products.

#### Khadi procurement has fallen

Government procurement of khadi has fallen as departments choose to ignore or overrule mandates that require them to do so. More worryingly, the Government has failed to build a global audience for Indian handlooms. At a time when consumers across the world are beginning to prize sustainable sourcing and fair trade, the fabric on which Gandhiji's satyagraha was founded should have been globally treasured. Instead, even in his very own nation, Bapu's khadi is being denied its identity. The Government has failed to regulate the market, and khadi spun from semi-mechanised *charkhas* is being sold indiscriminately, and under the same tag as traditional hand-spun khadi. This is to the detriment of our khadi spinners, whose wages do not exceed ₹200-₹250 a day despite their back-breaking manual labour.

The path forward is long, and it requires a reimagination of the place that India's handloom traditions hold in our society and economy. But the first step is also unequivocally clear: it must begin with a restoration of khadi as the only fabric with the distinction of bearing our national flag. The fabric which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru so evocatively described as "the livery of India's freedom", must find its rightful place as an embodiment of our national pride. We owe it to our history, and to our workers.

### Protecting Indian capital in Bangladesh

he dramatic developments in Bangladesh that led to the resignation and fleeing of its former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have created a political vacuum and, thus, uncertainty in India's eastern neighbour. Besides the political and diplomatic fallout of this crisis for India, another significant aspect is how this will impact Indian companies operating in Bangladesh. Indian companies have invested in Bangladesh in sectors such as edible oil, power, infrastructure, fast-moving consumer goods, automobiles, and pharmaceuticals. Despite political opposition, the Sheikh Hasina government rolled out the red carpet for Indian investors and adopted several measures to invite them, such as starting designated special economic zones. Unhappy with India's alleged support of Ms. Hasina's regime, her opponents launched an "India out" boycott movement targeting Indian goods. Since Ms. Hasina is no longer in power, the interim or the new government may adopt a hostile attitude towards Indian companies. It might change the existing laws or adopt new regulatory measures that may adversely impact Indian capital. What options do Indian businesses have in such an eventuality?

### **Legal protection for Indian investors**

As Jeswald Salacuse argues, three basic legal frameworks broadly apply to foreign investment. First, the domestic laws of the country where the investment is made. Second, contracts may have been signed between the foreign investor and the government of the host state, or among foreign investors and companies of the host state. Third, the international law contained in applicable treaties, customs, and general legal principles that have attained the status of international law. The Indian companies that have invested in Bangladesh can use the first two legal frameworks to protect their investments from regulatory risks. For instance, Indian companies can rely on Bangladesh's Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act. However, there



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are limitations to relying on the domestic law of the host state because it can be changed unilaterally by the state to the investor's detriment at any time. Likewise, contracts may be of limited value when it comes to challenging the sovereign actions of the state that adversely affect foreign investment. Therefore, the third legal framework, international law, assumes importance.

### The India-Bangladesh BIT

International law cannot be changed unilaterally and can be used to hold states accountable for their sovereign actions. When protecting foreign investment, the most crucial instrument in international law is a bilateral investment treaty (BIT). A BIT is a treaty between two countries aimed at protecting investments made by investors of both countries. BITs protect investments by imposing conditions on the regulatory behaviour of the host state, thus preventing undue interference with the foreign investor's rights. These conditions include restricting host states from unlawfully expropriating investments, imposing obligations on host states to accord fair and equitable treatment (FET) to foreign investment and not to discriminate against foreign investment. BITs also empower foreign investors to directly sue the host state before an international tribunal if the investor believes that the host state has breached its treaty obligations. This is known as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), by the end of 2023, the total number of known ISDS claims that have been brought stands at 1,332.

In case of adverse sovereign regulation, Indian companies can rely on the India-Bangladesh BIT signed in 2009. While India has unilaterally terminated almost all its BITs, the one with Bangladesh continues to exist. The India-Bangladesh BIT contains broad substantive investment protection features, such as an

unqualified FET provision that can come in handy for Indian companies challenging Bangladeshi sovereign regulatory conduct.

However, the twist in the tale is the Joint Interpretative Notes (JIN) that India and Bangladesh adopted in 2017 to clarify the meaning of various terms in the 2009 treaty. This JIN, now a part of the BIT, was adopted at India's insistence. As part of overhauling its investment treaty practice to safeguard its regulatory power, India proposed such JINs to several countries. This was done without considering whether India has an offensive or defensive interest vis-à-vis a specific country. This JIN has diluted the investment protection features of the BIT. For instance, taxation measures are excluded from the ambit of the BIT.

Likewise, the FET provision is linked to customary international law that would require a higher threshold to show a violation of the treaty. The JIN has been designed from the perspective of the capital-importing country to safeguard its regulatory conduct from ISDS claims. Between India and Bangladesh, New Delhi is the capital exporter, and Dhaka is the importer. Ironically, the JIN that India developed might work to the advantage of Bangladesh, and not the Indian capital operating there.

### The larger question

While Bangladesh provides the immediate reference point, the issue is not restricted to India's eastern neighbour. India's outbound investments have grown manifold. According to UNCTAD, outward foreign direct investment from India in 2023 stood at about \$13.5 billion. India is among the top 20 capital-exporting countries. Thus, the issue of legal protection for Indian companies abroad assumes salience. India should, therefore, evolve its investment treaty practice, keeping both its host and home status in mind and not just the former.

The views expressed are personal

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### **Unkindest cut of all**

Can there be anything more unpardonable and inhumane than the decision of the Kerala Gramin Bank (Inside pages, August 19) to deduct the monthly instalment of loans from the accounts of the Chooralmala landslide survivors in Wayanad? When lakhs of rupees of loans taken by crony capitalists and corporates are written off as non performing assets, it is a tragedy that the Kerala bank was so stone-hearted. It may have tried to make amends now, but the initial move was distressing. Tharcius S. Fernando, Chennai

#### **Court and Kolkata case** That the Supreme Court of

India has taken "suo motu cognisance of the rape and the murder of a doctor" at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital (Page 1, August 19), indicates the grave and horrifying extent of the crime. Medical aspirants first first slog to crack the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate). The successful ones then work strenuously for hours on end. Then, duty doctors do not have any designated restrooms in a hospital. One hopes that the Court will issue instructions to all health-care institutes to ensure a safe and conducive working environment for all medical staff, particularly women. A. Jainulabdeen.

#### Political developments The report, "Champai Soren likely to quit JMM, join BJP"

(August 19) is not surprising. The reason, that he was 'humiliated', does not hold water. When he took over the mantle in February, upon the arrest of Hemant Soren, the message was clear — that it was only a temporary arrangement. This shows the extent to which our political leaders can stoop in their quest for power. The ruling party at the Centre, as usual, seems ready to welcome the 'defector'. S.V. Venkatakrishnan,

San Jose, California, U.S.

### **Graft and probity**

As a nonagenarian reader, I find it distressing that the integrity of State Ministers is on the decline. Not a day passes without some Minister or the other being enmeshed in glaring corruption and neck deep in clandestine dealings. The developments in Karnataka come as no surprise. One only wishes that the truth is unearthed. Mani Nataraajan, Chennai

### Tall leader

Late DMK patriarch and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi did much for the cause of social justice and the uplift of the oppressed sections of society. His approach to infrastructure development in Chennai was visionary. And, his service to the cause of Tamil is outstanding. The

#### release of a commemorative ₹100 coin is a proud moment. V.S. Kannan, Chenna

A shrewd politician, an able administrator, a brilliant orator, and a man of letters 'Kalaignar' strode the political arena like a colossus. His hallmark was his ability to maintain a close rapport with the party cadre and masses. Adore or admonish him, his charisma was one that none could ignore. B. Suresh Kumar,

Coimbatore

### **Corrections & Clarifications**

The fifth paragraph of a report, "Malaysian PM arriving today; trade people-to-people links on agenda" (August 19, 2024) said: "In 2021, Mr. Modi raised Mr. Naik's extradition with the then Malaysian PM Mahathii Mohammad..." The year should have been 2019.

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#### **Ground reports** The surfeit of migrant

workers in almost all spheres of society in the southern States has been felt for a long time. They are prepared to work tirelessly without a murmur when local labourers are inflexible and demanding. More importantly, they are prepared to do any type of work at all times. Simply put, migrant workers are all over the place and have come to stay. The day is not far off when they could outnumber the local workforce (Editorial and Opinion pages, August

### V. Lakshmanan,

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

### **Opinion**

### The tyranny of inequality

onore De Balzac, a French novelist, wrote, "Behind every great fortune there is a crime." This is at best a half-truth as it overlooks that income/wealth accumulation also breeds serious offences/crimes. As we argue, based on an analysis of the Gallup World Poll (GWP) Survey for India (2019-23) and the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)'s Consumer Pyramid Household Survey, income inequality breeds corruption in the intersection of government and business – for example, in the approval of contracts by public officials of mega infrastructure projects (highways, bridges, ports) to be built by rich and influential private investors. Once rich, the greed for more wealth negates moral qualms in pursuing corrupt strategies. Indeed, wealth accumulation becomes easier too – for example, through share market manipulation, political lobbying to secure contracts for big infrastructure projects, and

investments in off-shore funds. In a recent study, Thomas Piketty et al have drawn attention to an astounding escalation of wealth and income inequality in India over the last few decades, especially between 2014 and 2022. The top 1% control more than 40% of total wealth in India today, up from 12.5% in 1980. The top 1% of income earners made 22.6% of the total pre-tax income, up from 7.3% in 1980. India is now among the most unequal countries in the world, yet few studies in recent times analyse the perverse effects of rising economic inequality.

#### The methodology

Our objective is to explore the relationship between income inequality and corruption. Specifically, we investigate whether higher income inequality fed corruption between government and business in the 2014-22 period. Since the two recent National Sample Survey (NSS) rounds of household expenditure for 2018 and 2022 are not directly comparable to the NSS



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Higher income inequality causes more widespread corruption, while greater confidence in the judiciary curbs it

round for 2012, GWP and CMIE data are the fallback options. As the GWP has a small sample, its representativeness of a country as large and diverse as India cannot be taken at face value. But it has several merits, including data on variables such as corruption which are not easy to measure.

We have used the Piketty measure of income inequality, which is defined as the ratio of the share of top 1 % to that of the bottom 50% of the population in total income. Although inequality in consumption expenditure distribution is usually lower than that of income distribution, we have preferred the former because of its greater reliability. Corruption is generally defined as the use of public office for private gain and thus leaves out corruption within businesses (for example, insider trading). So, a broader and more comprehensive definition is the use of public resources by executives in both public and private sectors for private gain without, of course, overlooking the role of politicians. The GWP asks the question whether corruption is widespread and if the answer is yes, it is taken as 1. By adding these up, we obtain a measure of corruption. Thus the measure of corruption is based on individual perception. There are three manifestations of corruption: in government, businesses, and the intersection between government and businesses. We focus on the relationship between inequality and corruption in this intersection – for example, whether award of contracts by the government to build ports is influenced by bribes offered by rich investors.

Corruption has risen following globalisation as natural resources have become more valuable, and regulatory agencies licensing their allocation are more subservient to powerful business interests and corrupt public officials. Besides, success of the 'Make in India' scheme has been elusive so far as none of the macro-economic indicators such as manufacturing, FDI, exports, and employment

have registered an increase. Worse, as argued in a Carnegie India essay (2023), hike in import tariffs and tax cuts have been distortionary.

#### **Findings**

This means that there is a possibility of greater rent-seeking by rich and influential investors. Rent-seeking is defined as the use of resources to capture an unwarranted monetary gain from external elements, such as government/public agencies, be it directly or indirectly, without giving anything in return to them or society. An economic rent causes dissipation of resources that is potentially more serious than the waste associated with the rent itself. Groups struggling for the rents invest time and money in the transfer of wealth rather than in the creation of wealth. Since corruption in the intersection of government and business remained high between 2014 and 2022, it is not unlikely that rent-seeking persisted at a high level too. Without going into the merit of the allegations by Hindenburg of the involvement of the SEBI chair and her husband in the Adani Group off-shore fund, and the slowing of the SEBI probe, it may well be symptomatic of a

larger and growing malaise. We find that income inequality was fuelled largely by speculative investments (such as mutual funds), while savings in FDs and post offices curbed it. Trust in the judiciary was driven by the conviction rate and moderated by its square, implying that trust rose but at a diminishing rate. We find that higher income inequality causes widespread corruption, while greater confidence in the judiciary curbs it.

While the Budget missed the opportunity to tax the rich at a higher rate, greater transparency and accountability of regulatory agencies remains a chimera. Both a more competitive political system and private businesses are daunting challenges but their potential for a more prosperous India is hard to dispute.

### A testing time for Revanth Reddy

He will have to handle Cabinet expansion and the BRS's relentless criticisms

#### STATE OF PLAY

R. Ravikanth Reddy ravikanth.ramasayam@thehindu.co.in

fter a successful 12-day business tour of the U.S. and South Korea, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has returned to Telangana

to face numerous challenges. Despite the Telangana delegation attracting impressive investments and assurances from top Information Technology, manufacturing, and service sector companies in the two countries, it has not returned to applause. This is because the Opposition party, the Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS), has launched a negative campaign against the government on social media, which the Chief Minister's PR team has failed to counter effectively. Senior ministers did not respond to the BRS's criticism, particularly the political attack on the Chief Minister's brother, Jagadeeshwar Reddy, whose company signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the State government for investments. The BRS also claims that K.T. Rama Rao, who was the IT and Industries Minister during the previous regime, secured investments and got assurances from global tech leaders more successfully than the present Congress government. Citing facts and figures, the Congress government has denied this.

Apart from the external challenges, the Chief Minister also faces internal ones. Several leaders are eagerly waiting to be chosen for the Cabinet, which the government is expanding. A few members from the dominant Backward Classes are putting pressure on the government to give them posts. There are six vacancies: the present Cabinet consists of 12 Ministers, including Mr. Re-



vanth Reddy.

Accommodating all these requests is impossible. For instance, Munugode MLA Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy from Nalgonda, who quit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and rejoined the Congress in 2023, claims that he returned only because he was promised a ministerial position if the Congress was voted to power.

When Mr. Rajagopal Reddy and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, who is now Revenue Minister, both changed their loyalties before the election, the people of Telangana became convinced that the Congress was coming to power. This galvanised the party cadre and also stopped leaders from migrating to the BJP, which was confident of defeating the BRS.

Mr. Rajagopal Reddy's inclusion in the Cabinet will be tough as his elder brother, Komatireddy Venkata Reddy, already holds a key portfolio. Known for his frequent outbursts, Mr. Rajagopal Reddy could prove to be a thorn in party's functioning.

Another Minister, N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, is also from Nalgonda district and belongs to the Reddy community. This will further complicate the regional and caste balance if Mr. Rajagopal Reddy is taken in.

Mr. Revanth Reddy will also have to choose between two MLAs who are brothers - Gaddam Vivek (Chennur) and Gaddam Vinod (Bellampally) – from the Mala community of the Scheduled Castes (SCs). The Madigas, who are numerically stronger SCs, are seeking a bigger share in the pie. Moreover, Mr. Vivek's son, Vamsi Krishna, is already an MP from Peddapally.

Caste equations and familial politics aside, the Chief Minister will also have to be mindful of ensuring a regional balance. Greater Hyderabad city consists of three districts and 24 MLAs; it does not have any representation in the Cabinet. There is no Congress MLA within the city limits. Mr. Revanth Reddy may prefer to choose one of the MLAs who defected to the Congress from the BRS in recent times, but the party high command may not be comfortable with this.

Some Congress leaders also believe that defections to the party are not taking place on the expected scale. So far, only 12 MLAs from the BRS have moved to the Congress. Luring another 15 MLAs will be an uphill task for the party. The BRS has been saying that its leaders will fight instead of meekly accepting defeat. Meanwhile, former president of the Congress, Rahul Gandhi, has taken a firm stand against defections.

Mr. Revanth Reddy is a seasoned politician. With the party high command backing him and no senior leaders looking to challenge him as of now, he may gain total control over the party. But from a governance point of view, countering the BRS and the BJP while also keeping all his party members happy will be a test of his leadership. The government is already under pressure to fulfil its six election promises. The much-touted ₹2 lakh farm loan waiver has not brought much cheer as the Opposition has been relentlessly highlighting the lacunae in the scheme. This is a testing time for the Chief Minister.

### NIRF: is quantity trumping quality?

The fact that private universities are performing much better than public ones in the NIRF raises questions about whether the rankings are being gamed

### **DATA POINT**

**Achal Agrawal Moumita Koley** 

he 2024 rankings of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) show some interesting trends in the standing of Indian universities compared to 2023. This article explores the factors contributing to these shifts in the rankings.

**Chart 1** shows the universities which have experienced more than a 20% change in their 2024 rankings compared to 2023. Institutions that seen a significant drop in their ranking are shown on the left; those that have shown a striking improvement are depicted on the right. In general, many more private universities have seen improvements in rankings, while many prominent public institutions, such as the IISERs and NITs, have experienced significant setbacks.

Of the 29 private universities that have seen changes in their rankings, 22 (76%) have seen an improvement, while only seven (24%) have experienced a decline. In contrast, among the 70 public universities with changes in ranking, 43 (61%) have seen a decline, and only 27 (39%) have shown improvement. At least on paper, private universities seem to be outperforming their public counterparts.

This raises questions about the underlying factors driving these changes. Are private institutions genuinely improving, or have they some found a way of gaming the research metrics? While we delve deeper into this question, one clear trend is the considerable drop in rankings for IISERs. On the other hand, the universities that have seen improvements in rankings include a mix of private and public institutions. We examine parameter-wise data to identify which factors contributed most to these changes.

Charts 2 and 3 provides in-

sights into the factors driving changes in the NIRF 2024 rankings and unveils a clear divide between private and public universities. Private universities that have improved their rankings have excelled in research metrics, particularly in the number of publications and citations. However, this success possibly comes at the expense of reputation, with several institutions accused of gaming citations a concern highlighted by reports published in international journals such as Nature and Science. Public institutions such as IISERs, NIT Trichy, and IIT Ropar have seen their rankings decline, primarily due to poor performance in these same research metrics. Despite their status as Institutes of National Importance, these universities have struggled to compete, possibly because they prioritise research quality over quantity. This focus on quality, while commendable, may be costing them in the rankings. The decline in citation counts and modest gains in publications have impacted their positions, highlighting a broader issue in how research output is evaluated.

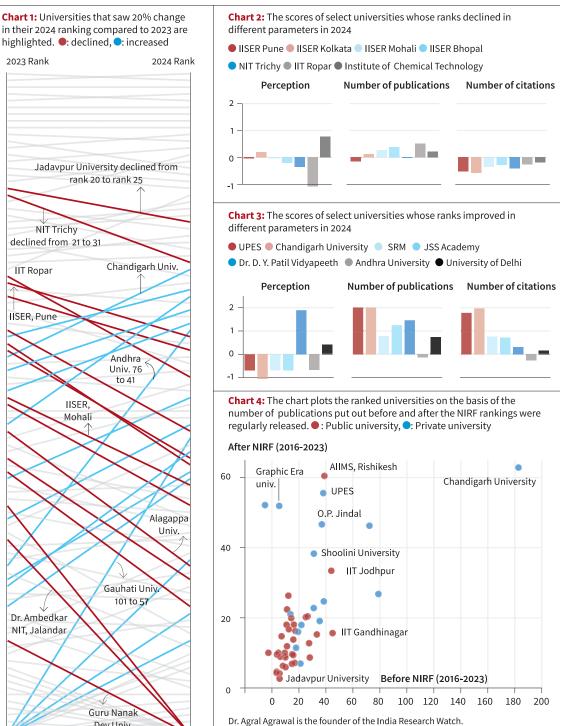
Chart 4 highlights the phenomenal growth in the number of publications by private universities, which is quite perplexing compared to the modest increase seen at premier institutions such as IIT Bombay or IISc.

Overall, the NIRF 2024 rankings point to a troubling trend: some universities are possibly gaming the NIRF rankings by manipulating the research metrics, which potentially have long-term harmful effects on India's scientific research landscape. As research misconduct becomes increasingly rampant, the emphasis on ranking parameters may be driving institutions to prioritise quantity and manipulation of metrics over quality. In any case, there is little doubt that some universities have cracked the code to better rankings, which is to publish en masse, whether by hook or by crook.

### Publishing to flourish

Dev Univ

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Institutional Ranking Framework



Dr. Moumita Koley is a Senior Research Analyst at DST-CPR, IISc, Bangalore

### FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 20, 1974

### Seamless Steel tube unit to be set up in Tiruchi

Madras, Aug. 19: Seamless Steel tubes would be manufactured in India and a plant for this purpose would be set up in Tiruchi shortly. The manufacture of seamless steel tubes would save the country's foreign exchange to the tune of Rs. 13 crores annually said Mr. T.A. Pai, Union Minister for Heavy Industry, to-day. Mr. Pai told newsmen that the total cost of the captive seamless steel plant would be about Rs. 25 crores and scrap iron from various BHEL units in the country would be siphoned to the factory in Tiruchi. The scrap available from the local Southern Railway Workshop would also be utilised by the plant. Referring to the export of railway wagons Mr. Pai said that he had asked wagon manufacturers to explore markets in Australia which was importing its entire requirement. There were enquiries from Iran also. He said the wagon industry expected orders for only 10,000 carriages out of a capacity of 30,000. He was afraid that recession might set in leading to considerable unemployment. The Government was taking note of the situation and was studying the effects of credit squeeze, so that production might not be affected. The Union Minister said that Yugoslavia has agreed to pay higher prices for wagons ordered from India. As a result of the negotiations carried on with Yugoslavia it had been agreed tentatively that the order must be reduced to 1,300 from 3,600 wagons and the escalated prices must be given even to the carriages already delivered.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 20, 1924

### Young men's miscellany

This student's magazine edited by C.T. Parthasarathi Mudaliar, I.E.S. (Retd) is the latest addition to the ranks of journalism in Madras. The Magazine aims to be "a channel of information and instruction which will not only bear directly upon the students' preparation for the S.S.L.O. public examination, but will also constitute an instrument for training the young mind and forming the youthful character." The first number contains a short story of student life, a brief description of the Empire Exhibition, notes about answering examination papers, tips for Boy Scouts and a lot of other useful reading matter for young men.

### Text&Context

THEMAHINDU

#### **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

Ouantum of additional electricity Nepal will export to India

in MW. This is the first time that Nepal will supply power to Bihar under a medium-term sales agreement. India approved 39 MW of electricity exports from Nepal for the first time in October 2021. PTI

### The number of British think tank experts Russia banned

Russia said it was banning 32 experts at British think tanks whom it accused of pushing an anti-Russia line in Western policy circles and of publishing disinformation designed to discredit Moscow. REUTERS

### The death toll from floods in war-torn Yemen since July

Flooding caused by torrential rainfall in Yemen has affected a total of 2,68,000 people. Yemen, grappling with an almost decade-long war, suffers from severe floods on a near-annual basis. AFP

### The increase in security for all Union government hospitals

In per cent. The Health Ministry approved the enhancement of security deployment in all union government hospitals, amid protests by doctors following the rape and murder of a doctor at a Kolkata hospital. PTI

### The worth of fake notes sold across the European region

in a million euros. A forger suspected of printing fake bank notes was arrested. He is believed to be responsible for over 27% of all fake euro banknotes in 2023 alone. REUTERS COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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### A change in India's power export rules

When did India's first transnational power project that supplies all the power generated to another nation come into being? Why did the Bangladesh Power Development Board request a revision of the power purchase agreement? What does the latest amendment mandate?

**EXPLAINER** 

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far: n August 14, Reuters reported on the introduction of an amendment to India's power export rules. Purported to hedge against political risks in Bangladesh, it allows Indian power exporters to reroute their output to Indian grids if there is a delay in payments from partner countries. Adani Power's plant in Godda (Jharkhand) supplies its entire generated power to Bangladesh. In a statement, a spokesperson of Adani Power emphasised their commitment of supplying electricity to Bangladesh, stating that the amendment does not affect its existing contract.

What is the Godda project?

The Jharkhand-subsidiary of Adani Power supplies 1,496-megawatt net capacity power to Bangladesh from the ultra super-critical thermal power plant in Godda. This is facilitated under a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) entered with the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) in November 2017 for a period of 25 years.

The Godda plant is India's first ansnational power project that supplies all the power generated to another nation. In a statement on July 15 last year, Adani Power stated that the electricity supplied from Godda will have a positive impact on the neighbour's power situation by replacing costly power generated using liquid fuel. It elaborated that the transition would help reduce the average cost of power purchased. As per the Bangladesh Power Development Board's (BPDB) annual report for 2022-23, the total installed generation capacity of the country was 24,911 MW in June 2023. Of this, 2,656 MW was imported from India (more than 10% of overall) with the Godda plant contributing 1,496 MW (about 6% of overall). On the policy prerogative for



power export, India's Ministry of Power illustrating the guidelines for power export in 2016 said the exchange of electricity across South Asia would promote "economic growth and improve the quality of life for all the nations"

Why was the project criticised? The criticisms emanated from the use of coal imported from the Carmichael mine in Australia into India to produce power for Bangladesh. Thermal plants utilise coal as a primary fuel. The Institute for **Energy Economics and Financial Analysis** (IEEFA), analysing the PPA back in April 2018 held that it allowed Adani Power to "push the high cost of importing and transporting coal into India, plus the cost of transmitting the electricity across the border onto Bangladesh." United News of Bangladesh had reported in February 2023 about the BPDB writing to Adani Power for a revision in the PPA. The

publication, quoting an official with anonymity, reported that in BPDB's view the coal price quoted at \$400/MT was "excessive", adding, "it should be less than \$250/MT, which is what we are paving for the imported coal at our other thermal plants". The other concern, as stated in the Bangladesh-based Daily Star in February last year, entailed the high capacity and maintenance charges regardless of whether it generates any electricity. The reportage held it was "very high" by industry standards.

Why does Bangladesh need imports? The answer is underutilisation. In a separate context, Soumya Bhowmick, public policy analyst and economist, explained to The Hindu that Bangladesh has made notable progress in expanding electricity access, especially in rural areas. However, notwithstanding the increase in electricity generation, India's

South Asian neighbour continues to experience fuel and gas supply constraints, thus, contributing to the underutilisation of its power plants. In fact, in July 2022, Bangladesh had sought support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cushion itself against a financial shock originating from volatile energy prices after Russian actions in Ukraine. This was after the country experienced blackouts, sometimes up to 13 hours a day, as utilities struggled to source enough diesel and gas to meet demand, AFP had reported.

Separately, Hasan Mehedi, Bangladesh-based activist specialising in matters relating to power and climate change, also pointed to "serious levels of overcapacity in Bangladesh". Quoting official figures, Mr. Mehedi pointed to total power generation capacity as on June 30 this year being 28,098 MW, of which the highest power generation was scaled at 16,477 MW – an unutilised idle capacity of about 11,621 MW.

Where do we stand now?

Mr. Bhowmick states that the regulatory change endows greater flexibility to power exporters by permitting them access to the domestic market and reducing the dependency on external markets. He explains that it mitigates risks associated with instability or economic challenges in neighbouring countries.

Further, Mr. Mehedi explained to The Hindu that delay in payments have been a standard phenomenon. "There is an entire internal vetting mechanism that follows after a bill is presented to the BPDB," he stated, elaborating, "The BPDB would then evaluate the prices of coal in the open market and that of other expenditures as stated in the bill. It would then send it back to the company for any corrections as necessitated."

On the potential impact to Bangladesh from the latest development, Mr. Mehedi said, "Even if the supply is stopped totally, the impact would last for 2 to 3 days because of the sudden nature, but not in the long-term."

### THE GIST

On August 14, Reuters reported on the introduction of an amendment to India's power export rules. Purported to hedge against political risks in Bangladesh, it allows Indian power exporters to reroute their output to Indian grids if there is a delay in payments from partner countries.

The Jharkhand-subsidiary of Adani Power supplies 1,496-megawatt net capacity power to Bangladesh from the ultra super-critical thermal power plant in Godda.

The criticisms emanated from the use of coal imported from the Carmichael mine in Australia into India to produce power for Bangladesh.

### What inflamed the far-right riots in Britain?

What role did social media play? Has there been a change in the demography of the rioters?

<u>Amir Ali</u>

The story so far:

he recent far right riots in Britain are a continuation of the phenomenon of urban rioting that the country regularly experiences, especially in the summer months such as the 1981 violence in Brixton in London and Toxteth in Liverpool; or in northern deindustrialised towns such as Burnley and Oldham in 2001. While previous rounds of violence witnessed youngsters from black and ethnic minority backgrounds in pitched battles with the police who were accused of being racially motivated and discriminatory, this year's summer violence involved men from white working-class backgrounds attacking, in some cases a mosque and hotels where immigrants were staying.

What led to the riots? In this round of race riots, social media played an almost incendiary role,

exponentially spreading misinformation. The immediate spark to the violence was the rumour that the perpetrator of the knife attack in the town of Southport, which killed three young girls, was Muslim and an immigrant who had recently arrived on a boat. Controversial far-right figures like the English Defence League co-founder, Tommy Robinson, took to social media on the issue, resulting in many of his followers violently taking to the streets.

The riots are a culmination of decades of dehumanising immigrants. Former U.K. Prime Minister, Theresa May, when she was Home Secretary in the David Cameron government, created what was called a 'hostile environment' in order to bully illegal immigrants into leaving. This reached even more extreme levels under Home Secretaries Priti Patel and Suella Braverman. Indian origin Prime Minister Rishi Sunak contributed his share with his pull-up-the-drawbridges mentality and stop-the-boats-from-arriving sloganeering. Signals from the highest levels of the

British political establishment reinforce the unfounded belief that immigrants are harmful for British economy and society. The highlighting and headlining of immigration also serves to obfuscate the manner in which unemployment has arisen through a deliberate deindustrialisation, rather than immigrants snatching jobs; how there has been a shortfall in building social housing; and a general stretching, to breaking point, of public services such as the National Health Service (NHS) through systematic under-investment.

How has right-wing media reacted? A curious phenomenon of these riots has been the concern towards the English working class by the right-wing media and commentariat. This plight was itself created through the declaration of a veritable class war when Margaret Thatcher during the miners' strike, called the National Union of Miners (NUM) as the 'enemy within', drawing a parallel to the 'enemy without' in the form of the

Argentine junta that had been defeated in the 1982 Falklands War. Historically, working class unrest in Britain such as the 1819 Peterloo massacre, or the 1984 miners' strike has had the potential to challenge and change the British establishment on more equitable and socially just grounds. The right wing commentariat does not visualise their working class framing of the current riots in this transformative manner. They have not been worried about the aggravation of working-class conditions owing to 14 years of austerity measures imposed by Conservative governments since 2010.

The current riots must also be understood as a far-right reaction to pro-Palestine protests across British cities that have called for a ceasefire in the face of Israeli military actions in Gaza. These protests were labelled as hate marches and anti-Semitic by the right-wing media. The possibility of further far-right violence was thwarted by anti-race protesters on the streets that the Labour government tended to be frigid towards. The Keir Starmer led government is unlikely to challenge the far-right, fearing a shift of support towards the immigration obsessed Reform U.K. Party, that received four million votes in the July elections. The Starmer government's ability to handle the violence is undermined by the prolonged austerity measures that have generally compromised the capabilities of

Amir Ali teaches at the Centre for Political Studies, JNU, New Delhi

### THE GIST

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In this round of race riots, social media played an almost incendiary role, exponentially spreading misinformation.

A curious phenomenon of these riots has been the concern towards the English working class by the right-wing

THE HINDU

#### **ABSTRACT**



Greener future: A camel drinks water from a small pond in Banni near the Great Rann of Kutch in 2018. FILE PHOTO

### How the Banni grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat can be restored

The Kachchh district in Gujarat houses one of the largest tracts of grasslands in the country. In a new study, researchers have assessed the suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grassland restoration, considering ecological value to be the primary criterion

#### P. Sunderarajan

Dey, R., Sharma, S.B. & Thakkar, M.G, 'Maximising ecological value and assessing land suitability for sustainable grassland management in Asia's largest tropical grassland, Western India', *Sci Rep* 14, 13658 (2024). doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-62775-9

rasslands are one of the largest ecosystems in the world. They are distributed mainly in semiarid and arid areas, and include savannahs, grassy shrublands, and open grasslands. They harbour a large number of unique and iconic species and offer a variety of material and intangible advantages to people, including several ecosystem services such as carbon storage, climate mitigation, and pollination. Like other types of biodiversity, they face the problem of degradation due to deforestation overgrazing, agriculture, urbanisation, and other natural and human-made reasons. As much as 49% of grassland areas worldwide are estimated to be experiencing degradation.

In India, grasslands account for approximately eight lakh sq. km, or about 24% of the country's total land area (32.8 lakh sq. km). They are increasingly threatened by agricultural conversion, tree-based plantation projects, invasive species, and mega-development projects. The issue is exacerbated by the strong bias of government and non-profit organisations for the conservation and protection of forests.

The Kachchh district in Gujarat, in the western part of the country, houses one of the largest tracts of grasslands in the country. Popularly known as 'Banni', it once covered an area of approximately 3,800 sq. km but it has now decreased to

about 2,600 sq. km. In a new study, researchers at the Department of Earth and Environmental Science in Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma (KSKV) Kachchh University, in Bhuj, have assessed the suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grassland restoration, considering ecological value to be the primary criterion.

#### Findings of the study

They grouped the prospective restoration zones of the Banni grassland into five categories depending on how suitable each zone was for restoration. They have found that as much as 937 sq. km (or 36%) of the existing grassland area was "highly suitable", 728 sq. km (28 %) was "suitable", 714 sq. km (27%) was "moderately suitable", 182 sq. km. (7%) was "marginally suitable", and 61 sq. km (2%) was "not suitable" for restoration.

Speaking to this correspondent, assistant professor and leader of the study team Seema Bhargav Sharma said the first two categories of "highly suitable" and "suitable" zones – which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the complete Banni grasslands – can be restored easily by simply providing them with adequate water sources, either through irrigation or rainwater harvesting.

Grassland expansion should also not be much difficult in the third "moderately suitable" zone. Further, the "marginally suitable" and "not suitable" zones can also be managed through interventions such as terracing; with supplementary inputs like fertilizers; and by protecting from high water run-off and erosion, and salt intrusion, the researchers said.

The study could provide the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and policymakers a robust foundation for crafting policies aimed at protecting and rehabilitating degraded grasslands. "The detailed assessment of land suitability can inform legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure sustainable land use and conservation practices," Dr. Sharma added. A key feature of the new study, she said, is that it provides a holistic assessment. The majority of research on grassland degradation has so far been performed only at the scale of sample plots. Some studies have been conducted at the regional scale but they also mainly used single vegetation indicators, such as net primary productivity (NPP) and the normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), without accounting for the characteristics of the soil. This compromised the accuracy of suitability analysis and grassland degradation assessment, she said.

"Our study fills the gap and also covers more aspects to get as comprehensive a picture as possible. We have analysed multiple characteristics of soil also, such as the availability of the three important nutrients, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and four essential micronutrients, iron, manganese, zinc, and copper, ... soil acidity, soil texture, soil organic carbon, salinity, the water holding capacity, cation exchange capacity, bulk density, and infiltration rate," Dr. Sharma added. She also noted that the team used satellite data to check aspects such as land use and land cover, geomorphology, and land slope. "In all, 20 parameters were analysed," she said. "The study aimed at not only assisting identification of lands suitable for grassland development but also to help manage them in a sustainable manner."

### Methodology and impact

The study was conducted across the area of the Banni grassland. The researchers collected soil samples from 45 locations, and data for geomorphological analyses.

The satellites in question that provided data on slope, land use, and land cover were the U.S. Sentinel 2 satellite and the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (or ASTER).

Research scientist Rupak Dey, whose doctoral work resulted in the study, said, "Our research can help generate evidence-based recommendations for sustainable grassland management, including biodiversity conservation and the enhancement of livelihoods for local communities dependent on grasses for their livestock."

The researchers' findings were published in the journal *Scientific Reports* in June. Apart from Dr. Sharma and Dr. Dey, the study team consisted of Mahesh G.Thakkar, the director of the Lucknow-based Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences.

Himender Bharti, a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Ecosystem Management South Asia Regional Network, said the study was appropriate as it could help provide action plans to conserve grasslands, which have a vital role to play particularly in the context of climate change as they are a great source for sequestration of carbon dioxide. Dr. Bharti wasn't involved in the research.

He also said that many bird species – such as the great Indian bustard and the Bengal florican – prefer to breed in grasslands, but grassland areas are shrinking constantly due to anthropogenic activities, threatening biodiversity as well as the ecosystem services they provide.

"There is an urgent need for government agencies and other stakeholders to make efforts to conserve them for the future generations," he said.

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

P. Sunderarajan is a Delhi-based freelance science correspondent.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily

quiz: 1. The six clubs to have played in all 32 seasons.

Ans: Leicester City, Ipswich Town and Southampton

Ans: Arsenal, Chelsea, Everton, Liverpool,

**Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur** 

2. The three clubs promoted for the 2024-25 season.

3. The first non-English club to play in the Premier

4. The only non-European manager of the 20 clubs

League. Ans: Swansea City, from Wales



FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Know your English

#### K. Subrahmanian

"Hello."

"Hi."

"It was an exciting match last night, wasn't it?"

"I don't know. I didn't watch it."
"Why?"

"You see my grandfather had the remote control to the T.V. last night. He kept changing channels every ten seconds. He wanted to know what was happening on Star Plus, BBC and what have you."

"So you have a zapper in your family."
"Zapper? What are you talking about?"
"Your grandfather, he's a zapper."
"What do you mean?"

"Well, any person who frequently switches from one channel to another is a zapper."

"By the way, is this word related to zap? In comics, whenever someone gets hit, the word 'zap' is written right across the page."

"Yes, that's right. 'Zap' is an informal

word and one of its meanings is 'to make somebody unconscious with a hit, blow, etc'.

The robber zapped the old lady with an iron rod.

If, on the other hand, you say the robber zapped the old lady, you mean that he shot her."

"All that is fine. But what has shooting to do with switching channels?"

"Another meaning of 'zap' is 'to move very quickly or go through something very quickly'. *Yesterday I saw Harish zapping around the university on his new scooter.*"

"Shall we zap into town for some idlis and vadas?"

"Sorry, I can't. I have to finish reading a book."

"Well, you'd better zap through it then. We'll leave in an hour."

"O.K."

"Where are you going? Your house is in the other direction." "I have to buy three big bars of

chocolates."

"Expecting guests?"

"They are for my grandfather. He eats chocolates while watching T.V."
"So your grandfather is not only a

"So your grandfather is not only a zapper but also a chocoholic." "Chocoholic?"

"Yes, a person with a compulsive desire to eat chocolates is a chocoholic." "I've heard of workaholics and

alcoholics but never of a chocoholic."
"You've heard of it now. And what's
more, you have one at home. By the way,
chocoholic is a recent coinage."

"Well, I'll zap to the stores."
"You seem to be full of zap."

"You seem to be full of za "What does that mean?"

"It means 'vigour'. You are zappy." "Thanks. I'll zap along."

Published in The Hindu on February 2, 1993.

### Word of the day

**Extemporaneous:** with little or no preparation or forethought

**Synonyms:** impromptu, offhand, unrehearsed

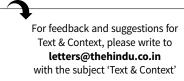
Usage: He made some extemporaneous

remarks before the ceremony.

 ${\bf Pronunciation:} {\it bit.ly/extemporaneous pro}$ 

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /ɛksˌtɛm.pɜ:(ɹ)'eɪn.i.əs/



A ND-NDE

### THE DAILY QUIZ

### A quiz on the life and times of the former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi who would have turned 80 on August 20, 2024

### V. V. Ramanan

### QUESTION 1

Born into the famous Nehru family, which famous school did Rajiv Gandhi attend in India and to which prestigious colleges did he go but without completing a degree?

#### QUESTION 2

What was his profession when he decided to join mainstream politics?

### QUESTION 3

From which constituency did he contest the Lok Sabha polls in 1981 and how is the constituency connected to his family?

### QUESTION 4

What record did Rajiv set when he took over as the PM on the

assassination of Indira Gandhi in October 1984?

### QUESTION 5

During his regime, Operations codenamed 'Flowers are Blooming' and 'Cactus' were undertaken to thwart coups in which two countries?

### QUESTION 6

What did the 61st amendment to the Constitution introduced under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership in 1988 bring about?

### **QUESTION 7**In which place in Tamil Nadu was

Rajiv Gandhi assassinated on May 21, 1991?

### **QUESTION 8**What is the 'Sa

What is the 'Sadhbhavana Diwas' observed on August 20?



Visual question:
Name the memorial to Rajiv Gandhi where his family is paying its respects. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

playing in the 2024-25 season. Ans: Ange Postecoglou, former Australian Footballer for Tottenham Hotspur 5. The player of the 2024-25 season who has played in more than 600 games in the Premier league. Ans: James Milner of Brighton and Hove Albion 6. This player has won the Golden Boot award the most number of times. Ans: Thierry Henry, four times 7. This man has scored the most number of hat-tricks in Premier league history. Ans: Sergio Aguero scored 12 hat-tricks for Manchester City
Visual: Identify this manager and his distinction. Ans: Arsene Wenger, longest serving manager in Premier League history.

Early Birds: J.A.N Corera Jithin Mathew

### thehindubusinessline.

### Trial and error

Clinical trials waiver for some drugs raises questions

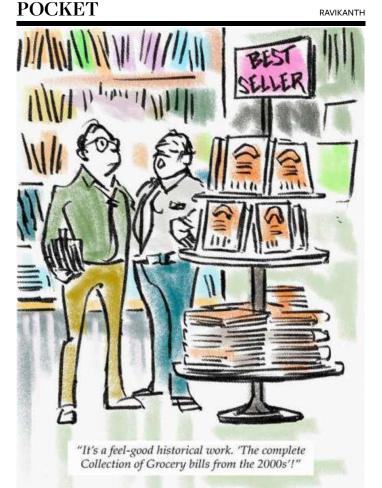
arlier this month, the Centre decided to waive the requirement of clinical trials in India for a select category of drugs approved by the regulators in the US, Japan, the UK, Canada, Australia and the EU. The medicine categories to which this waiver will apply are those used to treat a rare disease (orphan drugs); for gene and cellular therapy; pandemic-related drugs; those used for special defence purposes; and new drugs that mark a major therapeutic advance over the existing levels of treatment.



The waiver of clinical trials will provide speedy access to special category medicines by removing a market hurdle (both in terms of cost and time) to MNCs which are keen to sell in India after meeting the regulatory requirements of the developed world. However, the issue is whether medicines tested on populations with a different gene pool should be marketed in India without their being tested for compatibility with our genetically diverse populace. It cannot be assumed that the drugs so exempt are inert to genetic and ethnic differences. Therefore, using the Covid-19 experience as a guidepost, "bridging trials" over a few months should be conducted at the very least to evaluate their 'fit' with the local population. That would generate some rudimentary data on safety, efficacy and immunogenicity.

A waiver seems to invoke the principle of 'emergency use authorisation' during the Covid days. While the Centre might have been justified in responding to the needs of numerically small patient groups, it should not relax its clinical trials norms unless the situation is exceptional or dire. The office of the Drugs Controller General of India should be sure that due process with respect to clinical trials has been followed in the six countries/regions which have been allowed this concession. Follow-up monitoring of medicines, or post-marketing surveillance is another concern. The systems in place to conduct post-marketing surveillance do not inspire confidence. In the annual reports of the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission, tasked with overseeing this function, this issue has not been given the importance it deserves. It would inspire some confidence if the Health Ministry were to periodically report on its action on adverse events.

Towards the end of May this year, the Centre issued a pharmacovigilance protocol for vaccines, which details reporting procedures. But these need to be made simple and transparent, besides being extended to medicines at large. Above all, it is intriguing that MNCs keen to tap into the Indian market should not have included the Indian population in its clinical trials when the cost of conducting clinical trials here is considerably lower than in the West and an ecosystem of contract research organisations has come into being. Besides, the availability of rare medicines should be accompanied by a level of affordability. It should be possible for the Centre to arrive at an arrangement in this regard as a quid pro quo for allowing easy market access.





egulation (EU) 2023/1115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of May 31, 2023, is on making available in the European Union (EU) market and the export from the EU of certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation.

The avowed objective of the Regulation — referred to as 'Deforestation Rules' or 'Rules' in the ensuing narrative — is to minimise the EU's contribution to deforestation and forest degradation worldwide, with the consequential benefits of reducing the EU's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and global biodiversity loss.

The Regulation, as stated in Article 1, lays down rules regarding products, as listed in Annex I, containing, or have been fed with or have been made using, relevant commodities. The relevant commodities are cattle, cocoa, coffee, oil palm, rubber, soya and wood. However, it does not apply to goods that are produced entirely from material that has completed its life-cycle and would have otherwise been discarded as waste.

The thrust of the article is to bring home the risks faced by exporters from India into the EU. The preamble somewhat pre-empts any future claims that these are violative of the WTO fair trade framework. Noting that Indian exports of agri-commodities are currently running at \$50 billion and likely to expand, the Rules may have a significant impact in India's future

#### WHAT IS PROHIBITED

Article 3, 'Prohibition', states that 'relevant commodities and relevant products shall not be placed or made available on the market or exported, unless all the following conditions are fulfilled: (1) they are deforestation-free; (2) they have been produced in accordance with the relevant legislation of the country of production; and (3) they are covered by a due diligence

In order to understand the implication of the words 'deforestation-free', one must look at the meaning of the word 'deforestation' which per Article 2(3) is defined as the 'conversion of forest to agriculture use, whether human-induced or not'. 'Agriculture use' is defined per Article 2(5) as inclusive of agricultural plantations, set-aside agricultural areas, and for rearing livestock.

Going further to 2(13), the clause defines 'deforestation-free' as meaning: (a) the relevant products contain, have been fed with or have been made using the relevant commodities that were produced on land that has not been subject to deforestation after December 31, 2020; and (b) in the case of wood, that the wood had been harvested without inducing forest degradation after December 31, 2020.

It is noteworthy that the



### EU's forest rules can hurt India's agri exports

STRINGENT NORMS. The rules get triggered if forest land is converted for agricultural use. Exporters risk huge penalties and even being black-listed if the rules are flouted

(Conservation) Act, 1980 as amended by the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023 states that provisions of this clause shall not apply to such land, which has been changed from forest use to use for non-forest purpose on or before December 12, 1996. It should also be noted that the definitions of 'forest' are not aligned and that should anyone wish to do business with the EU, then the EU Regulation will have to be followed.

#### CONVERSION OF FORESTS

The crux of the matter, therefore, is whether forests were converted for non-permissible uses after December 31, 2020. As defined by Article 2(27), plot of land means a single real-estate property that allows an evaluation of the aggregate level risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with the relevant commodities produced on the

Further, there is a need for establishing the 'geolocation' with reference to the plot of land with the relevant latitude and longitude coordinates. This is one of the most difficult conditions to satisfy since the evidence has to go back to December 31, 2020. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) published gives an array of information, clarifications and advice on tech-based solutions for establishing the status of land as at December 31, 2020. It is important to note that in (a)

#### Corrective actions will mean preventing the relevant product from being placed, withdrawing

the product from the market and recalling it if sold

above, the word 'deforestation' has been used whereas in (b) the key words are 'forest degradation'. Article 2 (7) defines 'forest degradation' as meaning structural changes to forest cover taking the form of the conversion of primary forest or naturally regenerating forests into plantation forests, wooded land or into planted forests.

It is, therefore, clear that in the case of deforestation, there has to be a conversion of forests into agricultural use for the rules to apply whereas in the case of wood and its usage, even conversion of forests into plantation forests, wooded land, and planted forests is prohibited. This is to ensure that the indigenous people who live off the land in forests are protected whereas, presumably, wood is associated with commercial interests.

#### OPERATORS AND TRADERS

The rules place a heavy responsibility on operators and traders in the EU. An operator is defined by Article 2(15) as a person (including a legal person) who in the course of a commercial activity 'places' relevant products on the market or exports them. A trader is defined per Article 2(17) as a person (including a legal person) in the supply-chain other than the operator who in the course of a commercial activity 'makes' relevant products available on the market for distribution, consumption or use. It therefore follows that a trader is a step-down entity unless, of course, the operator acts as a trader as well. A branch/subsidiary owned by an Indian-entity in the EU will, therefore, be considered an operator or trader depending on the manner of functioning.

The responsibilities of the operator

regard to all relevant products supplied by each supplier. For this purpose, the operator should collect information, verify it and analyse the data and documents needed to support the conclusion that the products are deforestation-free per the requirements of Article 9. The operator should also carry out a risk assessment as to whether there is any non-compliance per Article 10 and take steps for risk mitigation per Article 11 prior to placing the relevant materials on the market. SMEs (per EU definition) have different rules.

#### PENALTIES

Exporters of commodities and products should be concerned with these developments in view of the penalties that can be invoked by the operators placing these products in the EU. Corrective actions will mean preventing the relevant product from being placed, withdrawing the product from the market and recalling it if sold. There are also huge penalties on the operators which will eventually be passed on to the Indian exporters who in addition face the risk of being blacklisted. Noting that the bulk of the rules including Article 3 'prohibition' will become effective from December 30, 2024 (other than SMEs to whom different rules will apply), there isn't much time left. One immediate development will be the rewriting of trade agreements.

Another issue that can come up is whether the principles of revenue recognition need to be changed since it raises the question of when the transfer of goods happens with the attendant tax implications. Accountants and auditors will need to address this issue immediately.

### Not much learnt since Shanbaug's trauma

The Kolkata incident and reports of violence against healthcare workers show safety is still a far cry

PT Jyothi Datta

t's been nine years since Mumbai's KEM Hospital bid its last goodbye to former nurse Aruna Shanbaug (67), possibly their longest surviving inmate. Shanbaug had been in a vegetative state for about 42 years, and was cared for by her family of nurses at the hospital. The reason behind her condition — a brutal assault and rape by a ward boy in November 1973.

Fifty-one years on, healthcare professionals are on the streets demanding safe workplaces — after having lost one of their own, again. Even as they protest and seek a professional investigation and punishment for those involved in the brutal assault and rape that killed a young doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College, there are reports of violence against the medical fraternity coming out of other parts of

the country. Clearly, not much has been learnt from Shanbaug's trauma.

Anyone who has walked through the massive corridors and passages of the iconic hospital buildings, will be able to relate how lonely it can get as twilight sets in, and the crowds of patient-families and bustle of other staff dissolves into a sterile silence.

### A SECOND HOME OF SORTS

But for doctors, nurses and other staff on these premises, these are a second home of sorts. They spend much of their waking hours there. And hence the familiarity with these institutions, that they don't find the need to look over their shoulders to see if danger lurks around the corner. Even in private hospitals, there are multiple floors and rooms, where healthcare staff work well through the wee hours of the day.

Doctors are asking for airport-type security at their workplaces and a



**PUBLIC SAFETY.** Tough laws and use of technology are vital

Central Act, to punish those who indulge in violence against healthcare workers. Hospital administrators say measures have been put in place, including technology support, private security, CCTV and transport to drop staff at their homes after late shifts.

The Kolkata incident is seeing an

outrage from civil society as well, in support of healthcare practitioners. And while that outrage translates into a law and action against those who committed the crime against the young Kolkata doctor, hopefully it will bring justice in other cases too, that do not find vociferous support from civil society or political circles. Like the recent report of a nurse in Uttarakhand, also said to be brutally assaulted and murdered. And possibly, also to the non-medical fraternity, like the young girl, allegedly brutally killed in Bihar.

It all comes down to building safe and sensitive communities. But till we get there, authorities need to use technology to ensure public safety and have quick response teams and helplines to prevent crime, besides a tough law for speedy punishment. It is our responsibility to nurse Shanbaug, to start with — to work towards, never

• 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.

### **Safety of GM crops**

Apropos 'SC order on GM crops can be implemented' (August 19), it is true that many committees have been formed and voluminous reports have been produced. But the basic question that remains is whether GM crops are safe for cultivation on commercial scale or not. The opinion of the scientists worldwide conducting research on GM crops has been divided with many concluding that these genetically modified crops are neither good for the environment nor for human health. The experience with Bt cotton has not been very encouraging with cost of cultivation increasing and farmers' income declining. Once cultivation of indigenous seed varieties will disappear and the farmers will be completely dependent on corporates that supply the  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{GM}}$ seeds, which may not be in the interest of farmers. It is well-established that GM crops contaminate the environment by cross-transfer of pollen to domestic varieties, which is not desirable. India needs to be more careful and circumspect before further introduction of GM crops on a commercial scale. It would be in the interest of the nation, if scientists from various parts of the country conduct extensive research on GM crops under various climatic conditions, and conclusively arrive at

GM crops becomes the norm,

a definitive answer for the questions: how safe are GM crops for the human and animal health, what is the impact on productivity, fertilizer and insecticide usage in the long run. Kosaraju Chandramouli

### **Falling rupee**

The depreciation of the rupee against the dollar in recent months is a cause for concern. While the RBI has been intervening in the currency market to moderate rupee depreciation, it has its own limits despite having at its disposal a strong forex reserve, which has now crossed \$675 billion. A weaker rupee would further delay the RBI's easing of its monetary policy as it normally

adopts a hawkish stance to defend the currency, making imports more expensive. It is incumbent upon the RBI to keep a close watch on the currency market and not allow runaway depreciation of the rupee. **M** Jeyaram

### **Digital consciousness**

The article 'Dark patterns and digitally conscious products' (August 19) dwells on an issue of grave significance, and often of dire consequences to 'app user' customers. It tarnishes the image, trust and goodwill of genuine brands by creating a general apathy among consumers. The effort in sensitising the general public and marketers on

the issue of 'dark patterns' devised to lure consumers into buying unnecessary items or force subscribing is laudable. **Jose Abraham** Vaikom, Kerala

### **Protect medical staff**

This is with reference to 'Horror in hospital' (August 19). It is a pity that in India doctors are often treated shabbily both by the government and by patients. We cannot afford to let our medical fraternity strike work as it is the poor who suffer the most in the process. The government is duty-bound to protect doctors from

**Veena Shenoy** 

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### Non-teaching staff ignored

NEP fails to recognise the essential role they play

#### Jai Mohan Pandit

■ he teaching and research community often receive significant attention and recognition for their contributions. On the other hand, members of the non-teaching community, who work behind the scenes to ensure the smooth and efficient functioning of the institution, are frequently overlooked.

This neglect is evident even in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Neither the regulatory framework nor educational institutions have prioritised the welfare of the non-teaching staff. This oversight underscores a critical issue: the lack of equitable human resource management policies that acknowledge and value the contributions of the non-teaching

According to the AISHE 2021-22 report, there are 15.98 lakh teaching members and 12.08 lakh non-teaching staff members in Indian higher education institutions (HEIs). The critical role played by a sizeable number of non-teaching staff in maintaining the efficient operation of HEIs highlights the pressing need for improved welfare, development, and motivation programmes. These staff members, who are in various departments such as administration, personnel/HR, technological support, finance and accounts, library, estate, laboratory and maintenance, directly impact the student experience and the efficiency of the teaching personnel.

But these employees face unstable employment, inadequate training, and a lack of opportunities for professional advancement. This leads to decreased morale, high turnover rates, and decreased productivity.

#### **CRUCIAL FUNCTIONS**

Administrative staff are crucial in HEIs, handling day-to-day operations, communication, and policy enforcement. They ensure smooth academic processes and access to resources for faculty, staff, and students. The academic administrative office oversees the academic calendar, keeps accurate student records, and ensures that the admissions process is managed efficiently in institutions. To support efficient academic operations, it also manages documentation and compliance. The IT department ensures the institution's technological infrastructure, data



development /іsтоскрното

security, and access to digital information.

Library personnel support research and academic endeavours by organising and maintaining resources. Estate management employees maintain physical infrastructure while accounting and finance departments manage finances and ensure financial stability. Laboratory staff assist in research by organising and maintaining lab supplies and equipment, handling hazardous materials, and upholding safety regulations. This underscores the indispensable role of non-academic professionals in ensuring the seamless operation of the academic institute.

Their traditional title — "non-teaching staff" — needs to be changed. What's in a name, one may think. The conventional name overlooks their significant role and reduces their importance. The title "Academic Support Professionals" (ASPs) is proposed to acknowledge their essential contributions better.

By referring to them as professionals, we recognise their expertise, commitment, and the crucial support. This title underscores their essential role in fostering an effective learning environment and highlights their importance in the academic community, ensuring they are valued and respected.

The role of teachers and researchers is undeniably prestigious and pivotal, contributing significantly to advancing knowledge and students' academic growth. It's equally important to acknowledge the vital contributions of ASPs, who form the backbone of educational institutions.

To sustain this contribution, ASPs must continually adapt to the evolving education landscape by equipping themselves with the latest technologies, acquiring new skills, and staying up to date.

The writer works at IGIDR. Views are personal

### The crisis of youth unemployment

The latest labour force survey data show how severe this is in urban India



TOUGH TIMES. The high rate of women's unemployment and low work participation is a cause for concern PERIASAMY M

#### MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

he "demographic dividend" that was so eagerly anticipated in India more than a decade ago has already become a demographic disaster. India's burgeoning youth population is achieving higher levels of education, and then entering a labour market that simply does not offer productive employment opportunities.

So extreme is the employment crisis that the problem goes well beyond that of finding a "good job" - one that is regular, formal and with decent wages and working conditions. It extends to the growing inability to find any source of gainful employment at all, however low-paid and tenuous.

This is clearly evident in the desperation of young people to access public employment, which remains the most secure (and therefore desirable) form of paid work. But since such employment has been falling over the past decade, even less secure and not very well-paid jobs are sought after.

The news reports of crowds and stampedes of candidates hoping even for casual work in some service sectors like hotels bear witness to the plight of young

The India Employment Report 2024, brought out by the Internation Labour Organization and the Institute for Human Development, flagged youth unemployment as a serious and growing problem.

Unemployment rates (the share of people actively looking for and unable to find paid work, in the total labour force of all those willing and able to work) in 2022 were found to be significantly higher among the youth (15-29 years) than for the rest of the adult

Open unemployment rates of youth were much higher in urban areas (17.2 per cent) than in rural areas (10.6 per cent) and for young women (21.6 per cent)

### THE EDUCATION CONUNDRUM

The higher the level of education, the worse the chances of not finding a job: in 2022, the unemployment rate was six times greater for youth who had completed secondary education or higher (18.4 per cent) and nine times higher for graduates (29.1 per cent) than for persons who could not read or write (3.4 per cent).

Educated young women had the highest open unemployment rates, going to as much as 34.5 per cent for female graduates (34.5 per cent), compared to 26.4 per cent for their male counterparts. The problem of educated unemployment has intensified over time, with 2022 showing the highest rates.

Of course, it is important to look beyond the open unemployment rates to the worker participation rate, since it is possible that many young people may simply have left the labour force (the "discouraged worker" effect") or face other constraints (such as gender roles) that prevent them from trying to access paid employment.

In addition, it is likely, especially given the increase in tertiary education, that many young people may be in education or training. But here the ILO Report provides an even more dire statistic: 28.5 per cent of youth were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in

2022. For young women, the situation was even more drastic: nearly half (48.2 per cent) were NEET, compared to only 9.8 per cent of young men.

Has the situation improved at all since then? The latest quarterly estimates of the Periodic Labour Force Survey of the NSSO provide some data for urban areas. The data refer to Current Weekly Status, which is based on the nature of the activity during the reference week (rather than month or year). Seasonal variations in employment are less important in urban contexts, but

Figure 1 shows that in April-June 2024, the employment situation remained dire for young people — and significantly worse than the average for all people aged over 15 years. The worker-population rate for youth was around 40 per cent lower, and the open unemployment rate was nearly three times, that of the population above 15 years.

Figures 2 and 3 show the disaggregated information for males and females (including transgender) over the previous five quarters.

#### **GENDER GAP**

Two features stand out. First, there is a large gap between young men and women in both work participation and open unemployment. Work participation rates for urban male youth have been more than three times that for females throughout this

Unemployment rates, by contrast, have been much higher for young women, on average around 50 per cent higher. Second, things may have improved very slightly for young men, with a slight uptick in work participation and a slight decline in unemployment, although both shifts are still within the margin of statistical error.

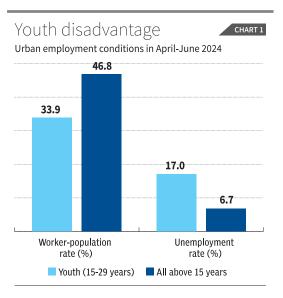
However, for young women, the work participation rate has only inched marginally upwards from the appalling low of less than 15 per cent to just above 16 per cent, and the (high) unemployment rate has remained largely stagnant.

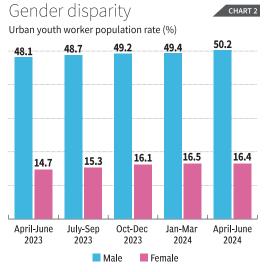
There are very significant differences across States, as evident from Table 1: in aggregate rates of work participation and unemployment among youth, as well as in gender gaps. States with overall poor employmen indicators, expressed in low work participation and high unemployment, also show the largest gender gaps. While work participation of young women is low in all States, with no State crossing the threshold of 22 per cent, it is especially low in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Youth unemployment rates are especially high (and extremely high for young women) in Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Odisha, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Assam—but this could also be because many young people are simply not in the labour force in other States.

This is not just an enormous waste of economic resources involving personal tragedy for tens of millions of young people, it is also a socio-economic recipe for major tensions and instability. We are already experiencing some of this, but much more is likely unless we get a central government that finally moves away from denial to proactive policies for employment

Educated young women had the highest open unemployment rates, going to as much as 34.5 per cent for female graduates, compared to 26.4 per cent for their male counterparts





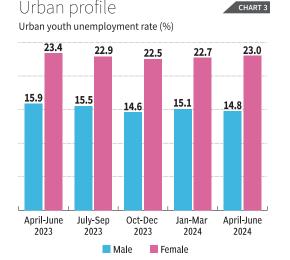


TABLE 1

### States profile

Urban youth employment conditions in major States, Apr-Jun 2024

Work Unemployment participation rate Male Andhra Pradesh 37.1 Assam 52.2 18.7 Chhattisgarh 47.1 19.4 20.8 28.8 38 14.5 3.8 3.3 Gujarat 62 22 8.3 8.1 9.9 Haryana 52.6 13.7 17.2 Himachal Pradesh 56 21.2 10.9 41.6 Jharkhand 35 19.9 11.5 16.8 Karnataka 50.8 19.5 12.1 15.6 Kerala 39.4 19.2 15.2 41.9 Madhva Pradesh 55.4 11.5 10.2 13 Maharashtra 55.2 22.9 14.4 17 Odisha 40.5 25.4 33.8 Punjab 56.1 15.7 14.7 21.8 Rajasthan 45.5 12.9 22.2 36.9 Tamil Nadu 49.2 16.9 12.8 23.7 Telangana 52.3 17.4 17.3 28.4 Uttarakhand 51 13.7 10.2 40.6 Uttar Pradesh 50.1 8.5 16.1 34.9 West Bengal 55.9 21.8 14.3 20.4 Jammu & Kashmir 42.1 13.7 18.8 52.7

### thehindu businessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 20, 2004

### **Hutch's Aircel buy hits DoT hurdle**

Hutch plan to acquire Aircel Cellular may have hit a minor bump with the Department of Telecom seeking clarification on the equity holding structure of the acquiring company. According to senior officials in DoT, clarifications were required since Hutch had sought to acquire the C. Sivasankaran-promoted company through its sister concern Aircel Digilink.

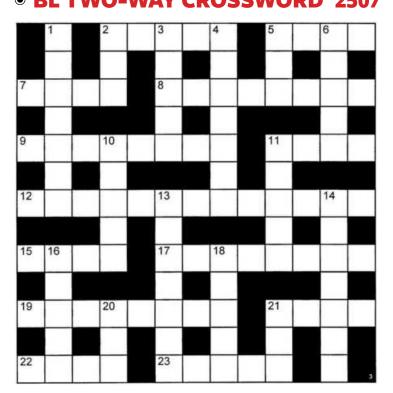
### India Inc gears up to face truckers' strike

India Inc is preparing contingency plans to counter the impending truckers' strike. While most companies have kept adequate inventory of raw materials to last them for a week to 10 days, they are hoping the strike is called off so that no major revenue losses occur.

### 'Govt to take more fiscal measures to ease inflation'

The Union Finance Minister, Mr P Chidambaram, has said that the government, if necessary, would take more fiscal measures to control inflation. Briefing newspersons after the meeting of Cabinet Committee on Pricing (CCP), Mr Chidambaram said the Government was watching the price situation and there were ample stocks of foodgrains, pulses, fruits and vegetables.

### BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2507



### **EASY**

**ACROSS** 

02. Showed in dumbshow (5) 05. Bring teeth together (4) 07. Chanted (4)

09. Something threadlike (8)

08. Business of professional

11. Go without food (4) 12. Tamino, Papageno

opera (3,5,5) 15. Plaster support for fracture (4) 13. Long-armed apes (7) 17. Wave, flourish (weapon) (8)

paying-point (5-3)

21. The sea (4) 22. Tick over (4) 23. Tube for sucking up (5)

### **DOWN**

01. Iberian language (7)

02. 'Face' (3) 03. Tree emblematic to

Canada (5) 04. Unsparing, violent (7)

05. Have a flutter (3)

06. Bastes (stitching) (5)

10. Let in (5)

11. Smoothed (metal, nails) (5)

14. Ascertaining flavour (7) 16. Pained protractedly (5)

18. Behind in place, later

20. Tipped rod (3) 21. Cut down in great numbers (3)

### **NOT SO EASY**

02. Had nothing to say as an actor (5) 05. Something to eat, a portion of escargots starters (4)

07. Solicitor-General had an entry as one was an informer (4)

08. It may be lawyer's business to take part in cost (8)

09. Like a thread that's felt, main difference becomes apparent (8)

11. Time to go without, if one's quick (4)

12. It left each gum out of the opera (3,5,5)

15. Those involved in play may get thrown (4) 17. Hard nib's used to wave it around (8)

19. Where to pay to verify umpire's decision (5-3)

21. The principal way to convey water to the home (4) 22. It will do nothing for one, getting nothing out of the

23. Skin growths have come back, the last being the

**All India** 

01. Language to put across, to his confusion (7)

**50.2** 

14.8

02. From which to drink in a stick-up (3) 03. How quietly man will go round a tree (5)

04. Draconian way to rid Cats of this arrangement (7)

05. Something put on Alpha to provide rest of the

06. Sails into the wind, which gets one in stitches (5)

10. Own up to it after turning mad (5)

11. Was neatly put away as one went in crocodile (5) 13. Apes Grinling as a wood-carver (7)

14. Thanks to sharp attack of pain, is getting the

16. Yearned to be put ashore and be lost (5) 18. It is in the fashion of being in quest of something (5)

20. Words signalling one to form a line, so we hear (3)

21. Make a wry face but get the lawn cut (3)

### **SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2506**

ACROSS 1. Homing pigeon 8. Nineties 9. Film 11. Turin 12. Dispose 13. Epee 15. Keep 19. Whistle 20. Ultra 22. Reed 23. Cocksure 24. Satisfactory DOWN 2. Owner 3. Intent 4. Greedy 5. Epitome 6. Number plates 7. In other words 10. Use 14. Exigent 16. Sty 17. Verona 18. Bucket 21. Truer

### An open bureaucracy

Appointing specialists is a good idea

he Union Public Service Commission's invitation for applications to fill 45 posts at the joint secretary and director/deputy secretary levels on a contractual basis for three years, extendable to five years, shows the central government's continued commitment to the idea of lateral entry into the bureaucracy. The advertised positions in various departments and ministries, such as the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and the Department of Financial Services in the Ministry of Finance are for specialists. For instance, the Union government is looking for a joint secretary in the Department of Financial Services to look at the digital economy, fintech, and cybersecurity.

There are several reasons why the government should take specialists for certain positions and the idea has been discussed at various points. The Sixth Pay Commission, for instance, noted that to reform the system, aside from lateral entry for senior positions, more result-oriented approaches should be introduced. Further, the NITI Aayog's three-year agenda and sectoral group of secretaries on governance in their report in 2017 recommended inducting people into the middle and senior levels with the objectives of bringing in fresh talent and augmenting the availability of manpower. According to the government's reply to Parliament earlier this month, 63 such appointments have been made over the past five years at the levels of joint secretary, director, and deputy secretary. At present, 57 such officers are posted in different ministries and departments.

The reasons for inducting lateral entrants are well known. As the economy grows in size and complexity, effective policy intervention will often need domain knowledge in different areas. Top positions in government are usually manned by officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). Although some officers do develop specialised domain knowledge over time, the usual demand of the service is that of a generalist nature and may not always fit the emerging requirements of policymaking. In any case, the number of IAS officers currently is much lower than the sanctioned strength. Even though there is a need to expand the talent pool by including officers from other services in making appointments at the policymaking level, which is being done to some extent, opening up such positions to specialists from the private sector will increase the chances of finding suitable candidates.

Additionally, since the engagement with people from the private sector is for a limited period, the government can continuously induct fresh talent as needed, depending on the demands of the moment. It should also keep the option of extending the term if required. State governments too should hire talent from the private sector in a similar way. However, for the government to truly benefit from this endeavour and for lateral entrants to succeed, the existing bureaucracy must cooperate with them. For this to happen and to increase the acceptability of lateral entrants within the system, the government will need to do at least two things. First, institutionalise the mechanism by regularly inducting personnel from the private sector. Second, it should communicate in this regard and show how it is benefiting from the mechanism. The move has been criticised by the Opposition on the grounds of reservations, which should have been avoided. These are limited-duration specialist positions, and the condition of reservations could defeat the purpose. The government, however, would do well to maintain the overall representation of reserved categories at different levels of bureaucracy as mandated by relevant rules.

### Leveraging agri-tech

Technology will boost productivity

n an effort to raise farm productivity, the Union government recently announced two important measures to support technology adoption in Indian agriculture. These are the launch of Krishi-Decision Support System (Krishi-DSS) and the National Pest Surveillance System (NPSS). The former is a digital platform that is set to leverage geospatial data and satellite imagery to convey realtime information on crop conditions, weather patterns, water resources, and soil health to farmers. It will also warn them about potential disasters, such as pest attacks and extreme weather events, help in crop residue management, and inform the government about the unique needs of each farm parcel unit. The latter is an artificial intelligence-based system that will help in pest management across the country. It is expected to benefit around 140 million farmers who can take photos of the infested crop or the pests and upload them using the NPSS platform. It will help address the problem of excessive pesticide use.

In the wake of climate change and the pressing need for sustainable agricultural practices, artificial intelligence-based solutions and geospatial technology can change India's agricultural landscape. By augmenting investment in agricultural research and using technology, India will be in a better position to prepare its agricultural sector to adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate variability, ensuring climate-resilient agricultural production and food security through a sustainable food-supply system. Notably, the 2021 geospatial data policy democratised the collection and use of geospatial and mapping data, enabling the use of artificial intelligence and navigation data in precision farming in the country. India's precision agriculture market is experiencing rapid growth.

The use of satellite imagery, remote sensing-based solutions, and artificial intelligence in agriculture is also fraught with challenges, such as high implementation costs, data interpretation difficulties, and the complexity of technology integration. Given small landholdings in the country, data up to 1-metre spatial resolution is required. However, the availability of high-resolution satellite images at a highly granular level remains a constraint. To support digital advancements in agriculture, the India Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture (IDEA) framework espouses the adoption of other emerging technologies in the sector, including robotics, drones, and data analytics. A study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that the potential for drone-powered solutions in Indian agriculture is valued at \$32 billion. Agricultural drone usage in India is set to increase at a compound annual growth rate of 38.5 per cent and reach \$121.43 million by 2030. Currently, their use is restricted to spraying pesticides but can be used for assessing water, plant, and soil health, and field mapping.

While this highlights the need to transform agricultural research in the country, funding for autonomous research bodies under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare was cut by 2 per cent in this year's Union Budget. In fact, the intensity of agricultural research, defined as agriculture research and development expenditure as a percentage of agricultural output, is a meagre 0.4 per cent in the country. Apart from leveraging geospatial data, the government must urgently carry out the digital crop survey and fine-tune farm statistics, which will help improve policy interventions.

### Revamping corporate governance

Government must be market-friendly, not business-friendly, and have a neutral relationship with all corporations

↑ he economy of independent India has gone India doubled its share in world manufacturing through at least two major episodes of policy transformation. The first, not widely mentioned in public discussions these days, was the beginning of planned development in April 1951 when the First Five-Year Plan was launched. The second, more widely discussed transformation was the liberalisation that took place in July 1991. Both of these led to an acceleration of the growth process, but they differed substantially in the role envisaged for the government. The impact of these two transformations is evident in the changes in the growth, investment and trade pattern of the economy indicated period-wise in the accompanying table. Note also a third relatively low growth episode from the mid-sixties to the end of the seventies, marked by drought, a new agricultural growth policy, and a decade of political turmoil. The extent of change brought about by the 1951-

52 transformation episode may seem modest, but it represents a substantial transformation because it amounts to a ninefold increase from the 0.5 per cent average annual growth rate that had prevailed in the century preceding Independence. The focus of economic policy during the first period (1951 to 1965) was an emphasis on public-sector development, particularly in heavy industries, though private investment also blossomed, as the investment figures show. Growth through export production was not seen as a possibility because

the boom in the value of global trade really started only after the mid-sixties.

NITIN DESAI

The higher growth phase clearly began by 1980 but the policy shift from public to private sector investment came significantly only after the liberalisation that followed the crisis-inspired budget of July 1991. Apart from the reduction (not removal) of government control on investment and foreign trade, a major change from the past was the opening of the banking and mutual funds to the private sector, and a radical reform of the share purchase and transfer mechanism. In fact, I would argue that this financial liberalisation is a much bigger change from the pre-liberalisation policy approach than the delicensing of industrial investment. To note just one example, we have seen an increase in new capital issues by non-government public limited companies from around ₹600 crore in 1981-82 to around ₹1.5 trillion in 2021-22.

The shift towards an outward export-oriented growth is less obvious. In 1951, India's share in the world merchandise exports was 1.9 per cent. In the first transformation phase, it fell to 0.4 per cent by 1980. But since then, it has grown steadily and during the eight-year high growth phase from 2003 onwards,

exports. It has now reached a level of 1.8 per cent, still slightly below its 1951 share! The situation is more exciting when it comes to commercial service exports where India's share in the global trade in commercial services shot up from 0.6 per cent in 1990 to 4.3 per cent in 2023.

What are the changes in government and corporate relationship that we require if we are to seriously pursue the stated goal of India becoming a developed state by 2047?

The most obvious change is to shift the relationship between the government and the private corporate sector from a partnership that promotes selected corporations to one where the government is not business-friendly, but market-friendly, and has a neutral relationship with all corporations. The argument for this is not just to avoid cronyism and corruption, but to recognise that politicians and bureaucrats are not

as knowledgeable about technology, products, processes, market development as today's corporate executives are. The production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, which requires detailed decisions about preferred technologies and rigorous bureaucratic scrutiny of actual performance, is an example of what needs to be changed or even forgotten. A similar move to make the government a market-friendly neutral factor is the complete avoidance of producer interests in the setting of

goods and services tax (GST) and trade tax policies. If comprehensive neutrality is difficult, at least ensure that recognition of specific producer interest is an exception rather than the rule. The most important policy initiative must be to raise the competence and effective impact of the Competition Commission and to reduce rule-based barriers on take-overs.

The importance of an effective competition policy lies in its potential impact on the management dynamism of the private corporate sector, which is still widely dominated by family ownership. However, ownership itself is not the issue. What matters is professional management of widely owned enterprises. The transformation from family managed enterprises to professionally managed enterprises will come with stronger competition and more vigorous assertion of shareholder interests by institutional shareholders. Corporations also must move away from giving priority to becoming the preferred partner of the government to focusing on their product and process technologies in comparison to domestic and foreign partners. Strengthening competition and ensuring government neutrality in its relationships with corporations will lead to this

INDIA'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Time period (FY)	Average annual rate of growth in GNI*	Public sector GFCF as % of GDP	Private sector GFCF as % of GDP	Average annual rate of growth in dollar value exports (India)*
1951-52 to 1964-65	4.3	5.6	8.4	2.5
1965-66 to 1979-80	3.0	7.3	10.0	11.2
1980-81 to 1990-91	5.6	10.9	11.4	8.1
1991-92 to 2002-03	5.4	8.2	17.6	9.7
2003-04 to 2010-11	7.3	7.9	24.9	22.1
2011-12 to 2022-23	5.9	7.0	23.0	5.3
Data source: Economic Survey 2	2023-24, Sta	atistical Appe	ndix Tables 1	.2,1.9&6.1B;*%

required shift in private corporate strategies.

The shift of investment from the public to the private sector makes this redesign of government policy about the private corporate sector the key requirement for the goal of making India a developed or at least a significantly upper-income developing country. However, there is a substantial public corporate sector. The government's view of the public sector corporations seems to be largely one of seeing them as liabilities and aiming at disinvesting and converting them to private entities. Some of these corporations have been pioneers in technology development and have generated a large body of technologically well-qualified individuals who, in fact, have been actively poached by the private sector. The government must take a more constructive view of the potential of public sector corporations to advance the growth trajectory. It must be particularly supportive of the role of the public sector in installing and managing monopoly infrastructure as privatising this, as has been done, gives some private corporations an exploitative power over others.

The policy for corporate governance that expands their freedom will not be politically attractive as it will not have mass support, though the acceleration of growth and job creation that should come from this will be welcomed. However, political acceptability will come more readily to a government that has a more visible involvement in supporting the non-corporate private sector, reducing high-income inequalities and substantial regional disparities and addressing caste related concerns. This is the true role of democratically elected government in a free-market capitalist economy. Hence the message that also needs to be understood is what was stated in the main strategy chapter of the First Five-Year Plan that "..the economic condition of a country at any given time is a product of the broader social environment, and economic planning has to be viewed as an integral part of a wider process aiming not merely at the development of resources in a narrow technical sense, but at the development of human faculties and the building up of an institutional framework adequate to the needs and aspirations of the people."

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### Soft inflation is not transitory

ndia's consumer price index (CPI) inflation dropped to a 59-month low of 3.5 per cent yearon-year (y-o-y) in July. Yet, this did not lead to any celebrations. The reasoning, according to the consensus view, is that the drop in inflation is due to base effects and that risks related to food inflation are tilted to the upside. Therefore, monetary policy cannot let its guard down, especially as growth is strong and there is a need to lower credit growth and narrow the credit-deposit growth gap.

We would push back against this consensus view for the following reasons.

This is not just base effects: Base effects did play a role, but they were well known, so the downside surprise in the July CPI implies weaker-than-expe momentum. July saw a steep upward revision in mobile tariffs; yet the sequential momentum for core inflation rose at the same pace as in June, meaning that inflation in most other

core categories remained benign. Food inflation is not a big risk: Food prices are volatile and hard to predict, but high frequency data shows that prices are cooling or will

cool soon. Nearly 50 per cent of food inflation so far in 2024 has been led by vegetables, which have shorter price cycles. With fresh arrivals increasing, vegetable prices are already lower in August. Pulses follow a cobweb cycle, where higher price incentivises more sowing, leading to higher output and low prices — a trend underway for tur dal. Above-normal rains in the rest of the kharif season and higher reservoir levels are likely to help cool rice and wheat prices. We think inflation is on track to undershoot the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) forecast of 4.4 per cent for the second quarter of financial year (FY) 2024-25 by at least 0.5 percentage points (pp).

Second-round effects are unlikely: Latest data shows a 0.2 pp rise in one-year ahead household inflation expectations, but that is still down 1.2 pp from the 2022 peak. Nominal rural wage growth is subdued at less than 6 per cent y-o-y in June, and corporate results show a moderation in salaries and wage growth of listed firms to about 6.5 per cent yo-y in Q1 FY25, down from 9.2 per cent in FY24 and 14.7 per cent in FY23.

Core inflation remains benign: Core CPI inflation rose to 3.3 per cent y-o-y in July from 3.1 per cent in June, but the reversal was due to higher telecom tariffs, a one-off move. From a policy perspective, a rise in y-o-y core inflation, if sequential momentum remains below 4 per cent, should not be a concern.

On a three-month, seasonally adjusted annualised rate basis, core CPI rose 3.2 per cent in July, and it has been below 4 per cent since June 2023 — too long a patch to call it transitory.

Geopolitical risks and oil prices: Amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, geopolitical tensions are a risk for oil prices, but this is occurring in the backdrop of a US economy, where labour markets are softening, and with still no signs of a

turnaround in China's domestic demand. Without higher global demand, any surge in oil prices due to geopolitical risks is unlikely to be sustained.

Inflation is aligned to 4 per cent: Excluding vegetables — the most volatile component of the basket, CPI inflation rose 3.3 per cent v-o-v in July. and has remained below 4 per cent since January. Our measure of the 20 per cent trimmed mean CPI, which excludes categories with highest and lowest inflation rates, also moderated to 3.3 per cent in July from an average of 3.7 per cent in the first half of 2024, and 5.5 per cent in 2023. Despite repeated supply-side shocks since 2023, second-round effects have not materialised. With nominal rural and urban wage growth in the 6-6.5 per cent range, we believe

this is consistent with underlying inflation of 4 per cent, given productivity growth trends in India.

Headline versus core argument: The RBI should remain steadfast with its current framework, but just as a spike in some food prices is not a trigger for a hike, a correction in some volatile food items is also not an appropriate trigger to cut. The debate is less about headline versus core, and more about the true inflation picture and the balance of risks.

Softer growth signals: Growth has surprised to the upside thus far, but inventory buildup for passenger cars, weak commercial vehicle sales, slower corporate profit growth and slower industrial output growth, are some early signals of growth softening. In the absence of a broad-based recovery in private consumption and private capey and with slower global growth believe risks to the RBI's FY25 and FY26 gross domestic product growth forecasts are tilted to the downside.

Policy rates don't need to stay high: Sustained low underlying inflation and early signals of softer growth suggest rising downside risks for both growth and inflation. Policy should be forward-looking.

Financial stability arguments: We believe India should follow the Tinbergen rule, with at least one tool for each target: The policy rate for price stability and macroprudential tools for financial stability. If pockets of consumer lending continue to hold up, then higher risk weightings should be announced, but monetary policy is a blunt tool to manage sectoral credit. The RBI's recent measures are already slowing unsecured lending, and we expect credit growth to slow further, narrowing the credit-deposit growth spread.

Overall, the balance of risk around growth and inflation is shifting. Inflation risks are overstated, while emerging growth signals appear soft. Given monetary policy works with long lags, we believe it is time to recalibrate policy settings.

The writer is chief economist (India and Asia ex-Japan)

### Fighting brand crises: Lessons from the marketplace



### **BOOK REVIEW**

AMBI PARAMESWARAN

uccess has many fathers but failure is an orphan' is a quote attributed to many including President John F Kennedy. In a similar vein, there are many books about brand successes but very few on brand failures or brand "transgressions". One of the books I managed to read many years ago. Brand Failures by Matt Haig, lists 100 biggest branding mistakes, nicely categorised as PR failures, culture failures, extension failures and so on.

Brands have faced challenges in India too and I was involved in a retreat at a business school that was set up to get

 $brand\,thinkers\,to\,capture\,the\,learning$ from such stories. The book that came out of it, Brands Under Fire, edited by Ivan Arthur and Kurien Mathews, captured the challenges faced by Cadbury Dairy Milk. Pepsi/Coke, and UTI 64. All four brands had to confront major challenges—some self-created, some arising from a hostile environment—but they all managed to  $survive (UTI\,64 vanished, but\,UTI\,Mutual$ Fundemerged from the maelstrom). Ramya Ramamurthy, who was part of the CNBC team that curated the retreat, has written a wonderful book. Rebuild, which is about how some brands overcame crises and emerged stronger. This book, published in 2018, includes 20+ Indian brand stories, including Maggi Noodles, Kingfisher Airlines, Satyam, Tata Nano, and Nokia

 $There are \, many \, less ons \, to \, be \, learnt$ from brand challenges and that is exactly what Professors Shailendra Pratap Jain and Shalini Sarin Jain are attempting to do through their book Managing Brand Transgressions. SPJain is a professor of marketing and international business at

the Foster School of Business, University of Washington, Seattle, and SS Jain is a professor of management and the inaugural director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the Milgard School of Business, University of Washington, Tacoma. Their research areas include marketing communication, consumer psychology, and business ethics. Unlike the heavy tomes that university professors often write, this book is an easy read.

First, what is a "transgression"? The authors define it as "a harm-causing violation of some fundamental rules and norms of the relationship". All brands make promises to their customers. When a brand violates this promise it becomes a transgression. There could be many types of transgressions. Somethat come from out of left-field, difficult to predict. Then there are those that could be termed transgressions waiting to happen, companies know there could be issues but continue with the job of marketing the product. Finally, there is what I would call "extreme transgression," where an organisation hides the truth in order to

sell a product that could cause bodily harm to its customers.

**SONAL VARMA** 

The book presents numerous examples from around the world to bring out the different types of transgressions and what could be the eight lessons or principles to extract

from these brand transgression stories. The first principle is "Do the right thing" and the case that is presented here is that of the Tylenol poisoning: somethingthat came out of left field but the

MANAGING response by the

company is today a much-discussed case in business school. I wish the authors had also delved into the asbestos controversy that Johnson & Johnson Baby Talc had to face in the recent past. While they mention the new challenge, they have not examined it in detail.

The second principle is "Take Accountability". Here the authors present the case of Dalkon Shield, a birth control device that was mis-marketed in the US and around the world. They contrast this with the Nokia India case where the company reacted with speed

**MANAGING BRAND** TRANSGRESSIONS: 8 Principles to Transform Your Brand **Author:** SPJain & SSJain Publisher: De Gruyter **Pages:** 195 Price: ₹2,741

with Lightning Speed". The case that is presented here is of how Starbucks reacted with speed to the issue that was created when the staff in one of their coffee shops behaved in an inappropriate manner with

to a battery issue.

Thethird

principle is "Act

customers who were non-white. The company owned up to the mistake, did not blame the staff but instead admitted to the lack of sensitisation of their staff. Then, they decided to shut all their outlets across the US for a day to provide their

staff with the requisite training. Nestle Maggi India case is highlighted here for not acting with speed.

The other principles presented in the book include "Communicate Transparently", "Choose Principles over Profit", "Treat Each Life With Dignity", "Leadership Sets The Tone' and "Build Brand Authenticity". The cases discussed include Volkswagen (the diesel pollution issue), Boeing (the 737 issue), Dolce & Gabbana (a culture clash in China), Ben & Jerry's ice cream, Fox New (#metoo), Taj Hotels [terrorist attack], Patagonia, among others. The book points out that some

transgressions are forgiven, especially if the brand is big and the harm is not physical, Volkswagen being an example. Some transgressions can be deep and may take years to get over the negative backlash (such as D&C in China). Finally, there are some that lead to the company being sued for millions of dollars and filing for bankruptcy.

The book holds some very valuable lessons for CEOs and brand owners.

The reviewer is a branding veteran and the author of over 11 books on branding, advertising and consumer behaviour



{ OUR TAKE }

### Safeguarding India's future

Installing cameras to monitor UPSC exams is only a start. Fixing the process and averting malpractice need deeper intervention

he Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has called for the use of smart cameras at examination centres and storage rooms where question papers are kept in an effort to curb malpractices such as impersonation, paper leaks and cheating. The cameras will relay live feeds and send alerts to a central control room to be set up at the UPSC headquarters. Officials hope to operationalise the new system in 14 major examinations conducted across 3,000 locations at 80 different centres in the country every year.

The proposal comes against the backdrop of two developments that have roiled millions of students this year. The first is the controversy surrounding former bureaucrat Puja Khedkar. The 32-year-old is accused of multiple counts of misconduct, including allegedly forging a non-creamy layer Other Backward Classes (OBC) certificate while her family commanded assets north of ₹40 crore, using fake addresses and falsified spellings to procure a disability certificate, and faking her age and date of birth to appear for the civil services examination more times than is permitted.

The second is the fiasco around the undergraduate edition of this year's National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET-UG). The botched process showed systemic lapses — unscientific marking amended under the glare of the Supreme Court (SC), grace marks that were eventually rescinded, leaked question papers in at least two places, and the socalled solver gangs paid to answer leaked papers jeopardising the futures of candidates.

The installation of cameras is a good first step. But it must be followed by deeper interventions that go beyond technical fixes to address problems unearthed by the two controversies. For example, more robust oversight and checking of certificates in addition to tamper-evident packaging for question papers, secure logistics providers, enhanced identity verification to prevent impersonation, regular audits and surprise inspections should be considered. In addition, installing transparency at every stage of the exam process — as advised by the SC while hearing the NEET-UG case — should be on the table.

The past few months have mired India's examination process in doubt and raised troubling questions about the systems used to select the people who carry the burden of taking the country forward. Systemic and structural reform of the exam process is needed to clear the air. India's future must rest on the shoulders of the most deserving.

### Mpox shows old lessons ignored

pox being allowed to worsen into a global public health emergence. public health emergency for the second time in two years shows how little the global community has learned from previous disease outbreaks, including the Covid pandemic. Neglecting surveillance and a coordinated response against the disease seeing a surge in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and some other African nations could prove costly, given the viral strain in circulation this time is more infective. Clade 2b, which was in circulation in 2022, when the disease was declared a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) for the first time, was transmitted primarily through sexual contact. Clade 1b, in circulation this time, has seen non-sexual transmission, and is likely more virulent given the higher fatalities reported.

Even when the sole vaccine that exists was deployed in the West in the first emergency, African nations didn't get as many shots as they required though the virus was endemic in parts of the continent. Then, DRC delayed approving emergency use for the vaccine. At present, while there are stockpiles in the West, the pipeline isn't ready to step up production right away and cater to a potential surge in demand. The authorities dropped the ball when they ended the first emergency last year in September despite many disease experts disagreeing due to the prevalence in Africa. Given the levels of global interconnectedness, the fallout shouldn't be allowed to exacerbate. The disease reaching western shores again is the price for neglecting Africa. The global community must now control it there, even as nations step up surveillance and work on boosting vaccine capacity and reach.

# J&K will finally have polls, but what after?

An elected administration will only be able to lower local tolerance for armed insurgents if the lieutenant governor facilitates it by taking the back seat

he Election Commission (EC) has finally declared dates for the long-delayed assembly poll in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). After 10 long years, the people of the erstwhile state will have an elected administration. That fact alone should be cause for celebration.

But there's a rub. The elected administration will have only limited authority since the Union administration recently assigned key powers to the lieutenant governor (LG), including over the police, appointment and transfer of civil servants, sanction to prosecute, and even finances. The new rules under Section 55 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act lay down that the LG's decisions cannot be reviewed by the council of ministers. His representative will attend all Cabinet meetings. Even the ministers' schedules and/or agendas of meetings will have to be submitted to his office at least two days earlier. In other words, the people of J&K, much like the people of Delhi, will have the right to vote for an administration, but they will not be fully governed by the administration they

Critics of the new rules point to their vice-regal quality. Whether they are constitutionally valid is questionable. In the case of Delhi, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled last year in April that the bureaucracy served under and

was accountable to the elected administration, not the LG. If that rule applies to a Union Territory (UT) which acquired some elements of statehood, it applies to Jammu and Kashmir, which was a full state with an elected administration until it was divided and demoted to a UT. Can a Delhi-type for-

mula be applied to a former state even if, as solicitor general Tushar Mehta stated, it would be a temporary measure towards full statehood?

Radha

Kumar

That question is yet to be brought up before the court. In the meantime, LG Manoi Sinha has said that he will endeavour to work with the elected administration, though he has stopped short of saying that he will act on the advice of the council of ministers. Possible sources of friction include security strategies that alienate residents, human rights and the misuse of legislation — an issue that the J&K high court has also recently highlighted — controversial land acquisition and economic development policies, and the independence of the media, to mention a few, Much depends on how Sinha or his successor, since his term ends in August 2025, will deal with the elected administration on these issues.

Just a day before the EC announced the assembly poll dates, Sinha's administration transferred close to 200 civil administrators and police.

The transfers appear to be in response to the EC's order that poll-bound states post officers out of their home districts, but both the National Conference's Omar Abdullah and the Progressive Democratic Party's Mehbooba Mufti have voiced suspicion that they will benefit

the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies. The former has requested the EC to examine the new postings.

While announcing the poll dates, which cross the SC's deadline of the end of September by a day, the EC said that it would ensure a level playing field for all parties to engage in a free and fair election. Whether the large number of transfers conforms to its orders is a question worth examining, if only to put any doubts at rest. For his part, Sinha should not hesitate to discuss the transfers case by case with the representatives of political parties contesting the assembly poll. It would be a welcome gesture of cooperation.



The upcoming assembly election and what follows it will be closely watched not only domestically but also internationally

Coming after 10 years in which the erstwhile state underwent massive change, this election and what follows it will be closely watched not only domestically but also internationally by well- and ill-wishers alike. A key question will be whether it results in improving peace on the ground. It would be naïve to expect such a result immediately — the recent spurt of armed attacks on civilians and security forces, led by Pakistan-based cross-border infiltrators, is unlikely to end just because J&K finally has an elected administration. But an elected administration will play a crucial role in mitigating and even reversing the alienation of the people of the former state by refocusing policy on the rights, welfare and public participa-

tion of people. The experience of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-Manmohan Singh peaceprocess years, in which elected state administrations had considerable influence, showed that such a refocusing did succeed in withering local tolerance for armed insurgents. But under the new rules, an elected administration will only be able to play such a role if the LG facilitates it

by taking the back seat and, where necessary, intervenes with the Unior home ministry to support the elected administration.

Bad as the friction between the LG and Delhi's Arvind Kejriwal adminis tration is, any friction between an elected J&K administration and the LG will be worse, because it will be noted internationally. It might even provide an opportunity for spoilers in Pakistan to take advantage. That is a

danger that must be averted. One last word. Ladakh will not be going to the polls since it is now a separate UT. But there, too, civil society groups have expressed their desire for an elected administration through the restoration of the executive powers of the hill councils. Why that has not been done is odd, given Ladakh is a sensitive border area over which there are ongoing tensions with China. Public goodwill is both a democratic and a security imperative in Ladakh, just as it is in J&K.

Radha Kumar's latest book is The Republic Relearnt: Renewing Indian Democracy, 1947-2024 The views expressed are personal

### Making higher education more disability-inclusive

Gupta

Neha

policies of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the ground reality of access to higher education for students with disabilities in India remains disheartening. If you walk around a university campus in India, amongst the thousands of students strolling the corridors, how many are likely to be students with dis-

Multiple data sets reflect a sharp dropout rate among students with disabilities from school to higher education. This raises critical questions about what these students are missing in school education that is not enabling them to reach higher education.

From the ones who work exceptionally hard to fight against the odds and apply to the institutions of their choice, many are not able to make the cut because of stringent admission processes. This compels us to check what is missing in our higher education system that prevents students from

A baseline mapping report undertaken by the Office of Learning Support (OLS), Ashoka University, has attempted to highlight some of these issues and delineate some possible solutions.

Amongst some of the most significant concerns found to be holding students back were lack of aspirations, lack of exposure, absence of quality education, lack of autonomy, advocacy, and rights awareness. In a society structured on ableism, the biggest challenge for a young student with disability is to be able to aspire and think freely for herself without being told what she can't do.

On the contrary, factors found to be enablers for transitioning to higher education despite the difficult environments were — familial

support, mentorship, a non-judgemental environment to practise and operate within preferred learning, communication, and expression styles and students' grit and

These are telling thinking points for the inclusion programmes in our schools. Are they geared towards preventing these barriers and facilitating the enablers? If we hope to see students with disabilities get the same access to higher education as others, our schools must start addressing these issues.

Within these factors, some are unique to different disability groups. Early exposure to technology for students with blindness, encouragement with responsibility-taking for students with specific learning disabilities, support with socialisation and awareness for students on the autism spectrum, early construction of a sense of identity and agency for students with locomotor disabilities, early intervention with supportive teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing are some of the disability-specific factors

IN A SOCIETY STRUCTURED ON ABLEISM, THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FOR A YOUNG STUDENT WITH DISABILITY IS TO BE ABLE TO ASPIRE AND THINK FREELY FOR HERSELF WITHOUT BEING TOLD WHAT SHE CAN'T DO

found to be enabling for students.

This leaves much to be desired within our current reality. The long-term aim should be to bolster the school system to address these gaps as early as possible. In the meantime, diverse stakeholders — NGOs, parent groups, government education programmes, and higher educational institutes (HEIs) — can help build collaborative bridge programmes that facilitate the transition of students within the current systems.

Programmes that will enable students to build aspirations with a strong sense of self with disability acceptance at its centre, and bridge academic gaps that might exist, will have better outcomes for students' academic and career prospects. Such interventions could take diverse creative forms, such as youth fellowships and summer grammes. They may not be restricted to being viewed as a structured training programme alone.

Colleges or universities can partner with local NGOs to offer multi-year bridge programmes. Such interventions can work with

secondary school students to prepare them for the future, building independence and self-sufficiency from the beginning

Universities and colleges can also aim to integrate a preparatory course within their academic structure for students with disabilities who need it. This programme can be integrated into the degree structure of the college/university, where students spend an additional year at the beginning. The college or university can design and curate its programme based on cross-cutting themes for different disability groups. Additionally, NGO partners can supplement disability-specific

Trivedi training at such courses. Youth fellowship programmes can also be offered to high-school students with disabilities to expand their aspirations and help them strive for a career of their choice. These fellowships can be creatively designed to meet disability-specific needs but also be designed on the lines of youth fellowships aimed to inspire young

> It is also perhaps time to start looking at education gaps for students with disabilities as not a disability sector problem but an educational sector issue. With the higher education space in India set to see significant expansion in the coming decade, what is it doing to address the challenges of this group of students?

> We need to begin a cross-sector dialogue on the issue to scan education sector solutions to drop out and start making those solutions inclusive

The baseline report seeks to outline some of the necessary steps. Its findings can benefit any practitioner, organisation, or educational institution interested in enhancing access to education for students with disabilities. Practitioners should leverage this report for designing their interventions and share feedback on their experiences. Through collaboration and shared insights, we can collectively advance as a community, ensuring inclusivity and equal opportunities for all students.

Reena Gupta is director, Office of Learning Support, Ashoka University, and Neha Trivedi is founder, Spandan: Inclusion and Accessibility Consultancy Services. The views expressed are personal

### { ANTONY BLINKEN } US SECRETARY OF STATE

This is maybe the last opportunity to get the hostages home, to get a ceasefire and to put everyone on a better path to enduring peace

At a news conference alongside Israeli president Isaac Herzog in Tel Aviv on Monday

### Delhi-Malé: Beginnings of a welcome recalibration

hankar's recent visit to the Maldives marked the first ministerial-level visit ✓ from India after Maldivian president Mohamed Muizzu's swearing-in. His visit came after several high-level political engagements from the Maldives — indicating that a recalibration is in the making. Muizzu's policy has seen some shifts in recent months, for the following reasons: India respected the government's decision to withdraw troops from the Maldives; a majority in parliament offered Muizzu the conditions to tone down anti-India rhetoric and mend ties; other countries (including China) are falling short of his expectations over investments, assistance, and diversification; a brewing economic crisis where Indian and Chinese help is crucial; and

India's accommodative policy that has incentivised engagement over escalation. The recent visit puts India-Maldives relations on the right track and underscores India's importance and diverse engagements with the island nation.

A crucial aspect of the visit was the demonstration of India's people-centric development approach. India is working on over 65 High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP) in the Maldives. Some recently inaugurated projects include a mental therapy unit, a speech therapy unit, and an educational support unit. Besides, India also handed over water sewage projects across 28 islands worth over \$110 million. India also inaugurated a link bridge and land reclamation

in Addu. These projects demonstrate New Delhi's assistance model that helps people with day-to-day activities, boosts the local economy and helps overcome challenges related to housing and the climate crisis. To further this people-centric cooperation, India has also scaled up its slots for training and capacity building by over 1,000 slots. Besides, the EAM took stock of infrastructure projects like the Gan International Airport and the Greater Male Connectivity Bridge

Cooperation in economic and financial sectors has taken precedence, too. The Maldives has proposed to upgrade the current Preferential Trade Agreement to a Free Trade Agreement. Jaishankar met the Maldivian economic and trade minister and finance minister. The meetings come at a time when the Maldives is experiencing an economic crisis with maturing debts, declining foreign reserves, and a worsening budget deficit. Given India's commitment to its SAGAR vision and Neighbourhood First policy, it is likely that discussions would have orbited around the disbursement and restructuring of Indian loans, and additional budget assistance; India pledged budget

xternal affairs minister (EAM) S Jais- assistance of ₹400 crore to the Maldives and offered a year's extension to a T-bill worth \$50 million. Another T-bill worth the same amount is set to expire next month. India and the Maldives also signed an MoU related to introducing India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI). The understanding will expand the country's e-commerce, and make financial services more accessible. This would benefit the Maldives's tourism and economy, especially as UPI allows Indian travellers to trans act without worrying about currency exchange rates. Discussions have also commenced to trade in local currency and access a currency swap agreement and credit line.

Discussions between the EAM and Maldiv ian defence minister Ghassan Maumoon high lighted the crucial aspect of India-Maldives relations — security and defence

cooperation. The meeting under-

scored India's concerns about Chi-

nese ambitions in the Indian Ocean

region. During his visit to China

Muizzu upgraded his country's rela-

tions with China to a strategic com-

prehensive partnership and agreed

to participate in the Global Security

Initiative. The Maldives signed a

defence pact with China and con-

sented to dock a Chinese ship in the

capital. On the other hand, the Mal

divian government declined to

renew the hydrography agreement

with India. It also halted India's

naval harbour project at the UTF,

where China will now develop an

agricultural zone. For Delhi, which

sees China's expanding defence and



Gowdara

Shivamurthy

security cooperation as a red line, the visit served as a crucial platform to assert that its neighbour has an equal responsibility

in upholding peace in the region. The visit has put India-Maldives relations on the right track, but the path ahead is not free of hurdles. Beijing will continue to leverage ties with the Male to expand its presence in the region. Muizzu's party enjoys good relations with Beijing, and there are expectations that the latter will offer additional grants, loans, and investments. China is also the biggest bilateral lender, and approximately 70% of the Maldives' sovereign guarantees are owed to Chinese lenders. With several Chinese loans maturing soon, Beijing has promised a grace period on interest and principal pay ments. These factors will hinder extensive engagement with India. The fact that no new projects were signed during the EAM's visit demonstrates the cautious balancing that Muizzu is practising.

Harsh V Pant is vice-president, Observer Research Foundation, and professor at King's College London. Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy is associate fellow, ORF. The views expressed are personal





**OUR VIEW** 



# We've ground to cover on women in workforce

IMF's Gita Gopinath has highlighted the need for safety to raise women's participation in the workforce. This is worth reiterating. But we need attitude changes to get women to work

nternational Monetary Fund (IMF) deputy managing director Gita Gopinath recently observed that increasing workplace safety is an important factor in raising women's participation in the labour force and the workforce (the former makes up for a broader cohort, of those looking for work, in addition to those who are at work and comprise the workforce). This has particular resonance in India right now, given the shock and outrage across the country over the gruesome rape and murder of a medical internat a Kolkata hospital earlier this month. IMF research shows that closing the gender gap in labour force participation rates (LFPR) can raise gross domestic product (GDP) in developing countries significantly. If the gap between the LFPR of men and women is entirely closed, for instance, output could rise by more than a fifth, by IMF's estimation. But even a smaller 6 percentage point-odd narrowing could drive a disproportionately larger 8% rise in economic output. So, it's in an economy's broader interest to have more women at work. Unfortunately, even after counting the self-employed women in the workforce—no matter their earnings are only 38% of their male counterparts, and despite counting unpaid helpers as self-employed women—the female LFPR in India is only 37%, less than half the rate for men, and lower than Bangladesh's 42%, and 47% for the world at large. China's figure for 2023 stood at 60%. This was down from the 70% level it had during its economy's heydays of double-digit growth. Still, it's clear there is plenty of scope for India to raise its female LFPR and also employ women in paid work.

Gopinath did not just call for a much larger presence of women at the workplace. She also

called for sustained multidimensional reform to improve India's growth rate. Justice delivery needs to speed up, for instance, the quality of education must go up, the capital-intensity of growth must fall so as to create more jobs, import tariffs must come down, and land and labour reforms need to be pursued while the social security net is strengthened. All this is not, obviously enough, any blinding new insight. But since knowledge of what needs to be done has not automatically led to action, such advice is worth reiterating. In any case, enhancing women's participation at work does not get the policy attention that, for example, improving the ease of doing business receives.

So, what can be done to raise women's LFPR, apart from improving safety at the workplace and on their way to and from the workplace? Societal prejudices inhibit women from working. There is the traditional notion that a woman's place is at home where she needs to take care of the family and perform domestic chores so that the primary breadwinner, her husband, can go out and work. Many women also face restrictions on their movements. For those fortunate enough to go out and work,  $they should \, be \, sheltered \, from \, night \, work \, as$ also hazardous jobs. Never mind if such restrictions prevent them from progressing in their career on par with men. Such prejudices also colour the girl child's progress right from infancy, disadvantaging her vis-à-vis her male siblings, be it on nutrition, medical attention, education, or an opportunity to build a career. It is vital we break such prejudices to raise India's female LFPR. That will entail changes ranging from a higher degree of urbanization to reform of societal attitudes, and division of labour within the family.

### MY VIEW | EYE ON AI

# Invest in hardware for GenAI: Its ongoing boom is not a mere blip

A tech tilt away from software is clear and it's time to put more money into high-end chip-making



is a Singapore-based innovation investor for LC GenInnov Fund.

n the GenAI era, hardware is having a moment. While companies in East Asia surge ahead in semiconductor manufacturing, many in Silicon Valley and India remain rooted in the belief that companies making software—or what we deem as the application layer—and those investing in it will continue to dominate this technology beyond the current aberrant phase. This belief is at odds with reality. The future of technology is being shaped not just by code, but by chips, and failing to recognize this could risk more than investment gains.

Consider Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), a near \$900 billion giant, posting 45% monthly revenue growth. MediaTek, collaborating with Nvidia on a new toptier processor, is seeing similar growth at 44%. Meanwhile, Samsung and SK Hynix in South Korea are experiencing a surge in chip revenues of over 80%. These numbers reflect a structural shift to hardware, particularly semiconductors, as the new engine of innovation.

Yet, many traditional application layer beneficiaries do little other than point to history and assume this as nothing but another cycle. In Silicon Valley, there's a deep-seated belief—or perhaps hope—that this hardware surge will soon return to the *status quo* where software reigns supreme. A famously optimistic investment house called the hardware surge a 'bubble' on the rough

premise that historically every dollar of revenue from upstream hardware led to more than \$5-6 downstream, and since this cannot be foreseen now, today's path is unsustainable.

However, this perspective risks repeating the mistakes of Detroit, a city that once symbolized industrial prowess but failed to adapt to global shifts, leading to its decline. We will discuss the commoditization risks for software from machines mastering human languages in other articles, keeping the focus here on the ascent of hardware.

In India, the country's engineers and business leaders must continue to assess the risks from a change in the hardware-software balance, even if they do not believe in a shift as much as I do.

The case for strategic hardware investments: For both Silicon Valley and India, the need to rethink their approach to tech investments is urgent. Strategic stakes in hardware companies, particularly those in semiconductor making, are becoming increasingly valuable. The dominance of TSMC and Samsung in chip fabrication and ASML's lead in extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography underline the critical role of hardware in the future of technology. These companies have built technological barriers that are nearly impossible to breach, making them indispensable to the tech ecosystem.

Indian business groups, traditionally focused on software and services, therefore need to broaden their investment horizons. Strategic partnerships with East Asian hardware firms, equity stakes in semiconductor companies and a deeper involvement in the global hardware supply chain should now become priorities. The recent collaboration between Nvidia and MediaTek is a rare but powerful example of what can be achieved when software and hardware giants come together. Indian businesses should take note and seek out similar alliances

An expected shift in engineering focus: India's engineering talent, long cele-

brated for its contributions to global software development, must also pivot. The next wave of tech innovation will require engineers who are as adept at chip design, robotics-related manufacturing and semiconductor technology as they are at writing software code. Indian educational institutions and tech companies need to invest in upskilling their expertise in these areas. The rise of GenAI, robotics and mobility technologies is driving demand for advanced semiconductors, and India has the potential to play a significant role in this space if it acts now.

The strategic imperative of looking East: Chips are the new oil. In semimanufacturing, innovations are cumulative. Individually, thousands of tiny process advancements occur on the shop floors of such factories. It's not glamorous research, but their collective power makes it insurmountable for anyone to join midway without walking similar paths through previous-generation processes.

In effect, for the best semiconductor investments to come to India quickly, Indian business groups must strive for board seats and ownership stakes in the world's companies in charge of critical technologies, like they pursued ownership in strategic assets in commodities earlier. Indian companies can benefit from a cost-of-capital advantage, and the valuation edge they have over their peers elsewhere should be used for long-term purposes. While businesses pursue such assets, Indian regulators must encourage their hardware pursuit through appropriate relaxations in external investment guidelines.

One example of a valuation gap could illustrate the point. Hyundai Motor, along with other group companies, owns most of Boston Dynamics. Its Indian unit alone may fetch a valuation comparable to the parent group. For investors with access to risk capital from India, strategic global acquisitions could provide ample benefits for India's long-term growth story.

### 10 PCARS AGO



### JUST A THOUGHT

If you exclude 50% of the talent pool, it's no wonder you find yourself in a war for talent.

THERESA J. WHITMARSH

MY VIEW | MUSING MACRO

### There still are hurdles to small businesses going formal

AJIT RANADE & KIRAN LIMAYE



are, respectively, vice chancellor and an assistant professor at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics in Pune.

ast month, we celebrated seven years of the rollout of the goods and services tax (GST). Its promise has been the elimination of the cascading impact of a tax on tax, inbuilt interlocking incentives which improve compliance, less tax leakage and the removal of friction in commerce across state boundaries. For small businesses, especially, it opens up a customer base across the country using e-commerce. Presently, there are 14.6 million active taxpayers, of which nearly 10.4 million have come in the post GST regime and are therefore new registrations. They represent a formalization of the economy. To what extent have small businesses benefited from this formalization?

Examining the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) can help answer this. The survey is conducted by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation. Key findings are now available for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 editions. The one prior to this was thwarted due to covid,. And before 2015-16, this survey was

conducted only once every five years. The recent surveys offer insight into the working and prospects of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME). It covers only unincorporated businesses. Several committees have studied the challenges MSMEs face and the policies needed for their healthy growth. An MSME law was passed in 2006. There is a ministry devoted to MSMEs in the Union government as well as in most states. Yet, MSME's, especially small ones, face numerous challenges of formalization. Their eco nomic health is crucial for India to achieve employment-intensive and inclusive growth. That growth is supposed to be aided by the formalization of the economy, catalysed by the GST rollout.

Over the two surveys, from 2021 till 2023, the number of enterprises rose from 59.7 to 65.4 million, and the corresponding employment from 97.9 million to 109.6 million. The employment numbers include single person-owned enterprises and are lower than in the 2016 survey. These are non-farm enterprises excluding factories, companies and non-profits. The lack of robust growth in employment corroborates other evidence

of a rise in farm employment post-covid. Of the 65.4 million enterprises, 82.6% have an annual turnover of less than ₹5 lakh. Almost 99% of the unincorporated enterprises have turnover of less than ₹50 lakhs, and merely 0.3% have more than ₹1 crore. More tellingly, only 2% are registered for GST. Two-thirds of all unincorporated enterprises are not registered under any act or authority. Note, a lot of the benefits to

small businesses are linked to their registration on UDYAM. These include collateral free loans under schemes like the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises. The latest budget included an additional ₹9,000 crore towards this trust, and to increase funding to small businesses. Other benefits tied to registration are access to priority sector loans, lower interest rates, exemption

from earnest money deposit requirement, preferential treatment in government procurement, among others. Yet, till early 2023, two-thirds of all unincorporated enterprises were outside the formal tax and registration net. Why do they choose to forgo the benefits of formalization? Some of this might

have changed in 2023-24 when, as per the UDYAM portal, there were 24.9 million new registrations, and a further 6.34 million this fiscal year. So, the momentum is picking up.

As per the survey, there is a big difference in the turnover and the gross value addition (GVA) by those who file GST and those who

don't. The former have an average turnover of ₹4.1 It calls for million and GVA of ₹1.6 million while the latter innovative have turnover of ₹0.4 million and GVA of only ₹0.2 policies that million. This shows that for incentivize smal micro businesses, comply ing with GST is difficult. businesses to One curious finding is on the value added by all the come under the 65.4 million enterprises. The total value for GVA is organized fold reported at ₹15.4 trillion,

which translates to barely 5% of gross domestic product (GDP). But the conventional understanding is that MSMEs contribute nearly 40% to value addition or at least the GDP. This wide divergence cannot simply be explained by dividing MSMEs into incorporated and unincorporated and asserting that it is the former that provide the bulk of the

value addition. Deeper study is needed.

A large section of informal small businesses involves sales of products and services directly to the end customer at wafer thin margins. These could be, for instance, selling vegetables or carrying out shoe repair, and often are single-person enterprises. For them, entering the GST net has a disincentive, even if they grow above the exemption threshold, since they do not derive any input tax credit, nor can they pass on the burden to their customer due to a competitive market. How then can we motivate them to join GST? There is also a significant cost related to financial literacy barrier and compliance. This can be addressed through more GST helpdesks (sewa kendras) and a free, easy to use super-app that caters to all their tax, procurement, billing, inventory and planning needs. Just as BHIM was developed for digital payments, so is an enterprise resource planning needed for micro businesses.

Undoubtedly, formalization helps small businesses scale up and improve viability. It also helps them access the bill discounting market to address problem of delayed payments. But their entry into the formal economy, even to join the GST network or access formal credit, poses hurdles, which call for innovative and enabling policies.



**GUEST VIEW** 

# Reading and numeracy in India: It takes a village and much more

The Nipun Bharat Mission is vital for India's labour productivity and demands our collective involvement at multiple levels



is a former member of parliament, Rajya Sabha.

he Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)  $suggests\,that\,approximately\,20\,PISA$ (Programme for International Student Assessment) points are equivalent to a year of learning. By this metric, India was 12 years behind China in mathematics, science and reading abilities the last time India took the PISA test in 2009. At a macro level, the last 15 years have created a large gap between the world's two largest countries. Between 2010 and 2023, the gross enrolment rate (GER) of students in higher education in China has risen from 26.5% to 60.2%, while India's comparable GER has stagnated between 25-28% since 2017. Low foundational literacy levels in math and reading abilities at a young age and a low enrolment rate in higher education has led to India's labour productivity being 44% lower than that of China's.

More importantly, a student's inability to learn even basic reading, writing and mathematics has led to disillusionment among the students, teachers and parents. This is why 8 out of 10 Indian students who enroll in grade 1 don't reach grade 8, 25% of teachers don't even show up to class, and parents are largely not concerned whether their child is learning or not. This has created a vicious cycle.

The problem is not one of spending on education but of the community's involvement and attitude towards education, which have a disproportionate impact on a child's learning outcomes.

In Vietnam, World Bank researchers found that as much as half of the country's score differential on the 2012 and 2015 PISA tests could be explained by community factors like the expectations that parents placed on students and teachers, which led to increased discipline, with the country being among the bottom three globally in terms of percapita spending on education all through.

When you compare this to India's School Management Committees (SMCs), the primary modes of community engagement in our public education system, the disparity becomes apparent: 88% of government and government-aided schools have formed SMCs, but headmasters, teachers and especially parents are not fully aware of their existence.

Breaking this vicious cycle requires institutionalizing interventions to change the behaviour of key stakeholders who are part of these communities. This means creating a mechanism to raise the involvement of teachers and parents.

We need to let our teachers teach. According to a study by Samagra, most teachers spend less than 37% of their time in teaching activities, leaving them only 13 hours a week to do it. Under such circumstances, teachers move back to the default option of teaching students who they think have learning potential, while ignoring others. To make



matters worse, low self-esteem, low levels of autonomy and lack of recognition tend to demotivate them

We need to make it easier for teachers to effectively teach in the limited time available, while showing them the progress they are making. This involves providing them with the right teaching material as well as tools and integrating technology. A pilot study done by edtech Chimple in Satya Bharti Schools, where teachers were provided with an app that allowed them to assign tasks based on a child's ability, showed children not only learnt better, but 94% of the teachers agreed that such a model was helpful for students. Technology can also be used to ease the administrative burden of teachers.

Simultaneously, teachers must be given avenues to grow through structured teacher training sessions. Currently, only one-third of teachers report that their in-service training was beneficial largely because these sessions are ad-hoc and do not focus on the core competencies needed for imparting Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN).

A framework to recognize top performers can create further impact. Madhya Pradesh has a Classroom Heroes programme that celebrates exemplary teachers and their practices. Such recognition has created increased ownership, value alignment and a renewed sense of vigour in teaching styles.

However, students spend just 20% of their time in a classroom and the rest at home. This not only makes parents critical stakeholders, but also the primary demand-drivers for quality.

Global studies have shown that schools with strong parental engagement are 10 times more likely to improve learning outcomes.

VIEWS

However, there are pitfalls. The socio-economic status (SES) of parents skews their perception of their child's academic achievements. High SES parents are more likely to believe their child is above average, compared to low SES parents, resulting in children of high SES parents spending over 70 additional minutes each week on educational activities. This creates a large gap in learning outcomes between the two cohorts.

This is coupled with a lack of clarity among parents on the role they play and their feeling underconfident in supporting their child, given their own low literacy levels. Addressing this requires giving contextual information to parents about their child's performance. This can happen either in parent-teacher meetings or through text messages. In the US, providing information on metrics such as child's absence, missed assignments and low grades led to a reduction in course failures by 27%. Creating involved parents and teachers invariably leads to more involved SMCs.

There are pockets across India and the world which have undergone a significant behavioural change to ensure their children learn. As they say, "It takes a village to educate a child." But this village comprises teachers, parents and community leaders. Finding ways to engage them will bring about the sustainable behavioural change that is needed to make India's Nipun Bharat Mission, the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy, a success.

MINT CURATOR

### Starbucks' new CEO could yet escape Schultz's long shadow

Brian Niccol appears to have insisted on a free hand at the chain



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As Starbucks' long-time CEO who became synonymous with the company he all but founded, Schultz can't seem to let go. He's twice boomeranged back into the top job when the company hit turbulence. And since he departed from the board a year ago, he has become a meddler—criticizing his successor Laxman Narasimhan and the board in a LinkedIn post and on a podcast, for example, even though he had handpicked Narasimhan, trained him, and set an aggressive growth plan on his way out the door.

It's only the latest example in Schultz's long history of undermining his replacements. He wrote in a leaked memo in 2007 that said under then-CEO Jim Donald the company's stores "no longer have the soul of the past." After Kevin Johnson left the company as CEO in 2022, Schultz said that he had returned to the helm because Starbucks had "lost its way."

Schultz seems to have orchestrated his latest official departure from company leadership to make it impossible for Starbucks to disentangle itself from his grasp. He is the company's largest individual shareholder and has negotiated to be chairman emeritus for life.

A piece in the Financial Times earlier this month detailed Schultz's ongoing ties to the company: he can attend and observe board meetings; he has a badge that gives him access to headquarters—where he also has his own parking space; the board reimburses him for the use of his private jet for corporate purposes; and he owns a stake in a business making olive oil for one of the company's coffee drinks. The piece also cited a recent Bernstein analyst report, which notes, "Decision-making processes are still heavily influenced by the presence of Howard Schultz, albeit informally." "We consistently apply the highest governance and accountability standards to the decisions we make, and we are transparent about them," a Starbucks spokesperson told the FT.

That dynamic even played out in the selection of Brian Niccol. Mellody Hobson, Starbucks board chair, said she ran the choice by Schultz a week ago, who



Howard Schultz has legend status but he's being urged to let go.

gave his approval. However, the two known activist firms that are circling the company—Elliott Investment Management and Starboard Value—reportedly were not given a heads up.

It's all more than enough to give any CEO candidate pause, especially a highly coveted one like Niccol, who could take his pick of companies. In addition to his track record executing a massive turnaround at Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc, his time there gave him experience dealing with activist investors as well as iconic founders. In 2018, Niccol replaced Chipotle co-founder and long-time CEO Steve Ells, who struggled to right the company after a slew of food safety disasters. Ells stepped away as executive chairman two years later, saying at the time, "Brian has proven that he is absolutely the right person to lead Chipotle forward and I've never been more confident about the future of this great company.'

With Schultz still lurking in the background, Starbucks likely had to make some serious concessions to lure Niccol—among them naming him chairman as well as CEO. Hobson was previously the company's chair and is giving up the title to become lead independent director. Niccol had added the chairman title at Chipotle in 2020 and probably made it a requirement for joining Starbucks. But it also raises more governance issues for a board that is already under scrutiny.

Corporate America has increasingly moved away from having a single person hold both titles. Just 4% of new S&P 1500 CEOs were also named board chair upon appointment last year, according to executive search firm Spencer Stuart, which has also reported that 41% of S&P 500 companies had a CEO with the dual title in 2023—down 25% from a decade ago.

It's well known that Schultz built Starbucks into a retail juggernaut over a span of four decades, so it's understandable that the board and executive team would want to keep someone like him on speed dial. But Starbucks is now turning into a B-school case study of why long-time CEOs need to make cleaner breaks with their companies.

Otherwise, they risk tarnishing their legacies by turning themselves from an asset into a liability. 

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MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

### Quantum cryptography could spell certainty of secrecy

SIDDHARTH PAI



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magine sending a secret message to someone. Traditionally, you might use a unique code or encryption to keep it safe from prying eyes. But can you guarantee that no one intercepts or tampers with your message, especially without being detected? That's where quantum cryptography comes in. It's a fascinating blend of physics and computer science that promises to revolutionize how we secure our communications.

Quantum computers, which can process vast amounts of information simultaneously, could break existing encryptions in seconds. This threat has spurred interest in quantum cryptography, which is safe from decryption (in theory). Given the value of secure communication for defence, finance and other purposes, countries worldwide invest heavily in quantum cryptography.

At its core, it is a method of securing transmissions using the principles of quantum mechanics, a branch of physics that deals with the behaviour of particles on the tiniest scales, like atoms and photons, and sepa-

rately, through the use of unimaginably complex numbers. Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) and Post Quantum Cryptography (PQC) are the main competing methods.

PQC is about pure mathematics, in which next-level cryptographic algorithms are made to run on traditional computers and are so complex that they can't be broken even by a quantum computer. In contrast, QKD allows two parties to share a secret key that can be used to encrypt and decrypt messages. Its magic lies in how the key is shared. Using quantum particles, typically photons (particles of light), the key is transmitted in such a way that any attempt to eavesdrop on a missive would disturb the particles and alert the parties intrusion. This method uses the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which states that certain properties of a quantum particle cannot be measured without altering them (bit.ly/3Aty2Yw).

In simpler terms, QKD works like this: First, a stream of photons (light particles) are sent that represent bits of information in a form recognizable by computer chips (Os and Is), but in different 'quantum' states. These states could be the direction in which the photons vibrate (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal). The receiver's device can measure the state of these photons. The uncertainty prin-

ciple means if someone tries to intercept and measure them, their 'quantum' state is disturbed. The receiver and sender can then compare a portion of their received and sent photons to check for discrepancies. Inconsistencies would mean the line has been compromised. If it is clear nobody has eaves-

dropped, they can use the detected photons to generate a shared secret key. This key is used to encrypt messages, thus ensuring greater security than assured by methods such as the Rivest-Shamir-Adleman algorithm, which relies on factoring large numbers (bit.ly/3WMK7PS).

The US has been a significant player in the quantum race, with substantial investments through government initiatives and private collaborations. The US National

Quantum Initiative Act of 2018 aims to accelerate quantum research. Organizations like the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) are developing quantum-resistant algorithms, even as firms like IBM, Google and Microsoft explore the field.

China pursues quantum supremacy with significant state backing. In 2016, it launched the world's first quantum communication satellite, *Micius*, which achieved long-distance QKD by transmitting quantum keys between ground stations separated by over 1,200km (bit.ly/3yCWl5H). Addition-

ally, China has built the world's most extended land-based quantum communication network, linking Beijing and Shanghai across 2,000km (albeit withover 30 nodes, each of which may be a weak link).

The EU is making significant strides in quantum

spied on our

messages

The EU is making significant strides in quantum cryptography, focusing on collaboration and integration across member states. The Quantum Flagship initiative, launched in 2018, is a €1 billion, 10-year pro-

gramme to advance quantum technologies, including quantum cryptography. Being a union of sovereign states, the EU is also working on standardizing protocols, which is crucial for widespread adoption.

India launched the National Quantum
Mission last year. It aims to spend about \$1

billion through 2030, including on building 2,000km of secure networks on the ground and quantum-encrypted satellite communication systems

Several challenges remain. Using QKD currently requires specialized hardware, such as single-photon detectors and quantum repeaters, which must be scalable and cost-effective for widespread use. Additionally, transmitting quantum keys over long distances, especially in real-world environments beyond controlled laboratory settings, presents major technical hurdles.

Moreover, the global quantum cryptography race raises concerns about cybersecurity on an international scale. If one country achieves quantum supremacy before others, it could significantly imbalance global security dynamics. However, collaborative efforts among nations and the rapid pace of technological advancement provide hope that quantum cryptography will eventually become a cornerstone of secure global communications.

As quantum technology matures, we can expect it to play a crucial role in safeguarding information in the digital age. The race to harness quantum power is well underway, with the potential to redefine the shaky digital security we endure today.

### WORDLY WISE

PEOPLE NEVER LIE SO MUCH AS AFTER A HUNT, OR DURING A WAR OR BEFORE AN ELECTION.

— OTTO VON BISMARCK

### **The Indian EXPRESS**

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽ RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

### INDIA'S SPACE

Small satellite launch vehicle could help open up space economy. Conversations must begin on a regulatory mechanism

N AUGUST 16, a 120-tonne rocket, about five times smaller than India's largest satellite launch vehicle, took off from ISRO's Satish Dhawan Centre in Sriharikota, heralding a major milestone in the country's space research. The Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) can carry payloads weighing up to 500 kg. These space capsules had to earlier wait for months, even years, to hitch a ride on vehicles designed for large satellites. But in the past decade, the miniaturisation of satellites has enabled the entry of universities, corporates and even individual innovators in a field once dominated by large enterprises and state institutions such as ISRO and NASA. The SSLV can prove to be a game changer for these micro and nano space stations. The launch vehicle can be assembled in less than a week by a much smaller team. With ISRO planning to transfer technology to private players, the country's space sector is poised for a significant expansion.

The utility of small satellites is increasingly expanding in a variety of sectors, including weather forecasting, communications, defence, urban planning and disaster management. They are also crucial enablers in the growing Internet of Things. There is near unanimity that the market for space tech is set to increase in the next five years. US and EU companies are currently the biggest players, while China, Australia and Russia are beginning to expand their footprint. China plans to launch more than 13,000 satellites by 2030 to establish a network supporting high-speed 6G communications. India currently is a relatively smaller participant — its current share in the space economy is about 2 per cent. With the SSLV and related endeavours, the government aims at a four-fold scale-up in the country's stakes by 2033. In the past two years, start-ups such as those by the Hyderabad-based Skyroot and the Chennai-based Agnikul have ticked several boxes, including working closely with ISRO. Agnikul, for instance, has built its own launch pad inside the Sriharikota range with ISRO's help. The IIT-Madras incubated company is working on a launch vehicle to carry payloads smaller than ISRO's SSLV and it has ambitious plans to launch one rocket every week.

India's space policy, introduced in April last year, recognised the country's need to transition from the ISRO-dominated ecosystem. At the same time, the policy took care to underline the premier agency's enabling role in expanding the country's footprint in the space economy. ISRO's work remains crucial to diverse social objectives of the government — education, healthcare, agriculture, climate-change mitigation and environment protection. Space tech is also critical to the country's security objectives. The challenge now is to frame a regulatory mechanism that complements ISRO's work, enables manufacturers of small satellites and rockets to unlock their potential while also making sure that the country's welfare imperatives are not crowded out. The SSLV's launch should be a prelude to conversations on such a mechanism.

### KAMALA'S CONVENTION

Harris is narrowing the gap against Trump. Her campaign must walk a fine line while trying to carve out its own path

T WAS NOT a candidature foretold. Until less than a month ago, incumbent Joe Biden was the presidential candidate for the Democratic party and Kamala Harris was set to be his running-mate, much like in 2020. Yet, since July 21 — when Biden withdrew from the race — VP Harris, the "accidental candidate" for the US presidency, has firmed up the nomination. Would Harris have been a US presidential nominee had Biden — whose age became his Achilles heel — withdrawn a year earlier? Given her underwhelming performance in the 2020 Democratic primaries, she would certainly have faced stiff competition. Whatever the circumstances of her elevation, Harris heads into the Democratic National Convention (DNC) — from August 19 to 22 in Chicago — to be crowned the leader of the ruling party with some momentum on her side.

On paper, Harris has several advantages. She was a senator from California — one of the largest, richest and politically significant US states — and was known for being a "smart on crime" public prosecutor. The party rank-and-file and leadership have stood behind her. And while Biden seemed frail in comparison to Donald Trump, the much younger Harris scores against her opponent in this regard. Democrats are also hoping she rallies young and minority voters behind the party. For now, they have reason to be optimistic: While Biden was trailing Trump in most polls, especially in "swing states" — crucial because of the US's electoral college system, in which winning states and not necessarily the popular vote can be decisive — Harris has caught up. Most polls now show Harris either tied with Trump or give her a slight edge. She is likely to receive a boost from the DNC, which will see Biden, former presidents, prominent Democrats and others endorse her.

The Harris campaign must walk a fine line while trying to carve out its own path. The Vice President cannot avoid taking responsibility (and, arguably, credit) for the achievements and faults of the Biden administration. For now, it seems that the Democrats are trying to woo the middle and working classes, who have suffered the most from inflation by promising an "opportunity economy" and suggesting price controls. Republicans, including Trump, are trying to label these moves "communist". The Gaza question, however, threatens to cast a pall over the Harris campaign and the DNC. Thousands are expected in Chicago to protest the US government's support for Israel's excesses in Gaza. At the Michigan Democratic primary in February, 13 per cent of Democrats voted "uncommitted" to show their anger against Biden's perceived support for Benjamin Netanyahu's war. As the conflict drags on and atrocities continue, those voters may become important in a tightly-fought election.

### A TEAM EFFORT

Coming together of Mohun Bagan and East Bengal fans at Kolkata protest shows what it takes to fight for justice

LD-TIME FOLLOWERS of the Kolkata Derby will vouch for the fact that the rivalry between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan — the two major football clubs in the city — runs deep. It is rooted not just in the game or the exchange of barbs over the superiority of chingri over ilish, but in the difficult, storied past of Bengal on the brink of Partition, and the distance between communities — the Ghotis, inhabitants of West Bengal, and the Bangals, who came in from East Bengal, or what is now Bangladesh. On Sunday, though, a day after the Durand Cup match between the two teams got cancelled over security concerns, none of the animosity that bristles between supporters was on display. Instead, in an unprecedented coming together, fans of both clubs, as well as others, and joined by Mohun Bagan's captain Subhasish Bose, took to the streets of Kolkata to protest against the rape and murder of the young trainee doctor in RG Kar Medical College.

Unlikely as this camaraderie might appear to be, it is not entirely out of character. Both clubs were born out of protest. Established in 1889, Mohun Bagan's claim to fame was their victory over East Yorkshire Regiment in the 1911 IFA Shield final, the first Indian club to beat a British team in colonial India. The formation of East Bengal Club in 1920 came on the back of another act of discrimination — the sidelining of Sailesh Bose, a *Bangal* player, in Mohun

Bagan, led to a faction breaking away to form a club of its own. What is it, then, that this coming together signifies? The power of the collective to demand accountability. The confidence that no difference is unbridgeable if there is a bigger fight to be fought. There is also a lesson here for those who consider protests to be exclusive — the residents of Hiranandani Gardens, for instance, who allegedly turned away Bahujan women from the Jai Bhim Nagar slums during a Reclaim the Night protest in Powai, Mumbai: Justice is a right not limited to a select few, and neither is the fight for it.

# After the crime, indignity



On top of the alleged cover-up, politicisation is added to a political pantomime where chief minister plays victim

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE BRUTAL RAPE and murder of a trainee doctor in RG Kar Medical College, Kolkata, has sparked widespread protests. The Supreme Court has taken *suo motu* cognisance of the case. But despite the demands for justice, the politicisation of the case threatens to inflict a double indignity on the victim. There is always a danger that justice might not be done, or the full facts do not come to light. But there is a nauseating indignity we have heaped on the victim by already instrumentalising the case. Even in death, she has become an instrument of political agendas, ideological world views, ulterior purposes and partisan bickering. The individual's dignity has been once again extinguished.

There is a kind of politicisation of rape cases that is potentially constructive. This represents a yearning for accountability and justice, an ending for clear cultures of impunity that make crimes in such settings possible. Expressing, even if occasionally, that as a society we understand the distinction between right and wrong is important. So, as we saw from Nirbhaya onwards, civil society will get mobilised, demanding accountability.

But this kind of mobilisation has three limitations. First, it is, by its nature, episodic. It is often limited by its urban settings, and the accusation that these movements themselves represent a form of class or caste privilege. It will often be the case that protests against rapes are entangled with significant fault lines of caste, class and location. Delhi and Kolkata will be privileged, not Hathras, Unnao, Nandigram or Kathua. Even the Supreme Court taking suo motu cognisance of particular cases will be afflicted by this critique.

Understanding this social entanglement is important from an explanatory point of view. Justice cannot be limited by class or caste. But too often, this recognition of structural injustices in our society is itself deployed as a species of whataboutery, an excuse not to act even in cases where we can.

Second, these protests need a focal point for action. It is often the demand for a new law, as after the Nirbhaya case, or a new health workers' safety law, as the current agitators

You would have thought that the one thing politicians would have learnt by now is at least a grammar of empathy. I don't mean individualised empathy. But how hard is it in the face of moral outrage for all parties to get together and say that whatever our other differences, we have shared objectives to seek justice in this case; or for the leaders and Opposition parties to express their outrage and put forth a constructive plan for action, together? How

difficult is it to seek

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investigation teams?

are demanding. But our challenge is not the absence of laws. It is the corruption and partisan entanglement of all the law-implementing and truth-producing institutions.

Often, it begins with the very first step: The mere reporting or representation of rape is never a simple matter. It is already encrusted under layers of prejudgements and prejudice, and increasingly subject to a fog of misinformation. The police are rarely trustworthy. We cannot seem to even get basic forensics right. And, increasingly, the judiciary is distinguishing itself only by its own evasions. We don't know what the result of the Supreme Court's suo-motu cognisance of this case will be.

Hopefully, justice in this one instance will get done. But it will be hard to represent this decision as above politics. At the very least, it is not just an indictment of the press, politics and police in Kolkata. It is also a vote of no-confidence in the judiciary itself. A movement for new laws is easy. Creating the sustained political pressure to reform the judiciary or police to the point that they can dispense justice is almost impossible. After decades of civil society activism, not one political party has committed to police or judicial reform. Not one voter votes on the issue. So "justice by mobilisation" is a script we will episodically repeat to no enduring effect.

But most importantly, the sincere, even if limited, yearning of the protest movements runs up against the obdurate reality of a different kind of politicisation: The idea that, even in death, women's bodies are merely political instruments. In most other parts of India, it is often community pride that is the alibi for this instrumentalisation, or sometimes even the halo around religious figures: Think of the shenanigans in the case of Ram Rahim or Asaram Bapu. In this case, the conduct of the West Bengal government is nauseating. But it is of a piece with West Bengal's recent history.

We often forget that, particularly since the days of the CPM, rape has been politicised along party lines in West Bengal. The CPM website in West Bengal will have entries on the TMC entitled "Rape as a Political Weapon," and the TMC will return the favour in accusations. Amta, Singur, Nandigram, Sandeshkhali Park Street and so forth, the geography of politicised rapes in West Bengal is extensive.

Mamata Banerjee, as a chief minister, has a dodgy history of public pronouncements in rape cases that make it easy to cast doubt on her credibility. But, in some senses, the West Bengal government's response at the official level — evasion, clamping down on critics, and then being unable to prevent violence if not actively fomenting it — is truly an abomination. The sight of a chief minister leading an agitation against god-knows-what was again a form of indignity to the victim. On top of the alleged cover-up or incompetence, politicisation is added to the spectacle of a political pantomime where the chief minister chooses to play victim.

You would have thought that the one thing politicians would have learnt by now is at least a grammar of empathy. I don't mean individualised empathy. But how hard is it in the face of moral outrage for all parties to get together and say that whatever our other differences, we have shared objectives to seek justice in this case; or for the leaders and Opposition parties to express their outrage and put forth a constructive plan for action, together? How difficult is it to seek cooperation across party lines to create credible investigation teams? It is often said that crime is an affront not just to an individual victim but to society as a whole. But the polarisation of Indian society is most deeply reflected, not in ideology, but in division over the most awful of crimes.

People are pointing out the hypocrisy in the BIP's stance. It is agitating in Kolkata, aiming to unsettle the government. But this party is hardly a poster child for protecting women's rights. There is, however, no inconsistency here: What is common is that whether evading justice or agitating for it, rape remains a political instrument. Even if, by chance, legal justice is done, the stench of a culture that instrumentalises human dignity, even in the aftermath of a horrendous crime, will remain.

> The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



### STEADY IN THE STORM

Why India's nuclear doctrine remains relevant 25 years after it was drafted

Manpreet Sethi

WITHIN 15 MONTHS of its nuclear tests — Pokhran II — India was ready with a draft nuclear doctrine. On August 17, 1999, K Subrahmanyam, convenor of the first National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), a subsidiary body of the National Security Council, presented the document to Brajesh Mishra, the country's first National Security Advisor. The document was made public so that the doctrine would, as then Prime Minister Vajpayee stressed, "be properly studied before it attains finality". The draft doctrine did not receive the official stamp. However, the principles mentioned in it were reproduced in a press note that the government released after the doctrine was operationalised in 2003.

The draft nuclear doctrine presented India's conceptualisation of its role as a nuclear weapons state. It unambiguously declared a political role for nuclear weapons, directed the building of credible deterrence at the minimum level, and for a retaliation-only policy. These principles reflected sobriety and restraint and have since directed the structure of India's nuclear force and its posture.

However, these principles were conceived 25 years ago. Closer home, Pakistan routinely resorts to shrill projections of its "full spectrum deterrence" for first use. China appears to be undertaking an unprecedented expansion of its nuclear capabilities. Do these changes necessitate a revision of the guidelines adopted a quarter century ago? Pakistan's use of cross-border terror and China's increasingly aggressive behaviour are certainly the two topmost security threats India faces. There is also the additional fear of

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These principles were conceived 25 years ago. Closer home, Pakistan routinely resorts to shrill projections of its "full spectrum deterrence" for first use. China appears to be undertaking an unprecedented expansion of its nuclear capabilities. Do these changes necessitate a revision of the guidelines adopted a quarter century ago? Pakistan's use of crossborder terror and China's increasingly aggressive behaviour are certainly the two topmost security threats India faces. There is also the additional fear of the two countries coming together against India.

the two countries coming together against India. Can India's arsenal deter two nucleararmed adversaries without a substantive accretion? Should India stick with the doctrine of credible minimum deterrence?

While India has abjured large-scale accumulation of nuclear warheads or the need to match those of the adversary, the draft doctrine does mandate a nuclear force that would be "effective, enduring, diverse, flexible and responsive". Therefore, the numbers are a dynamic entity related to the strategic environment. India's arsenal is growing at a measured pace every year and there is no need for panic – nuclear deterrence is not a numbers game.

The adversary's technological advances towards highly accurate conventional delivery systems, the ability to mount cyber attacks, the use of AI to neutralise retaliatory capability, and improved intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capability that could make India's nuclear forces more vulnerable to first strike merit greater attention. These necessitate changes in numbers, command and control structures. However, these do not require a change in the nuclear doctrine.

A second doctrinal attribute — no-first-use – is often instinctively dubbed as a reactive strategy that cedes initiative to the adversary. Pakistan and China's disruptive behaviour is considered by some as being encouraged by India's lack of a "hard-nosed hawkish" firstuse strategy. This argument, however, does not stand scrutiny. A first-use strategy needs to be supported with a credible striking capability that would obviate, or significantly minimise, retaliation. This, in turn, is contingent on a sophisticated arsenal of highly accurate nuclear delivery systems in large numbers, with good ISR that can locate and target the adversary's nuclear forces. An effective BMD will also be required. None of this will come easy or cheap. A credible first strike is not only difficult to build, but it will yield little by way of meaningful results against an adversary who has a robust second-strike capability.

Some argue that we should dispense with NFU but not declare first use, thereby staying ambiguous. The fear of an imminent nuclear strike and the pressure to "use or lose" could tempt the adversary to use its nuclear force first. Ambiguity would increase room for misperception and prove costly in conflict.

The draft doctrine has also been criticised for omitting deterrence through the threat of the use of tactical nuclear weapons. But the idea of limited destruction and escalation control are mere assumptions. Given the nature of a nuclear weapon, can there be anything tactical about its use? In fact, even a planned tactical nuclear weapon use could result in a completely unstable situation since the adversary's response can never be predicted.

The basic attributes of the doctrine, therefore, remain valid in the face of contemporary nuclear trends. India's nuclear doctrine, in fact stands out for being a beacon of nuclear stabil ity, even as others indulge in behaviour that encourages a cycle of hedging strategies and an arms race. The calmness of India's doctrine is a virtue amidst today's nuclear cacophony.

> The writer is Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies

### AUGUST 20, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO of an Indian Airlines Airbus from Srinagar to

### FAROOQ OUSTED

JAGMOHAN, GOVERNOR OF Jammu and Kashmir has informed President Zail Singh that keeping in view the environment in which he was called upon to exercise his discretion, he had no other option but to dismiss the Faroog Abdullah ministry and swear in G M Shah's ministry. The Governor has informed the Centre about the developments that led to the withdrawal of support by 13 MLAs of the National Conference.

**CBI** INVESTIGATION

CENTRE'S DILEMMA

pected connivance with the hijackers.

WITH THE IMPENDING arrival of the dismissed chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, NT Rama Rao, to demonstrate his majority before the President and with the law and order deteriorating in the state, the central government is in a quandary whether or not to defend the action of the Governor in installing the ministry headed by N Bhaskara Rao. The presi-

Lahore on July 5, has arrested four persons, in-

cluding two airline officials, on charge of sus-

Minister P V Narasimha Rao for discussions Rao is understood to have explained the situation and the constitutional validity of the Governor's action.

### BOMB HOAX

AN AIRBUS FLIGHT for Bangalore via Hyderabad on Sunday afternoon returned to Delhi minutes after it took off following a bomb hoax. An anonymous caller told the area control tower that there was a bomb on board Soon after, the plane was offloaded and a thorough check of the aircraft and the baggage was conducted, but nothing dangerous was found, dent, Zail Singh, called the Union Home airport sources said.

THE CBITEAM, investigating into the hijacking

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# THE IDEAS PAGE

### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"With Pakistan grappling with surging unemployment amid sluggish economic growth, as well as stagnating wages amid runaway inflation, it seems that neither businesses nor their employees want to continue living in the country if they have the option to leave." - DAWN, PAKISTAN

## Where are our political thinkers?

The sudden death of modern Indian political thought, about 25 years after Independence, is related to the sorry state of our politics today



BY YOGENDRA YADAV

YOU KNOW SOMETHING is seriously amiss when the pivotal idea of the Prime Minister's Independence Day speech, his vision for India at hundred, is "Viksit Bharat" (India as a developed nation), a tired repetition of a worn out concept called "development" drawn straight from the 1950s. This is not merely the intellectual limitation of a demagogue. It reflects a deeper pathology -- an atrophy of the political imagination -- that afflicts an entire political class, cutting across ideological and political boundaries.

Two decades ago, the renowned Sanskrit scholar, Sheldon Pollock, wrote a muchcited article, "The Death of Sanskrit", in 18th century India. Obviously, he did not mean to pronounce the death of a language; Sanskrit continues to exist. His point was about how, on the eve of colonialism, Sanskrit ceased to be the principal carrier of intellectual and cultural ideas of our civilisation. In a later commentary, Sudipta Kaviraj modified it as "The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge", an abrupt extinguishing of a conceptual universe.

Something similar has happened to the great tradition of modern Indian political thought that nourished politics of colonial and post-colonial India through the 20th century. While everyone notes and comments on the decline of political morals, we tend to miss out on something that is no less significant -- the emaciation of our political vision, the shrinkage in the vocabulary of politics, the withering away of our political understanding, the poverty of political judgement and the recession in the agenda for political action. The river of ideas that nourished politics has suddenly dried up. In a stylised way, you could call it the sudden death of modern Indian political thought.

As with all movements in the world of ideas, it is hard to put a date to this "death". But we can place it somewhere in the first quarter of post-colonial India. Just recall the number and range of political thinkers active in 1947. It's not just Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar that we all remember. There was a whole galaxy of thinkers, across the ideological spectrum. We had intellectual giants like M N Roy and Sri Aurobindo who had retired from active politics. Within those in active politics, we had Maulana Abul Kalam Azad within the Congress, Acharya Narendra Deva, Jayaprakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia from among the socialists, S A Dange and P C Joshi among the communists, Ramasamy Naicker Periyar for radical social justice, C Rajagopalachari from the economic right, and V D Savarkar and Maulana Maududi representing the pro-

Hindu and pro-Muslim end of the spectrum. You may agree or disagree with their ideas, but you cannot deny that they were all political thinkers. They were, or had been, political activists, but their political practice was an-



chored in a vision of future India. While engaged in everyday politics, they were also engaged in thinking, speaking, writing about issues beyond quotidian partisanship. They were fully immersed in India, but deeply informed of the developments across the world. They read and wrote in English but were deeply anchored in the world of Indian languages. They had strikingly different takes on modernity and tradition, but collectively they shaped a very Indian -- and very desi -- modernity. They all created a pool of political imagination that shaped our Constitution, divergent political ideologies and competing political practices. Within the first 25 years after

Independence, this tradition suddenly evaporated. By the early 1970s, almost all the thinkers mentioned above had died, leaving feeble ideological legacies, if at all. Political thinking was still dominated by political leaders, though they were not a patch on the body of thought available in 1947. Jayaprakash Narayan's concept of "total revolution" remained as the last flicker of socialist imagination; Charu Majumdar's was among the final creative interpretations of Marxism. Vinoba Bhave was among the few notable, if one-sided, inheritors of Gandhi, M S Golwalkar collected the remaining bunch of "Hindutva" thoughts, while Charan Singh articulated the vision of rural-agrarian India. This list may be incomplete, but is surely not

Cut to the end of the century and the remainder of the political activist-thinkers also disappeared, with the exception of Kishen Pattnayak, Sachchidananda Sinha, Ramdayal Munda, Dharam Pal and B D Sharma who remained outside mainstream politics. Since then, we don't have, in any meaningful sense, a body of political thought that reflects on and, in turn, shapes the world of political action.

To speak of the atrophy of political imag-

Something similar has happened to the great tradition of modern Indian political thought that nourished politics of colonial and post-colonial India through the 20th century. While everyone notes and comments on the decline of political morals, we tend to miss out on something that is no less significant -- the emaciation of our political vision, the shrinkage in the vocabulary of politics, the withering away of our political understanding, the poverty of political judgement and the recession in the agenda for political action. The river of ideas that nourished politics has suddenly dried up. In a

ination or, more boldly, of the 'death' of modern Indian political thought is not to say that we don't have brilliant minds, thinkers and writers any more. We do, perhaps more than before. But politics, at least in the narrow sense, is not at the centre of their thinking. The various strands of political thinking that still float around do not constitute a coherent conversation, a vibrant contestation, a meaningful dialogue that can connect to the world of politics. There are honourable exceptions. Critiques of the dominant model of development, explorations in the pluriverse of alternatives and occasional debates in feminist and Ambedkarite circles keep the tradition of political thinking alive.

By and large, political thinking was gradually relegated to the world of academia. This produced some brilliant political theorists like Rajni Kothari, D L Sheth, Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj and Rajeev Bhargava (and some sharp commentators who write on these pages), but it is safe to say that much of their ideas have not left a deep impression on the world of political practice. Barring such exceptions, the takeover of political thinking by the formal discipline of political science was an intellectual as well as a political disaster. Disconnected from involvement in the world of politics and any language other than English, the academic mode of thinking about politics is geared towards the demands and fads of global academia, indifferent to political consequences.

The sorry state of our politics today is in some measure the result of this atrophy. Reviving and reinvigorating this tradition of modern Indian political thought is a precondition to reclaiming our republic.

Yadav is member, Swaraj India and National Convenor of Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan. Deshkaal is a weekly column

### Listen to those left behind

India will neither be secure nor viksit if its leaders fail to create dignified employment



Arun Maira

INDIA IS CELEBRATED as a beautiful country for its diversity. But the governance of this diverse country has always been a challenge for its rulers. The British were able to impose their rule by dividing and ruling the people. When India became independent, it chose to become a "secular" country with equality, within its boundaries, for people of all religions, ethnicities, and castes.

Secularism is a contentious concept in India and France and other democratic countries. Does secularism mean "no religion" or equality of all religions? Independent India's founding leaders clearly meant the latter. Many Hindus, aggrieved by the greater freedom given to people of minority religions to maintain their own customs in "civil" matters such as marriage and dress in school have promoted "Hindutva" (their stylised version of Hindu ways) to reduce India's diversity, even amongst Hindus. They expect this will make India a better country for the Hindu majority, even if not for all Indians.

Promoters of hard Hindutva should pay heed to the insecurity of Zionist Israel (which they admire). An Israel created for Jews, and ruled by Jews for Jews, surrounded by countries with non-Jewish populations, is the most insecure country in the world. None of India's neighbours, except Nepal, has a large Hindu population. India has political problems with all of them, even Nepal. A Hindutva nation will feel perpetually threatened by its neighbours. India's borders with Pakistan and China have remained insecure ever since India's independence. The people of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Myanmar are not willing to live under India's hegemonic shadow.

Hindus have been divided into professional classes for centuries. Their professions codified into castes. On top are the repositories of knowledge. Besides them are those who are armed to rule. Beneath them historically, and now above them, were those who traded and made money. Below these power holders of knowledge, arms, and money are people who do the work without which society will not survive — labouring on farms and workshops to produce daily necessities, serving, and cleaning the mess created by others. They are classified as Scheduled Castes, backward classes, and other backward classes. They include at least half of India's population. Profession-based casteism prevails even amongst Muslims and Christians in India. They have appealed for caste-based reservation of economic opportunities to help them overcome centuries of social and economic discrimination.

The third demographic division, which is posing an enormous challenge for India's economic policymakers, is the huge bulge of youth seeking dignified employment with adequate income, combined with swelling numbers of aged persons who will need care. In India and elsewhere, advances in medicine and improvements in nutrition and sanitation have enabled peo-

ple to live longer. If the youth cannot earn enough to look after themselves, how will they look after their aged parents? And where will the state get resources to care for older persons if it cannot raise taxes from the youth, nor tax rich people because they say this will curb their enthusiasm to make more money?

Inequality between working classes and money-making classes has increased. Now, economically-deprived segments within the upper classes are also demanding reservation in education and employment. With these sections, the proportion of the population that is not feeling sufficiently included in India's growth story has crossed 50 per cent. Economists may use clever statistics as much as they like to show that India's growth, following the "liberation" of the economy in the 1990s, has improved the prospects for all. But, common citizens don't trust economists' numbers (even many economists no longer do). People experience reality in their daily lives.

In the second term of the BIP-led government, Hindutva went into overdrive. Many who opposed it were labelled as threats to national security. Leaders of opposition parties began to show their support for Hindus by appearing in temples, performing Hindu rites, and reciting Hindu chants. But they also took up the cause of the backward classes more vigorously to beat the government's Hindutva agenda. The government responded with public shows of support for the backward classes. Nevertheless, the BJP was shocked by the result of the election in June this year. It thought the masses would be impressed by GDP growth and computerised delivery of welfare services. However, bread-and-butter economics prevailed. The youth want not just jobs: They want employment with better wages and social security. Farmers want fair prices and higher returns from their work.

ligions and caste is justice for the working classes. Most Indians, across religions, ethnicities, and castes, are now on the same side of a growing class divide between those who do not have enough and those who have a much larger share of the growth pie. This divide is inevitable in insufficiently regulated markets in which the principle of "cumulative causation" operates freely. Those who have power and wealth use them to seize new opportunities to accumulate more power and wealth. Those who have little to begin with are left further behind. Since the 1980s, the concept of economic reforms has been distorted to mean less regulation of the private sector and handing over public services to the private sector. The ideology of "get government out of the way and leave it to the market" has increased inequalities of incomes and wealth around the world, even in the US and Europe.

A cause that will unite Indians across re-

A "million mutinies" (V S Naipaul's description of the dissatisfaction in India in 1990) are again erupting across the country, with violence amongst Indians and protests against the state. India will not be secure, nor viksit, in the future if its leaders don't stop the Hindutva parade, and stop beating the drum of GDP to divert the masses from the failure of the economy to create dignified employment, with more income and social security, for a billion Bharatis.

> The writer is Chairman, HelpAge International and former member, Planning Commission

### A code that unifies

Secular Civil Code will ensure all citizens have same rights and responsibilities

stylised way, you could call it

the sudden death of modern

Indian political thought.

HITESH JAIN

ON AUGUST 15, as India celebrated its 78th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort that echoed through the nation with resounding clarity. Among the various issues he touched upon, his bold call for the implementation of a Secular Civil Code (SCC) stood out, reigniting a debate that has been lingering for decades. Vested interest groups, who have long kept the pot boiling by dividing the country along religious lines, were left in stunned disbelief. This was not merely a policy announcement; it was a clarion call for the nation to rise above divisive personal laws and to unite under a single, just and secular legal framework.

The PM's appeal was rooted in the vision of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, who once said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." The SCC is a vital step towards achieving this vision, ensuring that every citizen, regardless of religion, is treated equally under the law — a true reflection of the constitutional values of justice, equality, and secularism.

The Opposition's narrative, which portrays the SCC as a threat to religious freedom, is deeply flawed. True secularism is not about treating people differently based on their religious beliefs, it is about ensuring equality under the law for all. The SCC would apply only to civil matters — such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption —

leaving religious practices untouched. This measure would, in fact, strengthen secularism by eliminating outdated and divisive personal laws that have perpetuated inequality and injustice for far too long.

Furthermore, the PM emphasised that the SCC would not erode religious identities; instead, it would foster national unity by ensuring that all citizens have the same rights and responsibilities. The Opposition's resistance, which often stems from political expediency rather than genuine concern for minority rights, is short-sighted and ultimately detrimental to national progress. An SCC is not about erasing diversity; it is about ensuring that all citizens have the same rights and responsibilities under the law.

The experience of other modern democracies that have implemented a uniform civil code demonstrates that it is possible to have a standardised legal framework without compromising religious freedom. In countries like the United States, France and Germany, citizens are governed by the same civil laws, regardless of their religious beliefs. These countries have managed to preserve their cultural diversity while ensuring equality before the law — a model that India can and should emulate. By opposing the SCC, they are not defending religious freedom but perpetuating a system that discriminates, particularly against women.

In fact, the current personal laws are not only different but also deeply discriminatory. They create a patchwork of legal standards that vary significantly from one community

to another, often leading to gross injustices, especially against women. By implementing the SCC, the government would be ensuring that all women — regardless of their religion enjoy the same rights and protections, thereby advancing social justice.

The SCC is not just about addressing inconsistencies and injustices; it is about modernising India's legal system. The current system, with its myriad of personal laws, is outdated, cumbersome, and often confusing. It creates a situation where citizens are subject to different legal standards depending on their religion, leading to legal uncertainty and, in some cases, exploitation of legal loopholes.

For instance, the case of Sarla Mudgal v Union of India highlighted how individuals could exploit the differences in personal laws to circumvent legal restrictions. In this case, a Hindu man converted to Islam solely to marry a second time, taking advantage of the fact that Muslim personal law permits polygamy. Such situations create a mockery of the legal system and undermine the rule of law.

An SCC would streamline and simplify the legal framework, making it more accessible and understandable for the average citizen. It would ensure that all citizens are subject to the same legal standards, thereby reducing the potential for legal exploitation and ensuring that justice is applied uniformly.

Moreover, an SCC would significantly reduce the burden on India's overworked judiciary. With nearly 4.70 crore cases

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pending across courts in India as of March 2022, the judiciary is struggling to keep up with the backlog. Many of these cases arise from disputes related to personal laws, which are often complex and time-consuming to resolve. By implementing an SCC, the legal system would become more efficient, freeing up judicial resources to address other pressing national issues.

Finally, it is crucial to remember that implementing an SCC is not merely a policy choice; it is a constitutional duty. Article 44 of the Indian Constitution mandates that the state shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code for all citizens. While this directive is not enforceable by law, it is fundamental in guiding the governance of the country.

As Prime Minister Modi rightly pointed out, the implementation of the SCC is not just a legal necessity; it is a moral imperative. Moving beyond outdated and divisive personal laws is essential to achieving the constitutional vision of an India where all citizens are treated equally under the law. As we move forward, let us recall the words of Babasaheb Ambedkar: "Law and order are the medicine of the body politic, and when the body politic gets sick, medicine must be administered." The SCC is the medicine that India needs to cure the ills of inequality and injustice that have plagued our society for too long.

> The writer is Managing Partner, Parinam Law Associates and Vice President, Mumbai BJP

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### AFTER HASINA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Stakes are high' (IE, August 19). Following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, New Delhi needs to carefully draft its foreign policy regarding Dhaka by dispelling the widely held perception that it was a friend of the Awami League. There is an urgent need to make it clear that it seeks to continue good relations with Bangladesh sans Sheikh Hasina and her party at the helm. There is little use to bicker about the time gone by. Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, the de facto head of government in Bangladesh, must show maturity by not insisting that India hand Hasina hand her over to his government. He must understand that good relations with New Delhi are beneficial to Dhaka.

**S H Quadri,** Bikaner

### Brewing crisis

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A health gap' (IE, August 19). Almost 30 per cent of medical students suffering from mental health problems is worrying. This situation in not limited to medicine but is also an issue among students in other prestigious such as

the IITs. Tragically, despite such an alarming situation and huge shortfall of mental health professionals, the Indian government has not realised how critical mental health is, evidenced by the relatively low amount allocated to the problem in the budget.

**Bal Govind,** Noida

### Unfair Portrayal

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The aliens and the alienated' (IE, August 19). The writer, while eulogising the RSS, cited tributes to the organisation by Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Indira Gandhi, and tried to portray Rahul Gandhi's political trajectory as deviating form the Congress legacy. and accused him of affinity towards communists. Contrary to this, PM Narendra Modi equated the Congress election manifesto in the recent Lok Sabha election with the Muslim League's. The writer's assertion that political opponents are rivals and not enemies is belied by RSS's Guru Golwalkar, who in the book Bunch of Thoughts stated that Muslims, Christians and Communists are the country's "internal enemies".

LR Murmu, Delhi

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

### Why selection of 69,000 assistant teachers in UP will take place afresh

**ASAD REHMAN** 

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 19

THE ALLAHABAD High Court on August 13 directed the Uttar Pradesh government to prepare a revised list of 69,000 assistant teachers selected through the Assistant Teachers Recruitment Examination (ATRE) in 2019.

Multiple petitions had challenged the recruitment process. It was alleged that candidates from reserved cat-

egories were not selected in accordance with the stipulated proportion. The High Court said the government should rectify the irregularities in applying reservations in appointments.

### When did the examination take place?

On December 5, 2018, the UP government issued an advertisement to recruit 69,000 assistant teachers in the state's Basic Education Department.

The ATRE was held on January 5, 2019,

and 4.10 lakh candidates appeared. The results were declared on May 12, 2020, and 1.46 lakh candidates qualified. The cut-off was fixed at 67.11% for unreserved or general category candidates, 66.73% for Other Backward Classes (OBC) candidates, and 61.01% for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates.

On June 1, 2020, the Secretary of the Basic Education Board, Allahabad, delineated the recruitment **EXPLAINED** process. Two lists of selected candidates — one dated October

> and another dated October 30, 2020, for 36,590 candidates — were issued, totalling 67,867 of the 69,000 posts.

11, 2020, for 31,277 candidates

The remaining 1,133 posts, for Scheduled Tribe (ST) candidates, were shown as lying vacant due to the non-availability of candidates.

### What were the allegations of irregularities?

The lists came under scrutiny following allegations that they were published without declaring the candidates' category-wise reservation against the mandated 27%.

Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) chief

break-up of marks.

**DEEPTIMANTIWARY** 

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 19

WITH FORMER Bangladesh Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina facing multiple criminal cases

back home, it is likely that India's eastern

Touhid Hossain said as much in an interview

to Reuters last week. He said that since Hasina's

fall and ouster, a number of cases had been

filed against her, and that should the country's

home and law ministries so decide, she may

Yes. India and Bangladesh signed an ex-

The treaty came into being in the context

tradition treaty in 2013, which was amended

in 2016 to simplify and hasten the exchange

of several Indian fugitives, particularly those

belonging to insurgent groups in the

Northeast, hiding in and operating out of

Bangladesh. Bangladesh too, was facing trou-

ble from outfits such as Jamaat-ul-

Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), whose oper-

atives were found to be hiding in states like

of two fugitives from Bangladesh to India,

and two fugitives from India to Bangladesh.

Among them is Anup Chetia, a top United

Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) leader, who

was extradited from Bangladesh in 2015.

What are the provisions of this treaty?

According to the treaty, India and

Bangladesh are supposed to extradite indi-

viduals "who have been proceeded against...

or have been charged with or have been

found guilty of, or are wanted for...commit-

ting an extraditable offence" by a court of the

is one which carries a minimum punishment

of one year imprisonment. This includes fi-

nancial offences. Crucially, for an offence to

be extraditable, the principle of dual crimi-

nality must apply, meaning that the offence

be granted if there is an "attempt to commit

or aiding, abetting, inciting or participating as

an accomplice in the commission of an ex-

The treaty says that extradition shall also

must be punishable in both countries.

An extraditable offence, the treaty says,

requesting country.

traditable offence".

The treaty has so far led to the extradition

West Bengal and Assam in India.

of fugitives between the two countries.

be required to "return to Bangladesh".

Do India and Bangladesh have an

extradition treaty?

Bangladesh's de facto foreign minister

neighbour may push for her extradition.

Chandra Shekhar at a protest in 2021. File

Further, more than 50% of the candidates

selected were allegedly from the unreserved

category, with reserved category candidates

not getting the representation due to them.

According to candidates who challenged the

Beginning from October 2020, candidates who took the exam staged multiple protests and, on several occasions, had run-ins with the police. In 2021, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath met a delegation of students in Lucknow and directed the Basic Education Department to find a "swift and fair" solution.

selection, OBC candidates were given 3.86%

### What did the candidates tell the HC?

The petitions mentioned that selection lists had been published without declaring category-wise details of marks.

The issue of disproportionate representation was also mentioned. Additionally, it was alleged that the Meritorious Reserved Candidates (those from reserved categories who made the cut-off for the unreserved category) were placed in the reserved category instead of the general category. This was against Section 3(6) of the Reservation Act, 1994, which provides that reserved-category candidates who score equal to general candidates must be mandatorily selected/ appointed on the unreserved vacancies.

During the hearing, the state government filed several affidavits. It later issued a press statement admitting that the Reservation Act, 1994, could not be properly followed in this case. It then issued a fresh selection list on January 5, 2022, making 6,800 additional appointments from amongst the reserved category candidates.

However, in an order passed on March 13, 2023, a single-judge Bench of the Allahabad High Court set aside the earlier lists of selected candidates. Several petitions were filed on April 17, 2023, challenging the court's March 13 order.

### What is the HC's latest ruling?

A division Bench of the High Court, comprising Justice Attau Rahman Masoodi and Justice Brij Raj Singh, has directed the state government and the authorities concerned to prepare a new list of 69,000 candidates for appointment.

They are to follow the provisions of the UP Basic Education (Teachers) Service Rules, 1981, and the Uttar Pradesh Public Services (Reservation for Scheduled Castes,

Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) Act, 1994. The court has directed that the exercise should be carried out within three months.

The court also said that if any assistant teachers employed on the basis of the earlier lists are affected, they shall be allowed to continue in their jobs through the current academic session, so that the students do not suffer. However, the earlier lists are to be guashed. Essentially, the recruitment process

will be carried out afresh. CM Adityanath said on Sunday that the UP government firmly believes that the benefit of reservations should be extended to all reserved-category candidates, and "No injustice should be done to any candidate." The CM directed the Basic Education Department to proceed according to the HC's order.

Opposition leaders have criticised the government. Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday that the court's decision was a befitting reply to the "conspiracies of the BJP government which is playing with the reservation system".

### THIS WORD MEANS

**POLICY** 

### **HAYFLICK LIMIT**

Maximum number of times normal cells can divide; a biological limit for how long an organism can live

BIOMEDICAL RESEARCHER Leonard Hayflick, who discovered that normal somatic cells can divide (and thus reproduce) only a certain number of times, died on August 1 at the age of 98. Hayflick's discovery fundamentally changed the understanding of aging especially the thesis that cells are capable of being immortal, and aging is simply a factor of externalities such as disease, diet, and solar radiation.

### Impossibility of immortality

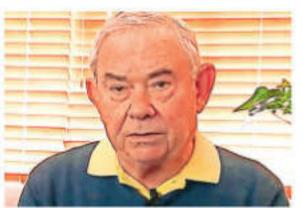
In the early 1960s, Hayflick, at the time a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, discovered that cell division in somatic(non-reproductive)cells stopped after roughly 40-60 times. This cessation in cell division is what Hayflick posited causes aging — as senescent cells (those that have stopped dividing) accumulate, one's body begins to age and decline.

This means that there is an in-built cellular clock in the human body (and that of other organisms) which determines how long one can live. This "ultimate Hayflick limit", as scientists have termed it, is around 125 years for humans, beyond which no amount of diet, exercise, or even genetic tweaking against diseases can extend the human lifespan.

Since the discovery was made, Hayflick and other scientists have documented the Hayflick limits of cells from animals with varied life spans, from Galapagos turtles to laboratory mice. The cells of the former species, which can live for a couple of centuries, divide approximately 110 times before senescing, whereas cells of the latter become senescent within 15 divisions.

### Correlation or causation?

Hayflick's discovery got further weight after researchers in the 1970s discovered telomeres. As cells divide, they create copies of DNA strands. Telomeres are repetitive DNA sequences at the very end of these strands, meant to protect the



vision, these telomeres get slightly shorter. Eventually, the telomere loss reaches a critical point at which cell divi-

That said, while shortening telomeres is related to aging, the exact relationship between telomere length and lifespan remains unclear. Lab mice, for instance, have telomeres that are five times longer than humans, but their lives are 40 times shorter.

The discovery in the 1980s of a protein called telomerase, capable of progested this possibility. Telomerase is present in all cells, but it is seemingly why, as Hayflick himself said, cancer cells

synthesise telomerase, and some in vitro studies have indicated that they may slow down telomere loss in normal human cells, any practical application for this seems some distance away.

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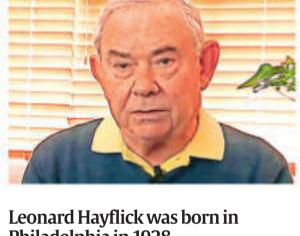
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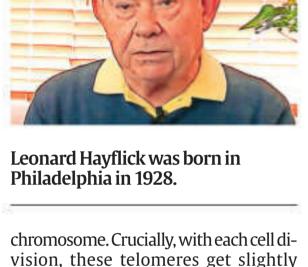
**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** 

10 सितंबर



This is what has led to some researchers arguing that telomere loss and the Hayflick limit are not limits on aging, but rather symptoms of aging. Theoretically, it might be possible to thwart telomere loss or replace telomeres, as the differential rates of telomere

are not subject to his limit.



loss among different species indicates.

ducing new telomeres, has strongly sug-"turned on" in only cancer cells. This is

Although scientists have been able to



**EXPLAINED FOREIGN POLICY** 

Could Hasina be extradited?

India and Bangladesh have an extradition treaty, and Dhaka may seek Hasina's extradition. But this does

not necessarily mean that India will have to send her back to Bangladesh, where she faces criminal cases

Irrespective of treaty provisions, whatever happens will be a political call. Express

### Are there any exceptions to these rules? Yes. The treaty says that extradition may

be refused if the offence is of a "political nature". But this is limited by the nature of the offence — and the list of offences which cannot be deemed as "political" is rather long. These include murder; manslaughter or culpable homicide; assault; causing of an explosion; the making or possession of an explosive substance or weapons by a person intending to endanger life; the use of a firearm with intent to resist or prevent arrest; damaging property with intent to endanger life; kidnapping or taking of a hostage; incitement to murder; and any other offence related to terrorism.

### So could Bangladesh seek the extradition

of Sheikh Hasina from India? Hasina is a political player, and she can claim to seek political asylum in India. However, some of the offences of which she has been accused are excluded from the definition of political crimes in the treaty. These include cases of murder, enforced disappearance, and torture.

On August 13, Hasina was booked for the murder of a grocery store owner who was killed in police firing last month. The following day, a case of enforced disappearance was filed against her on the charge of kidnapping a lawyer in 2015. On August 15, Hasina was slapped with charges of murder, torture, and genocide in a third case.

Things are further complicated by the fact that a 2016 amendment to Article 10 (3) of the treaty did away with the requirement for the requesting country to provide evidence of the offence committed. Now, only an arrest warrant by a competent court is needed to process an extradition request.

#### If such a request is made, will India have to send Hasina back?

Not necessarily. There are grounds spelt out for refusal of extradition requests in the treaty. Article 7 of the treaty says that "the request for extradition may be refused by the Requested State if the person whose extradition is sought may be tried for the extradition offence in the courts of that State." This is not applicable in Hasina's case.

That said, Article 8 lists out multiple grounds for refusal including cases in which an accusation has not been "made in good faith in the interests of justice", or in case of military offences which are not "an offence under the general criminal law".

What should India do in this situation? India has to look to build relations with whoever comes to power in Dhaka, and secure its long-term strategic and economic interests in Bangladesh. At the same time, it must also be seen to be standing by Sheikh Hasina, a longtime friend and ally to New Delhi.

India has the option of refusing Hasina's

### "Do our critical interests lie in handing over Hasina to Bangladesh? They don't. The

legalese of the treaty does not matter," a former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of ficer, who has dealt closely with Bangladesh told The Indian Express. The former spy argued that there are enough "structural linkages" between India and Bangladesh for a refusal to not matter in the larger scheme of things.

"There are enough interests in Bangladesh who would want to have good relations with India. The Awami League has not been finished. It has deep roots. It will rise again. There is an administration and a military that values Bangladesh's relations with India. So we have a critical mass that favours good relations... Then there are geographic realities. Bangladesh is surrounded by India," he said.

Other security establishment sources that The Indian Express spoke to underlined that no country ever trades fugitives against its national interest, with or without a treaty, and eventually, whatever happens will be the outcome of a political call. A former diplomat who has served in the

region said it was too early to be alarmed.

"First of all, this is an interim government in Bangladesh. Its statements should not bother India much. It is a regular government that India will look to engage with in the long term and thus pay heed to. Also, as of now, only FIRs have been filed. The case will have to be investigated, chargesheeted, and then the court will take cognisance following which the extradition process will start. A lot of water would have flown down the Teesta by then," the former diplomat told *The Indian* 

"Beyond diplomacy, having a treaty means its legal provisions have to be satisfied. There are multiple examples of relations between two countries being healthy despite pending extradition requests," he added.

### In landmark US antitrust ruling against Google, important lessons for India

IN FACT

epaper.indianexpress.com

**SOUMYARENDRA BARIK** NEW DELHI, AUGUST 19

Admissions 29 अगस्त

drishtilAS.com

FOUR DECADES ago, Apple was a young upstart taking on the entrenched tech giant IBM. Apple's iconic television ad introducing the Macintosh aired in 1984 and alluded to George Orwell's dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-four — announcing the arrival of free-

dom from "Big Brother" conformity. A decade and a half later, an antitrust judgment slammed the brakes on Microsoft's inexorably growing empire — and opened the doors for the upstart of the time, Google, to expand its web search business.

Apple and Google are on the other side of the dominance divide today. They epitomise Big Tech, and are among the most dominant forces and most influential companies in the world.

And earlier this month, a federal judge in the United States ruled that Google is a "monopolist" that acted illegally to maintain its exclusive control over online search.

The landmark judgment by judge Amit P Mehta of the US District Court for the District of Columbia strikes at the heart of online empires that now own a significant part of the public Internet, and could potentially alter the way digital businesses behave.

The likes of Apple and Microsoft face antitrust challenges in other jurisdictions as well — all of which essentially argue that these companies are now so big that they control every facet of the attention economy from hardware to software, creating insurmountably high entry barriers for new companies and, in the end, working to stifle innovation.

### **Concerns in India**

It took the US Justice Department four years to bring the case against Google — the most consequential legal action against tech power since the 1998 case against Microsoft.

The judgment in *US et al. v. Google*, and the subsequent action against the violation of competition laws — including proposals

to break up the company's various business units, according to reports — could have a bearing on the regulatory discourse in India as well. In India, Google has been found to be at

odds with start-up founders over its billing policy, for the commission it charges from

developers listed on its app store, and for allegedly stifling competition in the online advertising market, the maior source of Google's revenues globally.

As the legislative ecosys-

tem slowly evolves to challenge big technology companies in an increasingly online world,

competition is set to become an important regulatory tool for Indian lawmakers. A major overhaul of India's antitrust landscape is proposed to rein in digital empires. "Google is a monopoly in search and has

established moats around several dominant

digital services like Android and, particu-

larly of deep worry, in digital advertising,"

Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who was until recently Minister of State for IT, told The Indian Express. "The Internet was and must be a free and

fair space, and not carved into these private big tech islands where rules of the game get distorted through market power. Where

there is market power, market abuse follows — in the coming years, governments around the world will need to agree on clear guardrails and laws to protect the consumer without slowing down innovation," Chandrasekhar added.



Taking a leaf out of the European regulatory handbook, India has proposed a new digital competition law that could stop tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon from self-preferencing their own services, or using data gathered from one company to benefit another group company.

"The ruling in the US shows why India

needs an updated competition law and why our efforts at trying to introduce an ex ante framework have merit. We are closely tracking how the development unfolds in the US," a senior government official said, requesting anonymity.

The draft law, called the Digital Competition Bill, 2024, also has provisions to set presumptive norms to curb anti-competitive practices before they actually take place, and promises to impose heavy penalties — which could amount to billions of dollars — for violations. This could require big tech companies to make fundamental changes to their platforms.

The proposal in India is similar to the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA), which went into full effect earlier this year. The law requires large tech firms like Alphabet. Amazon, and Apple to open their services, and to not favour their own at the expense of rivals.

### Innovation domination

There is concern that the bulk of the in-

novation over the last decade or so has been confined within a handful of big tech companies, based mostly in the US. Officials believe that a major reason is the high barriers for new entrants in the sector — once a company gets a significant share of the online market, its product becomes the default way to access that particular service.

Indian government officials believe that big tech companies have demonstrated a history of engaging in anti-competitive practices, and a presumptive framework would work better to address this. Last year, India's antitrust regulator fined Google Rs 1,337 crore for its anti-competitive conduct in the Android ecosystem.

"A strict competition law for these online empires is the need of the hour. They are going to employ their full lobbying might, and we have our task cut out. We need to understand — and our legislation should reflect it — that by curbing their dominance, we are helping smaller companies who may not have a chance otherwise," another official said.



# TUESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2024



### PHARMACY OF THE WORLD

Union health minister JP Nadda

India has always been the world leader in the production and supply of vaccines contributing to approximately 60% of the global supply of vaccines

### Regime change in South Asia

India must step up engagement with neighbours to ensure that they have a greater stake in our growth story

**EGIME CHANGES IN** an unstable region present serious challenges for India's neighbourhood first policy. Besides the growing role of China in South Asia, there is the need to address the desire of neighbours to seek more strategic autonomy in their relationship with India. There is an interim government in Bangladesh after its longest serving Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina — with whom India had a favourable relationship — fled the country due to mass protests. Last month, the game of thrones in the Himalayan nation of Nepal saw the return of KP Sharma Oli as the PM for the fourth time in an alliance with the Nepal Congress. Earlier this year, Shehbaz Sharif was re-elected as PM of Pakistan. Next month, presidential elections are due to be held in Sri Lanka. As the dominant economic power in the region, India must engage with these new regimes on the basis of mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity, and develop economic interdependencies even as they also engage with China to further their ambitions on economic development.

The benefits of engagement — regardless of whether or not the new regimes are pro-China — are visible in India's evolving relationship with the Maldives and Sri Lanka. To be sure, our bilateral relations with the Maldives initially passed through testing times with its President Mohamed Muizzu formally requesting India to withdraw its military presence from that nation. But the times are a-changing as Muizzu attended the swearing-in ceremony of PM Narendra Modi. During India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar's recent visit, Muizzu's office issued a statement that "India has always been one of the closest allies and invaluable partners, facilitating and providing aid whenever the Maldives has needed it". Even the Maldives' political opposition lauded the Muizzu government's "sudden recalibration" of its India policy. Sri Lanka, too, was a major beneficiary of India's timely aid and assistance when it passed through a severe economic crisis a couple of years ago that led to a more favourable stance towards India vis-à-vis China

To further its neighbourhood first policy, India must push greater regional integration through connectivity initiatives so that these nations have a greater stake in its growth story. India may not be able to match the Chinese in chequebook diplomacy but it can certainly allow neighbours to export more to us to blunt the edge of their resentment of registering only growing trade deficits with India. Due to tensions with Pakistan, India has preferred alternative groupings like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). But there is no reason why inking a free or preferential trade agreement with BIMSTEC is taking so long. It must be fast-tracked to give our immediate neighbours more prosperity through trade. Otherwise, they will look elsewhere like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Dealing with regime changes also entails deploying more resources and diplomatic personnel to be abreast of fast-breaking developments. The sudden meltdown in Bangladesh took India completely by surprise. In this  $regard, former for eign secretary \, Shyam \, Saran's \, observations \, in \, media \, reports$ deserve to be taken seriously: "We have been talking about the neighbourhood first policy for quite some time, but do we have the established wherewithal and resources that must be deployed to give substance to it? Take human resources deployment, you can't have a ministry for external affairs that has only a couple of persons dealing with neighbouring countries."

### Populist economics antidote to corporate avarice

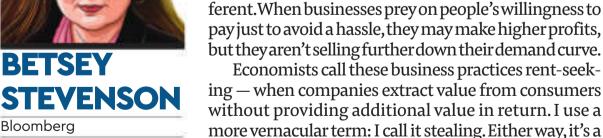
**BANNING JUNK FEES**, restricting price gouging, imposing rent controls: Why all of a sudden are there so many populist economic policies and proposals?

The answer lies in the cumbersome US economy. Americans are familiar with government red tape and bureaucracy, but the private sector is equally culpable. Corporations have perfected the art of making it just hard enough to pay less that consumers often give up and pay more. This strategy is doing long-term harm to America's culture and economy.

In a perfectly competitive market, businesses compete on price, quality, and service. They have to work hard to attract and retain customers, and shady practices are punished by the market. But our economy is not perfectly competitive. Companies work to ensure they have some market power, and the US financial system pressures them to find big profits quickly. One way to do that is to steal from customers.

Too many consumers are left fighting to keep what's theirs. Some customers do pretty well in this system: They negotiate for discounts, insist on refunds, and cancel trial subscriptions immediately. Others just don't have the time or energy to fight and they end up paying more. To be clear, this is not traditional price discrimination.

When companies can charge more to those willing to pay more for their product, and less to those who value their product less, they can make higher profits — and sometimes make the economic system work better by selling to more people. These practices might seem like price discrimination, but they are fundamentally dif-



far cry from the dynamics of a competitive market. The costs of this hassle-driven economy aren't limited to Americans' wallets. They are fraying the very fabric of society. When companies rely on making life more difficult for consumers as a path to profitability, they undermine confidence in the system and foster cynicism. And that has led Americans to become less trusting and more adversarial — not just in their interactions with businesses, but in their relationships with one another and with government. This is not a case of a trade-off in which something detrimental must be tolerated in order to have a more vibrant and efficient economy overall. These practices are harmful, full stop. And if left unaddressed, over time they will make things worse, because a healthy economy and society rely on cooperation and goodwill, both of which are undermined when businesses prioritise short-

term profits over long-term relationships with their customers. So what's the way out? It's clear that both government and corporations need to play a role. For governments, that means cutting unnecessary red tape and simplifying interactions with citizens. For corporations, it means eliminating practices designed to wear down the consumer until they capitulate. Unfortunately, corporations are unlikely to do this voluntarily, which is why there needs to be government action. Policies that rein in dubious business practices work. Three decades ago, mobile phone companies refused to let customers keep their phone numbers if they changed providers. Then Congress passed a law that banned the practice, requiring phone num-

ber portability, and now it is taken it for granted. Populist economic policies aren't just about being fair to consumers. They can also help foster a healthier, more trusting society and a more robust economy. In the end, reducing the bureaucratic burdens imposed by both the public and private sectors isn't a trade-off — it's an investment in a better future. By demanding more straightforward relationships with both government and businesses, the US can create an economy that is not only more efficient but also more just.

### THE AI RACE

INDIA SHOULD TAKE CUES, BUILD ROBUST AI ECOSYSTEM AND FOLLOW MULTI-FACETED APPROACH

### China clout in GenAI patents

The Chinese

fostered AI

planning

N1980, Asmall, nondescript garage in Palo Alto became the birthplace of what would eventually transform into Silicon Valley. This unassuming location housed two Stanford graduates who tinkered with circuit boards and computer chips, fuelled by their vision of a digital future. Their company, Hewlett-Packard, would soon become a tech giant, setting the stage for a wave of innovation that drew in engineers, scientists, and entrepreneurs from around the world. As word spread of the groundbreaking

work happening in Silicon Valley, the area became a magnet for talent and investment. Start-ups flourished, venture capitalists invested billions, and top-tier universities like Stanford and Berkeley churned out skilled graduates eager to join the tech revolution. This agglomeration of innovation created a self-sustaining ecosystem where ideas could be rapidly developed, tested, and brought to market.

Fast forward to today, and we see a similar agglomeration occurring in China, particularly in the field of generative AI. Chinese companies and research institutions have become global leaders, amassing a substantial number of patents in this cutting-edge field.

In July 2024, the World Intellectual Property Organization unveiled its Patent Landscape Report on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), revealing a monumental wave of innovation. Between 2014 and 2023, an astonishing 54,000 GenAIrelated inventions (patent families) were filed, accompanied by over 75,000 scientific publications. The top 10 GenAI patent applicants are spearheaded by Tencent with 2,074 inventions, followed closely by Ping An Insurance with 1,564, Baidu with 1,234, the Chinese Academy of Sciences with 607, IBM with 601, Alibaba Group with 571, Samsung Electronics with 468, Alphabet with 443, ByteDance with 418, and Microsoft with 377. Out of these 10 highest patent filers, six are Chinese.

China's dominance in this field is nothing short of staggering. With a commanding 38,210 GenAI inventions, China



Respectively OSD, research, EAC-PM, and assistant professor, FMS, University of Delh

outpaces the United States, which only boasts 6,276 inventions. The Republic of Korea, Japan, and India trail even further behind with 4,155, 3,409, and 1,350 inventions respectively. Chinese universities have achieved

dominance in GenAI patent filings, with the Chinese Academy of Sciences leading the pack with nearly 600 patents. Tsinghua University and Zhejiang University follow closely, showcasing substantial contributions with over 400 and 300 patents respectively. Besides, institutions like Zhejiang University of

Technology and the National Research Council of Science and Technology of the Republic of Korea are prominent. Despite this intense competition, no Indian university has made it to the top 20 list.

Chinese regulations have significantlyboosted AI inn-

ovation by being among the first to legislate on GenAI shortly after ChatGPT's launch. Initially, China implemented separate regulations for different AI products, with distinct rules for algorithmic recommendation services and deepfakes. However, in January, the ministry of industry issued draft guidelines to standardise the industry, with plans to establish over 50 national and industry-wide AI standards by 2026. The regulatory framework is crucial for emerging technologies as it provides clear guidelines, promotes uniformity, and ensures a conducive environment.

player in emerging tech, especially GenAI? First, the government has proactively fostered AI development through strategic

But what made China a dominant

planning and significant investments. Initiatives such as the "Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" have laid out comprehensive road maps for AI advancement, emphasising the importance of GenAI. Additionally, regulatory measures have been fine-tuned to balance innovation and control, creating a conducive environment for AI growth.

Second, it is often said that innovation usually thrives in the absence of regulations. But the inverse can also be true. Regulatory frameworks are paramount in catalysing innovation, par-

ticularly in burgeoning fields like AI. Studies show government has well-designed regulations provide a structured envimitigating ronment, development uncertainties and fostering through strategic a stable climate conducive to innovation. Porter and van der Linde (1995) suggest stringent yet flexible

> regulations can drive innovation by pushing firms to adopt more efficient technologies and processes. This "innovation offsets" hypothesis is backed by empirical studies demonstrating that clear regulatory standards reduce compliance costs and uncertainty. Blind (2012) highlights that regulatory clarity and consistency are essential for innovation, as they offer a predictable legal landscape and facilitate the standardisation of technologies.

> Third, China has developed substantial AI infrastructure, including high-performance computing resources and extensive data-sharing platforms. Leading firms like Alibaba, Baidu, and Huawei have leveraged their robust cloud computing capabilities to support AI R&D.

Fourth, the AI sector in China benefits from a thriving ecosystem that includes a large number of start-ups, tech giants, and academic institutions. Substantial venture capital investments and government funding support this ecosystem.

Fifth, China has developed a large skilled workforce in AI and related fields. It produces many AI researchers and engineers through its education system, emphasising STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines. Additionally, China has been successful in attracting international talent and collaborating with global AI experts.

Sixth, China's advancements in AI-specific hardware, particularly graphic processing units and AI accelerators, have been substantial due to domestic innovation, government support, and strategic adaptation to global challenges. Companies like Huawei, Biren Technologies, and Alibaba have developed powerful chips such as Huawei's Ascend series and Alibaba's Hanguang 800. Specialised firms' technologies have created custom AI accelerators for applications ranging from cloud computing to autonomous driving. State-backed initiatives, including substantial funding and policies under the "Made in China 2025" plan, have bolstered these efforts, fostering innovation and scaling up production capabilities.

India should take cues from China. To build a robust AI ecosystem, India should follow a multi-faceted approach: develop comprehensive AI strategies with significant government investment in a few centres of excellence which solely deal with AI establish clear and flexible regulatory frameworks to foster innovation, and invest in high-performance computing infrastructure. Supporting a vibrant AI ecosystem involves backing start-ups, tech giants, and academic institutions with venture capital and government funding. We need to prioritise STEM education to cultivate a skilled workforce. This also requires rethinking the curriculum, especially in higher education institutions.

Views are personal

### Tracking climate-related financial data

For extracting the

required data,

regulators can rely

on national agencies

to estimate

physical risk



THE INTERSECTION OF climate change

and financial risk management has crea-

ted a pressing need for reliable, compara-

ble, and affordable climate-related data.

Traditionally, financial risk management

relies on established and more predictable

data sets. Since the historical relationship

between climate change and finance does

not hold, relying on established data will

not help banks and financial institutions

to make informed, meaningful decisions.

and unique, different from what is tradi-

tionally used in financial risk analyses. In

addition, the exorbitant costs of collecting

and analysing such data are a serious chal-

lenge for small finance banks and non-

banking financial companies (NBFCs).

This is where regulators like the Reserve

Bank of India (RBI) have a role to play. They

can aid NBFCs, small finance banks, and

Despite the growing recognition of cli-

mate-related risks, significant data gaps

persist. For instance, while investors can

access carbon emission data, it is often

limited to Scope 1 (direct emissions) and

Scope 2 (indirect emissions from pur-

chased energy). Scope 3 emissions, which

include all other indirect emissions that

occur in a company's value chain, are not

as readily available. This is particularly true

for industries such as automotive, where

they are most relevant. Data from micro,

small, and medium enterprises is also

Banks often have incomplete asset-

level location data that fails to capture the

largely unavailable.

Data gaps in climate-related

financial information

other entities.

Climate-related financial data are new

### **LABANYA P JENA ABHINAV JINDAL**

Respectively, sustainable finance specialist, Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), and energy economist

exposure of adaptive capacity to climate change risks such as heatwaves, floods, precipitation, and drought. Moreover, information on companies' facilities, value chains, and customers is scarce. The available data is not uniform across different agencies, leading to inconsistencies. For example, carbon risk ratings vary significantly between providers, adding to the confusion.

### Lack of uniformity harms users

The lack of transparent, authentic, and comparable data creates substantial challenges for financial decision-makers. Investors and depositors

cannot differentiate between banks and financial institutions based on their financed emission intensity, the key indicator for assessing these institutions' carbon risk. Financial regulators,

including the central bank, struggle to identify and measure climate risks, rendering regula-

tory measures in effective. Without standardised data, regulated entities may make assumptions that present them in a favourable light, creating moral hazards. According to the Network for Greening the Financial System, over 65 organisations or private vendors provide different levels of emissions data, yet only seven of them are open-source. As a result, the data points are neither public nor auditable, creating transparency and authenticity issues.

Regulators can bridge the gap Recently, the country's financial reg-

ulators, particularly the RBI and the Securities and Exchange Board of India, have developed several guidelines and recommendations on climate-related financial risks for their regulated entities. While the existing disclosure guidelines mark a critical development in integrating climate risks into India's financial sector, regulators could also assist in enhancing the transparency, reliability, and comparability of climate-related financial information.

Regulators can provide common data points that all the regulated entities must use. All the financial regulators can create

a repository that collates all the aggregated and disaggregated public and private climate-related data material for the financial system. They can then publish it in the repository — for example, weather patterns to estimate financial losses from climate-induced

extreme weather events and a standardised methodology to calculate financed emissions.

For extracting the required data, regulators can rely on national agencies (such as the meteorological department) to estimate climate-related physical risk data, which could be converted into some standardised and quantifiable financial risk. They can then store all the borrowers' physical risks, which pertain to the impact of climate-induced weather events, on a borrower or investee's location, supply chain, and adaptive capacity in a single database. All banks, financial institutions, and regulators can access

this database.

Investing in data repositories and infrastructure,

regulatory compliance are critical for Indian banks

improving risk management, and ensuring

Creating a single repository will allow all banks and financial institutions to use similar data points, improving consistency. Since it is a public database, it will allow even small finance banks and financial institutions to use the data points, creating a level playing field.

#### Building robust data infrastructure on climate change

Regulators can also build a robust data infrastructure for tracking and reporting financed emissions, physical risk exposure, and transition readiness of banks and financial institutions. The aforementioned repository can help regulators to collect all the necessary data points from the data infrastructure. These data points will support regulators in better understanding and assessing climate-related financial risk in the financial system, thereby improving the supervision and regulation of their regulated entities. The data infrastructure will also help other decision-makers, such as policymakers and investors, measure climate risk in the financial system. Furthermore, decisionmakers can also assess the green economic transition readiness of banks and financial institutions, which will aid them in making better decisions.

repositories and infrastructure, improving risk management practices, and ensuring regulatory compliance will be essential for Indian banks and financial institutions. Such steps will help the country transition to a low-carbon economy and manage the financial risks associated with climate change.

Investing in climate-related data

### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

### **UPSC** and lateral entry

The Modi government's lateral entry policy for civil services is an indirect way of denying the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes a share in public employment, as pointed out by Rahul Gandhi. It is incomprehensible that the Union Public Service Commission advertised

vacancies for 45 posts at one go through the lateral entry mode. This is a way found by the Modi government to circumvent the existing reservation policy. Since lateral recruitment goes against the notions of social justice and common good, pressure must be brought to bear on the government to shelve the move.

—G David Milton, Maruthancode

### Neighbourhood troubles

While a stable and prosperous neighbourhood is in India's best interest, the changes in the region cannot be seen through the lens of Indian interests alone. Each development has meant notable changes for the people of that country and the common lessons are

ultimately rests with the people, not just the elected leader of the day, as history has repeatedly shown. It is in this spirit that we closely track developments in Bangladesh since Sheikh Hasina's ouster.

significant in that respect. Power

—CK Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

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EDITORIAL **HYDERABAD** 

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key Turn in the door once and turn once only We think of the key, each in his prison

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

— Ramnath Goenka

### **SUPREME COURT LETS** MINERAL-RICH STATES **OUT OF RESOURCE CURSE**

HE Supreme Court's verdict in July allowing states to tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing land has brought in a sense of euphoria among the mineral-rich regions of India. The ruling is momentous given the financial empowerment it provides to the states by fulfilling this longpending demand. The top court, which clearly defined the line between mineral royalty and tax, made the significant observation that the states' right to impose taxes with their legislative domain must be secured from "unconstitutional interference by parliament" to maintain fiscal federalism. It made a clear case for states such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha that suffer from what it called the 'resource curse', as they remain backward despite having natural riches. "Taxation is among the important sources of revenue for these states, impacting their ability to deliver welfare schemes and services to the people," the court observed. Soon after the judgement, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren described the ruling as historic, and said his state's persistent demand had finally been met as it stood to gain over ₹1.36 lakh crore.

Odisha too anticipates a windfall. While there is no clear number in sight, the state might mop up over ₹1 lakh crore in arrears from public sector and private mining companies as dues accruing since 2005. The eastern state had enacted the Orissa Rural Infrastructure and Socio-Economic Development (ORISED) Act, 2004 to levy tax on the annual value of all mineral-bearing land at a rate not exceeding 20 percent. However, the legislation was struck down by the Orissa High Court in 2005.

With the Supreme Court ruling, the state government will now have to compute the claims, which promises to be a complex job given the 20-year retrospective dues in the backdrop of different mining auction regimes. The state will have to factor in the uneven playing field, as some neighbouring states will likely charge differently from the ad valorem tax system Odisha is expected to deploy under ORISED. The state pins its hope for industrialisation on metal-linked businesses and many of its projects have mining linkages. Apprehensions over the mood of investors in the mining industries over the hefty arrears demanded by the state cannot be wished away. While the revenue from the mineral tax will surely help with development projects, the state will have to be careful in how it plays its cards.

### **KOLKATA FOOTBALL FANS** UNITE FOR GREATER CAUSE

NDIAN football has not had many reasons to be cheerful in recent times. The fortunes of the national team remain unsure. Sunil Chhetri, the men's side's record goal-scorer and talismanic leader, has recently retired from international football. However, in a remarkable display of unity, the fans of three of the most storied clubs in Indian football's rich history— East Bengal, Mohun Bagan and Mohammedan Sporting—joined hands on Sunday to protest the rape and murder of a doctor at Kolkata's R G Kar Medical College. It would be no exaggeration to say that the supporters involved in the protests went against the grain of over a century of fierce rivalry that is akin to tribalism. Some of them may have even violated family traditions for those unfamiliar with the socio-political fabric of Kolkata, fandom of a particular club is also a cultural identity. But they knew they could lend their collective voice to a greater cause.

The local authorities, anticipating trouble during a derby between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan that was scheduled for Sunday, cancelled the match a day before. Yet, a sizable, vociferous crowd assembled outside Salt Lake Stadium's gates in the evening. As the initial hundreds-strong crowd swelled beyond a thousand, the supporters exchanged clubs flags—regarded as 'treason' in normal times—sang songs and demanded justice for the family that had lost their daughter in the horrific tragedy. Even as the police detained a few supporters, others joined in, most notably Mohun Bagan captain and India international, Subhasish Bose; All India Football Federation President Kalyan Chaubey was also present. This was heartening to see at a time when some of India's leading sportspersons have been accused of keeping quiet on a number of societal issues. India's men's T20I captain, Suryakumar Yadav, was also unequivocal. "Educate your sons, your brothers, your father, your husband, and your friends," he posted on Instagram. This may be an issue plaguing society at large, but Indian sport has also suffered it from a close distance. Over the past 20 months, the country's leading wrestlers have been fighting their own battle off the mat. This is what sport can do if players and fans come together for a common cause. In this case, it was to use their platform in a powerful manner and demand accountability.

### QUICK TAKE

### REFORM U.P. EXAM SYSTEM

/ HILE the Centre tries to fix weaknesses in national tests, V tion's most populous state needs attention too. The Allahabad High Court recently directed the Uttar Pradesh government to prepare a revised list of 69,000 assistant teachers selected through a 2019 exam taken by 4.1 lakh candidates. A number of petitions had alleged that candidates from reserved categories had not been selected in the proportions provisioned. This comes a few months after the state cancelled exams to recruit police constables and public service commission officers following paper leaks. At a time unemployment is the biggest concern, such lapses are unconscionable.

N many ways, the fast-moving consumer goods or FMCG company is the defining foundational business that typifies early corporate India. The FMCG category—represented by the cake of soap you use, the skin cream that takes care of you through the winter

months, and your favourite brand of tea is something we have learnt to live with (and struggle without) over the decades. The brand at one end and the consumer at the other have been friends with benefits. Equal benefits even. Well, nearly.

As I tap this piece onto my desktop, my fingers quake with anticipation of the times ahead, even as this entire category is really at the crossroads today. The FMCG category represents a size of \$200 billion in India as of today. The biggest companies in the FMCG space are, however, experiencing a unique quake. Topline growth is rather static, price-lines are under stress, premiums are being challenged by the consumer at the retail points, and the rather comfortable margins these companies were used to reaping (and in some cases repatriating) are under acute stress.

The good and big companies in this space already started tweaking their business models some two years ago. The relatively braver and philosophically stoic companies are hoping the environment of business will change and they get their lost shares and margins back. And the smallest of them are in a state of confusion. All of them out there do, however, realise that it's not business as usual. Something big is amiss.

What's happening in FMCG-dom is a bit of an earthquake, a pandemic and a tsunami, all rolled into one. Let me call it a 'PanTsuQuake'. A tectonic shift of many kinds on many fronts. The trend-lines of each of these have been shaped over the last four years, ever since the Covid era gave way to a new era of consumption and consumptive behaviour all over again. Let me list the big seven.

**1. The distribution clout is over:** Once He who had the widest one ruled. upon a time, the company that had the biggest distribution reach in India was considered a market leader. In more ways than one, this company could create every kind of brand that would make an entry into the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, dressing room, and indeed every nook and cranny of a needy home. If your brand could enter into a sizeable percentage of the 14.6 million retail outlets in the country, life was made. You had set up the distribution channel with decades worth of hard work. It was now time to fill the pipe and let the consumer open the tap of consumption at the other end. At one end of the distribution channel

The comfortable margins that fast-moving consumer goods companies once reaped are under stress. All players in this \$200-bn market in India need to adjust to the changed field

### THE 7 QUAKES SHAKING UP **FMCG FIRMS**





MANDAR PARDIKAR

was the FMCG company and at another end, 301.3 million homes waiting to buy. Distribution was therefore the prime prowess.

Life was relatively simple until a few years ago. Today, we live in an age where distribution is not in the hands of the few. Yes, traditional distribution that is laborious, omni-channel and multi-layered is still with the big MNC of the overseas and Indian kind equally, but there is yet another layer of new distribution that has entered the market. Today, India can be reached in a jiffy through e-commerce of the B2B and B2C kind, quick-commerce applications such as Swiggy and Blinkit and more, and D2C platforms that reach out to you through social media channels. While that bottle of Dettol you ordered on Amazon might take

you three days to reach, Blinkit will bring it to you in 10 minutes. A D2C platform will bring you that totally new disinfectant brand you have never heard of before. You don't have to buy brands that sound boring and old anymore. You can buy the new, the ones with zing. And those who buy these stand out, it seems.

Distribution today is a true-blue democracy that even rebels against the hitherto egalitarian hold of the big businesses. Change is here.

2. There are four Indias, not just two: In the good old days, India was described as India 1 and India 2. While India 1 was urban, India 2 was rural. Today, we are four-in-one. India is urban, rurban, rural and deep-rural. In each of these avatars, there is the physical and virtual one to boot. Each of

these spaces are reached by the physical distribution system of yore and equally serviced by the virtual new distribution systems of today and tomorrow. Change is here.

3. Premium brands are a marketers paradigm: Premium brands do not exist anymore. What was premium yesterday is everybody's brand today. Surf is everywhere. Bourbon is not a premium biscuit anymore. Just as long as you can offer these brands in low-unit-price packs, the most premium brands penetrate into mass homes. Companies that stick to age-old marketing definitions and paper-partitions of premium, popular and mass are finding the going difficult. Change is here.

4. Small is beautiful, bountiful and even big: Recent consumer research exercises carried out by me in India are indicative of the gory fact that consumers are fed up with brand names they have been sticking to loyally for decades. They are looking for change. The small brands of today that tout the holistic, real, green, more healthy and better for the earth are making big inroads. These are quiet inroads, but nevertheless big. When these brands grow, they eat into the biggest brands in the category they live within. And these loser-brands are owned by the biggest FMCG companies around. Change is here.

5. The asset-light FMCG is the future: There are nimble new brand offerings hitting the FMCG market today. Many of these are using the advantage of new distribution through B2B intermediaries, e-commerce listings and D2C apps. They are totally asset-light. They have not sunk costs into factories of their own. They are not locked into geographies. They are able to outsource wherever they go. In the bargain, intermediary businesses of the intermediary pop-up factory and pop-up packaging unit have arisen in India. The asset-light FMCG offering is here. Change is here.

6. The FMCG game is a portfolio game: Every brand needs to offer something for the poor, the middle class, the rich and the super rich equally. The new FMCG game is a portfolio game. You must have a foot in every peg of the market. You must be a plug-and-play FMCG. Nifty. Nimble. Give everything to everybody. Change is here.

7. The biggest change is the generation: Finally, the biggest change in our lives is the generation. As on December 31, 2025, the largest living generation in our midst is going to be the alpha generation. Not many of us understand the needs, wants, desires, aspirations and, importantly, fantasies of this generation. Change is here.

Let's change.

(Views are personal) (harishbijoor@hotmail.com)

### QUALITY VS LENGTH OF LIFE IN AGEING INDIA

recently met X—once a domineering professor, now a lonely man living in a community for senior citizens. He is 90 years old. His wife and two sons are dead. He can still walk without help. X would like to die. But he can't because India believes in non-violence and has respect for life. The professor believes that this is an inversion of the truth it is because we do not respect life that he is still alive.

Euthanasia is not legal in India. A few countries like Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, parts of Australia, and parts of the US allow the

practice of euthanasia. Etymologically, in Greek, eu means happy and thanatos means death. The drugs used usually are barbiturates like pentobarbital. This can also be used in combination with muscle relaxants. Peaceful death occurs in minutes.

It's fashionable among optimists to talk of India as a young country. 'Vibrant' is the nearly-meaningless word they use to qualify India. Some 380 million of the population is aged 10-24 years, which is why they hope for a de-

mographic-economic dividend. But the current elderly population those above 60—is 153 million (by the magical year of 2047, this number is likely to touch 350 million), and it is not clear with what sense of comfort they are living. How many of them are rich enough to be assured of a good life in their terminal years? How many are likely to be looked after by their families? How many are healthy enough to enjoy a 'life of quality'? Our kindness to the elderly is kindness only because we do not ask these questions. It is sentimental evasion disguised as kindness.

In countries where euthanasia is legal if approved doctors agree that the patient is not mentally or physically able to have a 'quality life', he or she could opt for assisted death. And a rising number of people, especially from the elderly bracket, are opting for it.

We are a society that deifies youth. So, the truth is that we do not much care how the old live, simply because we have already got everything from



them. It is in this context that we must look at euthanasia as a possible option for those like the professor—whose eyes were once black and sharp, and now are grey and wet.

Why should elderly Indians be denied the option? The question assumes urgency given our poor social and



Unlike many other nations, India does not allow euthanasia. It may seem a luxury in a poor nation or a cruelty. But the government's poor nealtncare system is not in a position to take care of the elderly. By 2047, there will be more than 150 million Indians aged above 60

healthcare. If the government were in a position to take care of the elderly, one could still argue against this option. But then even in advanced societies where funds are not a problem, loneliness, depression and physical disabilities beset the old.

Humans have no choice in many significant matters. One cannot choose one's country of birth, parents, race, gender, IQ level or appearance. These are accidents contrived by fate. But one can choose when and how to die. Why is this not a fundamental right provided conditions are met?

In Europe, social security takes care of the old. In India, you may be paying up to 30 percent of your earnings to the

novel is *One Love and the Many Lives of Osip B* government every month for over 30

years. Yet, the day you retire, nothing comes back to you. Poor financial condition translates to poorer healthcare and other tardy standards of living, contributing to debilitating physical and mental problems. The net result is that quality of life suffers. Why not end one's life peacefully?

Empower the ailing and the lonely old to die. This is the least a poor country can do, no matter what its delusions of grandeur are. Euthanasia is especially relevant to India as its scriptures recommend the practice of vanaprastha to the old, meaning when one is old, one must disappear from society.

Euthanasia might look like a luxury in a relatively poor nation. But ask the old. The answers could surprise you. Who among us doesn't want to die well? Especially since most of us have not lived well. It is just that India has always been reluctant to adopt what 'seems' a cruel measure.

Till a few years ago, attempting suicide was a criminal offense. A desperately lonely person tries to hang themselves and, typically, the rope breaks. Instead of giving them a shot of brandy and an attentive ear, we had thought the right thing was to put them away in jail. That is our idea of love and respect for life. Our love is a kind of war.

Back to the professor. As I was leaving, he quoted the epigraph to T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*: I have seen with my own eyes, the Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her, "What do you want?", she replied, "I want to die."

The Sibyl was a prophetess in Cumae, an ancient city in Greece. She asked Apollo for eternal life and was granted the wish. But she forgot to ask for eternal youth. Who found her wasting away in a jar? A bunch of boys. To the young, the old is often just of curio value: the Sibyl in the jar of time.

Open the jar, release the spirit. (Views are personal)

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### MAILBAG

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### **Forex rate**

Ref: Rupee depreciation shows cracks in economy (Aug 19). The US dollar is a global reserve currency. It is imperative that the Indian government provides a good climate for increasing both foreign direct investments and portfolio investments and also produces quality goods and services to enhance our exports and maintain the rupee's exchange rate against the dollar in a narrow band. S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

### **Effective deterrent**

Ref: SC takes suo motu cognisance of Kolkata case (Aug 19). Though the Supreme Court has taken *suo motu* cognisance of the case, there seems to be no respite on murderous attacks on women in the country. A dearth of effective deterrent is the reason why such attacks continue unabated.

### **Protect children**

George Jacob, Kochi

Ref: Five in Arunachal arrested for minor's gangrape (Aug 19). It is so painful to hear of this incident. We need to protect children as they are vulnerable. Enough is enough. P Kiran Joseph, Dharmapuri

### Trust nobody

The Bengaluru police did a great job by nabbing in just a few hours a biker who allegedly raped a 21-year-old girl. Women should always remember never to take lifts from strangers and not to trust anyone who approaches to help. They must carry pepper spray and some sharp object with them.

### Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi

### IAS entry

Ref: 'Privatisation of IAS' is Modi's guarantee to end reservation, says Rahul (Aug 19). Rahul Gandhi raised a valid point regarding lateral entry into the IAS. To accommodate some people directly into top positions is nothing but making a mockery of the Constitution. The lateral entry system snatches the opportunity from the youth competing for the posts, apart from working against the principle of social justice. D V G Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram

### Karunanidhi tribute

The commemorative `100 coin released by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to mark the birth centenary of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi comes as a fitting tribute to one of the towering political leaders of south India. The late 'Kalaignar' worked the political arena like a colossus for 60 long years. His hallmark was his ability to maintain a close rapport with the party cadre and masses, communicating with them as one among them.

**B Suresh Kumar, Coimbatore** 

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# Maintain Highways, Not Just 'My Way'

Existing ones cost less to upgrade

The shift of emphasis for NHAI to maintain the existing highways was overdue after a decade of adding new capacity to the highway network. New highways are expensive and have a gestational period for economic benefits. In contrast, existing highways need less money for upgradation and the economic fallout is more proximate. This is principally due to reduced congestion and faster haulage, which brings down the economy's logistics costs. Since the bulk of cargo travels by road, the reprioritisation of maintenance could have a higher impact on how far it moves in a day. GoI's directive to NHAI may slow the pace of building new highways, but the overall impact ought to be favourable.

Improving overall network efficiency is the best available metric for all three modes of transport — road, rail and air. The same principle applies to railways and avia-



tion, where congestion avoidance may yield bigger gains than network expansion. Railways need more highspeed corridors to be able to claw back market share from road haulage. Safety on the railway network directly affects speed and could deliver outsized RoI. Airlines, likewise, need to build

fleet strength on existing routes before venturing into new ones. Subsidised air travel in new sectors has contributed to sickness among airlines in India.

Synergies among transport modes would, in fact, require a higher-speed railway network to decongest its highways. Cargo hauled by road typically travels further in a day than it does by rail, and this gap must be reduced. Highways are not only more expensive to build, they also have the highest carbon footprint among all forms of transport. An electric railway network is central to India's emissions reductions, and the goal is within reach. Track upgrades and safety are necessary conditions for a meaningful redistribution of India's freight market. The emphasis on maintenance should be widened to include railway rolling stock.

# Don't Rely on Nature For Pollution Control

Delhi's 22 consecutive 'satisfactory' air quality days—a combination of good wind speed and rain — is a gift of nature rather than human intervention. But relying on nature for pollution control can't be an option. Beijing is a case in point. Nature contributes to the city's high pollution levels, six times higher than WHO norms, despite its impressive record of reducing particulate pollution by 60% in 10 years. A recent study attributes Beijing's persistent pollution problem to non-particulate pollutants from surrounding areas. Though the dynamics of air pollution in India and Beijing are different, the Chinese city's experience is instructive as 131 Indian cities make slow progress towards achieving the target of a 40% reduction in



particulate concentrations by 2026. GoI's 2019 National Clean Air Programme(NCAP) must shed its city-centric approach. While a city will remain the unit for administrative ease of implementation, NCAP must adopt the airshed approach to deliver results. Pollution does not recognise geographical and administrative bound-

aries; tackling it requires identifying geographical regions by pollutant profile and interactions. The focus needs to be on all pollutants, not just PM10. This is critical as secondary pollution is rising from increased vehicular and industrial activities.

Source-apportionment studies to identify originating points for pollutants in the local and regional/airshed is the first step for designing pollution-control measures. Mechanisms are required to allow administrative units within an airshed to coordinate policy and action. NCAP units must share findings on pollutants with departments that can take measures to eliminate, substantially reduce or mitigate pollution sources. Concerted, broad-based action is necessary to make pollution reduction long-lasting, rather than just occasional gifts from nature.

India's remittance tax under LRS is a regressive step that threatens liberalisation gains

# Miss Forex for the Trees



nile there is unremitting talk about further policy changes in diverse areas of the Indian economy, there is relatively little discussion around the reversal, at least partially, of important and hitherto settled reforms.

This week is the 30th anniversary of an important threshold in our nation's economic evolution. On August 20, 1994, India's acceptance of IMF's Article 8 obligations was the culmination of the initial set of landmark reforms in liberalising our external payments from the erstwhile days of rationing foreign currency and irrationally pegged exchange rates administered by Kafkaesque discretion.

It may be recalled that in the aftermath of the BoP crisis in 1991, India had to be bailed out by IMF. But, by 1994, we were confident in our liberal and markets-based forex management to such an extent that we formally accepted full convertibility of the rupee for the current account of the balance of payments. Section 2a of Article 8 prohibits members from imposing 'restrictions on the making of payments and transfers for current international transactions'. There are exceptions that allow for specific considerations:

Transitional arrangements to facilitate graduation out of existing exchange strictures.

Historical bilateral agreements. Exchange controls for security reasons, including counterterrorism and anti-money laundering. For curbing monetary instability.

Acceptance of Article 8 obligations is not about gaining cosmetic international approbation. The allocative efficiency of the Indian external payments system was enhanced, and it



Let the cash go, it's not the '80s

was an important signal of the confidence in our capacity to manage a liberal exchange regime. It further galvanised investors' confidence that India is serious about an open balance of payments and was committed, in due course, to full capital account convertibility - a basic precursor to the internationalisation of the rupee on an

mitigate tax evasion by catching those who remit untaxed income, the gov should

If the goal is to

pay compensatory rate of interest on the withheld tax

appreciable scale that Indian policymakers, befitting a G5 economy, mention. There is no doubt that our commitment to liberal external payments has been a contributory factor why, during difficult times over the last three decades, our access to global capital has been relatively unhindered; this encompassed the Asian financial crisis in 1997, sanctions for the nuclear tests in 1998, the global financial crisis in 2008, the 'taper tantrum' in 2013, the actual taper in 2018 and the Covid outbreak in 2020.

for resident Indians to repatriate money abroad with the introduction of a transfer tax (IMF's terminology). In October 2020, TCS was introduced on remittances of more than ₹7 lakh under LRS; the tax rates of 0.5-5% were modest. In 2023, for categories other than education and health, TCS was hiked to 20%, which is not

modest by any yardstick. While the I-T law provides for the reimbursement of the tax by claiming redit, the measure is an exchange restriction since it is an additional burden on ma-

king current international payments and transfers. It is unclear whether this vicarious tax is a forex measure dressed up as a fiscal measure or vice versa.

The backdrop is a rise in remittances post-Covid, a durable spike in outward FDI and a precipitous drop in inward FDI. If the objective of the tax is to reduce outbound remittances, then it betrays a scarcity economy mindset of the past (pre-1994); that is, we are short of forex and, hence, it must, in some form, be conserved to manage the exchange rate. Restrictions inevitably engender discretion and delays that embolden a form of moral suasion to emerge within the administrative and Recently, we have made it costly banking system that increases explicit

financial costs (that are transparent), and non-transparent informal costs for citizens who avail of LRS. There has been talk of 'rationing' within LRS sub-categories, presumably for gift, maintenance for relatives abroad and investment. The additional burden is real as no interest rate is paid by the gov on the withheld tax amount, which given the lag in the filing and processing of taxes can take up to 16-18 months; undoubtedly, the time value of money is significant. If the goal is only to mitigate tax

evasion by 'catching' those who remit their untaxed income, then it behoves on the gov to pay a full compensatory rate of interest on the tax that is withheld. Collateral consequences of policy modification entail changes in incentives of economic actors regarding policy stability, credibility of rules and overall expectations about the future. In private, shrewd stakeholders, not unreasonably, wonder if the transfer tax on remittances could herald future intermittent changes in our external payments' architecture. Therefore, the gov must figure out whether the transfer tax is the best deterrent against tax evasion, leaving aside that evaders are much more likely to use the 'hawala' route rather than formal channels like authorised dealers. The tax, presumably unwittingly, has engendered distortion in the forex market; a 'dual exchange rate' is encouraged because, inevitably, the curb market in the rupee gets a fillip. It has also undermined faith, to an extent, in the unfettered two-way movement of foreign currency in the current account.

In conclusion, it cannot be the case that evaded income is only used for purchasing foreign currency. So, should the remit of TCS be expanded to include other sizeable domestic purchases? One sincerely hopes not. Even for tracking information, TCS is superfluous because of the annual information returns regime that is in place. TCS on remittances under LRS has no economic virtue worth the name, hence we must get rid of it.

The writer is former governor, RBI

### Build a Small Modular Reactor Policy





Els Reynaers & **M P Ram Mohan** 

With energy transition becoming a crucial weapon in the war against climate change, nuclear power is back in fashion. Recent reports said India and Russia are working on a ₹10,500 crore deal for the supply of nuclear fuel and core components to two new units in Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant. In her budget speech, Nirmala Sitharaman also laid the roadmap for the increased role of nuclear power in India's energy mix through greater use of small modular reactors (SMRs). She also laid out the steps that will be unveiled, including the involvement of the private sector. What remained unsaid is that there will be a need for structural changes in how we regulate nuclear power and, therefore, a need to arrive

at a broader consensus. But, first, let's look at the challenges: Of the 195 countries, only 35 possess civilian nuclear reactors.

▶ There are about 411 operational nuclear reactors globally, generating about 10% of global electricity. India's 24 nuclear power plants

Manufacturing's role, currently con-

tributing about 17% to India's GDP, in

the economy is crucial. GoI's aim is to

raise this share to 25% by 2030. This

will require growth at a rapid 15-16%

manufacturing heft is the 'China + 1'

adopting in their effort to build more

world. India has uniquely positioned

itself as a leader of the 'Global South',

forging strong relations with key glo-

bal powers from the US to Russia and

India's manufacturing sector is now

getting a greater push from GoI and

corporates under the Atmanirbhar

Bharat and Make in India initiatives.

It is also actively addressing challeng-

es like the ease of doing business, high

cost of logistics and relative lack of com-

petitive access to global export markets

that have, so far, blunted the sector's

potential. Policy initiatives like PLI.

key export partners are all aimed at

surmounting these challenges.

GST and FDI reforms, and FTAs with

With over half of our population un-

Israel to Iran.

strategy companies and countries are

resilient supply chains in a post-Covid

CAGR over the next seven years.

A key driver of India's growing

(NPPs) account for 8,080 MWe, which is 2.76 % of India's energy-generation mix. India aims to increase it from 8,180 MW to 22,480 MW by 2031.

After India's long historical isolation from international nuclear trade until 2008, the ambition was to scale up and opt for larger-size NPPs.

Yet, small is in again, and SMRs, nuclear reactors with power outputs between 10 MW and 300 MW, are the talk of the town.

India's policy direction is clear: the private sector will have a role. But what would this entail? Unavoidable is an amendment of the Atomic Energy Act (AE Act) 1962, which until now only allows licences to be issued to a GoI department, any authority or corporation established by it, or a government company. Hence, joint ventures among PSUs would be possible, but private companies are still excluded under the AE Act.

The definition of a government company and the entities that can obtain licences also directly influences the applicability of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLND Act) 2010, which focuses on the strict liability of licensed operators in case of damage caused by a nuclear accident.

However, it is important to remember that no SMR has been commercially deployed anywhere in the world. There's an R&D race, with about 80 SMR concepts being under development across countries. The first to obtain an approved design could swoop a



It's modern, it's safe, it's you

significant share of this new market. Modular means that the systems and components of an SMR can be factoryassembled and then transported and installed on-site as a unit. The costeffectiveness of SMRs has yet to be established.

As observed by the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) and NITI Aayog, the market for a single SMR design should be significant enough to achieve economies of scale. This, in turn, would require regulatory harmonisation and safety scrutiny by nuclear regulators across the globe, which International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and NEA are facilitating. Safety assessments and reviews by the regulatory bodies of nuclear reactor models are of prime importance.

India's Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) is yet to publish its safe-

ty codes for SMRs, which are bound to include smaller evacuation zones than NPPs. If SMRs, which have the added advantage of being able to be deployed both in on- and off-grid mode, are used widely, including by industry, to satiate energy requirements, the need for engagement with citizens living or working close to these SMRs and gaining their public trust will become crucial.

Apart from the need for a robust SMR regulatory regime, India would do well to facilitate comprehensive parliamentary debates and public consultations, culminating in clear language reflecting the underlying intent to allow the private sector to participate in the SMR sector while designing a broad-based public engagement model with transparency as its cornerstone.

India's unwavering commitment to nuclear energy since its independence is a feat that very few countries have achieved. It has the necessary know-how, a vast pool of dedicated and brilliant nuclear engineers and an experienced nuclear regulatory body in place. It must now seize the moment in the interest of the nation and its long-term climate change goals to build its SMR policy and legislation on a meaningful and effective public engagement model.

Reynaers is partner, MV Kini Law Firm Mumbai, and Mohan is professor, IIM Ahmedabad. Both are associated with Nuclear Law Association, India

### Making Make in India Tick'n'Run



We can't help but feel for Oxbridge. The global higher education market is so insanely competitive these days that no institution can rest on its laurels — or ivy-covered walls. Some unis flaunt their histories like a vintage wine collection, while others boast state-of-the-art campuses and lab facilities. With Oxbridge, its litany of alumnican also be trotted out as window-dressing. But Imran Khan, an Oxford blue from Keble College? A bit of barrel bottom-scraping, no?

We have nothing against the Great Khan, certainly one of cricket's greatest. But let's just say his career path has been quite the reverse swing since his salad days. For one of Britain's still-premier unis, to turn to a bandoblast from the past like Khan as an influencer is Ox-moronic. The former Pakistani PM has reportedly applied to run in the election on October 28 to become Oxford's next chancellor, replacing former Hong Kong's British governor Chris Patten. Oxford has relaxed its rules for Khan, allowing nominations and voting to be carried out online. Although a non-executive role, the chancellor chairs the committee appointing the vice-chancellor and is involved in fundraising, advocacy and oversight. How Khan, not the epitome of political straight batting, will handle his duties if elected is anyone's guess. But, then, Oxford does have an archaic ring to it these days.

der 25, we possess a vast, young workforce. This gives us the capacity to supply the world with a diverse range of skills while also acting as a stable source of talent for domestic manufacturing companies. This same demographic dividend, together with the rest **Anant Goenka** of our population, also creates a vast consumption market. As incomes rise, we are set to become the world's third-

> largest consumer market by 2027. Global companies and investors alike are increasingly viewing India as a key market to focus on in the future. Apple's revenues from India, for instance, are expected to cross \$10 bn this year. The country is also the fastest-growing market for players like Mercedes,

Netflix, SAP and other MNC giants. No major economy has seen breakout growth without exports being a key part of its story. We need to take our cost advantage of a young workforce,

Complete the picture

power costs coming down as a result of RE, and our own way of frugal innovation. Companies often adopt a sprayand-pray approach when trying to sell local products to global markets. To exponentially increase exports, we need to capture deep insights of our global customers, build a complete and differentiated product range for those markets, and develop strong distribution channels in our focused geographies.

More importantly, we need to make 'Make in India' closer to 'Made in Japan' (rather than 'Made in China'). Japan's post-World War 2 manufacturing success is nothing short of miraculous. The likes of Edward Deming introduced Total Quality Management (TQM) in Japan, impacting the culture of companies to ensure long-term thinking, deep customer centricity,

strong systems and people-focus. Various Indian companies like Mahindra, Tata Steel and CEAT have already reaped benefits of this approach. It's time for more organisations to leverage an already well-established playbook and adopt a high-quality mindset.

Data analytics, GenAI and IoT are proving to be transformative in the way we produce and deliver goods. Predictive maintenance, quality control, supply chain management, customer support, cost reduction, product design and worker safety — all these areas are benefiting from such Industry 4.0 technologies. However, we must adopt these technologies keeping in mind the Indian context.

We need to keep creating jobs. This should not be an opportunity to replace people, rather upskill them to do high-quality work and increase women in the workplace as automation reduces physical work.

India's investments in R&D are a mere 0.7% — developed economy average is 3%. A significant portion of R&D funding originates from government. Large enterprises need to take up this spend and not look at near-term RoI but realise the importance of innovation, tech and investment in marketing in building global brands.

'Where you play' is more important than 'how you play'. Our selection of key future S-curves will be an important determinant for our growth. We need to invest in new sectors including semiconductors, RE, electronics and EVs.

India's manufacturing growth transcends a singular sector. Its auto sector is the world's fourth largest. The country's footprint in telecom and smartphone manufacturing is the second largest. The pharma sector is the thirdlargest worldwide.

While we put the pieces of the growth puzzle together, we must not forget that growth needs to be both inclusive and sustainable, and shouldn't come at the cost of our environment. We need to go beyond statutory norms, adopt long-term sustainability goals and drive them by embedding sustainability into our performance metrics.

The writer is vice-chairman, RPG Enterprises



### THE SPEAKING TREE

### What Makes Love Ugly

### **SWAMI SUKHABODHANANDA**

In people management, one must learn the art of building bridges instead of walls. Friendship is the art of building bridges. Friendliness is like the fragrance of a flower, whereas friendship is a relationship.

Look at the whole world as a friend and you will build a friendly energy around you. Like a plant, you must grow friendship, water it and take care of it. All non-friendly people are cowards. He is truly a hero who makes the whole world his friend.

We don't allow the energy of love to flower forth in an upward direction. Love initially is expressed as an inner connection. Then it turns into possessiveness. It is this turn that makes love ugly. To care and connect is one thing, and to be possessive is yet another thing. One has to consciously develop non-possessive-

ness in a relationship. If the body itself is not mine, for I must leave it when I die, how can a relationship be mine? This understanding liberates, while non-understanding becomes ugliness in motion.

Another reason why love turns into ugliness is that love and hate, at one level, are indirectly connected. When you love a person and he does not fulfil your love and you start hating the per son, your hatred is an inverted form of love.

Negative emotions should be discarded like how one discards a bad habit. It is this discipline one must practice daily.

The moment you get interested in others, you will find people getting attracted to you. Drop the words 'I' and 'mine' as much as possible, and use words like 'you' and 'we' more often. This will connect you to people.



### Straight Man Richard Russo

Teddy is an insanely cautious

driver, unwilling to goose his little Civic into a left turn in front of oncoming traffic. 'The cars are spaced just wrong. I can't help it,' he explains when he sees me grinning at him. Teddy's my age, forty-nine, and though his features are more boyish, he too is beginning to show signs of age. Never robust, his chest seems to have become more concave,

It occurs to me as I study him that Teddy would have a hard time starting over - that is,

learning how

unfamiliar

things work.

competing,

findinga

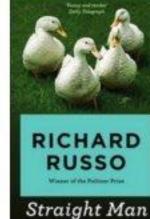
mate. The

business of

young men.

Why would

which emphasises his small



paunch....

I have to start over? he wants to know.... Apparently, to judge from the way he's looking at me now, I have spoken my thought out loud, though I wasn't

aware of doing so .... Having spied a break in the oncoming traffic, he takes his foot off the brake and leans forward, his foot poised over but not touching the gas pedal, only to conclude that the gap between the cars isn't as big as he thought, settling back into his seat with a frustrated sigh.

### Chat Room

### Invisible Fork in The GST Road

Apropos 'Edu Min Steps in After

IITs Get GST Notices' by Deepshikha Sikarwar (Aug 19), a closer observation of the tax liability of the research grants received by academic institutions for which show-cause notices have been issued — reveals an important issue regarding the type of disputes that need to be left for normal adjudication by the GST authorities and the type of disputes that need to be deliberated by the finance ministry (read: GST Council). In absence of an apparent demarcation, clear guidelines are necessary. If the nature of the dispute per se deserves resolution by the GST Council, the strenuous efforts made by the Directorate General of GST Intelligence to delve into the same dispute become infructuous, which can be avoided.

TR RUSTAGI New Delhi

centre stage.



### A thought for today

At the end of the day, the goals are simple: Safety and security JODI RELL

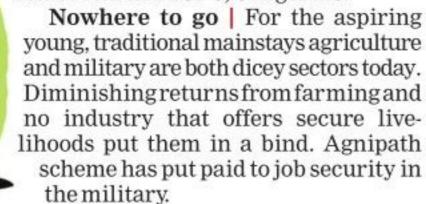
### The Haryana Story

Poll-bound state is a microcosm of the larger problem of young people desperately searching for decent jobs

The Haryana unit of unaffiliated farmers body Samyukt Kisan Morcha is expected to deliberate today on a legal guarantee for MSP, agricultural pricing body CACP's formula for calculating MSP, and related matters, including a demand for a memorial for 736 farmers who died during the farmers' protest. Regardless of the outcome, it sets the tone for the Oct 1 election to the 90-seat assembly. SKM had dismissed CM Saini's recent MSP declaration - in campaignmode made at a BJP rally in Kurukshetra – as an "election stunt". Farmers claim they stand to lose ₹3,851cr under new MSP.

Countdown begins | As incumbent BJP govt and its second CM Saini - BJP had swiftly removed Khattar reading the antiincumbency tea leaves pre-LS polls - push ahead on their campaign 'Nonstop Haryana', they face a tough challenge from Hooda-led Congress campaign 'Haryana Maange Hisab'. Though the template of joblessness, farmers' crisis, and a stagnating economy is familiar,

> Haryana is no easy battle-LS polls to its 10 seats returned BJP 5, Congress 5.



Shaky on jobs | Haryana's govt and opposition have been in a long-running face-off on the state's high unemployment rates, sparring over CMIE data that showed Haryana had India's highest unemployment rate against state counter with PLFS data, putting it at fourth highest. Bottomline: Haryana fared worse than neighbours Punjab, UP, Himachal, even Rajasthan. Govt's bid to fix the jobs crisis with a 75% quota for domicile workers was expectedly stayed by its HC. The crisis is evident in the spike in out-migration. IELTS centres are mushrooming. Between 2018 and 2022, over 30,000 students went overseas to study – 2,000 of them were stuck in Ukraine when Russia struck.

**Gurgaon stalls** | Fresh investment in the island of prosperity has faltered, following the Jat agitation, farmers' stir, and communal violence that spikes sporadically-sometimes against namaz, sometimes against "illegal immigrants". At the same time, industrial activity concentrated in Gurgaon and Faridabad has seen investments shrink in the state's other industrial sectors. Much political imagination will be required to reach out to voters – to farmers and the young - aspiring for incomes halfway comparable to counterparts in other rich states, and cousins overseas.

### No Happy Ending

Delay in making a sexual harassment in Malayalam film industry probe public, is as dark as the findings

ven as India is grappling with a nightmarish example of how → unsafe women are in healthcare, comes a reminder of their lack ✓ of safety in another prominent sector of our economy. It comes from the Malayalam film industry, ironically on a day its *Aattam* was being celebrated for winning the Best Feature Film national award. The film engages with sexual harassment with acute sensitivity while the Justice Hema Committee report released yesterday finds that sexual harassment is widespread across Mollywood.

But arguably, the report's contents are less galling than how much of a fight it took to get them into the public domain. Ever since a woman actor was abducted and sexually assaulted in a moving car

> in Kochi in Feb 2017, not only the Women in Cinema Collective that was formed in response, but also other voices have shared accounts that we now find echoed in the report. For example, that women suffer sexual demands from the time they enter the industry; that harassment, abuse and assault take place across work sites, transport and accommodation; and that women are punished when they resist, including through fan clubs. And yet, the report commissioned in July 2017, and shared with Pinarayi govt in 2019, has been released only now, after several legal battles, and some of it still redacted. Thus, the question of when any of its

recommendations, or indeed any serious reform at all, will be implemented, feels absurd. From where should one draw such hope?

One idea that emerges clearly from the report is that it's going to be a question of numbers. It says that currently India has only 9% female directors, 12% female scriptwriters, 15% female producers, and "very few" female members in decision-making bodies related to films. Plus, all of this is much less than the global average. But that women need numbers to take on the "mafia sangham" is a terrible reflection on our democracy.

### Superman supermoon

How the purnima gets poets going, and wackos

**Shinie Antony** 



Astronomers, astrologers, aam admi – the purnima had all agog. It's a moon...it's a full moon...it's supermoon! 'But, but, but,' went soothsayers, 'it is Mercury retrograde and this full moon is in Aquarius!' And while they warned in a low voice that early Aug already saw a new moon, we were ready for the Superman of supermoons. Those who spy the Man in the Moon on clear nights – a face peeping down from the sky – believe Neil Armstrong is

still there. Since it is made of cheese, the moon, one hopes, is free of mice. Moon easily rhymes with June and soon, ingratiating itself with poets. It went from being a black and white discemerging out of dark clouds in early films to a perfectly round halogen light manually or digitally hung, its main purpose

being to enable amour on Earth. Chand is there in every love song, being compared to female faces and getting men drunk on moonlight, and perhaps moonshine. The *chand* is *khoya-khoya* or *pyara-pyara*. Endearments go from chand ka tukda, a piece of the moon, to chaudhvin ka chand, the full moon. Propagation of the species is the moon's sole responsibility. 000

Ghouls too favour full moon nights. Time to dress up and practise their laugh, for on full moon nights the living are said to be sleepless. Studies suggest melatonin production may rise on such nights, leading to insomnia, and thus a readiness to be haunted. Full moons have multiple passports. In Jan they travel as Wolf Moon, Snow Moon in Feb, Pink Moon in April and Strawberry Moon in June, then Harvest Moon in Sep and Hunter's Moon in Oct. Blue moon, blood moon, sickle moon, paper moon... Lunar eclipses are studied by scientists and the hocus-pocus industry alike.

The moon has quakes-moonquakes-and water too. It sends us moonbeams in fairy tales. No one waxes and wanes like the moon: new, waxing crescent, first quarter, waxing gibbous, full, waning gibbous, last quarter, waning crescent. The first of the four this year, the latest supermoon has pet names like Dog Moon and Red Moon. Also Barley Moon, Herb Moon, Corn Moon, Grain Moon-named obviously by a hungry person. 'Love you to the moon and back' is a common late-night text. Everyone is agreed upon the grave consequences on the human heart 'when the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie'.

# Only Laws Won't Protect Docs

SC begins suo motu hearing of the RG Kar case today. Former CJI writes that though 23 states have health workers' safety laws, their impact needs thorough audit. Penalties must be uniform nationwide

**NV Ramana** 



The rape and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, Kolkata, has put the issue of doctors' safety at the centre

of national discourse. Cities across India have seen protests. And as the citizens' marches continue, these must spur govts to take corrective actions that are long overdue. Our constitutional aspirations of a healthy and dignified life for all can only be realised by having a strong public health system, in which doctors get all the respect that is their due.

**Healthcare neglected** | Unfortunately, healthcare just hasn't gotten the attention it needs, from govt after govt. All governmental failures over time have ended up in the corporatisation of the health system today. This, in turn, has resulted in a widening gap in quality health services available to different sections of society. A large section of India's population cannot afford private healthcare. They depend on the public healthcare system, so it ends up seeing very high patient volumes.

It follows that govt doctors are under tremendous pressure. But additional factors that make their work difficult include the great infra inadequacies in govt hospitals. Govt doctors as well as paramedical staff are challenged by (i) inadequacies of infra and resources, (ii) poor working conditions and harassment of doctors and paramedical staff, and (iii) women doctors suffer more due to lack of safe environments and adequate infra. All of this is worsened by the inability of medical associations to effectively redress the issues.

Union and state govts, and courts have intervened time to time to facilitate and monitor health and safety of healthcare professionals. Given the need of the hour, the Epidemic (Amended) Ordinance, 2020 was passed. Memories of the pandemic are rife, but clearly the drive to ensure fair and safe working conditions

for doctors and other healthcare professionals hasn't kept pace.

Violence, huge concern | Doctors frequently operate in volatile environments,

of 'Prevention of Violence Against Healthcare Professionals and Clinical Establishments Bill, 2022,' which was introduced in 2022, has taken



percentage of doctors who experienced violence at the workplace was 75% in India, and 47% in US, with assailants generally being patients and their relatives.

A recent Indian Medical Association survey highlighted that 82.7% doctors feel stressed out, 62.8% fear violence, and 46.3% say violence is the main cause of their stress. The less experienced younger doctors and women doctors are more vulnerable to violence. This is why the demand for passing and implementation

Violence and Damage to Property) Act, also known as Medical Protection Act (MPA), has been implemented in about 23 states in India, though its efficacy remains doubtful. The numbers of

FIRs registered, convictions

and awareness of stake-

holders, are issues that need

deeper exploration. As with other enactments, one must have an audit system to understand the statistics of complaint registrations, chargesheets and convictions under this legislation. Merely enacting a law isn't enough. With exception of, inter alia, Tamil Nadu and

Pondicherry, which have prescribed a punishment ranging from 3 to 10 years, other states have limited punishment to 3 years along with fine. If the disparity in sentencing is varied across states, then Centre must step in to consolidate and provide a uniform model law in consultation with states.

Coming to other industries, Parliament had earlier introduced The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. This code does not cover or encompass the health industry in particular. So, there's an urgent need to codify safety concerns of doctors throughout India. In fact, Centre ought to come up with a model law to be circulated among states for implementation.

Plan for safety | Security of public health workers is a policy issue that requires long-term planning. For this, courts have to make way for govt to consider the issue on a long-term basis and bring about changes

uniformly.

An equally horrific incident involving a judicial officer in Jharkhand had occurred during my tenure of chief justiceship. The matter was taken up suo motu by Supreme Court, wherein court ordered Jharkhand HC to monitor the investigation.

Last, we must foster an environment where more young people want to become doctors and serve society. Many aspiring doctors from small towns and rural areas rely on govt for education, support and employment. But, beyond this initial support, govt must look out for the welfare of its doctors and improve their working conditions. Absence of such a fostering environment will only further the brain drain where young and talented doctors do not see a future in India.

Medical bodies and govt agencies must put their heads together to address larger concerns like higher salaries, pensionary benefits, social security, security measures and better working conditions. The RG Kar horror and the outrage it has evoked reflect the failure to do so and give doctors in India their due.

### The Mandala Theory Of Smart Foreign Policy

The Bangladesh crisis has brought out the complex nature of Indo-US relationship. But this is of a piece with India's age-old norms of statecraft, codified by Chanakya

**Ashwin Sanghi** 



Chanakya, the master of statecraft, provided an ancient framework for foreign policy in his *Arthashastra*. He suggested that states pursue foreign policies that protect their interests and security on some issues while

recognising that other states will do the same. He perceptively wrote, "There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self-interest. This is the bitter truth." Known as the Mandala construct, Chanakya postulated that one's foreign relations would span four types of states: arior enemies, mitra-or allies, madhyama-or mediators, and udasina - or neutrals.

He then outlined six possible foreign policy strategies - the shadguna. First, sandhi - a treaty for both parties to maintain stability. Second, asana – strategic neutrality or status quo. Third, yana - war preparation to signal readiness to attack or defend. Fourth, vigraha – or active conflict. Fifth, sansraya - seeking an alliance with others to counter a threat. Finally, there is dvaidhibhavaor employing multiple strategies in parallel with one or more states. Nothing exemplifies dvaidhibhava better than Indo-US relationship. The proof of that is Bangladesh.

For those who believe that Indo-US relationship is that of *mitras* – or allies – there is enough to back that claim. Both countries are democracies and understand the necessity of countering China. US is one of India's top three arms suppliers, with a rapidly increasing share. Substantial investments by American companies are flowing into India. With massive purchases, India supports many business sectors in US. Both countries have worked towards strengthening Quad and G20. America is India's biggest trading partner and one of the countries with which India has a substantial trade

surplus. The joint Indo-US statement in 2022 affirms "a vision of the US and India as among the closest partners in the world."

But for those who believe that the relationship is that of aris-or enemies-there is enough proof, too. For example, it is common practice for USCIRF to make statements about perceived state of religious minorities in India. US state department routinely expresses "concern" about India's internal matters, such as CAA. US applies pressure on India over an alleged plot to assassinate a Khalistani militant while confabulating in Five Eyes with its Anglosphere allies like Canada. On its part, India rankles America by buying Russian oil and arms and refusing to ditch Putin. It maintains a relationship with Iran that US has problematic ties with. Historically, it has walked a tough, independent line on nuclear weapons. It even works within BRICS to find alternatives to American dollar.

So, which view should we believe? Is Indo-US relationship one of allies or enemies? The American novelist T Scott Fitzgerald wrote that the test of intelligence is "the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." In Quantum Theory, Schrödinger's Cat can simultaneously be alive and dead. And in foreign policy, the Indo-US equa-

tion can simultaneously be one of mitra and ari.

Nothing symbolises this better than present crisis in Bangladesh. On Bangladesh situation, US is telling India that if it wishes to be a friend to US yet remain unallied with it, then US is free to use regime change playbook in India's neighbourhood to advance its interests in Indian Ocean. If refugees destabilise India's eastern borders, so be it. If it results in India's defence spending shooting up, wonderful. If Islamist forces are unleashed, cool. But hey, we can still be friends!

But geopolitics can be visualised as interaction of multiple forces, much like tugs and pulls of various vectors in physics. Each player exerts a force or vector that represents its interests, and these can vary in magnitude and direction. The combined effect of all these individual vectors results in a net vector that can often be unexpected.

The truth is that US values India's

democracy, economic rise, and geographical position. But it would like India's unwavering commitment to US while keeping its options open. In recent years, India has been playing the same game - testing the boundaries to see what it can get US to overlook. It's easy to get swayed into euphoria or despair by news events of a given day, but truth is both countries want marriage while scouring for affairs on the side.

China's military strategist Sun Tzu wrote that all warfare is based on deception. He says, "When able, we should seem unable. When we are in action, we must seem inactive. When near, we should seem far. When far, the enemy should think we are near." We forget that deception is needed not only in rivalries but also in alliances. Both countries are indulging in it, bringing a sense of unpredictability to their moves. What needs to be understood is the predictability of such unpredictability.

The writer is an author of several works of fiction

### I THRIVE ON



### **Sacred**space



Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about

un-becoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place.

**Paulo Coelho** 

### In Its True Sense, Raksha Bandhan Is Gender-Neutral

Sonal Srivastava

**Calvin & Hobbes** 

I THRIVE ON

CHANGE.

aksha Bandhan was celebrated with great enthusiasm yesterday, ▲ Land i participated in a ceremony where not only did sisters tie rakhis to their brothers and sisters, but brothers, too, tied rakhis to their sisters and each other. This was done to honour deep bonds and to pledge mutual protection against negativity.

Traditionally, the festival is marked by sisters tying rakhis to their brothers, who, in return, promise to protect them in difficult times. According to a legend, Draupadi tore a piece of cloth from her dress to tie around Krishna's bleeding finger after he cut it while flying a kite. Moved by Draupadi's gesture, Krishna promised to protect her from evil and fulfilled this vow when Dusshasan, one of the Kauravas, attempted to disrobe her in Hastinapur.

In modern times, Rabindranath

Tagore suggested that Raksha Bandhan should not only create strong bonds between brothers and sisters but also foster camaraderie between Hindus and Muslims, especially in the aftermath of the partition of Bengal in 1905. To Tagore, Raksha Bandhan symbolised not just a brother's promise to protect his sister but also a connection between people of different faiths, embodying the spirit of unity.

The act of tying a rakhi acknowledges the divine Shakti in everyone. Thus, in its true spirit, the festival is gender-neutral. It is not confined to a woman, sister, tying a rakhi to a man, brother, seeking a promise of protection. Rather, it celebrates human relationships and

recognises the Divine in all beings. Both brothers and sisters should tie rakhis to each other. A sister can tie a rakhi to her sister, and a brother should strength. Durga's victory over Mahishathathere is no room for duality.

also tie one to his sister, acknowledging that the sister embodies shakti and has the strength to protect her brother if necessary. In modern times, sisters care for their brothers just as much as brothers care for their sisters. There are many instances of sisters protecting

their brothers from disease and harm. Most recently, a 21-year-old woman in Navi Mumbai donated a

sizeable part of her liver to save her 17-year-old brother. In the Indic pantheon, many goddesses were created to protect the devas from THE SPEAKING TREE asurs, representing evil

> tendencies. One of the strongest asurs, Mahishasur, could only be sublimated by a woman. To defeat him, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and other devas combined their energies to create Durga, who embodies the shakti of the male deities and serves as a source of their

over destructive and negative tendencies. Tying the sacred thread is a

sur symbolises righteousness prevailing

reminder to maintain the purity of the Self and a promise to live by the right values. Anyone can tie a rakhi to anyone, regardless of gender. According to the Brahma Kumaris, the most significant battles we face are not external but internal-our weaknesses, racing thoughts, and inner turmoil that disrupt our peace. Thus, the key rituals of Raksha Bandhan, like applying a tilak on the forehead and tying a rakhi, serve as reminders that we are Atman, encouraging us to embrace our real Self.

Thus, the act of tying a rakhi should not be confined to the patriarchal notion that a woman is weaker and seeks protection from a male sibling. Instead, the festival should be marked by strong camaraderie among individuals, reflecting the spirit of Shankara's Advaita-

### The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

### PM's Ukraine visit

Tightrope walk for Modi under Russian gaze

HE government's announcement that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Ukraine later this week comes amid reports of the death of a Kerala man in a Ukrainian attack on a Russian military camp. The Indian fatalities — around 10 so far in the nearly 30-monthold war — are a pressing reason why the PM is likely to tell Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy what he told Vladimir Putin last month: Moscow and Kyiv should resolve their conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. And Ukraine is expected to reiterate that it wants India to play a significant role for restoring peace, even though Delhi has deftly confined itself to being a messenger between the warring sides rather than a mediator.

In an assertion of its strategic autonomy, India has made no effort to conceal its pro-Russia leanings, but at the same time it has continued to engage with Ukraine. Zelenskyy had not minced words when he described PM Modi's July visit to Russia — and a hug with Putin — as a 'huge disappointment and a devastating blow to peace efforts'. Apparently, it was this criticism that prompted the PM to do a balancing act — he lamented the loss of innocent lives in a missile strike on a children's hospital in Kyiv, a response that wasn't music to Moscow's ears.

Even as Russia will closely observe the PM's upcoming meeting with Zelenskyy, the hard fact is that the discharge of Indians from the Russian military remains a work in progress. PM Modi had reportedly got an assurance from Putin in this regard last month, but not much has happened on the ground. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told the Lok Sabha on August 9 that of the 91 Indian nationals recruited in the Russian army, 69 were awaiting discharge. Exerting pressure on Moscow to ensure their expeditious return should be a top priority, but India also has to tread warily so as not to antagonise its all-weather friend.

### Online arsenal

Web-based apps fuelling illegal arms trade

HE rise of web-based apps and dark web marketplaces has ushered in a newera of criminal activity, particularly in the illegal weapons trade. Investigations have revealed that criminals are increasingly using these platforms to procure and smuggle firearms, enabling them to carry out targeted killings and other heinous crimes. The recent arrest by the Punjab Police of a Rajasthan-based weapon smuggler from Shambhu highlights the alarming ease with which such activities are conducted. The suspect, who was intercepted while smuggling illegal arms to Bathinda, was allegedly connected to a broader network involving foreign-based gangsters and local suppliers, all coordinated through encrypted apps like Signal.

This case is not an isolated incident. In March, the State Special Operating Cell, Mohali, had arrested four smugglers and seized some weapons from them. Globally, the dark web has become a haven for illegal arms dealers, where anonymity is guaranteed, and transactions are untraceable. Studies indicate that handguns and semiautomatic weapons are the most commonly traded items, posing a severe threat to public safety. The dark web's ability to mask identities and locations makes it challenging for law enforcement agencies to track down the criminals involved in this trade.

The implications of this trend are far-reaching. As technology advances, so does the sophistication of criminal operations. Law enforcement agencies must adapt quickly, developing new strategies and tools to counteract these digital threats. The global community also needs to collaborate more effectively, sharing intelligence and resources to tackle the cross-border nature of this crime. The flourishing illegal arms trade via webbased platforms is a grim reminder of the dark side of technology. To protect society, it is imperative that we address this issue with urgency, ensuring that the tools of modern life do not become the weapons of violence.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

### The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 1924

### What CR Das said

IT was a fine speech which CR Das delivered as President of the Swaraj Party Conference which held its sittings in Calcutta on Saturday and Sunday. Appropriately enough, he began by repeating what he and other nationalist leaders had said again and again, that the Swaraj for which the country was fighting meant simply the right of the people to govern themselves, and was not to be confused with any particular system of government. "Systems of govemment," he said, "come and go. Systems of government are established one day, only to be broken another day, and another system is re-established upon the ashes of the old system. What we want is a clear declaration by the people of the country that we have got the right to establish our own system of government according to the temper and genius of the people, and we want that right to be recognised by our alien rulers." This was a conclusive answer to those who have been perpetually twitting the nationalist party in India with their unwillingness or inability to define Swaraj. As a matter of fact, it has been defined for practical and necessarily provisional purposes as parliamentary self-government, and it is just because that definition has not satisfied those who do not wish to be satisfied and whose only purpose is to defeat the people's cherished object, that it does become necessary for the leaders of the country to reiterate the first principle of nationalist, and indeed, of all democratic politics. When, however, Das went on to say that it was not for the British to confer this right of self-government on India, but for the people themselves to take that right, to seize it and compel the Government to recognise what they had seized, he was on more debatable ground.

### India should engage more with Taliban

Delhi must accept reality of Afghan situation without according diplomatic recognition to the regime

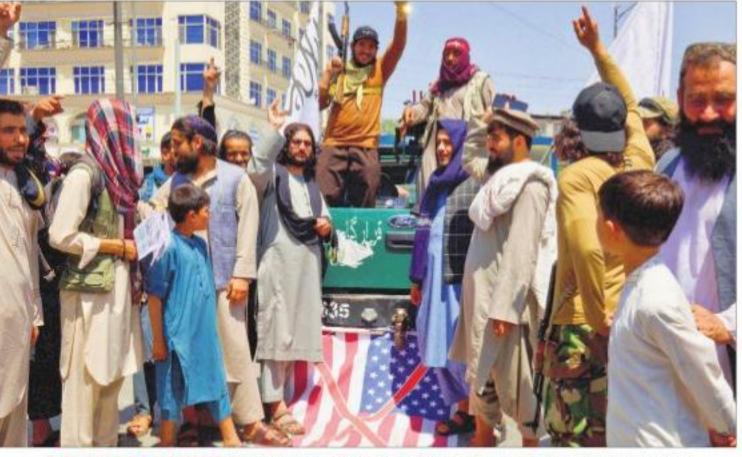


VIVEK KATJU FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

HREE years after the Taliban recaptured Kabul on August 15, 2021, and, for the first time, gained control over all Afghan territory, they remain firmly in the saddle. This is even though their emirate is not internationally recognised and their government is 'interim'. Top leaders of the erstwhile Afghan republic are, except Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, scattered outside the country; they have no capacity of mounting an anti-Taliban revolt, violent or non-violent, within Afghanistan. There have been reports of some small actions, but these do not constitute a threat to the Taliban.

The initial general international response towards the Taliban after their victory was to demand (i) the formation of an 'inclusive' government representing all sections of the Afghan polity, (ii) the Taliban should prevent terrorist groups to operate from Afghanistan and (iii) follow internationally accepted standards on gender issues. The US, smarting from its defeat in the 'forever' war, also froze more than \$9 billion Afghan assets. Over the past three years, some countries have intensified contact with the Taliban individually, Indeed, China has sent a new ambassador. The community's international engagement is through the 'Doha process' initiated by United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres. Its third round concluded in Doha on July 1.

The demand for the formation of an inclusive government, a nonstarter to begin with, has been



ANTI-AMERICA SENTIMENT: Members and supporters of the Taliban held rallies last week to mark the third anniversary of the takeover of Kabul. REUTERS

abandoned. The focus is now on conditions set out in (ii) and (iii). There is global unanimity on (ii) because it impacts all countries. It is here that the Taliban are playing a skilful game. They are seeking to counter terrorist groups that are oriented against countries showing sympathy to their regime, including Russia and China, but are encouraging those they need to use as a card. In the latter category is the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP). The Taliban are also against the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Afghan branch of ISIS. ISKP's presence is a thorn in the Taliban side but is not a threat to their structure.

On gender issues, various countries are making the right noises but the Taliban are aware that all countries do not place the same degree of emphasis on them. Certainly, it is not a priority for China and Russia. On its part the Taliban's theological position on them has not changed but its application on the ground is not as harsh as it was in the 1990s. Women wearing the hijab move around in Kabul, and, as of now, male doctors are permitted to attend to

The most important step Delhi has to take relates to resuming the grant of visas to Afghans who wish to visit India.

female patients if their families permit. A recent development is the placement of mullahs in major hospitals; doctors and staff are expected to attend their short daily discourses. Discriminatory practices against women from the middle level in education is being practiced.

United Nations reports on the Afghan situation persistently note the continuing impoverishment of the people. In his report to the UN Security Council in June this year — the latest on conditions in Afghanistan — the UNSG noted "Nine out of 10 households were struggling to feed themselves adequately..." Low-level economic activity is taking place, but the situation continues to be dire. Consequently, those Afghans who can leave the country are doing so even as Pakistan has forced the return of a large number of refugees living for decades there. Opium cultivation, a source of income for Afghan farmers in some provinces, has been banned and its production has fallen but not eliminated. Ephedrine is also produced to prepare methamphetamine, which is smuggled out of the country through Iran to the wider world.

Tensions within the Taliban interim government continue. The principal fault line is between the Hagganis, whose power base is in the east, headquartered in Khost province, and the traditional Pashtun leadership based in Kandahar. By now, the latter, under the supreme leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, has been able to establish its sway. The Kandahari leaders are more hardline and less exposed to the world. They can be expected to resist any dilution of their interpretation of the Sharia in running the administration, though on the ground, practical ways are found by the people in major cities to deal with their decrees.

The Taliban's regional and foreign engagement has continued, though at a low level. Their relations with neighbours are stable, with the exception of Pakistan. The Pakistani establishment clearly feels that the Taliban leadership has shown scant concern for its core interests because it has not tightened the screws on the TTP. The Taliban are unlikely to change their position on the TTP, at least in the near future. Consequently, bilateral Pakistan-Taliban ties will continue to be rocky.

India should shed its inhibi-

tions in opening full ties with the Taliban. The term 'full ties' does not imply diplomatic recognition. India's interests demand that China should not be allowed to gain primacy in Afghanistan. The Taliban have been urging India to enhance its interaction with them. Indeed, India has taken some 'practical' steps. It should now openly clothe them formally. This could begin with calling the Technical Team what it actually is - the Indian embassy - and its head should be called a charge d'affaires. Doing so would not mean a move towards diplomatic recognition of the Taliban but accepting the reality of the Afghan situation, Also, India has already given humanitarian assistance to the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. It should now resume project assistance. This can be done keeping the security of personnel, if they have to be sent to Afghanistan, in mind. The training of Afghan professionals should be resumed.

The most important step India has to take relates to resuming the grant of visas to Afghans who wish to visit India, for instance, for medical and educational purposes. Naturally, security concerns would have to be addressed while doing so. The stoppage of visa issuance has deeply hurt Indian interests. The policy needs an immediate review. It was inexplicable to begin with and a foreign policy-oriented clarification on why it was undertaken needs to be given.

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### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

There are a lot of children in Afghanistan, but little childhood. - Khaled Hosseini

### "

### Find hidden worth in things discarded

SRIPRIYA SATISH

HILE taking a stroll in a neighbourhood park, I saw a woman struggling to feed her baby, who was reluctant to accept even a few morsels. She tried to coax her child by pointing out the beauty of nature, all the while attempting to put food into the baby's mouth. In an effort to distract the toddler, she even tried feeding a stray cat, but it showed no interest in the baby's food. Then, suddenly, a crow swooped down, picked up the food and flew to a nearby tree, seemingly content with its find.

There is much to be learnt from this seemingly ordinary incident. The food, which held no interest for the baby or the cat, was gobbled up by the crow.

How often do we value what others are ready to discard? For every designer dress worn once by a celebrity or possession they are eager to get rid of, there are countless others who would take pride in owning them. Indeed, one person's waste can be another's treasure.

A creative individual might cherish broken bangles, glass shards or worn-out tyres — items that might seem completely useless to someone else. Similarly, knowledge and ideas dismissed in one field might be highly valued in another area of expertise. Many second-hand shops and thrift stores thrive by giving a new lease of life to discarded items.

Isn't it time we started appreciating the worth of things we consider waste? With landfills overflowing and natural resources depleting at an alarming rate, we need to rethink how we can turn these mountains of waste into treasure troves.

Consider this: the world generates two billion tonnes of municipal solid waste annually. Of this, a staggering eight million tonnes of plastic waste enter our oceans, severely affecting marine life. About 40 per cent of the global waste ends up in landfills, creating significant environmental hazards.

How can we reduce waste? By diligently practising the three golden Rs - reduce, recycle and reuse. At an individual level, we can all contribute to minimising the global waste crisis. A small act on our part can go a long way in preventing our beautiful world from turning into a dustbin. If there are babies and cats who discard waste, there will always be crows hovering around to relish it. We must recognise that discarded waste will always hold significance for someone or something on this planet.

American poet Mary Oliver said, 'The world is full of good things, and even waste has value.' A thought worth pondering, and also a life lesson.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Stop voting criminals to power

Refer to the article 'Zero-tolerance approach a must to curb crimes against women'; the horrifying rape and killing of a junior doctor at a government medical facility in Kolkata serves as a stark reminder of the grave threat women in the country face every day. While growing calls for swift justice are welcome, are we being realistic? After all, 46 per cent of the newly elected Lok Sabha MPs face criminal cases, according to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms. The massive criminalisation of politics in India is a matter of concern. Things will not change for the better until and unless voters decide to pick only the candidates who have integrity and a clean track record.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

### Doctors' lives matter

Apropos of the editorial 'Doctors' strike'; the whole nation was jolted awake by the brutal 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape case. People from all quarters of society came together to call for justice. But sadly, the ongoing protests against the Kolkata rape-murder horror are mostly being led by members of the medical fraternity, as civil society remains in deep slumber. It reflects our lack of concern for those who serve and treat us in times of need. Do doctors' lives not matter? It is time for the nation to wake up again and introspect.

RAJESH KUMAR SHARMA, FAZILKA

### Patients bear the brunt of strike

With reference to 'Doctors' strike'; the gruesome rape and murder of a young doctor on the premises of a state-run hospital in Kolkata has understandably caused massive outrage. The government must heed the voices of the medics across the nation who have been striking work in protest for days. It is the need of the hour to ensure a safe working environment for medical professionals. There needs to be a comprehensive law in place to shield healthcare workers from violence. At the same time, it is imperative for the authorities to make sure that underprivileged people don't bear the brunt of the ongoing doctors' strike. As the stir cripples hospital services, the powers that be must look out for those who cannot afford treatment at private hospitals. It is incumbent on the Centre and the

state governments to address the doctors' demands and end the stalemate.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

### Step up security at hospitals

The horrific Kolkata incident must be condemned by all in the strongest terms. But the harsh reality is that such cases are reported every day from across the country. We must not be distracted by the growing calls for West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to step down. Asking someone at the helm of affairs in a state rocked by controversy to resign is not the solution. Why do the people who want Mamata ousted not call upon the CMs of all other states that have witnessed such heinous acts to quit as well? The focus should be on enhancing the security measures for healthcare workers.

SK KHOSLA, CHANDIGARH

### A fresh chapter in J&K

Apropos of the editorial 'Polls in J&K'; holding elections alone won't solve all the challenges facing the region. The first step towards restoring normalcy in J&K would be ensuring an end to militant activities. But there will be no let-up in the unrest until and unless there is a change in the mindset of local residents and their leaders. The focus should not just be on casting votes but also on achieving all-round development, progress and prosperity. Besides, the erstwhile state has massive potential for industrial growth. And a return to normalcy in the region will boost local tourism. Saying 'no' to violence and militancy will pave the way for a brighter future for J&K.

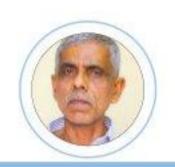
PV MADHU NIVRITI, SECUNDERABAD

### Crack down on drug peddlers

With reference to the editorial 'Call against drugs'; it is commendable that the Punjab Government has taken a serious view of the drug menace prevalent in the state. The authorities must leave no stone unturned to check drug addiction. Punjabi celebrities from film stars to sportspersons — can play a vital role in educating the youth about the harms of consuming narcotic substances. Besides, the powers that be must crack down on those involved in drug peddling. HIMANSHU GOYAL, KAITHAL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

### There's more to the Preamble than a solemn pledge



AVUIT PATHAK SOCIOLOGIST

S I reflect on the recent controversy over the reported removal of the Preamble to the Constitution from select NCERT textbooks, I realise once again the significance of the politics of knowledge. Possibly, it is not easy for the ruling regime to free itself from the alliance of religious nationalism and market fundamentalism, or the politics centred on the cult of a narcissistic/potentially authoritarian personality. Not surprisingly, you and I need not be surprised if the establishment feels somewhat uncomfortable with the grand egalitarian/secular ideal the Preamble articulates.

However, as a teacher with a keen interest in pedagogic practices, I do not want to remain confined merely to what has been deleted from school textbooks. My question is whether the prevalent pattern of classroom transaction is capable of making the young learner understand and internalise the significance of the Prein these textbooks. As teachers and educationists. we should reflect on this pedagogic question more seriously rather than getting carried away by the rhetoric of the debate between the government and the Opposition.

In this context, I feel

tempted to refer to the experience of a workshop in which I got an opportunity (thanks to Vikash Sharma of the Shiksha Swaraj initiative) to interact with a group of Class-XI students in the hinterland of rural Bihar. Well, their NCERT text of political theory begins with the Preamble. I asked them to read and feel every word of the beautifully written Preamble: "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic..." Well, they read it; and I was not sure whether they could make sense of it. In a culture of rote learning and examcentric education, this grand vision of the kind of India we wish to make, I feared, has already been reduced to a mere 'fact' soulless, and without any enchanting power, or just a two-mark question in the board examination. But then, I didn't give up; I sought to intervene; and I wanted them to think and reflect. I asked them a simple question: "Do you see



LETDOWN: We need not be surprised if the establishment feels somewhat uncomfortable with the grand secular ideal the Preamble articulates. REUTERS

or in your village?" They remained silent for quite some time. It was not surprising. The teacher's monologue in the classroom in most of our schools, or the disappearance of lived experiences from our classrooms creates a culture of silence. Seldom do the students get an opportunity to see beyond the frozen words stored in the textbook, articulate their own experiences and ask new questions.

I was aware of this difficulty. Yet, I kept trying. amble, even if it is included democracy in your family, And eventually, some of

We need to broaden our vision and take the debate on education beyond what is deleted from or added to NCERT textbooks.

these students began to speak. "There is no democracy in my family. My father takes every decision. We have no voice," a girl finally spoke. This gave me an opportunity to make them reflect on patriarchy and how it negates the spirit of democracy - democracy as dialogue, art of listening and the process of collective decision-making. Furthermore, I wanted to make them think whether democracy as a way of life can exist in the grand

villages, schools and society. Yes, this conversation began to stimulate them. And this time a Dalit girl came forward and asserted confidently. "There is no equality in my village. We are looked down upon; we are stigmatised" - her voice convinced me that education is about asking critical questions and interrogating the takenfor-granted world. In the process of this free-floating conversation, they brought the experiences of lived realities and felt encouraged to see beyond bookish knowledge.

practised in our families,

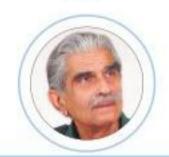
At this juncture, I asked them yet another question: "Do you think that the Preamble is just a garland of noble words, and the way our country operates is far from this grand vision?" Initially, they were silent or possibly confused. I kept waiting for their response. And then, a girl began to speak: "There is economic inequality in India; there is 'Hindu vs Muslim politics'; and there is caste oppression. But then, India should try to become like what the Preamble visualises." And this inspired me to make a couple of observations and conclude the session.

"The purpose of knowing the Preamble," I told them, "is not to answer a two-mark question in the political scitant is to get a vision of democratic/egalitarian/culturally pluralist India for which you need to raise your voice, remain alert, acquire the courage to question even the most 'popular' leader, continually fight for equity, justice, democracy and religious/cultural pluralism."

I saw a spark in their eyes. Every child has immense potential, and if we allow our young learners to think, reflect and articulate their own voices without fear, the culture of learning will acquire an altogether new meaning. It will become dialogic, interactive and problemposing. And everything will be critically scrutinised in terms of lived realities and experiences.

Likewise, it is not just sufficient if we include the ideas of freedom, equality, rights, democracy and secularism in our school textbooks. Unless we abolish what Paulo Freire would have characterised as the 'banking form of education', and move towards praxis dialogic/'problem-posing' education, the spirit of even a politically correct curriculum can destroyed or reduced to just another 'exam material' for rote learning. Hence, we need to broaden our vision and take the debate on education beyond what is deleted from or political system if it is not ence paper; what is impor- added to NCERT textbooks.

### Regime change can impact Bangladesh's defence ties with India



MAJ GEN ASHOK K MEHTA (RETD) MILITARY COMMENTATOR

N a conversation with me after Pakistan's surrender at Bogra in the 1971 Liberation War, \_\_\_\_Maj Gen Nazir Hussain Shah, General Officer Commanding of the 16 Pakistan Infantry Division, had said prophetically: "Bangladesh will be a disturbed desh."

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, head of the 16-member non-political interim advisory council that has two student leaders, has described Sheikh Hasina's exit as 'the second Liberation'. It has also been referred to as the 'third revolution', a redux of the 2006 Nepalese revolution and 'Arab Spring on steroids', and likened to the 2022 Aragalaya (uprising) in Sri Lanka.

There are conspiracy theories attached to last month's Anti-Discrimination Students Movement. A warning by Bangladeshi filmmaker and philanthropist Chanchal Chowdhury about an impending US-led couphas gone viral on social media. The immediate fallout from Hasina's eviction will be for India, which has historically put all its eggs in the Awami League basket.

Faced with a crisis of legitimacy and the backsliding of democracy, Hasina's port of call was New Delhi, which welcomed her with a bit of nervousness. The mayhem that marked the violence and revenge killings was similar to those witnessed during the regime change in Afghanistan in 2021. The army under Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman, praised by the US, carried out a coup, the fifth in 53 years.

During a lecture tour to the Centre for the Study of Genocide and Justice at the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka last November ahead of the January 2024 parliamentary elections, I failed to read the graffiti (read writing) on the wall: 'Hasina go'. And so did India. My driver told me that if a free and fair election were the Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Begum Khaleda Zia, would sweep the polls. This was echoed by an officer of the Indian High Commission in Dhakaand several journalists. Still, India backed Hasina to the hilt. The civilmilitary relations seemed harmonised, with both sides marking their red lines. During several visits to Bangladesh since 1971, one saw the Awami League focus on two areas: the glorification of the legacy of the Liberation War and strengthen-India-Bangladesh relations despite the lurking anti-India sentiment.

The battle between the two



MOMENTOUS: Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus (centre), head of the non-political interim advisory council, has described Sheikh Hasina's exit as 'the second Liberation'. REUTERS

Begums (and the proxy war between their sons Sajeeb Wazed and Tarique Rahman) was clearly manifest in their love-hate approach towards India. During the BNP's rule, the India connect with the Liberation War diminished. And when the Awami League regained power, especially in the last 15 years, emphasis was laid on reviving the cult of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the war. Therefore, the image of a student defacing Mujib's statue in Dhaka and the public hangings of Awami League workers illustrate the vicious cycle. India's Eastern Command, which oversaw the 1971 war, commemorates the Liberation War with Mukti Jodhas from Bangladesh every year in December: And Dhaka reciprocates with warmth through a

Faced with a crisis of legitimacy and the backslidingof democracy, Hasina's port of call was New Delhi.

lavish felicitation of Indian veterans of the conflict. That ritual was sanctified by the construction of awarmemorial for India's 1,670-odd martyrs (similar to the one for the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Colombo) at Ashuganj. It was to be inaugurated later this year by PM Narendra Modi and Hasina. Scholarships, medical schemes and myriad welfare facilities have been introduced for the dependants of Mukti Bahini personnel, and free medical treatment has been made available for members of the Bangladeshi armed forces.

The rise in military-to-military relations is a stellar achievement, given that the Bangladeshi military used to wargame scenarios with India as an enemy until recently. Almost everyone, other than the military and the beneficiary families, seems to have forgotten about the Liberation War. Enhanced defence cooperation between the two nations is marked by the \$500-million line of credit extended by India.

There are tri-service interactions with institutionalised staff and training-level dialogue. Visits by military leaders are common. Gen Zaman was to visit India later this month. Last year, personnel of the Bangladesh Air Force had visited Dimapur, where it was christened in 1971. Bangladesh was also supposed to take part in the Tarang Shakti multi-national air exercise with the Indian Air Force this month. Joint exercises and sea patrols are rising. Service chiefs presiding over passing-out parades in each other's military academies is a regular feature. Nonkinetic military equipment has been sold, as the armed forces division responsible for modernising Bangladesh's military has categorised defence acquisitions under A, B and C groups. While India still falls in the C category, China — the mainstay of military hardware - comes under A. How much of the enhanced defence ties will survive the regime change is crucial for India.

Anti-India sentiment, a familiar refrain in the neighbourhood, has become a metaphor for New Delhi's unflinching support to Hasina. Some Indian leaders have repeatedly called for the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act/National Register of Citiand described zens Bangladeshis as 'insects' and 'infiltrators'. The China Media Group, along with Pakistan's ISI, is encouraging the banned Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, to fuel anti-India sentiments.

Bangladesh shares its border with five Indian states. The turmoil along the India-Myanmar border, coupled with simmering unrest in Manipur, can wreck India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies if an unfriendly regime returns to Dhaka. The threat from China to the Siliguri corridor will also reappear. The BIM-STEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Techand Economic nical Cooperation) will also be destabilised as a regional grouping. Consequently, the role of the Army will be the key to maintaining India's strategic interests and ensuring stable and friendly relations with Bangladesh, given the love and labour that have gone into building them. India must send the right feelers to the keepers of the keys in Dhaka. A great deal is at stake for New Delhi, which took its eves off the neighbourhood.

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TEMPERATURE IN °C

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### **OUICK CROSSWORD**

ACROSS 1 Disperse tense

- atmosphere (5,3,3) 9 Irreverence (7)
- 10 Long narrow view (5) 11 Quits (4)
- 12 Maintaining plan and schedule (2,6)
- 14 Fraudulent scheme (6)
- 16 Heedless (6)
- account (8)

- 24 Experiencing difficulties
- 19 Express gleeful triumph (4)
- 23 To rescue (7)
- 18 Take into
- 22 Raise in rank (5)
- (2,4,5)

2 Slight error (5)

- 3 Old (4)
- 4 Vexatious (6) 5 Highly desirable (8)
- 6 Visible (2,5)
- 7 Squib (11) 8 Coarse pottery (11)
- 13 Disparage (8)
- 15 Keep in check (7) 17 Parody (4-2)
- 20 Light theatrical entertainment (5)
- 21 Defendant's answer

to charge (4)

### Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Pacify, 4 Merciful, 9 Vanity, 10 Estimate, 12 Lull, 13 Endow. 14 Echo, 17 Old wives' tale, 20 Simple-minded, 23 Rule, 24 Tokyo, 25 Pall, 28 Decipher, 29 Repent, 30 Eternity, 31 Portly.

Down: 1 Pavilion, 2 Conclude, 3 Fate, 5 Easy on the eye, 6 Chip, 7 Fias co, 8 Lie low, 11 Under protest, 15 Civil, 16 Plain, 18 Adjacent, 19 Idolatry, 21 Grudge, 22 Cliche, 26 Span, 27 Zero.

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#### FORECAST TUESDAY YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 6 9 7 2 8 4 CITY MAX MIN 8 5 3 2 1 6 7 Chandigarh 33 6 4 8 1 5 9 3 New Delhi 36 5 2 3 6 8 7 4 1 Amritsar 34 7 9 2 4 3 5 6 Bathinda 34 3 1 7 5 9 2 8 Jalandhar 33 Ludhiana 34 7 2 8 5 3 4 35 Bhiwani 5 2 6 8 1 9 35 Hisar 7 9 6 3 5 35 Sirsa CALENDAR Dharamsala 28 26 AUGUST 20, 2024, TUESDAY Manali Shaka Samvat Shimla 27 ■ Shravan Shaka 29 Srinagar 33 Bhadrapad Parvishte Jammu 32 Kargil ■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 1, up to 8.33 pm Leh 29 Atiganda Yoga up to 8.55 pm 31

■ Shatbhisha Nakshatra up to 3.10 am

■ Moon in Acquarius sign

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

### **Women safety is non-negotiable**

The apex court's suo moto congisance of Kolkata rape case could lead to stronger security measures in workplaces

he Kolkata rape and murder case has shaken the nation, sparking widespread outrage and a call to end such horrific crimes. While similar cases in the past, like the Ranga Billa case in the 1970s and the Nirbhaya case in 2012, also provoked national anger, real change has been limited, with crimes against women continuing sporadically. The recent assault and murder of a resident doctor in Kolkata serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing vulnerability women face in the workplace. The Supreme Court of India has taken suo motu cognisance of the Kolkata doctor rape-murder incident. A three-judge bench presided by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud will hear the matter on August 20, 2024. Earlier, the Calcutta High Court expressed displeasure over the handling of the case by the State Government. The incident took place at R G Kar Medical College in Kolkata. The case has been transferred to the CBI. The Supreme Court's decision to take up this case underscores a growing concern about the safety of women in

public spaces, including professional environments. The matter, while primarily focusing on doctors' safety, also opens a window to address the broader context of women's safety across the country.

In a country where women's safety continues to be a major societal concern, the Supreme Court's intervention in the Kolkata case regarding the safety of doctors brings to light a parallel issue— the precarious conditions under which healthcare workers, especially women, operate. While India grapples with various cases of violence against women, the healthcare sector has seen its share of attacks on women professionals, prompting national attention and legal action.

India's struggle with women's safety is long-standing and complex. High-profile cases of sexual violence, harassment, and workplace discrimination have repeatedly sparked public outrage. Despite legal reforms and awareness campaigns, incidents of violence against women remain alarmingly high. Public spaces, including hospitals, which should be places of care, have become dangerous for many women, underscoring the systemic nature of the problem. The healthcare sector is particularly concerning because female doctors and nurses not only face violence from patients' families but also internal issues such as sexual harassment from colleagues and superiors. This dual threat makes their professional life increasingly challenging and unsafe. With the Supreme Court stepping in, it is hoped that this case will lead to more robust security protocols in hospitals and other public institutions. As the Supreme Court examines the Kolkata case, there is hope that this will lead to a more comprehensive approach to women's safety in India. The focus should not just be on doctors but also on broader societal reforms that ensure women can work, travel, and live without fear of violence or discrimination. If the court's ruling leads to enhanced safety measures for doctors, it could set a precedent for other professions as well, where women face similar threats.



Vomen tie 'rakhi' on wrists of BSF personnel on the occasion of Rakshabandhan at Attari-Wagah Border, Amritsar

### Bangladesh questions Sheikh Mujib's legacy SIDHARTH MISHRA



With institutions under siege and the legacy of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman under attack, the parallels with the French Revolution become starkly apparent

uprising in the neighbouring country Bangladesh. Despite an interim government led by a Nobel laureate economist and entrepreneur Muhammad Yunus in place, the rule of the 'hoi polloi' continues. Mass power is forcing a 'purge' of the various institutions of the state of what are believed to be compradors of the ousted regime.

Even the judiciary has not been spared. It's unlikely that we would have stability returning to the nascent nation founded by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman following liberation from Pakistan in 1971. Mujibur Rahman's legacy, politically represented by his daughter Sheikh Hasina, the ousted Prime Minister of Bangladesh, is today under attack.

Though there are those in the revolution mass and leadership, who would want to distinguish Sheikh's legacy from Hasina's regime. But in the current situation of social turmoil, a manifestation of an ideological bent could be catastrophic.Public uprisings the world over, especially in the post-colonial democracies of the 20th and the 21st centuries, have drawn inspiration from the French Revolution of the 18th century

The revolution which started with the symbolic fall of Bastille and the establishment of the Estates General of 1789, ended with the coup of 18 Brumaire in November 1799 and the formation of the French Consulate with the military under the leadership of Napolean Bonaparte capturing power.

The French Revolution was driven by the ideas of the fundamental principles of liberal democracy. Its causes are generally agreed to be a combination of social, political, and economic factors, which the ruling establishment led by Emperor Louis XVI was unable to manage. What spurred the fall was a financial crisis and widespread social distress.The tall of Louis XVI saw radical reforms including the abolition of feudalism and a declaration of rights. But this did not bring an end to political instability.



The next decade was dominated by the struggle for political control, worsened by economic depression. To overcome the crisis the revolutionaries formed the Committee of Public Safety, which unleashed a reign of terror in which about 16,000 people were executed. Finally in 1799 following a military coup, Napoleon Bonaparte came to seize power marking the end of the revolution. The quick recall of the events of the French Revolution was to establish the fact that insurrection doesn't generally guarantee one thing,

the stability of governance. This is best seen in the case of Bangladesh. Ever since its birth, the coun-

try has witnessed numerous coups and uprisings with Sheikh Hasina's 15-year regime from 2009-2024 being an exception to the general rule. This period was, till the fall of the government, seen as a period of not only stable authority but also economic growth.Then what brought the fall? Conspiracy theorists are blaming the American Deep State and the Chinese interest but no uprising can happen without local discontent. After coming to power in 2009 through a free, fair, and credible election, Sheikh Hasina subsequently presided over largely non-participative

Madam — It was heartwarming that the

Finally when he got selected for the

Karnataka State team he made an

unbeaten double century on debut.

When he was spotted by Tiger's eye the

then Indian skipper Tiger Pataudi

included him at the Kanpur test in 1969

against the mighty Australians. While

scoring a 'duck' in the first innings the

enraged fans hurled matkas at him.

Vishy was so much disappointed by sit-

ting in isolation and the pat came from

Pataudi by his word of confidence 'Just

relax boy, you will get a hundred'. Rest

became history by Vishy scoring 137 at

debut in the second innings with 25

In his career span of 14 years Vishy had

play cricket.



THE COUNTRY'S

PER CAPITA **INCOME** TRIPLED IN A DECADE, AND THE WORLD BANK **ESTIMATED** THAT OVER 25 MILLION PEOPLE WERE LIFTED

> POVERTY IN THE LAST

and controversial polls on three occasions — 2014, 2018, and 2024. She appeared to be near-invincible, but muzzling democracy was an increasing indication of her growing political frailty. There isn't a doubt that Hasina's rule saw noteworthy economic achievements. Under her Bangladesh transformed from one of the world's poorest nations into one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, even

outperforming India. The country's per capita income tripled in a decade, and the World Bank estimated that over 25 million people were lifted out of poverty in the last 20 years. But then why the downfall, such anger against a regime that was bringing prosperity to the nation? The answer probably lies in the fact that economic progress alone cannot sustain a leader's popularity in the face of eroding democratic values and civil liberties. Democracy, like the proverbial 'jinn', cannot be put back in the bottle once unleashed with whatever power at hand.

The Indian sub-continent, which the Americans decided to call South Asia, is the best example of the sinews of democracy. Across the five nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, authoritarian leaders

have met nemesis. India is the only exception, where the change of power has always been through a democratic process and sans violence. The Indian leadership of different political and ideological hues have maintained the delicate balance between socioeconomic progress and democratic values. Political setbacks have happened when a government has been seen to be

promoting crony capitalism,

nepotism, high-handedness and corruption, in that order. Such perceptions have overshadowed acts of major social welfare and economic and development successes. Muhammad Yunus becomes the second economist in the sub-continent to head a government after Dr Manmohan Singh. While Manmohan Singh has been credited with steering the country out of financial turmoil, expectations from Yunus is to take his nation out of a social and political tumult. The challenges for

history would judge.
(The writer is an author and president, the Centre for Reforms, Development & *Justice*; *views are personal*)

Yunus is equal in measure to

what the İndian economist

faced. Dr Manmohan Singh is

largely seen to be successful in

overcoming the challenge,

would Yunus too succeed?

### UK-India Free Trade Agreement set for a green shift under Labour leadership



KAVIRAJ SINGH

As the UK pushes for greener economic practices, the FTA with India will need to balance trade facilitation with stringent environmental standards

rith the Labour Party now leading the UK, international trade dynamics, particularly the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, are set for transformation. The Labour Party's emphasis on climate change and its advocacy for mechanisms like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) will likely influence the future of this trade deal.

#### Labour **Environmental Agenda**

A key aspect of Labour's policy is its strong commitment to environmental sustainability. Under the leadership of Keir Starmer, the party has set ambitious goals to tackle the climate crisis, aiming to decarbonize the UK economy by 2030, significantly earlier than current targets. Labour plans to invest heavily in renewable energy and enforce stricter regulations on carbon emissions. The UK's Climate Change Act 2008 mandates that the UK achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, and Labour's policies intend

to accelerate this shift. The Labour Party's Green New Deal is a central compowith the global urgency to meet and exceed Paris Agreement targets. As a result, the party's approach to trade, including the India-UK FTA, will likely reflect its commitment to green policies. Labour's aggressive stance on climate action will shape its

#### tional agreements. Impact on the India-UK Free Trade Agreement

trade policies, embedding

sustainability into interna-

Labour's focus on environmental sustainability is expected to influence the ongoing FTA negotiations with India. Traditionally, FTAs emphasize reducing tariffs and trade barriers to facilitate commerce. However, under Labour, the India-UK FTA will likely include cli-

mate-related provisions. India, too, has made progress in renewable energy and carbon reduction efforts. nent of this push, aligning However, its economy still to the UK would face higher

heavily depends on fossil fuels. This poses a challenge in aligning with Labour's stringent environmental requirements. The transition to greener energy will require significant investments, and India's economic growth might be affected by these demands. Balancing trade promotion and environmental sustainability will be a central issue in the FTA discus-

#### The Role of Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Labour's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is a policy designed to impose a carbon tax on imported goods based on their carbon content, leveling the playing field for domestic industries. This ensures that foreign producers face the same carbon pricing as local ones, preventing carbon leakage and promoting emission reductions globally. For India, CBAM poses a sig-

nificant challenge, especially for industries like steel, aluminium, and cement, which have high carbon footprints. As the world's second-largest steel producer, India's exports production costs under CBAM, potentially impacting competitiveness.

To manage this, Indian industries would need to adopt cleaner technologies and lowcarbon production methods The Indian government might need to offer subsidies or incentives to ease this transition.

#### **Green Trade Opportunities** Despite challenges, the CBAM also presents opportunities for India and the UK to expand green trade. Labour's focus on renewable energy and green technologies could open doors for collaboration in sectors like solar energy, wind power, and elec-

tric mobility. India's growing renewable energy market positions it as an ideal partner for the UK in achieving mutual sustainability goals. By aligning trade policies with environmental objectives, both nations can ensure that economic progress is achieved responsibly. Labour's leadership brings a new era for the UK-India FTA, with climate change and the CBAM taking center stage.

(The writer is founder and managing director, Earthood)

#### scored 6080 runs in 91 tests with 14 hundreds to his credit. Barring his debut century which ended up in a draw, the remaining 13 matches in which Vishy scored a hundred were all won by India. Vishy's strong wrists in his hey-

days was a nightmare for world class bowlers and whenever he plays a square cut the art in him flourishes and ripples to the boundary line like a bullet. There can never be a better role model than him for all sportsmen to learn that failure alone can bring success to get into the history in any field. ÁP Thirvadi | Chennai

fours to his credit.

**FAKE MEDICINES FOR SALE ONLINE** 

eating fast food. Obesity is one of those

Madam— Lifestyle diseases are on the rise due to the increasing tendency of

### THE EDITO **LIFE OF SPORTSPERSONS IS NOT EASY Ensure safer workplace for women**

#### celebrated wrestler Vinesh Phogat received a rousing welcome at Delhi after her disappointing day at the Paris Olympics. It's not the bed of roses for anything in life and especially for the sportsmen and more to a sportswomen. I can quote a classic example of a great Indian cricketer G R Viswanath. Fondly addressed as Vishy by his fellow players, a selector then was against him by mentioning he was 'too short' and 'lean' to

mid the nationwide protests, the Supreme Court(SC) has taken Suo moto cognisance of the recent rape and murder case at RG Kar Medical college and Hospital in Kolkata. It is a small victory for the protestants across the country for the speedy justice against the crime and

the Bengal government's failure to address the global health challenges impacting the lives of millions. Obesity is expected to rise from 14% of the world population in 2020 to 25% by 2035, or 1.9 billion

people and so the market to woo the

affected patients. Recent worrying trends and warnings about the safety, efficacy of obesity medications has put the health of people in a quandary. The perils of counterfeit drugs was recently brought to light by Tim Mackey, a professor at U.C. San Diego's Global Health Programme where he studied such dubious drugs.

The W.H.O. has also warned the public about falsified vials of semaglutide that contained undeclared ingredients including insulin which is likey to per-

To counter such malpractices professional bodies must put their act together to disseminate authentic evidence based research. Obesity as a public health challenge deserves more attention and close monitoring so as to free it from

the clutches of such fake companies. Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital issue properly, stand beside the victim's family, and provide efficient safety to the women in the state. After Kolkata Police's insignificant progress in the case, the high court intervened to hand over the case to the CBI, and now SC's intervention will definitely be crucial considering the many

The Indian Medical Association has also written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding the fundamental right to life. It may be a doctor or any woman working at any place; there need to be strict rules in place for their safety, and the centre should look into the fact that incidents like these do not occur. Apart from that, there should also be strict punishment in our laws, like in the Middle East. It would be significant so that people having the slightest thoughts of such a crime should be terrified and show respect to the other gen-

Sumit Saha | New Delhi

### **RETHINK THE FOREST ACT**

attempts to subdue this case.

Madam — The article about Forest Acts (18-8-24) presents fact that needs to be pondered over by one and all. In the present course of reforms what is predominating is that everything is a commodity - education, healthcare, relationship, forest, wind and water also. In the process forest also is allowed to be commercially exploited. Result is that the forest cover which is, supposed to be one third of the land mass is reduced to one fifth. This threatens the wild animals, environment, carbon sink and the natives of the forests. The amendment to the concerned act made last year poses further threats as forests can be.used for sikar also. We must exert democratic pressure over the government to ensure protection to forests and the animals and natives. They have been at the receiving end and have suffered in silence for long.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

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### **FIRST COLUMN**

### **SOOTHING A STRESSED MIND**

Through spiritual practices and positive affirmations, one can find the peace



RAVI VALLURI

student of archery, in all sincerity, asked his Guru how long it would take to master the craft. The Master ponders and with his prescience provides a measured reply. "It would take ten years." The student is stupefied. The Guru is promised by the student that he will strive hard to achieve proficiency by putting in extra hours of work. Thereby he would become an ace, an unrivalled archer.

The teacher paused and gravely replied that it would take twenty years to become an expert. So how do ten years become twenty? The simple answer is anxiety and increasing levels of stress. A stressful mind cannot scale the summit. The Guru knew the potential of the candidate in question and the time required to harness the skills. The anxiety, feverishness and desperation of the student can never compress the period of learning. Humans live in highly stressful and disharmonious conditions. Pressure is exerted on their minds, resulting in an unhealthy lifestyle. Stressful conditions are also created by our feverish attitude and desperation: A mental state when our expectations far exceed the actual requirement. Not living in the NOW and a covetous nature also contribute to mental disequilibrium. The memory of past events has a double whammy on the mind. A pleasant occurrence brings peace, but turbulent experiences make us stressed and fret. Unfortunately, the human mind gives more credence to negative experiences and that leads to the gathering of stress in the mind. A stressful mind can be smoothened only through a 3C policy, namely commitment, control, and challenge. The energy of the mind needs to be channelled productively and this can be done



through proper training and a firm commitment. Challenging situations and tasks endear the human mind: to try something new or different and think out of the box. Renowned psychologists Endler and Parker have enunciated a three-factor model to overcome stress or manage this ail-

(a) Task-Oriented Strategy: The individual should ensure proper time management to complete the task at hand. Also, box out stressful conditions when through experience we are aware of negative possibilities

(b) Emotion-Oriented Strategy: Create a space in the mind to vent anger and frustrations. Literally to let go of the emotions. Develop a belief and hope in a higher power through the power of surrender and sublimate

(c)Avoidance-oriented Oriented Strategy: Create a shield or envelop the mind with an aura of positive thoughts. This works like magic and it mitigates the seriousness of the situation and stressful situations get oblit-

The model merely provides the framework. In reality, relaxation techniques, practising yoga, dwelling deep into meditation, engaging in visualisation (which incorporates features such as imagery and positive imagination), learning breathing techniques like Vipassana and Sudarshan Kriya or even hitting the gym are some of the tools to implement the model

All these strategies uplift the mood of the person and assist in combating stress. Stress can also be dealt with effectively by acquiring knowledge, taking up responsibility and inculcating a feeling of genuine compassion, love, and concern for humanity. The mind should become bigger than the problem or stress. This, only a true seeker or sadhakcan achieve and that too by resolute practice or sadhana. Only positive thoughts, realistic ambitions and limited wants and desires can enable the mind to reduce the magnitude of stress."In time of great stress or adversity, it's always best to keep busy, to plough your anger and your energy into something positive," says Lee lacocca.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# Why India needs a secular civil code



As India approaches its 76th Republic Day, the question of whether laws should be shaped by religion or remain universally applicable becomes ever more urgent



MinisterNarendra Modi, in his Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Red Fort, dispelled all misconceptions and rumours about the stability and strength of his coalition and showed that he has complete control over the govern-ment. His address also revealed that his goals have remained the same. His speech was filled with energy and strong determination, as it always is.

He stressed the implementation of the Secular Civil Code (CC). He said the Supreme Court has repeatedly discussed and given orders on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) because a large section of the country feels, and it is correct, that the present civil code is a communal and discriminatory civil code. There is no place for them in modern society.

The need of the hour is a Secular Civil Code (SCC). The Prime Minister's use of the phrase "Secular Civil Code"was interesting. A "Secular Civil Code" (SČC) was used instead of the possible "Uniform Civil Code" (UCC) so that opposition parties could support it appropriately. On November 23, 1948, Article 44 was introduced in the Constituent Assembly by Dr B R Ambedkar as draft Article 35 and was unanimously passed. "Uniform Civil Code for the citizens



NEXT YEAR. ON JANUARY 26, 2025, WHEN WE THE 76TH REPUBLIC DAY, WE MUST ASK **OURSELVES:** "DO WE WANT TO CONTINUE LIVING IN AN **ERA WHERE** LAWS ARE BASED ON RELIGION, GENDER, OR ANY OTHER **CLASS OR** COMMUNITY?"

The State shall endeavour which proves that this to secure a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India for the citizens." So states Article 44 of our Constitution. During the Constituent Assembly discussion, amendments were moved by Hussain Imam and some other members, "That any group, section or community or people shall not be obliged to give up its own personal law in case it has such a law, and, provided that the personai iaw of any community which is guaranteed by the statute shall not be changed except with the previous approval of the

community. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in his reply to the discussion, stated that our country has a Uniform Code of Laws covering nearly every aspect of human relations. We have a uniform and comprehensive criminal code throughout the country, contained in the Penal and Criminal Procedure

We also have the law of transfer of property, which deals with property relations and applies throughthe country. Additionally, there is the Negotiable Instruments Act, among other acts,

country has practically a civil code that is uniform and applicable throughout the country. Dr Ambedkar argued in the Constituent Assembly that the Uniform Civil Code should be viewed as a secular law applicable to all.In 1985, the former Chief Justice of India, YV Chandrachud, shared similar views during the 'Shah Bano' case.

Shah Bano Begum, a the 76th Republic Day, we Musiim woman who had sought maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure after her divorce. The initial judgment ruled

in her favour. However, her husband, Mohammed Ahmed Khan, appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that Section 125 should not apply to Muslims as it contradicted Muslim Personal Law. The Supreme Court disagreed with this contention, asserting that Section 125 applies to all individuals, irrespective of religion or personal law, and dismissed the husband's petition. Eminent Muslim iurists like Chaudhary Haider Hussain and former Chief Justice of Bombay High Court M C

upheld Article 44 (UCC). In the case of John Vallamattom vs Union of India in 2003, the Supreme Court once expressed regret that Article 44 of the Constitution had not been implemented. Supreme Court also asked the government if they were ready to implement the Uniform Civil Code. Next year, on January 26, This case revolved around 2025, when we celebrate want to continue living in an era where laws are based on religion, gender,

Chagla had also strongly

If the answer is NO, then the Secular Civil Code (SCC) must be implemented. Implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would be equivalent to fulfilling the vision of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar because the codification of laws should be independent of any specific religion. The current times require a secular civil code, leading to freedom from religious discrimination.

or any other class or com-

(The writer is Professor of Finance - XLRI Xavier School of Management and BJP Leader; views

### Safeguarding India's Future: The urgent need for a critical infrastructure protection act

This legislation is essential to fortifying India's vital systems against emerging challenges, ensuring both national security and sustained economic growth

ndia's critical infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to Lattacks and sabotage, a threat amplified by regional instability, particularly in neighboring Bangladesh. Recently, radical groups in Bangladesh have targeted essential infrastructure, with the intention of causing widespread disruption. This trend of sabotage is concerning for India, where similar threats

loom large The need for a legislative framework, such as the Critical Infrastructure Protection Act (CIPA), is more pressing than ever. Such a law would establish a robust defense mechanism for safeguarding critical assets against both internal and external threats, addressing a significant gap in national



PADMALOCHAN DASH

Geopolitical Necessities for CIPA: India faces numerous challenges from both regional and internal security threats. The South Asian region, marked by political and social unrest, poses a direct threat to India's stability. Radical ideologies and terrorist groups in the region, often driven by external adversaries like Pakistan and China, aim to target India's infrastructure, aiming to disrupt its economy and physical and cyber threats.

social harmony. These groups are adept at exploiting vulnerabilities in India's critical infrastructure, using methods like cyberattacks and hybrid warfare, which combine traditional and unconventional tactics. To effectively counter these evolving threats, India must urgently enact CIPA to protect its critical assets and systems.

Safeguarding Economic Growth: As India emerges as a global manufacturing and supply chain hub, protecting its infrastructure becomes vital. CIPA would not only shield key sectors but also ensure sustained economic growth. A well-defined legal framework would boost investor confidence by demonstrating that India is prepared to tackle both

Additionally, CIPA would enable swift recovery from disruptions, helping India maintain its position as a global player. **Evolving Threat Landscape:** 

India's critical infrastructure is vulnerable to various threats, including terrorism, cyberattacks, and geopolitical tensions. These risks are dynamic and rapidly evolving, necessitating a proactive legislative response. CIPA can provide the legal tools to assess and mitigate these risks effectively, shifting the country's security strategy from reactive to proactive. By implementing comprehensive protocols for sectors such as energy, transportation, and financial systems, CIPA would bolster national security and protect



**Coordinating Protection** Efforts: Protecting critical infrastructure requires coordination among multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector players, and security forces. CIPA would facilitate this collaboration by establishing a clear framework for joint and manufacturing, which are efforts, ensuring efficient vital to India's economy.

responses and minimizing

fragmented actions. Aligning with Global Standards: Enacting CIPA would also bring India in line with global standards for infrastructure protection. By addressing emerging technologies like digital infrastructure and the International Things ture and the Internet of Things (IoT), and integrating advanced cybersecurity measures, India can ensure its protection strategies remain up-to-date. The act should incorporate technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain to stay ahead of evolving threats.

**Securing Critical Sectors:** CIPA must prioritize the protection of essential sectors such as power, transportation,

Ordnance factories, which produce military equipment, and water reservoirs, crucial for public health, must also be protected.

Furthermore, nuclear power plants, chemical factories, and airports require robust security measures. Social, political, and economic infrastructure including government buildings, financial institutions, and public places—are critical to national stability and must be secured under CIPA.

Learning from Global Examples: Global responses to infrastructure threats highlight the importance of legislative frameworks. The United States passed the Homeland Security Act after 9/11 to protect vital systems from terrorism, while the United Kingdom enhanced measures

bombing in 2017. Countries like Australia and Germany have created specialized agencies to address cyber threats and improve coordination. To protect its critical infrastructure and maintain its trajectory as a global economic power, India must prioritize the enactment of CIPA.

after the Manchester Arena

The government should take immediate steps to establish a centralized coordination authority responsible for overseeing protection measures. A comprehensive risk assessment framework must be developed, and public-private partnerships should be enhanced to ensure efficient responses to threats.

(The Author is affiliated with an Independent Think Tank; views are personal)

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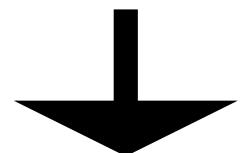
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