#### **Testing times**

The National Testing Agency needs an overhaul to regain credibility

he cancellation of the UGC-NET examination on Wednesday, just a day after its supposed "successful conduct" by the National Testing Agency (NTA), is one more load of straw threatening to break the agency's creaking reputation. Coming as it did after irregularities in this year's NEET-UG (medicine), and complaints about the JEE (engineering), the NTA is under intense pressure. In some ways, the Education Ministry's actions are in stark contrast to its response to the ongoing NEET fiasco, and seem to indicate that it has learnt some lessons. It took suo motu action on the basis of the Home Ministry's cybercrime team's inputs, even without any formal complaints from candidates, unlike in the NEET case where it has dragged its feet through committees and court cases despite multiple allegations and police complaints of paper leaks. The Ministry immediately cancelled the UGC-NET and promised a fresh examination. It has asked the CBI to probe the case, while not heeding the persistent demand of NEET aspirants for a similar probe. However, for the over nine lakh UGC-NET candidates who studied for months, and then travelled long distances to their examination centres, some taking loans to cover their costs, this is little consolation.

These young people deserve answers, and right now, most of the questions are still unanswered. For one, no one in the government's education establishment has explained why the NET was an offline exam conducted by the CBSE till 2018, when it was taken over by the NTA and became an online exam, only to revert this year to an offline, pen-and-paper exam, which is potentially more vulnerable to paper leaks. As the investigation is carried out, full transparency is key to any hopes that the NTA can regain trustworthiness in the eyes of candidates. The second is accountability and punishment of the guilty. The government would also do well to consider a rehaul of the NTA's systems and personnel to ensure that the technical glitches, cheating scams, paper leaks, and proxy candidates that have plagued the exams this year are not allowed to happen again. With the fate of lakhs of India's educated youth and youngest voters at stake, it is not surprising that the testing agency's woes have become a political hot potato. Some Opposition leaders have demanded that the NTA be dismantled and the responsibility for entrance examinations be handed over to the States instead. This may well curb the Union government's centralising tendencies leading to examinations of enormous scale that are harder to manage in a farflung nation. However, some all-India examinations will always remain, and the need is for the States to join the Centre in recovering the integrity of the beleaguered examination system.

#### **New Cold War**

Russia's pact with North Korea will deepen U.S. ties in East Asia

he security pact reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang, in which both countries promised mutual assistance "in the event of aggression", has echoes from the Cold War era. Russia and North Korea, erstwhile allies, are facing biting sanctions, but for different reasons. And, both are at odds with the West. Now, they seem determined to revive the alliance so that they can stand up to the western-led global order together. Mr. Putin's visit to Pyongyang, his first in 24 years, itself marked a new beginning. The Russian leader has supported multilateral efforts to curb the North's nuclear programme in the past. Moscow has also voted for sanctions at the UN Security Council against Pyongyang over its nuclear arsenals. But the Ukraine war appears to have altered Kremlin's geopolitical arithmetic and provided an opportunity for Pyongyang to make itself useful as an ally. When the Ukraine war dragged on and Russia came under western sanctions, Mr. Putin turned to Mr. Kim for ammunition and ballistic missiles. After Mr. Kim's visit to Russia in September 2023, North Korea reportedly supplied ammunition to Russia. Moscow stepped up supplies of food and fuel, and there was speculation that it could help the North's defence sector with critical technologies. While both have rejected reports of weapons trade, the security pact clearly elevates ties to the level of a de facto alliance.

Ever since the Ukraine war, Mr. Putin has steadily expanded Russia's cooperation with countries that are at odds with the U.S. He reportedly bought kamikaze drones from Iran. China has also emerged as a key economic, technological and energy partner. And, by promising to help North Korea, an isolated, one-family-ruled totalitarian state that is still technically at war with South Korea, in the event of an attack, Russia has signalled its readiness to play a larger role in northeast Asia. Mr. Putin, essentially a cold warrior, wants to build an axis of the 'others' opposed by the West to expedite the churn in the global order. China remains cautious but seems fine with the idea of its closest partners challenging the western order. This will have far-reaching geopolitical consequences. North Korea will now have little incentive to discuss denuclearisation. Russia, which already has testy ties with Japan, could see its relationship with South Korea deteriorating. The agreement is also likely to strengthen the emerging tripartite partnership in East Asia among Japan, South Korea and the U.S., further solidifying the new cold war between great powers, which is still in its early stages.

#### A mandate for a new economic approach

he results of the just concluded general election may partly be interpreted as signalling a discontent with economic conditions. The substantial drop in the number of seats won by the Bharativa Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh – which is among India's poorest and most rural States – aligns with

#### **Discontent, its sources**

Dissatisfaction with governance is bound to be high at a time of unemployment and persistent inflation. Food-price inflation, in particular, has remained elevated for five years. It is highest for cereals and pulses, which are staples. For households at the bottom of the income distribution, food constitutes close to half their household expenditure. Past experience suggests that the price of food can be a determinant of how the electorate votes. For instance, historically high food-price inflation towards the end of its decade-long tenure had preceded the end of the A.B. Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance government in 2004. When it comes to jobs, the unemployment rate has mostly been higher since 2014. The Periodic Labour Force Survey also shows a decline in the real earnings of regular employees and the self-employed, being substantial in the case of the latter. These are some of the sources of the economic discontent that may have propelled the shift away from the BJP.

In the spirit of democracy, which he constantly refers to, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must now honour the mandate given by the people. His government must address the sources of their discontent. This would require a change from the economic approach that has been followed for the last decade. We are yet to see indications that the government has this in mind. The Finance Minister has promised 'reforms', and some supportive commentators have spoken of how they are essential for growth. Two points spring to mind as reforms are brought to the table.

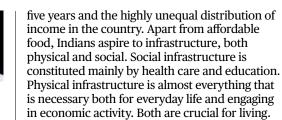
First, Mr. Modi's much praised reforming zeal has not translated to a higher average growth rate after 2014. Reforms understood as changes in the policy regime are effective only to the extent that they affect the forces of demand or supply. Clearly, this has not happened strongly or widely enough in the economy, whatever the reforms undertaken by the present regime so far.

Second, the growth that we have seen since 2014 has not brought along with it the things that Indians aspire to. I have already mentioned the high food inflation. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that close to 75% of the Indian population cannot afford a healthy diet. This is not surprising given the extent of increase in food prices in the past



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The economic policy of the past decade has focused on attracting foreign investment, moving to digital payment in all spheres, building a manufacturing sector through subsidy and, in the past three years, unleashing a highway construction spree. Combined with this, there have been a host of transfers, cash for farmers and housewives and free rations for the poorest. This might appear to be a winning formula, but it has not been enough to bring the BJP back with a majority. To continue with this would be to ignore the people's verdict. To honour it would require going beyond vague pronouncements on reforms or doubling down on welfare transfers, even if there was fiscal capacity for this. Showcasing macroeconomic stability also will not do. Till the COVID-19 pandemic, the central government had had fair success with fiscal consolidation, though not equally with inflation control, but that could not prevent growth from sliding even before COVID-19 had struck. While you certainly do not want macroeconomic instability, we can now see that it does not necessarily bring more growth or deliver the goods citizens aspire to. Continued high growth in India would require a rise in the investment rate. Private investment is guided by anticipation of demand. The private investment rate in India has not budged for a decade. Whether it will rebound at a time when its principal cheerleader, Mr. Modi, has lost his majority in Parliament is to be seen.

#### **Glaring deficits**

So, if 'more reforms' is not the way for economic policy to respond to the electorate, then what is? It would be to undertake specific interventions at the pressure points which currently signal a presence. The first, as already flagged, is the rising price of food. Other than the promotion of millets, agriculture has been a generally neglected aspect of the Modi economic package of the last decade. The relentless rise in prices of staple foods is the sign of an under-developed economy, and sits uncomfortably with the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat'. While wheat production only experiences shortfalls in certain years, the production of pulses, a major source of protein for workers, has chronically fallen short of demand for decades. Making India self-sufficient in pulses must be taken up in mission mode. The supply of fruits and vegetables, the sources of

vitamins and minerals, is hobbled by the absence of cold-storage facilities and poor transportation.

A second pressure point in the country is to be found in the Indian Railways. Its leadership appears to have been caught unawares by the rise in long-distance migration for work. Pictures of reserved compartments on long-distance trains swarming with ticketless travellers have sent shock waves across the country. In such a situation, to treat high-end 'Vande Bharat' trains as a priority, not to mention the bullet train. is a serious failure of judgment when it is not actually irresponsible.

A third pressure point is the strained water supply situation in our mega cities. First Bengaluru and now Delhi have witnessed severe deficits this summer. These are India's leading agglomerations and water shortage can cripple their economic potential, apart from endangering social harmony. 'Nal se jal' must seem a distant dream to many.

#### The public sector is crucial

I have selected only a small set from the many deficits in India today, but this would be sufficient to see the point being made. Expressways and a Digital Stack, which the BJP has championed, have their place for sure, but connecting cities and digitising India are not the most pressing of the country's needs right now. The country needs infrastructure that supports both everyday life and economic activity. The first is easily understood, but the second perhaps not. Firms, including the self-employed, need producer services ranging from efficient transportation and steady electricity supply to sewerage and waste disposal facilities. When such services are unavailable, production cannot take place, and employment cannot expand.

The relatively high growth in India over the past quarter century has not delivered these services sufficiently, and they are unlikely to be supplied by the private sector within any time frame. Only the public sector can supply them at scale. Surely, this must be obvious to Mr. Modi as he travels the world to attend summits held in locations with impressive public infrastructure. His economic approach has banked too much on the private sector to take the lead in developing the country. But this has not materialised in a decade, and it is unlikely to change. The government, however, can undertake course correction now. Instead of promising, or even implementing, liberalising reforms, it should move swiftly to address the pressure points that are so obvious. It has set 2047 as the date to make the country a developed economy. However much it may grow by then, India will remain underdeveloped without the infrastructure to

#### A progressive Indian policy on Myanmar outlined

hree years on, the military in Myanmar, which overthrew the elected civilian government in February 2021, continues to kill, maim and displace its own people. India has steadfastly maintained formal relations with this regime, which has so far murdered more than 5,000 people and displaced some 2.5 million people. In its second tenure, the Narendra Modi government did very little to engage with the pro-democracy resistance, which now has both political and military wings. Indian foreign policy scholars and practitioners have doggedly defended this policy by arguing that India needs to work with the junta if it has to protect its "interests" in Myanmar and not get swayed by an idealistic preoccupation with "values".

How India can step out of China's shadow But, in foreign policy, there is no clear line between "values" and "interests" simply because neither has a standard definition. It all depends on how a country defines these terms. This is also the case with India's Myanmar policy. New Delhi has long defined its "interests" in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms. But now, it needs to leverage a unique set of "values" to better defend its interests. It is possible for India to put in place a more progressive, values-driven Myanmar policy that works in favour, and not

against, its national interests. This new policy should have two key pivots, namely, democracy and human security. The new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, therefore, needs to take four interlocking steps immediately.

First, India needs to use its credentials as the largest federal democracy in the region to sharpen its influence in Myanmar. For long, Myanmar's pro-democracy political elites and civil society have looked up to India as a model of a federal democratic union with a well-oiled power-sharing arrangement between the centre and various subnational units. This is even more relevant today as the democratic resistance in Myanmar, which is led by the National Unity Government (NUG), dozens of ethnic revolutionary organisations, civil society organisations, and trade unions, strives to replace the military-drafted 2008 constitution with a



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<u>Angshuman</u> **Choudhury** 

New Delhi-based researcher and writer from Assam, and formerly an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research

New Delhi's

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country in

terms needs

to change

'interests' in the

Southeast Asian

narrow strategic

federal constitution. By helping this vibrant opposition achieve its aim through capacity-building and knowledge exchange programmes, India can distinguish itself from China, its primary regional competitor in Myanmar. Both Beijing and New Delhi can sell military hardware to Myanmar, but only India can sell the spirit of federal cooperation. Here is a chance for the new Indian government to outmanoeuvre the Chinese in their own 'backvard'.

#### Weapons sales and humanitarian outreach

Second, India needs to immediately halt all weapon sales to the Myanmar military. According to the advocacy group, Justice For Myanmar (JFM), Indian state-owned military hardware manufacturers have sold a range of non-lethal and semi-lethal equipment to the junta since the 2021 coup. In its most recent report, published on March 27, the group claimed that on January 2, the Indian Air Force transferred a package which had 52 items, including navigation and communication parts, to its Myanmar counterpart. Another recent investigation by Frontier Myanmar claims that India sold more than \$1.5 million worth of navy-grade diesel to junta-linked entities since the coup. New Delhi needs to immediately put a stop to these, as the Myanmar military continues to use all its three services – the army, air force, and navy – to attack non-combatant civilians using imprecise lethal tactics

Third, India needs to immediately open cross-border humanitarian corridors to help civilians affected by the conflict along three border provinces – Sagaing Region, Chin State and northern Rakhine State. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) data, Sagaing Region has seen the largest quantum of internal displacement in all of Myanmar since the coup (as of March 25, 2024). Rakhine comes next, while Chin State sits tenth in the list. Continuing air strikes by the junta and clashes between armed groups in these areas have only pushed more civilians across the borders. New Delhi needs to first revoke its plans to fence the India-Myanmar border and reinstate the Free Movement Regime,

or the FMR, which the Union Home Ministry suspended in February 2024. Then, it should engage existing humanitarian aid networks along the India-Myanmar border to send emergency relief assistance including medicines, food and tarpaulin to the other side. Mizoram, where a multi-layered asylum and aid ecosystem is already operational, is a good starting point. India should also collaborate with local and international non-governmental organisations with experience in the field. Best practices from Thailand, which recently started cross-border aid deliveries into Myanmar, should also be adopted. New Delhi should use its clout to ensure that the aid is not distributed by the junta, which not only has a disastrous track record in this field, but is also not even in control of large areas along the India-Myanmar border. It is also possible to run cross-border aid corridors without allowing contraband to pass through, with stringent checks and pre-delivery vetting.

#### **Detention of asylum seekers**

Fourth, the Narendra Modi government should immediately halt the detention and deportation of asylum seekers from Myanmar. This is especially so in the case of Manipur, where the BJP-led government has so far deported 115 asylum seekers to Myanmar - the latest round was on June 11. These are people who entered India not because they wanted to or with mal-intent, but because they were forced to. Regardless of the fact that India has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is incumbent upon the government to treat them as refugees in need of humanitarian assistance and protection rather than as "illegal immigrants". Both the Indian Constitution and international law allow the Indian state to do so. In fact, the customary international legal principle of non-refoulement discourages India from deporting refugees back to a home country where they face a threat of persecution or death. The Centre should also urge the BJP-led Assam government to release the 27 Chin refugees detained in the State and house them in a humane refugee shelter.

India, the "Vishwabandhu", routinely claims to stand with the people of Myanmar. It should now walk the talk.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Kallakurichi and policy

It is heart-wrenching that several families in Kallakurichi district have lost their breadwinners. It is likely that the Tamil Nadu government will take action against bootleggers, at least in the short term. However,

the elephant in the room flawed liquor taxation policies — is being ignored. Liquor is viewed as an easy source of revenue for governments, as consumers are from diverse social classes and are not organised, allowing the

governments to raise taxes without much backlash. Since total prohibition has been shown to be ineffective historically, there is a need for measures to ensure a safe product. Simultaneously, efforts to promote de-addiction and

more awareness of the impact of alcohol on health must be scaled up. Michael Jom, Thiruvananthapuram

**Examination scandal** It is a real shame and pathetic that even decades

after Independence, a competitive examination cannot be conducted in a fair and scandal-free way in India. The plight of hapless aspirants cannot be imagined. Their being demoralised is only one aspect.

Even though there are loopholes in the legal system in India, there needs to be stringent legal action and severe punishment even if the political class is found to be involved. K.V. Ramesh Nair,

#### GROUND ZERO



# Catching a falling star

The killing of Renukaswamy, allegedly by Kannada film actor-producer Darshan and his associates, has made news even in places he and his films are not popular. K.V. Aditya **Bharadwaj** and **G.T. Sathish** chronicle the horrifying series of incidents that mirror society's realities: fan-culture, alleged social media violations, and violence so brutal that it caused death

food delivery executive out with a Sunday-breakfast parcel on June 9, was headed to one of the apartments in Sattva Anugraha, an upmarket complex on the Outer Ring Road (ORR) in Bengaluru's western suburbs. On his way, he saw street dogs pull at what looked like the body of a man in a storm water drain. He alerted the security guards, who in turn called the police

Based on the complaint of Kevalram Dorji, the security officer of the apartment complex, the police recovered the body riddled with injuries. It was stuck on a bushy slope off the road and had not fallen into the running water. There was no identification on him. The CCTV footage from the apartment com-

plex gave leads on two suspicious vehicles. As is routine, the police secured the body in a morgue and put out an advertisement with photographs in newspapers that evening, seeking information. It might have ended up as one of the many unidentified bodies in the metropolis, but the police were in for a surprise on the evening of

At about 7 p.m. that day, four men walked into the Kamakshipalya police station and confessed to the murder of the man they said was K.S. Renukaswamy, 33. A resident of Chitradurga, a district headquarters in central Karnataka, around 200 kilometres away from Bengaluru, Renukaswamy worked at a retail pharmacy chain. Raghavendra, 43, also from Chitradurga; Karthik, 27; Keshavamur-

> thy, 27; and Nikhil Naik, 21, all from Bengaluru, claimed they had a financial dispute with the deceased, had abducted and brought him to the city, beaten him up, and he had died.

**Police action** 

Chitradurga

Bengaluru The police were sceptical: "The victim did not have a profile which could have led to his murder due to a financial dispute. Such surrenders usually happen only in underworld cases," said a senior police official, who has been leading the investigation.

Following sustained interrogation, the four told a different story. "What they revealed came as a shock to us," the official said. The men said Darshan Thoogudeepa, one of the most popular Kannada cinema actors, had got the victim abducted from Chitradurga, had him brought to a shed in Rajarajeshwari Nagar in Bengaluru, and had beaten him up by his associates, leading to

They said the victim had sent obscene messages to Darshan's alleged partner Pavithra Gowda on social media. The actor had sent the four to surrender, paying them to keep his name out, police say. One of the four, Raghavendra, was the president of the Chitradurga District Darshan Fans' Club.

In the next few hours, the police arrested seven more people: Vinay V., 38, owner of Stonny Brook resto-bar in Bengaluru, where the actor had been partying on Saturday afternoon. Vinay's uncle owns the shed where the victim was



June 28 is his wedding anniversary, and we were planning an event to mark the occasion KASHINATH S. SHIVANA-GOWDRU

father

allegedly tortured and killed. Deepak, 39, is a partner in the company running the shed and a nephew of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) city MLA. Pavan K., 29, is an employee of Darshan, working as Pavithra Gowda's helper. Pradosh, 40, is a corporate executive and has been Darshan's friend for two decades. Nandeesh, 28; Lakshman, 54; and Nagaraju, 41, were allegedly present at the shed and had assaulted the victim

The next morning, as Gowda was arrested in Bengaluru, city police arrested Darshan, who was at a hotel in Mysuru for a film shoot.

Darshan is one of the highest paid actors in the Kannada film industry, called Sandalwood informally. "He did at least two or three movies a year earlier, and was considered a 'dependable' hero. Producers invested money in him; exhibitors felt the need for such a hero so that theatres would be busy most of the year. Both the industry and the audience admired him for different reasons," said Shashidhar Chitradurga, author and film journalist.

Darshan's most recent action film Kaatera is the industry's biggest hit this year so far. At election time, politicians flocked to get the D-Boss, as he is popularly known, to campaign for them, especially in southern Karnataka.

#### Last day at home

At about 2.30 p.m. on June 8, Renukaswamy had called his mother Rathnaprabha, 62, over the phone to tell her that he would not come home for lunch, and would return late in the evening. That was their last conversation. His body was brought to Chitradurga three days later.

Renukaswamy had left home around 9 a.m. on Saturday and parked his two-wheeler near Balaji Bar, close to the circle where the roads connecting Chitradurga with Bengaluru and Challakere taluka meet. As per CCTV camera footage, he

got into an autorickshaw, and the vehicle took the Bengaluru route. After a couple of kilometres, the passengers in the autorickshaw and the driver shifted to a taxi. They have now been identified as Raghaven-

dra, the driver Ravi Shankar, and two of his associates Anu Kumar, 25, and Jagadeesh, 36, all from Chitradurga. Raghavendra had allegedly lured them into the plot, promising them a meeting with their idol, Darshan.

Back home, his mother; father, Kashinath S. Shivanagowdru, 75; and wife, Sahana K.S, 26, waited, as the evening turned to the next day, and there was no sign of him. "We called his friends and the pharmacy, but no one knew anything," says Shivanagowdru.

As they contemplated lodging a complaint with the police on Monday, Shivanagowdru, who retired as a senior assistant from the Bengaluru Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) 17 years ago, got information of his son's death from the police. "I felt the ground beneath me cave in," recalled the father, still shaken.

Renukaswamy, who was actively involved in the activities of a few Hindutva groups, according to people in the locality, had dropped out of college, where he was studying Commerce. He secured a job in the sales section of a pharmacy company and worked at its outlets in Chitradurga, after undergoing training. "Last year, we got nim married to Sahana. June 28 is his wedding anniversary, and we were planning an event to mark the occasion," said Shivanagowdru.

Instead, on June 17, the family held a ritual in memory of Renukaswamy. "Sorry, the moment I start to speak about my son, I cannot hold back my tears," Shivanagowdru said. What haunts him most are the reports of torture. "The moment I remember him, I start to imagine how he must have suffered. I imagine him pleading with folded hands, wailing in pain. He must have cried for help; he must have begged them not to torture him." Then, "His wife is five months pregnant."

#### Where it all happened

The now infamous shed, about 300 metres away from the road, is situated on a four-acre plot owned by Pattanagere Jayanna, who has significant land holdings in the Pattanagere village, now subsumed within Rajarajeshwari Nagar, a suburb in west Bengaluru. Intact Autoparc India Pvt Ltd had rented the land parcel. About 400 seized vehicles, including some trucks and buses, allegedly of loan defaulters, are parked in the space. It has a two-storey building at one end and is covered by at least eight CCTV cameras.

Raghavendra was allegedly instructed to take Renukaswamy to the shed, where at least one movie of Darshan had been shot. Darshan was partying at Stonny Brooks.

Gowda, who runs a boutique, had on January 24, this year, posted pictures with Darshan on so-



Barring Darshan, who had a domestic abuse case [in 2011, when he was arrested]; three others have petty cases against them; none of the other accused has any criminal record A SENIOR POLICE OFFICER

cial media with the caption, "One decade down; forever to go. #10vear. It's been 10 years of our relationship. Thank you." A sprinkling of hearts and stars was added. Gowda became a target of trolls. The message upset many Darshan fans who sided with his wife, Vijayalakshmi, and wrote messages against Gowda.

Renukaswamy was one of them. Allegedly operating under multiple fake Instagram identities, he had persistently trolled Gowda publicly. Police say he used the account @goutham\_ks\_1990 to send her obscene messages and pictures. Police have now found that Renukaswamy was a habitual offender and had employed a similar modus operandi with many women. One of them had brought it to the notice of a police officer in March 2024, but no action was taken.

These messages enraged Gowda, who allegedly informed her help Pavan. Posing as Gowda, he had chatted with Renukaswamy, managing to extract his mobile number and details of his whereabouts. With this information, Darshan allegedly contacted Raghavendra, seeking his 'help'. Using the photo and number, Raghavendra tracked down Renukaswamy and brought him to the shed, allegedly on Darshan's instructions.

Darshan then allegedly landed up at the shed with Gowda and several of his associates, including Pavan, the pub owner Vinay, and his friend Pradosh. Investigations have now revealed that Darshan got Gowda to beat up Renukaswamy and made him apologise. Renukaswamy was later tortured for several hours. Police claim that Deepak, a partner in the company running the shed, who had been out on work, joined them midway.

#### Past and present offenders

The post-mortem report says that Renukaswamy's death was "due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of multiple blunt injuries sustained," say the police. The police's remand application gives graphic details of the torture. So far, 17 arrests have been made.

Police claim Pavan took charge of the coverup, roping in three associates. Late in the night, the trio along with four others, took the body in two SUVs and threw it into the drain. "They assumed it would be washed away, but the body got stuck in the bushes," a police official said.

Darshan claims he only warned Renukaswamy, got Pavithra to slap him, and left, and that he had nothing to do with the murder. But police say he was present for much longer. The actor has now reportedly confessed to having paid Pradosh ₹30 lakh for the cover-up. Pradosh allegedly gave ₹5 lakh each to three who surrendered before the police, taking the blame for the murder. They had been promised more money for their families. Police have recovered the money.

Bengaluru City Police Commissioner B. Dayananda said they were confident of the case against the actor, as the arrest was based on strong evidence. "Barring Darshan, who had a domestic abuse case (in 2011, when he was arrested after his wife filed a case]; three others have petty cases against them; none of the other accused has any criminal record," another senior police officer leading the probe, said. He adds this was the reason they did not know how to cover their tracks.

#### Fact, fiction, and the film world

Following Darshan's arrest for murder, social media is abuzz with multiple clips from his films which eerily mirror the happenings in the case. The characters Darshan plays in the movies often portray a type of masculinity that punishes those who violate women, by taking the law into their hands. At 6.3 feet and a gym-built body, Darshan's appeal was at many levels.

"In the initial years, people appreciated his screen presence and stunts, in addition to his looks. It was the time when gym culture picked up in Karnataka. Young boys who were keen on their physical appearance followed the actor," said Shashidhar.

Despite being the son of on-screen villain and character-actor Thoogudeepa Srinivas, wellknown in the 1970s and 1980s, Darshan started at the bottom of the film industry pyramid, working as a light boy, when he lost his father at 18. His first break as a lead actor came with the 2002 superhit Majestic, in which he played an orphaned youth led astray into Bengaluru's underworld.

With his arrest after the domestic violence case, for which he got bail, his relationship with the media soured, but most of his films continued to rake in money. Days after the domestic violence case, his film Sarathi, in which he played an auto driver fighting to take revenge over his father's murder, became a blockbuster.

Today, fans stand outside the police station where he is being held, and the police, have had to impose prohibitory orders around the station. Social media is awash with fan support.

In recent years, Darshan had made an effort to break away from the mould he found himself in, essaying roles of freedom fighter Sangolli Rayanna and the Mahabharata's tragic-hero Duryodhana in recent films. These brought him closer to family audiences. His recent films Yajamana, Kranti, and Kaatera, made good business and were hailed for their social messages.

Away from the blinding camera lights, Chandrappa, 60, accused person Anu Kumar's father, collapsed and died on hearing the news of his son's arrest. Chandrappa was a construction labourer; his wife Jayamma works as a domestic help. In their one-room tenement in Chitradurga, Jayamma says, "My son Anu's friend Jagadish is Darshan's fan. He forced Anu to join him for the trip," she says, weeping.



Police seal the shed were Renukaswamy, a fan of actor Darshan, was allegedly tortured and murdered. MURALI KUMAR K

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SATURDAY - JUNE 22, 2024

#### The good(s) tax

Prioritise reforms in GST rates, procedures

early seven years after its inception, there can be no denying the success of GST as a tax reform measure. Businesses have benefited from a more streamlined system after State imposts were dispensed with. Transparent e-filing processes appear to have stemmed leakages, boosting tax revenues. The gross GST mop-up in FY24 crossed the ₹20-lakh crore mark (₹20.18-lakh crore), up 11.5 per cent over the previous year. It is remarkable that GST collections have increased 71 per cent since FY19, notwithstanding the pandemic shock.



Yet, when the GST Council meets today for the 53<sup>rd</sup> time, the first under the new government, it needs to impart a push to crucial reforms - rationalising tax rates; bringing alcohol and fuel into GST's ambit; and doing away with a punitive approach to mopping up taxes. Besides rate rationalisation, a review of taxes on specific sectors is likely to figure as an agenda item. The latter includes a 28 per cent levy on online gaming; addressing inverted duty structure in sectors such as textiles, footwear, medicines and fertilizer, which stymies input tax credit claims; and surprisingly high rates of duty on items of common use such as cement and two-wheelers. The Council has, in the past, corrected genuine anomalies. However, it remains to be seen whether it makes major progress in crucial but contentious areas such as rate rationalisation and inclusion of new items, given electoral considerations and the realities of coalition politics.

The need to rationalise rates to promote ease of doing business is one of the main goals of GST. But it is apprehended as being inflationary. The move would mean a rate of 8 per cent instead of 5 per cent and 12 per cent, and 15 per cent instead of 12 per cent and 18 per cent. The 28 per cent rate can perhaps be reduced to 18 per cent. Much would depend on how the fitment committee (comprising central and State tax officials who have been meeting often of late) approaches the issue. The consensus-building skills of BJP's State ministers can play a crucial role in achieving a breakthrough. They are part of the multi-party 'group of ministers' looking into rate rationalisation, led by Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Khanna. GST marks the success of consensus building in a diverse polity; that spirit should be sustained.

It is easier to move quickly on procedural matters. GST tribunals must be set up soon to resolve disputes. Multiple reasons for delay in disbursing input tax credit should be addressed, including the cost borne by a buyer due to tax filing irregularities by a seller. These delays or denials could lead to costs being passed down the chain. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has recently issued orders to restrain overzealous tax officials, but harassment remains a concern – more so with MSMEs. Powers of arrest under Section 132 of the GST Act have been a subject of controversy. Ultimately, it should not be forgotten that GST is meant to smoothen matters for business.

RAVIKANTH







# Political branding: Pluses and minuses

Political branding is now a reality in Indian politics. But politicians must work hard to maintain the image they create



CAPITAL IDEAS.



**RICHA MISHRA** 

olitical branding has become a part of Indian elections and more than the symbol of political parties it is the individuals who have now become the face of the party.

For the BJP it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Telugu Desam Party (TDP), once identified as NT Rama Rao's party, has N Chandrababu Naidu as its face, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has Naveen Patnaik as its face, YSR Congress Party has YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, and Rahul Gandhi is the face of the Indian National Congress (INC).

The latest elections in Andhra Pradesh are a good example of how political branding followed by individual branding works.

How does the branding of politicians happen? Does it influence the voter? Does it make a political party more individual centric?

Political branding is different from political advertising. Here the stakes run high on one individual if not the party. As experts say, the brand is an organisation's most important asset as it gives it an identity and helps create a

According to Harish Bijoor of Harish Bijoor Consults Inc, a private-label consulting firm that specialises in brand and business strategy, "The brand of a politician actually emerges slowly but surely. In the beginning there is a hunger to establish a share of view, a share of mind and of course a share of heart with the electorate."

#### POLITICAL PITFALLS

"A politician typically follows in the footsteps of those who have been there before and emulates typically what has been good practices of politician branding. In the bargain many of them make mistakes because one of the key issues in branding yourself is the fact that you must not look like the other, and most politicians end up looking like one another," he pointed out.

A politician's branding occurs in the minds of people and hinges crucially on the politician's actions, inactions, and acts of commissions and omissions.

"Many try and harvest family names, family work, etc. But the best thing to do would be to depend on your own work and establish for yourself a very solid high ground. In branding, occupying a

The key to political branding is differentiation. Politicians must strive hard to create a distinct political identity for themselves and make sure they don't "resemble" each other.

key high ground is very very important," he said. Look at two politicians from two ends of the political spectrum-Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi. Says Bijoor, "I think Rahul Gandhi realised over a period of time that it is not enough to look like the other, but it is very important to distinguish and look disparate from Modi. And therefore, if you look at the recent high ground occupied by Rahul Gandhi you will see that if Moditalks of religion Rahul Gandhi talks of caste and caste consolidations. If Moditalks about wealth creation, Rahul Gandhi talks about wealth redistribution. And therefore, I think the story has been learnt and there is a new brand Rahul which you and I see today.3

According to Robbin Sharrma,
Director ShowTime Consulting, and
mastermind behind brand CBN for these
elections, "Branding of politicians is
connected to the party he/she
represents. It is simple. Face of the party
represents the positioning of the party.
For example, in Andhra Pradesh Jagan
Mohan Reddy and Chandrababu Naidu
were representing their parties."

How does it create a recall value in the voters mind? "The brand by my definition is a thought that lives in a person's mind. The politician brand is a key thought of a persona which lives in a voter's mind and establishing that key thought is the task of the politician brand. When it comes to voting day, it is this brand equity that helps swing a vote in favour or against the candidate in mention," Bijoor sad.

"In the realm of politics there are two brands really — there is a party brand and then there is a leader brand. Both matter, but in most cases, it is the charisma and the persona of the individual that override the party brand. If you look at BJP, the BJP story is PM Modi, and it has done exceedingly well for the party. And Modi has ruled the roost and hearts of the voters," he pointed out.

Sharrma says it is very important to create a differentiator for individuals or parties. For example, TDP was created by NTR then Naidu came in. YSRCP was close to Congress in its positioning.

"We had to work on a differentiator. So, we ensured that Naidu talks about development. A party's positioning and ideology had to be in sync. For example, if Congress starts talking about hardcore Hindutva then how will it be different from BJP? When branding a leader we keep in the crowd which is the target as well as the colour," he said.

"For TDP we chose yellow and red representing hope and energy. Naidu was being projected as coming with new energy at 74 and Nara Lokesh getting ready to take over the mantle from Naidu subsequently," he added.

So when marketing Naidu, the brand colours used were 30 per cent red, 60 per cent yellow and close to 10 per cent green (farmers), while for Lokesh 70 per cent red and 30 per cent yellow, he said.

Branding does have an impact on voters. Going ahead, political branding is going to gain momentum but for politicians and parties maintaining that image will be a challenge.

#### Economic agenda for the new government

Direct sops for farmers, tweaks to PLI scheme and I-T relief for some income categories can be considered

Radhika Rao

A s the surprise outcome of the election wears off, the coalition government's agenda comes under focus. The first '100 days' report card, which rose to prominence during the action-packed tenure of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, will be the first milestone for the NDA administration.

A big shift in the government's priorities post the poll results is unlikely, even as we expect more emphasis on an inclusive growth agenda and deeper support for the agrarian sector.

Continuity: The core Cabinet team was kept unchanged, which signalled the status quo on the broader policy direction by introducing certainty and consistency on the decision-making front

This was followed by plans to transfer the 17th installment of the PM-Kisan fund, likely pending due to the model code of conduct, which will amount to ₹200 billion (0.1 per cent of GDP) to 93 million farmers. Subsequently, the Cabinet also approved government assistance for the construction of 30

million houses under the PMAY programme, with two-thirds to be built under the rural component.

Consistency: The gross fixed capital formation ratio to GDP has risen to north of 31 per cent in FY24 but is still below the FY12 peak.

A large part of the increase in capital expenditure by direct government and non-corporate private (households) has been concentrated in construction (of infrastructure projects) and real estate, reflected in 'dwellings and structures' under the GDP series, with higher private corporate participation expected to provide a boost to 'machinery and equipment'.

Further tweaks to the PLI scheme and other incentives to better target the intended sectors, expand to a few ancillary segments, and ease disbursements are also likely to be under consideration. Subsidy allocations are likely to stay at similar levels as the interim budget. The revenue windfall from strong tax collections and RBI surplus transfer provides ample fiscal flexibility to not only target a small improvement in the FY25 deficit target but also accommodate additional stimulus measures.



BUDGET TIME. Policy matters ISTOCKPHOTO

Cost of living: Post-poll surveys signalled the need to address food inflation, job creation, and farm sector stress. After a record heatwave, the south-west monsoon has started with a 20 per cent deficit, posing a headwind for the agrarian sector, after farm output GVA growth averaged a weak 0.7 per cent yoy in FY24.

Direct support for farmers via inputs, including fertilisers, and a 5-10 per cent increase in MSPs for kharif crops, including rice and pulses, might be considered.

Concurrently, to contain spillover

impact on food prices, reports suggested that the government plans to add 16 new commodities to its price monitoring list, increasing the total to 38.

Income tax cuts for certain categories (for instance, on incomes over ₹15 lakh) might also be on the cards to boost disposable incomes.

Rating agency S&P recently upgraded the economy's sovereign rating outlook, opening the door to a potential upgrade within the next two years.

With the large combined fiscal deficit and debt levels being highlighted as the drags on the sovereign, we expect fiscal consolidation to be demonstrated by lowering deficits to below 4.5 per cent of GDP next year.

This is likely to be accompanied by a gradual moderation in the path of the debt levels towards 80-81 per cent of GDP over the next five years. These incremental steps are focused on achieving bigger goals, such as meeting the government's centennial goal of 'Viksit Bharat' plans by 2047 to rise from an emerging economy to developed status.

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• 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.

#### Eco-friendly fashion

Apropos 'Ethical fashion is chic' (June 21), indeed fashion industry in consonance with environment protection must ensure good working conditions to their workers especially in providing protection to workers who handle dye and other

Also they must take steps to recycling practices, low emissions and reducing cotton waste.
Reducing the green house gas

Reducing the green house gas emissions is also vital for the environment. **NR Nagarajan** 

#### Rly safety concerns

The article 'Railways safety going off-track?' (June 21), depicts the painful and appaling state of affairs in the Railways. The writer rightly doubts whether gaps in information, lack of real time alert generation leveraging available data and proactive response all added to endanger safety. The slow progress of Kavach installation is also a matter of concern, especially at a time the Railways has been getting huge investments. The author's advocacy not to take

shelter behind statistics of lowering of accidents and aim for 'zero-fatality' should be a creed to all up the hierarchy: time for IR to wake up.

#### Jose Abraham

Apropos, 'Railway safety going off-track?', as more than 22 million passengers on an average travel in 13,000-plus passenger trains daily, we can't afford to be lax on safety. The recent disaster involving the Sealdah Kanchanjungha Express and a goods train in West Bengal shouldn't have happened. However, the much flaunted anti-collision system, Kavach, is currently operational on only 1,400-odd km of rail track, with plans to extend coverage by another 3,000

km by end-2024. Indian Railways has cited costs and practical challenges for the tardy progress but that hardly cuts any ice. There can be no compromise on passenger safety.

N Sadhasiva Reddy

#### RBI's valid worries

Apropos 'RBI's timely action helped moderate unsecured credit growth, says Das' (June 21). Banks need to deploy their money on high-yielding assets.

assets.
Accordingly, retail lending, credit card businesses and lending to NBFCs are the areas where banks earn higher interest compared to other advances. At the same time there is higher

amount of risk involved on these unsecured consumer loans and loans to NBFCs forcing banks to make higher provisions on these loans. The banks therefore are forced to reduce their exposure to unsecured lendings resulting in declining outstanding balances under these heads as on April'24. The RBI policy is therefore certainly correct in this direction as uncontrolled lendings to unsecured loans also create recovery problems involving huge provisions to cover

them. Viable and proper monitoring of lending is the need of the hour. **Katuru Durga Prasad Rao** 

the potential risks associated with

Hyderabad

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ND-NDE

#### Indian banks are strong enough to support growth



SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

lose to a decade ago, India's regulators, along with banks, teamed up to launch a surgical strike on asset quality issues plaguing the banking sector post the global financial crisis. The message was clear: The sanctity of the financial fabric was sacrosanct for the regulators, entrusted with a dual mandate of anchoring growth while safeguarding the interests of the common man and ensuring financial stability. Similarly, the recent bulldozing of unruly payment aggregators echoes this commitment.

It is thus rather sad to see the salvos fired from select quarters now dubbing India's financial sector as poorly regulated and questioning the integrity of the country's top financial institutions. Irrational exuberance in coloured counter-narratives, may we say so!

First, through the last decade, and particularly in the post-pandemic period, the Indian banking system has exhibited unprecedented resilience with maturity and surpassed many challenges arising from both the domestic and global economic environment. The improvement in asset quality has been primarily led by strong macroeconomic fundamentals, effective regulatory and supervisory oversight, the creation of strong banks through mergers and capital infusion, improving governance practices while expanding the reach and quality of financial services, and enhancing the adoption of digital-heavy banking while ensuring customer interests are protected. Most importantly, this has been achieved by ensuring that the financial fabric remains well-cushioned with capital and liquidity buffers to tide over any exogenous or intrinsic shocks.

Second, the Indian financial system remains truly unique with overwhelming market dominance of heavily regulated banks, both public and private, dictating the terms of trade co-terminus with their risk appetite, while maintaining robust internal controls and remaining open to

constant vigilance. Third, the fears fanned by select quarters regarding the rapid growth of bank credit seems unfounded, as credit growth in the Indian banking system remained at 16.3 per cent in FY24 (including HDFC at 20.2 per cent), with a near secular growth across sectors, including agriculture and small and medium enterprises. While the share of retail loans has increased to 32.4 per cent from 29.5 per cent, mainly anchored by secured home loans, which grew from 14.4 per cent in

April 2022 to 16.6 per cent in April 2024. Fourth, analysing the time trend in retail loans shows no major compositional shifts since April 2021 for both the secured and unsecured portfolio of retail credit. Both segments have grown since Covid-19, with an unmasked bias towards the secured portfolio.

Fifth, the total share of unsecured retail loans remains just around onetenth of the entire scheduled commercial banks' credit portfolio.

Sixth, the quality of retail portfolio growth in non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), including Fintechs and peer-to-peer, is subject to scale-based regulation of NBFCs, with 15 larger players commanding close to a quarter of the sector's assets.

Seventh, the latest TransUnion CIBIL data on origination statistics reveals the share of prime and above cohorts stand at 41 per cent, while new-to-credit consumers are at a low level of 14 per cent. Eighth, small-ticket personal loans of

less than ₹50,000 account for 0.3 per cent of the total retail loan book size at the industry level.

Ninth, household debt in India, as measured by credit card outstanding per card, has either been static or declined in recent times. With approximately 10.1 million credit cards in circulation as of January 2024, the average outstanding per card is around ₹26,000, with rollovers and revolvers under control. This pales in comparison to the US, where the total outstanding credit card debt stands at \$1.13 trillion for about 167 million cardholders, exacerbated by rising interest rates and defaults.

Finally, household sector financial savings increased to ₹49.6 trillion in FY23 from ₹38.4 trillion in FY20. Out of the ₹49.6 trillion, the large jump in physical assets of ₹12.3 trillion during FY23 more than offset the increase in financial liabilities at around ₹7.9 trillion. Additionally, out of the ₹79 trillion increase, ₹7 trillion (90 per cent) came from household borrowings from the banking system, mainly as retail credit that satiates basic needs. This puts to rest the constant nitpicking over the decline in net

financial savings during this period. We believe that total household savings (both financial and physical) for FY24 would still surpass FY23 levels despite the decline in financial savings. In sync, household debt-to-gross domestic product stood at 40.1 per cent as of December 2023, down from the highs of 42.2 per cent as of March 2021, according to the Bank for International Settlements.

The fortification of the banking and financial system, buoyed by the tailwinds of higher capital adequacy ratios/common equity tier 1, improved liquidity coverage ratio /provision coverage ratio, return on equity and return on assets aligning with industry standards, coupled with the lowest gross to net non-performing asset levels in a decade, better usage of alternate data (goods and services tax/ income tax) for credit underwriting and wherewithal to stand shocks as vouched by stress test models under both baseline and stressed scenarios, signify the resurgence of the "novel" approach to balanced tenets of banking. It is thus regrettable that coloured and unfounded criticisms, tinged with bias, have now become the norm rather than the exception.

The writer is group chief economic advisor, SBI, and member, 16th Finance Commission,



#### What the tribals fear



PLAIN POLITICS

**ADITI PHADNIS** ow afraid are tribal communities in India that the

LUniform Civil Code (UCC) will marginalise their identity? Judging by the results of the Lok Sabha election, it is not an

easy question to answer. Exactly a year ago, the Law Commission had asked for public reactions to a proposal to replace personal laws based on religion, custom, and tradition with one common law for everyone irrespective of religion, caste, creed, sexual orientation, and gender. Personal laws and laws related to inheritance, adoption, and succession were to be covered by a common code. Till June 2023, around 1.9 million suggestions had been received by the government. Now, after the election, WhatsApp messages are being forwarded by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sup-

'yes" to the UCC. Even before the UCC was included in the BJP 2024 manifesto, leaders of tribal groups had been meeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other top government functionaries to demand that tribals be kept out of

the UCC. A BJP MP, a non-tribal,

and the head of the Standing ing women's rights, inheritance tribals in the Northeast should be kept out of the UCC. He was echoing the demand of chief ministers from the Northeast like Conrad Sangma (Meghalaya), an ally of the NDA, who believes the UCC will compromise India's core strength

of diversity. The Nagaland and Mizoram Legislative Assemblies have passed unanimous resolutions that they be exempt from the UCC. Mizoram, Nagaland, and Meghalaya the proportion of the tribal population, according to the 2011 census, is as high as 94.4 per cent, 86.5 per cent, and 86.1 per cent, respectively. Mizos cite con-

sonal laws under Article 371(G). But India being India, there is always "a but".

stitutional protection for their per-

BJP leaders from Jharkhand frankly confess that fears of the UCC submerging tribal identity cost them the Lok Sabha election. Although the party did win eight of the 14 seats in Jharkhand, the victory margin of the BJP candidates was lower than in 2019. The party lost twice over: In terms of vote share (from 51.6 per cent in 2019 down to 44.58 per cent in 2024) and in seats reserved for the tribals: It was not able to win even one.

The losses in Jharkhand have en attributed to both the ar of former chief minister Hemant Sarva Adi Dal was more than the Soren on charges of corruption, and the imminent threat of the UCC. Tribal communities have been active on the issue of protection to Sarna, a system of worship of animistic gods and mobilisation by the Adivasi Samanvay Samiti to protect the tribal way of life regard-

Committee on Law, the late Sushil and adoption. The situation gets Modi, had publicly said he felt more complicated because of tribal conversion to Christianity.

And vet, the situation was dramatically different in Madhya Pradesh and even Chhattisgarh. In Madhya Pradesh people — including tribals — bestowed vast riches on the BJP. The party won all the 29 Lok Sabha seats, a rousing endorsement after the 2023 Assembly elections, in which it won its highest ever tally of 163 of the 230 seats. Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh together have 76 Assembly seats reserved for the tribals. From 19 in 2018, the BJP won 44 in 2023. Most of them were earlier held by the Congress.

This brings us to the central question: If the tribals in Jharkhand are so worried about the UCC swamping their identity, why didn't the same fear inhibit tribal voters from supporting the BJP in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh? Or tribal-dominated Odisha for that matter, where the party posted its best ever results forming the government in the state and winning 20 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats?

Maybe the answer lies in more granular analysis. In Chhattisgarh, for instance, the combined vote of the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Communist Party of India, and the newly formed Hamar Rai and victory margin of the BJP in the two tribal seats of Kanker and Bastar. So, a working hypothesis is: They may have voted for it, but tribal voters are worried about threats to their identity from the UCC and the BJP would do well to keep this in mind.

#### Modi 3.0, T&C apply

A changed reality for Modi govt in its 3rd innings is by no means rise of a new phenomenon. It's a return to old normal where even majorities had to routinely wrestle with storied million mutinies

NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

fter 23 years in power, 13 of them in Gujarat as chief minister, this will be AGujarat as chief infinister, time in a comparate of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first experience of governing in an environment of

contested politics. The most fiercely contested new space will be the 18th Lok Sabha, set to convene later next week. Despite the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA's) comfortable majority, the rejuvenated and united Opposition INDIA bloc will match the numbers and throat-power of the Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP). Mr Modi, and the BJP under him, has never had to deal with such a challenge either in the Gujarat Assembly or in New Delhi. The time-

tested method of the Modi-led BJP, to shout down, suspend or expel Opposition members en masse — as with 146 in December last year — will no longer be available.

Some of the most important laws were passed by near unanvoice votes Opposition-mukt chambers of Parliament. The three new criminal laws are among the most significant examples. These come into effect from July 1.

All Bills will henceforth be fully and contentiously debated and put to vote. Even areas where unanimity was found on the basis of the political rivals' shared "trade union" interest, such as the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, will now face a challenge. Parliamentary committees will change character. It is easy to understand, therefore, how critical the choice of the new Speaker will be.

Prominent political strategist (or political aide as he prefers to call himself) Prashant Kishor has gone wrong with his somewhat hasty prediction of an easy and large BJP majority. But the second significant change he foresaw will turn out as right as the first was wrong: That even with this big majority, the BJP would face popular discontent, Opposition action. As for his third — that Brand Modi is in decline — let's hide behind the oldest cop-out of the opedist: Only time will tell.

The Opposition is already sharpening the knives on three issues: Serial examination paper leaks, the Agnipath scheme, and Manipur. Each concerns large segments of the voter demographics vital for the BJP. Rahul Gandhi made the opening moves Thursday with a press conference on the paper leaks but also mentioned Agnipath.

The government was carrying out a review of the Agnipath programme even before the elections, but it has to brace for two things now. One, the Opposition isn't going to be satisfied with any changes short of a full withdrawal. Second, even if the government retains it with substantive changes, the Opposition will claim that it forced the government's hand. In the 17th Lok Sabha, when the scheme was implemented with the shock-and-awe secrecy characteristic of the Modi government, no such pushback was possible. On exam leaks, the minister

has already walked back to admit responsibility and ordering reviews and inquiries. The BJP has so far had an easy ride on its failure to restore normality in Manipur. With the Congress winning both seats in the state and even a chief minister as discredited as Biren Singh digging in his

heels, the Modi government can no longer afford the earlier outof-sight-out-of-mind approach. There will also be a new challenge in the Rajya Sabha now,

though not as severe as in the Lok Sabha, but significant nevertheless. So far, the BJP was able to count on support from two significant regional parties, Andhra Pradesh's YSR Congress Party and Odisha's Biju Janata Dal. This included support on most contentious Bills, like the one constitutionally downgrading the powers of Delhi's elected government. Neither was a member of the NDA or an ally of the BJP in any formal way. If anything, the BJP contested against both in their respective states, but in a friendly manner. Both became the majority government's obedient Opposition. Can the BIP continue to count on their blind support now? With their defeat by the BJP or its partner, political equations in both states have changed.

And finally in Parliament, if Rahul Gandhi accepts the post of leader of the Opposition, he will have the constitutional right to sit with the Prime Minister to choose people for key positions, including the heads of the Central Bureau of Investigation, Central Vigilance Commission, and Election Commission. However notional it is, chai with Rahul, unavoidable if occasional, is an important metaphor for the Prime Minister's transformed universe.

The views are personal

The changed reality for the Modi government in its third innings is a return to the old normal, where even majorities had to routinely wrestle with the storied million mutinies. The past decade was the Centre's least challenging on that count. Most that emerged, notably the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act and Jawaharlal Nehru University protests, were speedily put down. Only the farmers' protests ended with a victory.

By and large, the government had the space to compartmentalise its challenges, deal with some in a piecemeal manner, and put off others indefinitely. Take the stalled Naga peace agreement, for example. It simply fell off the to-do list.

These aren't earthshaking new challenges. But they underline the fact that in its third term, the Modi government will now need to square up to what used to be usual, mundane challenges in governing India. For example, the matter of the three radicals who have won in Punjab and Kashmir, two of them still in jail, is the kind of issue he has never had to confront. This is the return of the normal irritants of democracy.

And finally, the political challenge of the day after. From 2002, when Mr Modi led his party to victory in his first election in Gujarat, there was never any doubt about his all-conquering electoral power. Each election further cemented his position as his party's main vote-getter first, and the only one in the course of time. Leaders of consequence from other parties, who had opposed the RSS-BJP ideology for decades, walked across presuming that crossing over brought them a "Modi ki Guarantee" of winning elections. Does that presumption still exist?

Even after both general elections, 2014 and 2019, it was evident that Mr Modi wasn't able to swing for his party even most of the state elections that followed soon thereafter. It was then argued that while he could swing a lamp-post election as long as the vote was sought for him, the same formula did not often work when he wasn't on the ticket. But it was not seen as a failing because he was only rising at the national level.

Now, every state election — first up, Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand later this year, then Delhi in January and Bihar in September next year — will be seen by his followers for evidence of his recovery, and by rivals of sharpening decline.

It isn't as if Mr Modi hasn't faced challenges in the past. As chief minister of Guiarat, he and des were confronted with multir and investigations, a western boycott, and tough challenges from activists and courts. Instead of weakening his politics, however, these strengthened it. Because he was the underdog fighting for his ideology, his base was happier. Nobody was able to challenge him electorally. The new situation is qualitatively different.

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#### Superbugs in space

#### **EYE CULTURE**

**KUMAR ABISHEK** 

constellation of panicked headlines recently danced across our screens: "Sunita Williams in danger?", "Trouble for Sunita Williams, crew", "Sunita Williams 'bugged' in space", and so on. The very notion of this intrepid astronaut and others like her. nestled within the International Space Station (ISS), beset by unseen adversaries, stirred the collective imagination.

Though the situation at the ISS is slightly unsettling, holding funeral dirges would be an overkill.

Astronauts aboard the space station have found themselves facing a foe far tinier than any rogue asteroid: A joint study by the Indian Institute of Technology Madras and Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory — under principal investigator Kasthuri Venkateswaran — has revealed that strains of the bacterial species Enterobacter bugandensis, a multi-drug resistant superbug, have been hitting the

gym in the microgravity crucible. Now, before you start imagining scenes from a sci-fi movie, allow me to puncture your thought bubble: These aren't alien microbes: thev're hitchhikers from Earth that have adapted to the unique environment of the space station. Near-zero gravity, high radiation, and recycled air with elevated carbon dioxide levels seem to be a perfect evolutionary pressure cooker, turning run-of-the-mill bacteria into potentially

tougher opponents. On Earth, Enterobacter bugandensis is mainly found in clinical specimens, including from the human gut. This usually harmless bacterium can act as an opportunistic pathogen, co-infecting

people with compromised immunity. This bacterial species is also known to transfer its genome or obtain DNA from other organisms — in other words, it can lead to a "plethora of infections", said researchers. Also, the superbugwhich, according to the study, has developed a method to evade the action of many different types of antibiotics can persist on the ISS for long periods, co-existing with multiple other microorganisms. Astronauts' immune systems are

weakened by microgravity and radiation exposure, making them relatively susceptible to infections. Enhanced pathogenicity and virulence of microorganisms in space pose a significant risk to immunocompromised astronauts during long-term missions, and a superbug outbreak in the space station can be catastrophic, thus forcing

mission terminations. Beyond crew health, there's the concern of superbugs contaminating celestial bodies during exploration missions. If microorganisms from Earth are introduced to extraterrestrial environments, it could disrupt fragile ecosystems that may have evolved

But here's the paradox: Space may also offer solutions. Studying these superbugs in the ISS' closed environment allows us to predict their behaviour and develop countermeasures - vaccines, new antibiotics, or alternative strategies.

Space missions can also act as testing grounds for advanced microbial monitoring technologies. Early detection of outbreaks is crucial for implementing mitigation strategies and protecting astronauts on long-duration missions like Mars exploration. In terrestrial

settings, insights from space superbugs can boost safety measures at hospital ICUs and surgical theatres.

Microorganisms also carry out lifesupport functions in space, such as waste degradation, water recycling, and oxygen production. Studies show that fungi, bacteria, and cyanobacteria can enhance vitamin production and air decontamination under space conditions. Harnessing fungal biotechnology could lead to selfsustaining space stations in terms of food, pharmaceuticals, and plastic degradation for long-term missions.

Also, microorganisms exposed to space conditions encounter extreme radiation conditions and therefore, develop protective adaptation mechanisms. Understanding these mechanisms can help us develop ways to protect humans from harmful radiation, in space and on Earth.

Furthermore, a bacterial species — Bacillus stratosphericus — normally found 30 km above Earth has been identified as a highly efficient generator of electricity. Microbial Fuel Cells (MFC) that work in a similar way to a battery use bacteria to convert organic compounds into electricity by a process known as biocatalytic oxidation. A biofilm, or "slime". coats the carbon electrodes of an MFC and as the bacteria feed, they produce electrons that pass into these electrodes and generate power.

Superbugs in space serve as a reminder that microbial evolution knows no boundaries. While they pose a threat. they also offer opportunities for scientific advancement and better health practices. Challenges ahead may involve developing a balanced microflora that maximises life support functions and minimises the threat to crew health in closed space systems.

So, while Sunita Williams might have a new workout buddy on board. it's one we can definitely outsmart.

#### It can happen only in Japan



YES, BUT...

SANDEEP GOYAL

o, there is a street in Kunitachi, a district of western Tokyo, called Fujimidori — Street With a View of Mount Fuji. On it, a building called Grand Maison Fujimidori was being constructed. But then suddenly, the developers, Sekisui House, announced that instead of putting the finishing touches on the building that was scheduled for a July handover, they were going to bring down the building! But why? The upcoming building was blocking the view of Mount Fuji from the street that was famous for just that. Sekisui House said that as the construction progressed, they saw the actual effect the building had on the view, and they "have come to the decision to prioritise the view from Fujimidori and are voluntarily cancelling the construction project." That can happen only in Japan.

Now to the back story. A number of residents who already lived in the Fujimidori neighbourhood weren't happy

about the negative impact the Fifth Avenue. It is called 262 condominium would have on the vista of a street named for its nice view of the revered mountain. Shortly after Sekisui House announced the project in February of 2021, complaints from locals started pouring in. In response, in September of that year, Sekisui House said it would revise its blueprints for the building, shrinking it from its originally planned 11storey, 36.09 metres (118.41 feet) height down to 10 floors and 32.7 metres. But the locals pressed for a further reduction. However, in January of 2022. Sekisui House said the building dimensions had been finalised. The development plan was approved by the Kunitachi government that November, and construction began in January of 2023.

Earlier this month, Sekisui House did a volte-face. It informed the Kunitachi government that it would be demolishing the Grand Maison Fujimidori without any residents moving in, saying, "We did not sufficiently consider the effect on the surrounding area, including the scenery ... we are voluntarily cancelling the project." Wow!

Something like wouldn't have happened anywhere else in the world. Not in the US. Not in the Big Apple. A pencil-thin, 860-foot-tall building is, in fact, spoiling views of the Empire State from Lower

Fifth Avenue. Designed by a Russian firm named Meganom, it has 56 stories and contains just 26 apartments. For all intents and purposes, the new edifice has obliterated a large part of the Empire State building, which was once the tallest building in the world, and is without doubt a landmark of New York city. New York has just one legally

designated "view shed" — the panorama of Lower Manhattan across the East River, from the Brooklyn Heights Promenade. During the 1970s, residents of the Heights successfully lobbied the city to safeguard that vista. Authorities were starting to redevelop the Brooklyn waterfront at the foot of the Heights, raising fears about derelict warehouses giving way to high rises. Instead, the waterfront became Brooklyn Bridge Park, one of the glories of 21st

century New York. Urban and natural landscapes can be protected — and their beauty preserved - if there is the will and desire to do The Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum wanted to build a retreat up in the quiet and snowy mountains. What was conceptualised and created was a building inside a mountain forest, and presented as a place of power that embodies courage and wisdom. In addition to its main function. the building also serves as an The writer is chairman of exhibition space showcasing Rediffusion

the history of Chinese entrepreneurship. The design of the centre resembles a canopy, slightly powdered with snow. And the silvery-white surface echoes the peaks of the mountains surrounding the building. Zero intrusion, by design. The Fujimidori voluntary

demolition would be unthinkable in India. We don't even understand or appreciate the concept of visual pollution. Visual pollution refers to things that obstruct or detract from natural and man-made landscapes. Billboards or hoardings are the biggest culprits in Mumbai. They are all over the city, crowding its already overcrowded roads, hanging onto high-rises, and towering over colonies and communities. The Brihanmumbai Corporation (BMC) claims that there are only 1,025 legal hoardings in the island city that fetch it an annual licensing fee of ₹100 crore. But the actual number exceeds the official count by at least a thousand per cent. Following the Fujimidori example, the BMC should announce a voluntary takedown scheme for illegal hoardings. Give a 30-day window for a self-initiated clean-up. And if they don't act, the culprits (read owners), like in the Ghatkopar hoarding collapse case, should be sent to jail. Nothing less would be a deterrent.



{ OUR TAKE }

## When House gets down to business

Treasury benches and the Opposition must accommodate their respective concerns for the 18th Lok Sabha to have a productive term

he 18th Lok Sabha will assemble for the first time on Monday, when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government will take its place in the treasury benches for the third consecutive time, signifying a landmark not achieved since the Republic's infant years. Across the aisle will be an energised Opposition swollen in ranks and buoyed by its better-than-expected performance in the general elections. One by one, representatives of the world's largest democracy will be sworn in, followed by the election of the custodian of the Lower House, the Speaker, and the speech by the President laying down the government's agenda.

This session marks the first time that Parliament is meeting after the world's largest elections not only cemented India's place as the biggest democracy but also affirmed the vibrancy of its grassroots processes. The representatives who enter the home of Indian democracy will have to remember their solemn duty to not only represent their constituents to the best of their abilities but also contribute in good faith to maintaining the highest standards of lawmaking.

The last few sessions of Parliament were witness to unseemly stand-offs between the government and the Opposition and the widening of the trust deficit between both sides. The government felt its democratic mandate was being disrespected while the Opposition was upset by what it saw as the government using its numerical superiority to ram bills through, short-circuiting the parliamentary process. The new session and parliamentary officials will have to find a way to break this impasse, and open channels of communication that allow the House to function to its fullest ability. Moreover, over the years, fewer bills were being referred to committees, fuelling the perception that the primary function of Parliament — scrutinising bills — was suffering. This impression was further strengthened with pandemonium often replacing sober debate and discussion in the House. The lawmakers and officials will need to carve out time for both sides to raise issues, and for sufficient scope to scrutinise key legislation.

The first session will mark an epoch. After two consecutive terms of single-party majority, the Indian public has voted for continuity but also judiciousness, certainty, and collaboration. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is well short of a majority on its own for the first time in a decade, though it has a majority as part of the NDA, and the Opposition is strengthened by its revival. This can easily slip into confrontations and face-offs, but all lawmakers must prioritise careful deliberation. At the heart of the issue is the willingness and sincerity that needs to be shown by all parliamentarians to lawmaking. They have to prioritise discussion over acrimony, debate over disruption. This will need accommodation and sagacity from both sides, as well as a commitment to showcase the best of India's hallowed tradition of parliamentary procedures, speeches and rebuttals.

The upcoming session will likely see the balance of power between the government and the Opposition being recalibrated in the 18th Lok Sabha. In the balance will hang key issues that affect millions of people, such as irregularities in premier examinations, the climate crisis that has upended lives across the country, and a better deal for India's vast poor. The government, Opposition and parliamentary officials will need to remain flexible. and create a compact on allowing Parliament to function. Nothing less will befit the nerve centre of the largest democracy in the world.

{ THIRD EYE }



## NEET fiasco is a test of the govt's outreach skills

A dispensation known for smart political communication has allowed the ground to slide

he government's first big misstep, in its third term, has been its response to the student agitation over the NEET medical entrance exam. Less than a week ago, Dharmendra Pradhan, the Union education minister, called the protests "motivated" and rubbished the charge of a leak. When arrested students in Bihar confirmed otherwise, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) tried to turn the tables by claiming a link between the accused and an aide of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav. The RJD retaliated by targeting the BJP over its purported links to an examination centre in Haryana from where, suspiciously, six of the perfect scorers sat for the paper

That India's examination system is broken – reports suggest at least 40 paper leaks in five years — is obvious. That this cannot happen without a nexus between politics, the bureaucracy, and an underground mafia is obvious. What's less obvious is why the government believed it could be so contemptuous of an issue that impacts 2.4 million students, some of them who are sitting for the exam for the fourth or fifth time. If you add the 900,000 young Indians impacted by the cancellation of the UGC-NET examination, we are talking about nearly 3.3 million Indians.

Can any government afford to be this cavalier about young voters? Especially in a country where more than 65% of Indians are below the age of 35. The answer to the BJP should be obvious from the fact that among the agitators out on the streets are its party affiliates and supporters. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad is among student union groups demanding a Central Bureau of Investigation inquiry into "the entire mechanism" of the National Testing Agency, which is entrusted with the tests.

At his latest press conference, Pradhan took 'moral responsibility" for the fiasco. So, why did he not strike a more conciliatory, less abrasive note to begin with? And why would the Prime Minister (PM) not address the issue? A statement from PM Modi, a sideways reference in a public speech, or even a comment on social media, would have gone a long way in containing the upsurge of anger and anguish. Instead, Modi kept his focus on the International Yoga Day, seeming oddly out of sync with the zeitgeist of the moment. Effective political communication — an effective personal narrative, powerful oratory, smart use of social media and a constant awareness of the power of the image — has been a key chapter in the Modi playbook in his first two terms as PM. I once described Modi as India's "influencer-in-chief" to make a point about his acute understanding of an increasingly digitised voter base.

But right from the campaign of the 2024elections, through the first weeks in government, this prowess appears to have not been deployed. Modi's Hindu-Muslim speeches at the stumps did not go down well with his own

MODI'S HINDU-MUSLIM SPEECHES AT THE STUMPS DID NOT GO DOWN WELL WITH HIS OWN VOTERS. THERE IS ENOUGH POST-POLL DATA AVAILABLE TO SHOW THE LIMITATIONS OF HINDUTVA RHETORIC ON THE GROUND IN THE HINDI-SPEAKING STATES



Can any government afford to be this cavalier about young voters? Especially in a country here more than 65% of Indians are below the age of 35

voters. There is enough post-election data available to show the limitations of Hindutya rhetoric on the ground in the Hindi-speaking states. And oddly, the BJP, otherwise an agile and adaptable election machine, did not tweak or replace the Hindutva messaging with more imaginative narratives, even when it had time

Modi was the first to understand that politics is, above all, about powerful storytelling. And, as we in the media know only too well storytellers constantly need to adapt to shrinking attention spans, new formats, new messages and also, the competition. Modi's personal story as the self-made son of a tea vendor who rose to be chief minister and PM on his own merit was powerful. It worked as a put down of entitlement, old elites and pedigree in politics. But nothing in politics remains constant. The Congress, at first defensive about the dynasty charge, is today all set to have three members of the Gandhi family in Parliament. The party is confident that the two Bharat Jodo Yatras, to borrow a phrase from Yogendra Yadav, ensured that people now feel Rahul Gandhi has earned his inheritance

Modi, meanwhile, has not added new per-

sonal stories to the original one. His challenge is not unique to him, it is the challenge of many incumbents. But there is some evidence to show that where the PM has opted not to communicate at all, or where others in his party have smeared people's movements (good or bad, fair or unfair notwithstanding), there have been political costs to pay. The Congress won both seats in strife-torn Manipur. In Haryana, CSDS post-poll data shows that amongst farmers, 61% voted for the INDIA bloc, And in states with strong martial traditions, the contentious Agniveer recruitment scheme made its electoral impact felt.

While the economy, livelihood and jobs and managing allies will be the inevitable priority of Modi's third term as PM, he will also need more weapons in his communication arsenal If 2014 was a vote for change and 2019 about national security, the message of 2024 has some layers of ambivalence. Listening, with empathy, to the "mann ki baat" of ordinary Indians may be a good way to refresh the communication strategy of NDA 3.0.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

#### Road ahead for PM Modi, India in a China +1 world

lan

Bremmer

slide victory he hoped for, Prime Min-ister (PM) Narendra Modi has secured a rare third five-year term as India's

PM. It wasn't an easy win. High inflation and unemployment helped a more unified Opposition portray Modi as too cosy with big business to cut into the victory margin of his Bharativa Janata Party (BJP)-led alliance. The wealth inequality this has exacerbated forced Modi to lean more heavily on the appeal of an often-ugly Hindu nationalism pitch, a burden he has allowed subordinates to carry in the past. In addition, India's media envi-

more people get their news online than when Modi was first elected a decade ago. But Modi himself remains far more popular than his party. He has built a reputation for

ronment has become more polarised as many

personal integrity, and after a decade in office, his name recognition is uncontestable. That matters in a country where dozens of different languages are spoken by millions of people. Once the votes were counted in the world's largest and longest-running election, Modi emerged again as man of the moment.

India needs a popular leader, because the long-term challenges it faces are formidable. Within 10 years. India will face serious water shortages, and there is no obvious fix. He must work with weak local governments, many of

interests that rely too heavily on water-intensive agriculture in areas where water is already in short supply.

Then there is the climate crisis. India has already set temperature records this summer, and hundreds of millions of Indians have no way to escape the heat and humidity. Add some of the world's worst air quality, a problem that will become much worse given the country's expected robust economic growth, and the enormous power requirements needed to sustain it, including with the use of huge

amounts of coal generation. The result will be an expansion of human suffering in a nation with more than its share of environmental damage

There is also a major structural problem with India's economy: Not many women contribute to it. Fewer than one third of employable women are now in the workforce. There are very few female CEOs or corporate board members, and a tiny fraction of the country's venture capital funding goes to startups founded or led by women. The World Economic Forum's most recent gender gap report ranked India 127 out of 146 countries, behind Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. To solve this problem. Modi and other local officials must contend with a high rural population, crippling poverty, and conservative social values.

INDIA HAS ROUGHLY 1.5 BILLION PEOPLE, AND TOO MANY STILL LIVE IN POVERTY. IN 2023, INDIA STILL RANKED 111TH OF 125 COUNTRIES ON THE

Many tout India's strong demographics as a crucial economic advantage, particularly when compared with China, Japan, and some of Europe's largest economies, but when half the population faces such obstacles to joining the formal economy, the advantage is far from its potential.

Finally, India has roughly 1.5 billion people, and too many still live in poverty. In 2023, India still ranked 111th of 125 countries on the Global Hunger Index. While China has become a middle-income country. India's path toward that status is far from secure. Given all these structural challenges, India could fail to develop as Modi promises, leaving the country more vulnerable to social and political instability, fuelled in part by the Hindu nationalism that Modi's party itself has amplified.

Yet, we can't ignore the many advantages of India's current geopolitical position. Modi's government will continue to benefit from the trend that many Indians call "China +1". Western and many Asian countries think of limiting production and supply chain risks associated with China by shifting business operations and investment toward India. Many multinational corporations across a variety of key economic sectors now see India not only as a viable alternative for long-term capital investment, but as an attractive market in its

India's domestic infrastructure investment continues to lag behind China, but the gap is narrowing. In Mumbai, major new highways, bridges and tunnels are easing some of the world's worst urban traffic. There are fewer interruptions of electricity, data and the internet. India is not China, but its day-to-day business operations are no longer regula rupted. India has also made gains in higherend manufacturing, with the export of more motorcycles, cars, and other goods that meet an international quality standard once unknown in India.

India's biggest foreign-policy challenges are on its borders — in China, Pakistan, and Myanmar. All three create security problems for Delhi. But outside India's neighbourhood, Modi looks abroad and sees important opportunities. That's true not only in relations with the United States — India is one of the few countries that can expect increasingly close ties with Washington no matter who wins the November US election — but especially in the Global South, where Modi has earned a leader ship role. As we saw last year when India hosted the G20 Summit. Modi wants India to become a vitally important bridge between the developed and developing worlds. Since the Cold War's end, no country's rise has been welcomed by so many other governments.

In short, India still faces enormous longterm challenges. But Modi's personal appeal at home and the inroads he has helped open for India abroad make this country's development one of the most important stories of the next

Ian Bremmer is the founder and board president of Eurasia Group Foundation The views expressed are personal

{ ANOTHER DAY } Namita Bhandare



## Male feminist allies: Why every woman needs one

Then I decided to quit my full-time job with this newspaper and go freelance so that I could spend more time with my then school-going daughters, my father-in-law was appalled. But he didn't want to directly question my decision and, so, told a friend that he would make sure my children were well looked after at home.

I knew that but quit anyway. When I wrote a 12-part series on women's declining workforce participation that went on to win a national award, Baba, which is what we

called Murlidhar Bhandare, couldn't have been prouder — though he continued to believe that I could, and should, have dodged the "motherhood penalty", one of the barriers to workforce participation that I had written about.

Baba was my feminist ally, the sort of man every woman should have in her corner. Someone who believes in her thinks twice before questioning her decisions, and

remains her most enthusiastic cheerleader. After the death of his wife, a Delhi high court judge, he had started the Justice Sun-

anda Bhandare Foundation with the goal of "gender equality". In truth, it was as much his goal as it was hers. "The freedom to choose, the right to excel" was the motto he chose. Ever the optimist, he believed that given the opportunity, there was no reason why women could not flourish. The challenge lay in creating the right environment.

Sunanda Bhandare had married young. To say that her husband was responsible for her success would be to undermine her grit and brilliance. But he was the catalyst that ensured she not only completed her law degree but went on to a successful law practice while raising two children with him.

We don't talk enough about the value of male allies. The wrestler from Harvana who trains his daughters and nieces in defiance of social norm. The airport loader who sells his land to finance his daughter's education. The shop owner who is assisted by his daughter when she returns from col-

This is not an avuncular benevolence but an ingrained belief that everyone around

you regardless of gender, sexuality or circumstance is deserving of dignity and freedom. That society cannot advance without taking everyone along. And that everyone gains when women and girls gain.

At 95, Baba might not have been up to date on issues like gender identity. He could be anachronistic about his choice of words - preferring lady to woman, for instance and was unquestionably paterfamilias. But his feminism shone through his actions and the way he lived his life.

Where families are so often the gatekeepers of gender roles and morality, particularly of daughters, he had thrown away the key. He was happy to be challenged and proud to follow the budding careers of his granddaughters.

Every time my column was published, he would call with feedback — not always positive — but always willing to listen. What a loss for me then that I will not be receiving his call after this one.

> Namita Bhandare writes on gender The views expressed are personal

#### { EDITOR'S PICK }

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

#### DECODING THE HEATWAVE PHENOMENA

Delhi registered its highest minimum temperature on Wednesday, at 35.2 degrees Celsius, the highest in 60 years. The national Capital is not the only region affected by extreme heat, with prolonged heatwaves claiming 143 lives to date across the country. In the face of extreme weather events, understanding the dynamics of the climate crisis is vital.

This week, we recommend The Weather of the Future by Heidi Cullen, which offers a sobering look at the future of our planet as the climate crisis worsens. Cullen examines the increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves, hurricanes, droughts, and floods, with real-world examples and projections. She provides case studies from various parts of the world, such as the Sahel region in Africa, and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, to highlight how different areas are uniquely affected. The Weather of the Future underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to safeguard our planet's future.



The Weather of the Future: Heidi Cullen Year: 2010

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2024

## THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

THE AIR POLLUTION IN DELHI HAS BECOME A MATTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. — M S SWAMINATHAN

## The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## **QUOTAS AND EQUITY**

Patna High Court's order striking down 65 per cent reservation should lead to debates on creative approaches to end inequality

HE BIHAR GOVERNMENT is weighing its options after the Patna High Court struck down its decision to raise the quota cap from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. The Nitish Kumar government's move to increase the reservation ceiling in employment and entrance to educational institutions was based on the Bihar Survey Caste Report, which showed that OBC, EBC, SC and ST communities together comprised about 85 per cent of the state's population. But in response to petitions against the hike, the HC's two-judge bench has said that the "state proceeded on the mere population of different categories as against their numerical representation in government services and educational institutions". The verdict aligns with the judiciary's more or less consistent approach towards the 50 per cent ceiling. However, in 2022, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld the EWS quota on the ground that the cap applied only to SC, ST and OBC communities. The apex court is also reviewing a challenge to the quota ceiling. At the same time, political parties, especially Congress, have demanded raising the reservation limit. The Bihar government has said that it will press for including the enhanced quota cap in the Ninth Schedule to obviate legal challenges. Removing entrenched inequalities will require multiple measures and the issue should be thoroughly debated. The political class will do well to be more creative, and not harp on a one-track approach of extending reservations.

In the past two decades, Bihar has shown appreciable improvement in both economic and socio-economic indicators. The state's economy has grown faster than the national average and the Nitish Kumar government's measures have resulted in the state closing the gap on welfare indicators — life expectancy, infant mortality, the sex ratio at birth, drinking water and sanitation, access to electricity. However, Bihar remains amongst the poorest in terms of per capita income. The average person in the state earns about a third of the national average. Data from the 2021 NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that 51 per cent of Bihar's population is poor, the highest among all the states. The state also has the country's highest fertility rate. It is among the states with a high outmigration rate for low-paying jobs.

About 50 per cent of Bihar's workforce is involved in agriculture, which contributes less than 25 per cent of the state's GDP. The big challenge for the state — like in several other parts of the country — is to reduce the dependency on farms by drawing investments in more productive sectors. It must also increase the educational pie, address skill deficits and bring Bihar's fertility rate close to the national average. In doing so, the Nitin Kumar government should give special attention to marginalised and deprived communities. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the Patna High Court's verdict should occasion discussions on more expansive approaches to end historical inequalities.

#### CLEAN AIR FOR THE YOUNG

India has the most number of children dying due to emissions. Their well-being must be at the core of pollution policies

N YET ANOTHER reminder of the severity of the problem, the State of Global Air (SoGA) Report 2024, released this week, shows that air pollution has become the second leading global risk factor for death. More alarming is the finding, which drew on data from 2021, that air pollution is the second leading risk factor for death among children below the age of five, with 709,000 out of 8.1 million of those who died that year belonging to this demographic. For India, where 2.1 million died due to air pollution, according to the SoGA report, the statistics are sobering: With 1,69, 400 of those dying being children under five, the country recorded the highest total number of deaths in this category.

For over two decades now India's air pollution has led to much hand-wringing, especially during the winter months when a thick layer of smog blankets a vast swathe of the country. Action, however, has mostly taken the form of piecemeal panic-induced measures, like spraying water to minimise dust on the roads and imposing the odd-even scheme for vehicles. Even with the adoption of clean air plans by most cities, the failure at the policy level to link pollution with public health has meant that the long-term damage it can cause has not received adequate attention. The heaviest price for this oversight is paid by the most vulnerable, especially, as is clear now, by children. They inhale more air per kilogram of body weight and absorb more pollutants compared to adults. With their lungs, brains and other organs still developing and their body's defence mechanisms still relatively weak, exposure to pollution sets them up for ailments like asthma, upper respiratory tract infection, childhood leukaemia and high blood pressure.

Still, there is hope. The report notes that since 2000, the global death rate linked to air pollution, among children under five, has dropped by 53 per cent. This is mainly the result of expanding access to clean energy for cooking, improved healthcare access and nu $trition\,as\,well\,as\,building\,awareness.\,The\,measurable\,impact\,of\,implementing\,stricter\,air\,alternative and alternative action as a constant of the constant o$ quality policies and encouraging the shift to hybrid or electric vehicles in Africa, Latin America and Asia also holds lessons. With 42 out of the 50 most polluted cities in the world and where a 2022 study found that even municipal employees — who should be among the frontline workers driving the change — had little awareness of air pollution's link to cancer and heart diseases, the challenge for India is steep. To face it, the health of its citizens, especially the young, must be at the heart of any solution.

#### NUSRAT RETURNS

An album of the maestro's lost recordings could be just what a world riven with conflict needs

WENTY-SEVEN YEARS after Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's death at 48, the maestro's sublime voice that had once drawn the world to the gawwali's wisdom will feature in a new album. On September 20, British record label, Real World Records, will put out four tracks by Khan, alongside his eight-piece ensemble, that were recorded in 1989, when British composer Peter Gabriel signed him on, Gabriel was struck by the intensity of Khan's voice when he heard him at the WOMAD Festival of 1985 and was keen to work with him. That meeting would lead to Real World Records, which specialises in world music, releasing a lot of Khan's music through the '90s. But somehow, one tape, with four recordings, got lost in the warehouse's storage. It was only discovered when the record label decided to relocate its archive in 2021. Now four pieces, one of which has never been heard, will see the light of day in an album aptly titled, Chain of Light.

Known for tracks such as 'Mun kunto maula', 'Halka halka suroor' and 'Dum mustt', Khan's music transcended borders, finding admirers across the world. The recovery of the recording is therefore not only thrilling for them but also an opportunity to introduce newer generations to the ecstasy of his music. Those who have not heard Khan before will find a voice at the pinnacle of its sonic capabilities, replete with sparkling vocal cadenzas. While Khan's music was a refuge for many, its symbolism and lessons in humanity and peace came from the poetry of the Sufi saints from different centuries.

Chain of Light could be a conduit between the past and present, nudging a world riven with conflicts and suffering to look within. This is a time when the world needs the Sufi message in Khan's sublime voice more than ever before.

## In the name of merit



Patna High Court striking down expansion of quota is in line with SC rulings. But 50 per cent cap seems selective

Faizan Mustafa

THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION promises social justice and permits the state to make special provisions in favour of the underprivileged. Governments of all political parties, including the BJP, have tried to expand reservation — more out of electoral compulsion than due to constitutional principles. However, a closer look at the judicial response to these reservation policies demonstrates that our judiciary, through the "strict scrutiny" doctrine, has been quick to nullify such policies with respect to Jats, Gujjars, Marathas, Patidars and Muslims. The judiciary has seemed more concerned with "merit" and "efficiency in administration".

An 87-page judgment by Chief Justice K Vinod Chandran and Justice Harish Kumar of the Patna High Court struck down 65 per cent reservation in Bihar. This expansion was based on the much-discussed Caste Survey of 2023. The verdict is consistent with the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court. It is a setback for the Congress party, which has promised a Caste Survey in all states, removal of the 50 per cent upper limit of reservations and giving a proportionate share to the Other Backward Classes. The High Court did opine that the only consideration that the Nitish Kumar government weighed in with was that the Backward Classes constitute a major part of the state's population and their representation is not proportionate in the unreserved category.

The judgment has categorically rejected the "proportionate representation" of Backward Classes and held that the term "proportionate" is alien to Articles 15 and 16. The expression "proportionate representation" has been used in Articles 330(2), 243D and 243T with respect to the representation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the Lok Sabha, panchayats and municipalities, respectively.

Article 16 uses the term "inadequacy of representation". The High Court rightly relied on Indra Sawhney (1992) in which the SC had observed that "adequate representation cannot be read as proportionate representation". But then inadequacy is indeed related to the poor proportion of representation of any backward class and the impugned reservation was not really proportionate as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward castes constitute 84.46 per cent of Bihar's population. And the SC has acknowl-

The High Court refused to accept that Bihar is not in the national mainstream. Bihar has indeed been at the epicentre of national politics But the government did not inform the court that Bihar has the lowest per capita income (less than \$800) in the country — 30 per cent of what the average Indian earns — and the highest fertility rate. Only 12 per cent of its population lives in urban areas compared to the 35 per cent national average. The state's college density is the lowest in the country and every third person lives below the poverty line. These

are compelling reasons.

edged in Indra Sawhney itself that "proportion of population of backward classes to the total population would certainly be relevant". Is it not a fact that prior to extending EWS reservation on the eve of the 2019 general elections, no survey was done to examine the inadequacy of representation of the EWS category? True, the policy was brought in through a constitutional amendment, which restricted its judicial scrutiny only on the basis of "basic structure". However, Janhit Abhiyan (2022) is a unique pronouncement in which the consistent judicial approach of strict scrutiny was diluted.

The other major ground for striking down the Bihar reservation amendment is the breach of the 50 per cent upper ceiling for reservation. In MR Balaji (1962), the SC came up with the judicial innovation of the 50 per cent limit, holding it per se violative of the right to equality. It has been consistently followed in a catena of judgments such as Devadasan (1964), N M Thomas (1976) and Indra Sawhney (1992). But even Indra Sawhney said that this limit need not be religiously adhered to in far-flung or remote areas or in areas that remain out of the mainstream of national life.

The High Court refused to accept that Bihar is not in the national mainstream. Bihar has indeed been at the epicentre of national politics. But the government did not inform the court that Bihar has the lowest per capita income (less than \$800) in the country – 30 per cent of what the average Indian earns – and the highest fertility rate. Only 12 per cent of its population lives in urban areas compared to the 35 per cent national average. The state's college density is the lowest in the country and every third person lives below the poverty line. These are compelling reasons. In fact, one was surprised by the apex court's judgment in the EWS case (2023), applying the sacrosanct 50 per cent upper ceiling for reservation only for SCs, STs and OBCs, and not the EWS category.

The High Court has rightly observed that the recommendation of the National Backward Classes Commission or the State Backward Classes Commission was not necessary but its insistence on the so-called "analysis" of the Caste Survey and consultation with the experts would in the future put additional restraints on the government's affirmative ac-

tion policies. *Indra Sawhney* (1992) did refer to consultation with experts led by sociologist M N Srinivas (who, along with two other experts, Yogender Singh and BK Burman, disowned the report). But since Mandal's 11 yardsticks of backwardness had been approved by the SC, there was no need for experts' inputs after the massive exercise of surveying a population of 11 crore. The government was well within its rights to act on the report and then the assembly unanimously passed the amendment enhancing reservation. Even the BJP, which had opposed the Caste Survey, supported the reservation amendment.

The 50 per cent rule is justified in the name of efficiency and merit. The Patna High Court too observed that "merit... cannot be sacrificed completely". No scientific or empirical research has proved that SC/ST/OBC employees, in the performance of their duties, are less efficient than employees recruited under the general category. Justice Chinnappa Reddy in Vasanth Kumar (1985) demolished the efficiency argument when he stated that "efficiency is very much on the lip service of the privileged whenever reservation is mentioned. Efficiency, it seems, will be impaired if reservation exceeds 50 per cent; efficiency, it seems, will suffer if the carry forward rule is adopted; efficiency, it seems, will be injured, if the rule of reservation is extended to promotional posts." He went on to say that "the underlying assumption that those belonging of upper castes and classes who are appointed to non-reserved posts because of their 'presumed merit' naturally perform better than those who have been appointed to reserved posts and the clear stream of efficiency would be polluted by the infiltration of latter into the sacred precincts is a vicious assumption, typical of superior approach of elitists classes."

Justice Chandrachud in B K Pavitra II (2019) observed that we need to redefine our notions of merit in terms of a more inclusive and plural society. Merit cannot lead to exclusion. He rightly held that the transformative vision of the Constitution cannot be buried by the myths around "merit". Merit must be measured in terms of social good.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna. Views are personal



## THE DIL IN DILJIT

Diljit Dosanjh embodies a Punjabiyat that is less controversial — but no less deep

CHAHARIKA UPPAL

PUNJABIYAT HAS BEEN a site of much contestation – over nationalism, religious identity, and even language. However, with the emergence of Punjabi artists on international platforms, and a growing diaspora in the West, the flexibility of Punjabiyat has allowed it to evolve into a global phenomenon where it is celebrated.

Earlier this week, Diljit Dosanjh left a mark with his debut on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. He was unabashedly Punjabi. Despite Fallon's introducing the star as a "poon-jabi" artist, the Punjabi in question seems to have taken over the show — through his music, traditional attire and bhangra breaks. But Dosanjh's commitment to "wearing his Punjabiyat on his sleeve" doesn't limit his reach. It makes him more accessible. Punjabi lyrics, merged with modern genres like hip-hop, transcend borders and language barriers, pulling crowds even at Coachella.

Dosanjh's music remains true to its linguistic roots. This sets him apart — his thrust towards the modern and contemporary without abandoning the traditional. His contemporaries, those with similar levels of fame like A P Dhillon or Sidhu Moose Wala model their appearance on Western rappers and delve into darker themes of Punjabi culture – guns, violence and objectification of women. Dosanjh's music, for the most part, as He navigates themes of love and desire in way that's reminiscent of traditional Punjabi folklore, a la Heer-Ranjha. Older works like his collaboration with Gurdaas Mann in 'Ki Banu Duniya Da' evoke a similar sense of Punjabiyat as he sings about the need for a cultural renaissance to inspire the region's youth, using the motif of the five rivers commonly seen in Partition poetry.

seen from his Coke Studio song, 'Magic', has an elusiveness and sense of yearning. He navigates themes of love and desire in a way that's reminiscent of traditional Punjabi folklore, a la Heer-Ranjha. Older works like his collaboration with Gurdas Maan in 'Ki Banu Duniya Da' evoke a similar sense of Punjabiyat as he sings about the need for a cultural renaissance to inspire the region's youth, using the motif of the five rivers commonly seen in Partition poetry.

Dosanjh's recent film, Amar Singh Chamkila, also looks at this celebration of Punjabiyat. But his character does so differently — celebrating his Sikh identity but not ignoring its uncomfortable realities, like the moral condemnation from upper castes, reprimanding the double meaning of Chamkila's lyrics, which act as a commentary on social ills during one of Punjab's most turbulent periods.

Dosanjh isn't the only one engaged in this celebration of Punjabiyat. As popularised by Rahul Gandhi's refrain during the recent Lok Sabha election campaign, Sidhu Moose Wala's '295', also holds deep meaning in the context of Punjabiyat. The song was appropriated by the opposition as a commentary against the misuse of religion for a cynical politics (the song is a reference to Article 295 of the IPC ) and the dilution of truth in the public eye. Although the late Moose Wala has been criticised for his penchant for AKs and fast cars, his work is permeated by rural woes and the distresses of Punjab. Moose Wala's identity holds a duality, of violence and peace, of separation and unity — a mirror of the contestations within Punjabiyat. He is a lover and a fighter.

Diljit's identity, on the other hand, is less mired in controversy. He, much like his song suggests, is just a lover. Punjabiyat is often saddled with the contentious themes — of Sikh secessionism, transnational unity, and distinct religiosity, before even reaching the cultural aspect. But Dosanjh carries Punjab with a spring in his step — not haunted by its history of violence and militancy. He emphasises its "softer" aspects — language, literature and tradition. That doesn't mean he is divorced from its politics but points to a more playful messaging. As with his song 'Riri' which was released conveniently around the time Rihanna tweeted about the farmers' agitation. That's what makes Diljit a global favourite, his palatability and his attempts to not be weighed down by Punjab's past Instead, he uses it as a way to be nostalgic about the promise of a future.

> The writer is a third-year student at Delh University. She is currently *interning at* The Indian Express

#### JUNE 22, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

## INDIAN EXPRESS INDO-PAK ARMS TALKS

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi does not rule out the possibility of India having a discussion with Pakistan over arms smuggling. In an interview to an independent television channel in London, Gandhi said some of the arms had come from across the Pakistani border but it was "difficult to say who is involved."

NORMALCY IN PUNJAB

WITH THE SITUATION returning to normalcy in Punjab, the state government on June 21, lifted the ban on the movement of vehicles,

with the exception of two districts. All gurudwaras, except the Golden Temple and Gurudwara Muktsar, were opened to all devotees.

#### **JUDGES' PENSION HIKE**

THE GOVERNMENT HAS decided to provide enhanced pensions to all judges of the Supreme Court and high court, who retired prior to October 1, 1974 as well as payment of arrears to legal heirs, and family pensions to widows of retired judges. The Supreme Court Judges Act, 1958, and the High Court Judges Act, 1954, were amended in 1976 to

enhance the pension for judges who retired

on or after October 1, 1974.

#### Orissa's Bridge feud

A CONTROVERSY OVER the construction of a river bridge has brought the Orissa chief minister, J B Patnaik, and his wife, Jayanti Patnaik, member of Lok Sabha from Cuttack, on a collision course. The controversy started because Jayanti Patnaik wanted the proposed bridge to be constructed at Salepore, which falls under her constituency, whereas Basant Biswal, minister of state of public works wanted the bridge to be constructed in Cuttack district's Patkura.

epaper.indianexpress.com

## THE IDEAS PAGE

DIS/AGREE THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



C R Sasikumar

NCERT has made changes to its school textbooks citing a range of reasons, including students' well-being. But does that infantilise them?

## evolve with times

They should present a balanced curriculum, fostering a culture of curiosity, empathy, understanding and critical thinking



M JAGADESH KUMAR

HISTORIES, TO A large extent, are contested constructs. Since Independence, our school textbooks have often portrayed historical facts in a manner that parallels partisan or narrow viewpoints. In alignment with this dominant discourse, the effort was usually to eschew the recognition of India's strides in art, literature, philosophy, education, science, technology, and economic development. The objective was clearly to construct a view of Indian history that suppresses India's profound impact on the world's civilisation, resulting in a skewed perception of our national identity and historical narrative. This positioning resonates with a typical colonial mindset.

In their formative years, school children do not possess the capacity to comprehend intense emotions and complex moral dilemmas. At an early age, since school students are still developing their cognitive and emotional capabilities, if they are exposed to the aggressiveness of historical events and conflicts, they are likely to develop anxiety and emotional distress

appropriate stages of education in the school curriculum, it can immor-

If historical conflicts are introduced at in-

a balanced history that

minimises conflict-based

narratives does not

limit their access to

multiple versions of

history as they grow

older. Students who

progress to higher

education can study and

research more nuanced

historical accounts.

talise deficit perceptions of the broader historical context in children's minds. In essence, the history taught to our students in schools should not lead to animosities and prejudices that could divide communities.

Unsurprisingly, should not overlook the ethical implications of one-sided historical facts in the earlier school textbooks. We should also question whether it would help promote social cohesion and mutual respect among our school children if such conflict-focused history books continue to be used in

our schools. Opposition to meaningful textbook revisions stems from the old narrow ideological thought process, knowing well that such a stance risks eternalising historical grievances and animosities into the future.

Given these concerns, appropriate textbook revisions are vital to provide a balanced, credible and reliable historical narrative, underscoring positive examples of conflict resolution and mutual respect. When students read such examples, they are inspired to apply these principles in their lives. Our school textbooks should prioritise enabling them to become responsible and empathetic citizens with a finer insight into India's heritage, while building the cognitive and emotional foundation essential for future critical analysis.

Teaching school students a balanced history that minimises conflict-based narratives does not limit their access to multiple versions of history as they grow older. Students who progress to higher education can study and research more nuanced and comprehensive historical accounts. They have access to various scholarly works that provide multiple viewpoints on historical events.

Universities are autonomous; their statutory bodies approve the syllabus in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and they have the freedom to decide what is taught to their students and what books to follow as reference texts. University students can engage in informed and in-depth discussions about all aspects of historical conflicts with a mature perspective. This, in turn, will help the students develop their scholarly opinions based on debate, discussion and critical analysis.

In fact, universities are the appropriate places for students to engage with contentious facets of history since they possess the cognitive maturity to critically analyse and understand multiple perspectives. Therefore, universities should remain centres of academic freedom where students can thoroughly examine complex historical issues without prejudice.

Consequently, any efforts in revising school textbooks focusing on balanced narratives is not an end but a beginning. The foundation that the students attain from such balanced textbooks will help them build a deeper historical understanding in later years.

One of the pedagogical goals of school education is to help adolescent students develop a constructive and positive attitude toward their future roles in society by exposing them to a comprehensive understanding of history so that they are not trapped in an early disillusionment.

The revised school textbooks must present a fact-based history that promotes a broad knowledge of India's past. Therefore, they must rightly emphasise national unity, national belonging, and India's cultural and historical contributions, moving away from divisive narratives and compartmentalisation. Textbooks

should teach our students the value of unity, the ubiquity of Teaching school students inclusivity and peaceful coexistence, instead of attempting to weave disparate narratives of division and conflict.

> A growing body of research indicates that school textbooks need to keep pace with the changing times to be responsive in meeting the emergent needs of students. Following this, in addition to history, global issues such as climate change, inclusive growth, sustainable development, renewable energy, water and food security, mental health, and digital literacy, which are increasingly be-

coming relevant in students' lives, must be addressed in the revised relevant subject textbooks to provide a contemporary understanding of these topics.

Inherent in this is a belief that the sole purpose of revising school textbooks should be to present a balanced curriculum fostering a culture of empathy, curiosity, understanding and critical thinking among children to fuel their ambition to further studies later.

There is still much to be done to develop meaningful pedagogical praxis that fosters healthy, creative and inquisitive thinking among our students. By revising the textbooks, we can provide our school kids access to every opportunity to thrive and realise their potential in building a strong India.

While the newly revised school textbooks are a welcome development, as envisaged in the National Education Policy 2020, we must continue to revise the textbooks at reasonable periodic intervals to ensure that these books support the diverse ways of learning to enhance students' critical thinking and problemsolving capabilities.

> The writer is chairman, UGC, former VC, JNU. Views are personal

## Textbooks need to Changes political, limit knowledge

NCERT's edits rupture the threads between today's events and those of the past

In India, where an

overwhelming number

of instructors lack

autonomy on

authority. This means

that from now on, in

the political science

class of most schools,

the Babri Masjid is not

likely to have a name.

epaper.indianexpress.com



Kaushik Das Gupta

UNTILTHE LIONS have their own history, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. The African proverb, recounted by the great Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, is an apt metaphor for the power exercised by dominant groups on knowledge.

School-level social science textbooks, especially the officially designated ones, are perhaps the greatest bearers of this burden. In most countries, including India, history, political science, and sociology textbooks are not only shaded by politics and carry imprints of the regime in office, but their drafting exercises often invite controversy.

India's National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established in 1961 to improve the quality of teaching material. In about a decade, it began publishing model textbooks. Since Independence, the country's school curriculum has undergone four revisions — in 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005. In the past 10 years, the NCERT's modus operandi has changed somewhat

Instead of creating new content, it has been tweaking the books that first entered the market in 2005. The most substantive of

these changes have taken place in the last two years parts dealing with Gandhi's assassination, mediaeval history, caste, protest movements and the Emergency

have been "pruned". The textbook-framing agency's justifications have ranged from reducing the burden on students after the Covid pandemic to "rationalising" content. This week the NCERT's director has again talked about student well-being. Sections dealing with Babri Masjid demolition of 1992 and the 2002 Gujarat riots were shortened or deleted, he has rea-

soned, because studying these events can "create violent and depressive citizens". Before examining such noble concerns, let's pause a bit and turn our attention to an al-

ternative view of textbooks — one that holds that accounts of the hunt need not always be that of the hunter's bravery. In the US, for instance, there is nearly a century-long history of African-American educators taking issues with racist ideas of learning so that "the story of the hunt reflects the agony, as well as the bravery of the lion".

In other words, education is a catalyst of change and empowerment. Pedagogy can prepare students for life. School textbooks further this endeavour in at least two ways. They are a source of basic information required to understand a discipline. The combination of a good teacher and good textbook can encourage students to ask questions, to make sense of society, politics, and culture.

In India, initiatives to write textbooks that serve as tools of critical enquiry have almost always had to navigate a system rarely receptive to criticism. The National Education Policy 2020, with its ostensible aim of nurturing critical thinking, could have furthered a more expansive outlook. Instead, the NCERT's edits

rupture the threads between today's events with those of the past.

About three decades ago, the Ram Ianmabhoomi movement whipped up passions claiming that the Babri Masjid was built after the Mughal emperor's army destroyed a temple to Lord Rama. The destruction of the 16th century mosque by a politically charged mob on December 6, 1992, triggered violence in several parts of the country which claimed thousands of lives. The BJP used the movement and the demolition of the masjid to propel itself to relevance and power.

On January 22, a temple for Lord Rama was consecrated at the Babri Masjid site, enabled by a Supreme Court ruling, which the tweaked Class XII political science textbook describes as a "classic example of consensus". It is, however, silent on the Court's strictures, on the fact that the five-judge bench had also described the destruction of the mosque as "an egregious violation of the rule of law".

In India, where an overwhelming number of instructors lack autonomy on classroom teaching, the textbook is the ultimate authority on the subject. This means that from now on, in the political science class of most schools, the Babri Masjid is not likely to have a name. It will instead be referred to, after NCERT's latest change, as "a three-domed structure". There will be no mention of the lives claimed by the enmity and bitterness in the aftermath of December 6, 1992.

The classroom will also be innocent of one of the worst outbreaks of communal bloodshed in independent India – in Gujarat in February 2002 under the watch of India's cur-

rent prime minister and home minister. The Supreme Court has dismissed allegations of "a state-sponsored crime". Even then, "to create positive citizens," the textbook has avoided reference to classroom teaching, the Gujarat 2002. textbook is the ultimate

The NCERT director is right. Textbooks can be springboards for positivity. But to do that, a senior school student, very likely a voter in a year or two, deserves knowledge that can help make connections. He's also right about the unfortunately large number of riots in the country. That's

why acquainting learners with what happened on December 6, 1992, or Gujarat 2002 could be a stepping stone to fathom how distrust between communities turns into rage — as it did, perhaps, in Delhi in 2020. Who knows: Today's young adults could tomorrow find better resolutions than envisaged by scholars, politicians and policymakers.

Revisions are, indeed, a global practice. Social science demands rewrites — at times, hunters have to cede place to lions. But the NCERT's changes have been framed around limiting knowledge. The erasures remind us of the Soviet state airbrushing Leon Trotsky's photographs after his execution, China's Communist Party forbidding discussions on Tiananmen Square or the silence of US educators on the extermination of indigenous Americans. A government that places a premium on decolonisation should also keep in mind that the NCERT's changes are of a piece with the UK's curricula not acknowledging the Empire's role in the impoverishment of large parts of the world.

Or are there new hunters today, armed with a shield they call students' "well-being"?

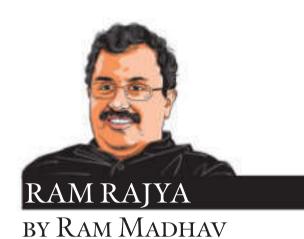
kaushik.dasgupta@expressindia.com

#### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Nepal must take the initiative to invite regional cricketing powerhouses such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for friendly and competitive matches so that our players get greater exposure... We stand to be the next big story... if we play our shots right." -THE KATHMANDU POST

## Bracing for new hurdles

Real test for Modi 3.0 will come not from managing his coalition, but from an Opposition that believes ruling party has no mandate to rule



IT IS A travesty that those who lost the election are in a celebratory mood while those who won are sombre. The Congress, that touched its lowest tally in history in 2014, coming down to 44 seats from 206 in 2009 and failing to recover from that drubbing in 2019 elections by managing to marginally improve its tally by eight seats, ended up winning just 99 seats this time despite much hype. Its vote share remains at a low 21 per cent, whereas that of the BJP hovers around 36-37 per cent. It failed to open accounts in 11 states, including important ones like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Tripura. It won just one seat in big states like Orissa, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. The BJP too failed to open its account in seven states, but the significant ones are only Tamil Nadu and Punjab.

This statistical reality shows that people have given the Congress-led alliance a mandate to function as a responsible Opposition. Still, the Congress leadership seems to believe that the mandate was not for the NDA, but for them. Mallikarjun Kharge, president of the Congress party, predicted that "Modi's minority government" may "fall anytime", while Rahul Gandhi chose arguments like "tectonic shift has taken place in Indian politics", and "the idea and image of Modi have been destroyed" to conclude that the NDA government was "very fragile" and could collapse at the "smallest disturbance".

The Congress leadership is suffering from two illusions; first, that the mandate was for them and not for Modi; and second, that the NDA alliance would soon collapse because Prime Minister Narendra Modi is temperamentally not equipped to run a coalition.

Modi's real challenge is not managing this coalition. With 240 seats in its tally, the BJP is placed far more comfortably to run the coalition government than a hotchpotch INDI alliance government. The BJP is leading coalition governments in several states, including Maharashtra and Assam. Moreover, with his vast political experience spanning more than three decades, Modi cannot be considered a novice to coalition politics.

The challenge for Modi will come not from managing his coalition, but from an Opposition which is coming to the House with the mindset that the ruling party has no mandate to rule. Modi said he missed a "good opposition". He should brace up for a rancorous Opposition in this term.

Besides managing the choppy waters of the Parliament, the new government needs to turn attention to certain priority areas. A burgeoning young population, with over 20 million youngsters attaining employable age of 18 years annually, will be a challenge for any government. In the last 10 years, the government has taken multiple initiatives to address this, mainly encouraging self-employment. Yet, formal employment opportunities for millions of skilled and semi-skilled youngsters is a major need of the hour Inflow of private investment into the manufacturing sector is an important answer to this. Hurdles in the way of the smooth inflow of such investments need to be curbed. The World Bank's data showed in 2021 that India's ease of doing business ranking had substantially improved. Yet, several systemic hurdles remain.

We are in the era of industry 4.0, internet 3.0 and genetics 2.0. Our education sector needs to gear up to face the new reality. While the Opposition will naturally raise controversies over competitive exams like NEET and NET, greater attention is needed for ramping up research and innovation. India continues to fare poorly in these areas. What many claim as innovation is mostly imitation, where copying substitutes for creativity.

The R&D and innovation domain too needs greater infusion of private capital. Unfortunately, our R&D funding, both public and private, is not even 0.7 per cent of our GDP, which accounts for around \$17 billion. China spends over 2.5 per cent of its GDP on it. It spends close to \$500 billion annually on R&D, almost 30 times that of India's spending, while the US spends around \$600 billion.

In 2022, India filed around 60,000 patents, of which almost 50 per cent were filed for the domestic market. Perceived quality of these patents was very low. China, on the other hand, filed four million patents in the same year, of which 25 per cent were "high value patents". Unlike China, we don't have any such scientific classification. The US filed around 0.7 million patents in 2022 A recent study found that thanks to the push given by the Modi government, India's research output grew by around 54 per cent to one million research papers during 2017-22, taking it to the fourth position globally. However, the quality and relevance of many of these papers remain questionable as only 15 per cent of them have been cited in top academic journals, according to research platform SciVal. China continues to be the world leader with 4.5 million research papers published in the five-year period, followed by the United States with 4.4 million

and the United Kingdom with 1.4 million. Then, the fast-changing geo-strategic environment may soon call for a major re-adjustment of India's strategic priorities Strategic autonomy is never easy. It is going to become much harder in the face of the hardening of positions between the West and Russia-China axis. It is no secret that China's influence in the region is a predominant challenge for us. The new axis of China, Russia and Iran against the considerably weakened West will lead to new challenges A world dotted by multiple conflicts will be the new reality, calling for a deft handling of our foreign policy.

Domestic and international challenges coupled with an unrelenting political Opposition that cares less for any scruples, could pose a real test for PM Modi in his record-breaking third term in office.

> The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### NEED OF THE HOUR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Examine

the exam' (IE, June 21). Many good suggestions have been made to check leaks of question papers. These include the use of AI-based proctoring and screen monitoring, (OMR)-based exams, randomised questions, item pooling, etc. However, an increase in leaks despite such techniques indicates that a system is as good or as bad as the persons who use it. Those involved in the testing process must be above board. If there is dishonesty, the Opposition should avoid criticism and make constructive points, which the government should adopt without demur.

**Y G Chouksey,** Pune

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Examine the exam' (IE, June 21). The row over two examinations conducted by the NTA has put a question mark on its credibility. A large section of aspirants, belonging to humble backgrounds, borrow money to prepare for these exams and join expensive coaching institutes. But paper leaks, controversies and flawed policies of the authorities destroy their dreams, leaving them frustrated. The exam fixers charge a fortune from aspirants for leaking papers. There is a need to take strict action against them. Restoration of aspirants' faith in the NTA is the need of the hour.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

#### NEW CRIMINAL LAWS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Out with the bad laws' (IE, June 21). The objective behind the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita was to erase our colonial legacy. However, the writer has flagged that certain laws still pose a risk to citizens. First, Section 63 of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita continues to hold marital rape as an exception even though it qualifies as sexual assault. Second, the use of Section 124A of the old sedition law has been suspended by the SC, pending reconsideration by the Centre. Sadly, under the Sanhita (Section

LR Murmu, New Delhi

#### FOCUS ON SECURITY

stringent than the earlier laws.

150), its provisions are vague and more

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Security in black & white' (IE, June 21). Successive governments have been reluctant to formulate their security strategies in writing, possibly due to concerns about secrecy issues, criticism and divergence between the military and bureaucracy. The government must adopt a comprehensive approach to resolving such issues. Operational agencies involved in national security should be brought on board to discuss all the issues to iron out differences and allay concerns. National security is paramount.

**Manish Mishra,** Bhopal

#ExpressExplained

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

## Bail in money laundering cases, and the 'twin test' under PMLA

EXPLAINED

**LAW** 

APURVA VISHWANATH NEW DELHI, JUNE 21

A DAY after a trial court granted bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is in jail on charges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the Delhi High Court stayed the order.

A Bench headed by Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain on Friday heard an urgent plea by the Enforcement Directorate seeking a stay on the bail, and reserved its order until next week. The ED challenged the trial court's order on the ground that the court had failed to apply the 'twin test' for grantING bail under PMLA.

What is the twin test, and why is bail under PMLA so contentious?

#### Section 45 and twin test

Section 45 of the PMLA, which deals with bail, first states that no court can grant bail for offences under this law, and then proceeds to mention a few exceptions. The negative language in the provision itself shows that bail is not the rule but the exception under PMLA.

The provision makes it mandatory to hear the public prosecutor in all bail applications, and when the prosecutor opposes bail, the court is required to apply a twin test.

These two conditions are: (i) that there are "reasonable grounds for believing that [the accused] is not guilty of such offence"; and (ii) that "he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail".

There are similar provisions in several other laws that deal with serious offences for example, Section 36AC of The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, Section 37 of The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and Section 43D(5) of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967.

The provision in the UAPA, for example, states that "no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV (Punishment for Terrorist Activities) and VI (Terrorist Organisations) of this Act shall...be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard", or if the court "is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation...is *prima facie* true".

#### Legal challenges to twin test The first blow to the constitutional valid-

ity of the twin test came in a 2017 ruling. Nikesh Tarachand Shah v Union of India. A two-judge Bench comprising Justices

Rohinton Nariman and Sanjay Kishan Kaul struck down the bail provision as unconstitutional on the ground that the onerous conditions were not a reasonable classification. 'Reasonable clas-

sification' is a feature of the right to equality, which is a fundamental right. However, by a subsequent amendment,

Parliament put these provisions back in the law through the Finance Act, 2018. This reinsertion was challenged before various High Courts and eventually before the Supreme Court, culminating in a batch of petitions that

Harish Damodaran

INDIA'S PRODUCTION of cereal grains has gone up by more than 1.5 times over the

past two decades, according to the

for direct human consumption, but for use

in processed form (bread, biscuits, cakes,

noodles, vermicelli, flakes, pizza base, etc) or

for making animal feed, starch, potable

Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) of

the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)

show a marked decline in the quantity of ce-

reals consumed by the average person per

month between 1999-2000 and 2022-23 —

from 12.72 kg to 9.61 kg in rural India, and

weights based on the rural-urban distribu-

tion of HCES sample households, has been

from 11.78 kg to 8.97 kg during this period.

12 months with the country's population

yields the total annual consumption of cere-

als by Indian households, in direct or

processed-at-home form. This, as *Table 1* 

shows, has registered only a small increase,

from 148.4 million tonnes (mt) in 1999-2000

to 153.1 mt in 2022-23, and has actually

stagnated, even fallen, production has significantly increased from 196.4 mt in 1999-

2000 to 303.6 mt in 2022-23. The gap be-

tween the officially estimated cereal

production and HCES-based household con-

sumption, too, has widened from 48 mt in

1999-2000 and 29.5 mt in 2004-05 to almost

This raises the question: where is this ex-

Part of it is getting exported. In 2021-22

(April-March), India shipped out a record

While direct household consumption has

fallen over the last decade.

151 mt in 2022-23.

cess production going?

**Exported and processed** 

The overall per capita decline, using

Multiplying this weighted average over

from 10.42 kg to 8.05 kg in urban India.

Data from the latest Household

But a rising share of cereals is going not

Agriculture Ministry.

liquor, and ethanol fuel.

were heard in 2022 as Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v Union of India.

The petitioners argued that the underlying reasoning in *Nikesh Tarachand Shah* was valid even if Parliament brought back the law. However, a three-judge Bench headed by Justice AM Khanwilkar (now retired) refused to accept the previous ruling.

"We are unable to agree with the observations in Nikesh Tarachand Shah distinguish-

ing the enunciation of the Constitution Bench decision in Kartar Singh; and other observations suggestive of doubting the perception of Parliament in

regard to the seriousness of the offence of money-laundering, including about it posing serious threat to the sovereignty and integrity of the country," the court said.

Legal experts have questioned the logic of equating money laundering with stringent anti-terror and narcotics laws when the offence of money laundering, however serious, carries a maximum sentence of only seven

years. Only in money laundering cases where the scheduled offence involves narcotics, is the maximum sentence extended to 10 years.

In response, the government had argued in court that persons who are involved in money laundering are "influential, intelligent, and resourceful, and the crime is committed with full pre-meditation, which ensures that offence is not detected and even if it is detected, investigation agency cannot trace the evidence".

The government has defended the onerous bail conditions on the ground that the offence is committed "with the help of advanced technology so as to conceal the transaction".

#### **Current position in law**

One key aspect of the challenge to the amendment on bail conditions still remains open even after the Vijay Madanlal Choudhary ruling: the passing of these amendments through the Money Bill route.

A separate larger Bench challenge is pending before the SC on whether certain laws, such as the Aadhaar Act, service conditions of Tribunal members, etc. can be passed as a Money Bill. A Bench is yet to be constituted on that issue.

Although the Supreme Court has agreed to review its Vijay Madanlal Choudhary ruling itself, it is still valid law since no stay is operating on the judgment.

As per the ruling, the twin test has to be rigorously applied by all courts - special courts trying money laundering offences as well as constitutional courts. It would also apply in the same way for both regular bail and anticipatory bail.

However, an accused can still get the benefit available under Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), under which he is entitled to bail after serving half of the maximum sentence as an undertrial.

This means that in most money laundering cases, if the Enforcement Directorate is not able to finish the trial within three and a half years, the accused is entitled to bail, irrespective of the twin test.

#### **EXPLAINED** AI

#### WHAT IS CLAUDE 3.5 SONNET & HOW IS IT BETTER THAN ITS RIVAL AI MODELS?

**BIJIN JOSE** 

NEW DELHI, JUNE 21

ANTHROPIC, OPENAI'S biggest rival, has launched its latest AI model called Claude 3.5 Sonnet — the company's first release in the upcoming Claude 3.5 AI model series. Anthropic has claimed that its latest offering outperforms its peers such as OpenAI's GPT-4o, Google's Gemini-1.5 Pro, Meta's Llama-400b, and even the company's proprietary models — Claude 3 Haiku and Claude 3 Opus.

"Claude 3.5 Sonnet operates at twice the speed of Claude 3 Opus. This performance boost, combined with cost-effective pricing, makes Claude 3.5 Sonnet ideal for complex tasks such as context-sensitive customer support and orchestrating multi-step workflows," Anthropic said in a statement.

#### What is Claude 3.5 Sonnet?

Claude 3.5 Sonnet is a large language model (LLM), and is part of the family of LLMs which is being developed by Anthropic. These models are known as generative pre-trained transformers, which means they have been pre-trained to predict the next word in large amounts of text. Claude 3.5 Sonnet is the predecessor to the Claude 3 Sonnet, introduced in March this year.

Claude 3.5 Sonnet is likely to be the middle model (based on parameter size) in the upcoming series of AI models by Anthropic — the smallest and biggest models are yet to be released. Anthropic has said Claude 3.5 Sonnet outperforms Claude 3 Opus by a huge margin. The new model is claimed to be twice as fast as the Claude 3 Sonnet.

#### How does Claude 3.5 Sonnet perform?

According to Anthropic, Claude 3.5 Sonnet sets some new industry bench-

marks in capabilities such as coding proficiency (HumanEval), graduate-level reasoning (GPQA), and undergraduatelevel knowledge (MMLU).

model has also shown significant im-Sonnet is exceptional at writing high-

Based on the benchmark scores shared by Anthropic on its official website, Claude 3.5 Sonnet seems outstanding. It has outdone GPT-40, Gemini 1.5 Pro, and Meta's Llama 3 400B in seven out of eight overall benchmarks.

However, benchmark scores should not be taken too seriously — many AI startups have been accused of cherrypicking scores under categories that make them look good.

#### vision capabilities?

Anthropic claims that Claude 3.5 Sonnet is its strongest vision model. A vision model in AI is a model capable of interpreting and analysing visual data such as images and videos.

provements in Claude 3.5 Sonnet are most noticeable for tasks that require visual reasoning such as decoding charts and graphs. The model is also capable of accurately transcribing text from imperfect images. For instance, The Indian Express clicked a random picture from Claude's iOS app and asked about the location. The model immediately identified the location by reading a poster and text on the distant wall.

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The company claims that the new

provement in grasping nuance, humour, and complex instructions. Claude 3.5 quality content with a natural and relatable tone, according to Anthropic.

#### What about Claude 3.5 Sonnet's

According to the company, the im-

This ability to transcribe is what makes Claude 3.5 Sonnet beneficial for retail, logistics, and financial services, where AI may rely more on insights from an image, graphic, or illustration than from text, according to Anthropic.

#### **© 8010 208 000** 9 707, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar, New Delhi **TARGET CLAT**

#### TABLE 1

#### INDIA'S ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD CEREAL CONSUMPTION **VERSUS PRODUCTION**

**EXPLAINED ECONOMICS** 

Cereal numbers

The demand for cereals for direct household consumption is falling in India, but demand is rising for

use in processed foods, animal feed, and fuel. Official figures suggest production of cereals is

outstripping overall consumption, but certain other indicators remain unexplained

#### Monthly per capita cereal consumption (in kg)

	1999-2K	2004-05	2009-10	2011-12	2022-23		
Rural	12.72	12.12	11.35	11.23	9.61		
Urban	10.42	9.94	9.39	9.32	8.05		
Weighted Average#	11.78	11.33	10.54	10.44	8.97		
Population##	1050.01	1145.64	1232.08	1266.1	1422.03		
Annual Consumption*	148.43	155.76	155.83	158.62	153.07		
Annual Production*	196.38	185.23	203.45	242.2	303.63		
#Weights based on number of sample households in consumption expenditure surveys: ##In							

million; \*In million tonnes.

#### TABLE 2

#### **BREAK-UP OF ESTIMATED CEREAL CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION: 2022-23** (in million tonnes)

	Per capita monthly consumption (in kg)			Implied Annual Consumption	Estimated Annual Production
	Rural	Urban	Average*		
Rice	5.321	4.281	4.9	83.62	135.76
Wheat	3.935	3.583	3.79	64.67	110.55
Other cereals	0.357	0.183	0.29	4.95	57.32
Total	9.613	8.047	8.97	153.07	303.63

\*Weighted average based on number of sample households in consumption expenditure surveys. Source: NSSO, United Nations Population Division, and Ministry of Agriculture

32.3 mt of cereals, including 21.2 mt rice, 7.2 mt wheat, and 3.9 mt other grains (mainly maize). In 2022-23, cereal exports totaled 30.7 mt, comprising 22.3 mt of rice, 4.7 mt of wheat, and 3.6 mt of other grains.

These exports would, however, account for just a fifth of the 150 mt-plus difference between production and direct household consumption of cereals in 2022-23.

A second source of the difference would be consumption in processed form — as bread, biscuits, noodles, etc. Assuming this is 25% over and above the direct cereal consumption, it would amount to an additional 38 mt or so.

A third source is cereal grain used for manufacture of feed or industrial starch. The Agriculture Ministry has pegged India's

Ninety per cent of this would have been used as the primary energy ingredient in poultry, livestock, and agua feed, or for wet-milling and conversion into starch, which has applications in the paper, textiles, pharmaceutical, food and beverage industries. *Table 2* shows the production of "other

maize production in 2022-23 at 38.1 mt.

cereals" — maize, barley and millets such as bajra (pearl millet), jowar (sorghum), and ragi (finger millet) — at 57.3 mt. The direct consumption of these grains in Indian households worked out to less than 5 mt. Much of the consumption would be in indirect form — as milk, eggs, and meat after being fed to cows, buffaloes, and layer/broiler poultry birds.

Feed and starch manufacturing apart, ce-

(after milling and converting their starch into sucrose and simpler sugars) and distilled into about 94% rectified/industrial spirit or 99.9% ethanol. In recent times, many sugar mills have

real grains are also fermented into alcohol

installed multi-feed distilleries, enabling them to run on cane molasses or juice/syrup during the crushing season (November-April) and grain (broken/damaged rice, maize, and millets) in the off-season (May-October). This has received impetus from the government's programme for blending up to 20% ethanol in petrol. In other words, cereals are today not just

food and feed, but also fuel grains.

#### The unexplained surplus Adding exports of 32 mt, usage in

processed food form (38 mt) and diversion for feed, starch-making and fermentation purposes (50-55 mt) — these are very rough estimates — to direct household consumption of 150-155 mt will take the total yearly demand for cereals to 275-280 mt at best.

That's way below the estimated 300 mt plus domestic cereal output. The difference is the surplus grain being mopped up by government agencies and accumulated in the Food Corporation of India's warehouses. In the 2022-23 crop year (July-June), around 56.9 mt of rice and 26.2 mt of wheat were procured, more than the total annual cereal requirement of 59-60 mt for the public distribution system (PDS).

Under the National Food Security Act some 813.5 million persons are being given 5 kg of wheat or rice per month through the PDS free of cost (the issue price was Rs 2 and Rs 3/kg respectively until December 2022). The 5 kg entitlement for these beneficiaries covers more than half the monthly per capita cereal consumption of 9.61 kg in rural and 8.05 kg in urban India as per HCES, 2022-23.

If the Agriculture Ministry's cereal output estimates are correct, the country is producing at least 25 mt of excess grain every year, thereby exerting downward pressure on market prices, if not adding to government stocks.

But given the recent experience of high cereal inflation (8.69% year-on-year in May), notwithstanding ban/ restrictions on exports, and depleting stocks in government warehouses (16-year low for wheat on June 1), questions can be raised on the veracity of the official production estimates themselves.

## 11 candidates apply to verify EVM burnt memory: what is this process?

epaper.indianexpress.com

**DAMININATH** 

NEW DELHI, JUNE 21

IN A first, 11 candidates in the 2024 Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections have asked for verification of the burnt memory of the Ballot Units (BUs) and Control Units (CUs) of electronic voting machines (EVMs), and of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units.

Eight of the applicants contested the Lok Sabha election, the other three were candidates in Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

The remedy of verification was made available to losing candidates by the Supreme Court this April.

#### The Supreme Court order

On April 26, while upholding the EVM-VVPAT system and rejecting the plea for a return to ballot papers and for 100% counting of VVPAT slips, the court directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to allow second- and third-placed candidates

to seek verification of burnt memories of EVMs and VVPATs of up to 5% of machines in an Assembly constituency or Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha constituency. The two-judge Bench of Justices Sanjiv

Khanna and Dipankar Datta said:

"The burnt memory/ microcontroller in 5% of the EVMs, that is, the control unit, ballot unit and the VVPAT, per assembly constituency/assembly segment of a parliamentary constituency shall be checked and verified by the team of engineers from the manufacturers of the EVMs, post the announcement of the results, for any tampering or modification, on a written request made by candidates who are at Sl. No. 2 or Sl. No. 3, behind the highest polled candidate."

The court said that candidates or their representatives "shall identify the EVMs [to be verified] by the polling station or serial number", and "shall have an option to remain present at the time of verification". Requests for verification have to be made within seven days of the declaration of the result, the court said.

"The actual cost or expenses for the said verification will be notified by the ECI, and the candidate making the said request will pay for such expenses. The expenses will be refunded, in case the EVM is found to be tampered," the court said. (Association for Democratic Reforms vs Election Commission of India, April 26, 2024)

#### The process of verification The ECI is yet to finalise the

technical standard operating procedure (SOP). The technical SOP, including the methodology, will be released in time for the first set of verifications that are likely in August. However on June 1, the ECI re-

and verification of the burnt memory of EVMs and VVPATs. ■The District Election Officer (DEO) will be responsible for the process.

leased the administrative SOP for checking

■ Both the second and third candidates can request that up to 5% of the EVMs and VVPATs per Assembly constituency/ Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha con-

stituency be checked. If both these candidates make the request, each of them would be allowed to have 2.5% of the EVMs verified. ■ The candidates can choose the units

to be verified either by giving the polling station number or the unique serial number of the BU. CU. and VVPAT that is made available to candidates before polling.

■ The candidates have to make the request in writing to the DEO **EXPLAINED** concerned, and deposit Rs 40,000 (plus 18% GST) per set **POLICY** of EVMs (the BU, CU, and

> concerned. ■The DEOs will send a list of all such ap-

> plications to the state Chief Electoral Officer. who will notify the manufacturers of the EVMs, public sector companies Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Ltd (ECIL), within 30 days of declaration of results.

■ The checking will commence at the end of the 45-day period after declaration of results, during which Election Petitions

against the outcome can be filed by any candidate or elector. Since the results were announced on June 4, Election Petitions can be filed until July 19. ■ The checking will start only if no

Election Petitions have been filed. In case a petition has been filed, the checking will start only after a court issues an order specifically allowing the checking to commence. ■ The process is to be started within 30

days of the manufacturers being told if any Election Petitions have been filed. Thus, mid-August is the earliest that the results of the checks can be known. ■ The checking will be done at desig-

VVPAT) to the manufacturer nated halls within the manufacturers' facilities, with the requisite strong rooms and CCTV cameras in place. ■ Electronic devices, including cell

phones and cameras, will not be allowed inside the halls. The hall will have a single entry and exit, with at least one section of armed police force will be deployed there.

Candidates who have applied The 11 applications together cover 118

polling stations or sets of EVMs and VVPATs. For Lok Sabha constituencies, three candidates each from the BIP and Congress have applied, plus a DMDK and a YSRCP candidate. Not all these candidates have lost by nar-

row margins — while the Congress candidate from Kanker in Chhattisgarh was defeated by just 1,884 votes, the Congress candidate at Karnal in Haryana was defeated by more than 2.32 lakh votes.

EC officials argued that the fact that doubts have been raised over only 118 polling stations out of the lakhs in the country, shows the trust in the system of EVMs. However, Jagdeep Chhokar, a founder of ADR, the nonprofit working on electoral reforms that had moved the SC, said the exer-

cise has no real meaning. "The verification will be done after 45 days, by the same entities [BEL and ECIL] who have programmed the EVMs in the first place, with a cost imposed on the candidates. All this is in the direction of discouraging anybody who wants to apply for verification," Chhokar said.



# SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2024



#### SMART AGRICULTURE

Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan

There is a need to develop climate-resilient varieties and short-duration varieties so that the effects of climate change could be countered

#### Missing animal spirits

Industry's pre-Budget wish list hardly reflects the real issues that are acting as stumbling blocks for investments

**HE PRIORITIES OF** the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in its third term no doubt include facilitating a private investment-led revival to boost the India growth story. Ahead of the forthcoming Union Budget for FY25, it is naturally keen to listen to suggestions from stakeholders like the apex industry associations on how to ensure that a virtuous spiral of private capex kicks in. This is an unfinished agenda of the last five years. The fact remains that despite a strong public capex push, corporate investments have not crowded in to drive the process of overall economic expansion, which hit 8.2% in FY24. To be sure, leading conglomerates have been making big-ticket investments but a broader private capex upswing has not kicked in. In this milieu, it is indeed surprising that India Inc offered extremely timid, if not pusillanimous, suggestions like public capex spending must be stepped up by 25%, besides simplifying the tax regime, and more production-linked incentive schemes which the government in any case is mulling.

The pre-Budget consultations would have been more fruitful had industry frankly told the ruling dispensation why their animal spirits remain dampened and what it takes to ensure that corporations drive the growth process. Perhaps that is asking for too much as India Inclacks fearless leaders like the late Rahul Bajaj to talk truth to power. After the NDA dispensation came to power for the second term in 2019, Bajaj frankly stated at Bajaj Auto's annual general body meeting: "There is no demand and no private investments. So where will growth come from? It doesn't fall from the heavens." Later at an awards function, he raised concerns about the fear of speaking out among businessmen in the presence of the Union home minister. The reality is that domestic firms are hesitant to tell the government that unless there is demand — although an industry spokesperson said that the Centre must continue supporting the growth momentum by "energising" demand — capacity utilisation will not improve to a point where industry makes fresh investments.

This hesitancy of India Inc was observed by the late economist IG Patel who presciently wrote about this tendency of many in private business "who think even now that rather than incur the displeasure and unpleasantness of opposing government policies and all that, it is much simpler, much cheaper, much more comfortable to be on its right side". The bland demands for a simplification and rationalisation of the tax regime also conceals the anxieties of industry — which came to the fore with the suicide of the founder of Café Coffee Day, VG Siddhartha, in 2019, whose last letter mentioned harassment by the income tax department and a private equity investor — over so-called "tax terrorism".

It is also striking that India Inc does not forcefully advocate a bold and ambitious reforms agenda to trigger a private capex upswing by implementing deep-going structural reforms to free up the land and labour markets. Problems of land acquisition have bedevilled many investment projects. Domestic small and medium businesses, for their part, are struggling to cope with labour law requirements and predations of the inspector raj. It is these structural economic reforms, besides improving the conditions for doing business, which can kick-start more private sector investments. India Inc's animal spirits then are bound to be rekindled to broaden and drive the pace of overall economic expansion.

#### Zyn won't save big tobacco

**PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL** Inc. has stopped online sales of Zyn in the US after receiving a subpoena in the District of Columbia related to flavoured products that are banned there.

It's the latest example of the popular nicotine-pouch brand hitting the head-

lines, and raises further questions about not just the fast-growing product, but Big Tobacco's ability to shift from cigarettes to potentially less risky alternatives. The debate around Zyn already looked eerily similar to that which engulfed vaping five years ago. The latest episode, combined with soaring sales and the rise of social

media "Zynfluencers", could make restrictions on the sale of the pouches more likely. Philip Morris said this week that it had received a subpoena from the attorney general of the District of Columbia, requesting information about Zyn owner Swedish Match's compliance with the sale of flavoured tobacco and nicotine prod-

ucts, which were banned in the region in October 2022. The company said it had investigated, and its preliminary findings indicated that there had been sales of flavoured pouches — which do not contain tobacco in DC, predominantly related to certain online platforms and some independent retailers. It added that this did not relate to youth use: Zyn.com sales were agerestricted. It also said that Zyn.com represented a very small percentage of nationwide volumes since the acquisition of Swedish Match in 2022.

Nevertheless, it said it faced an unspecified "material liability" if there was an "unfavourable outcome" related to the matter. But the incident could mean further scrutiny of Zyn's sales and marketing practices, and in the longer-term, greater



The discovery of further sales of flavoured pouches in locations where they are prohibited can't be ruled out, particularly given how quickly demand for Zyn has ramped up.

Philip Morris was hit with its first Zyn lawsuit in March, alleging that it marketed nicotine pouches to teens. The company said the complaints were without merit and would be vigorously defended. Indeed, many of the concerns have

centred on whether young people who have never smoked are getting hooked. Even so, if vaping is anything to go by, the most likely outcome of the scrutiny on Zyn will be restrictions on the flavours that pouches can be sold in. Alternatives

would be limiting their potency, or even an outright ban in the US. That looks far off for now. But what happens at Zyn — both in the DC case and beyond — has huge ramifications for the tobacco industry. While Philip Morris is the market leader in modern oral tobacco as it's called, British American Tobacco

Plc and Altria Group Inc. are also marketing the products. With smoking rates falling in many developed markets, and some governments, such as the UK, seeking to stub it out altogether, tobacco companies have been investing their still prodigious cashflow into products that will continue to

generate sales and profit. Zyn looks like just that, as does Philip Morris's other market leading alternative, the IQOS device that heats rather than burns tobacco. Indeed, the company has been the most vocal in moving to what it calls a smoke-free future. Sales of these products, including Zyn and IQOS, accounted for 39% of its revenue in the first quarter. Philip Morris aims to generate more than two-thirds of its revenue from

potentially reduced-risk products by 2030. But the DC subpoena to Zyn is a stark reminder that giving up smoking is eas-

**FELSTED** 

Bloomberg

ier said than done. (Michael R Bloomberg, founder and majority owner of Bloomberg News parent Bloomberg LP, has been a longtime champion of tobacco control efforts and has campaigned and given money in support of a US ban on flavored e-cigarettes and tobacco.)

#### KEEPING STOCK

AN ESTIMATED ₹86,207 CRORE MIGHT BE UNDISTRIBUTED TO THE GOVERNMENT IN FY24

## Simplify RBI risk accounting

The RBI's

accounting policy

involves daily

marking-to-market

(MTM) of foreign

and rupee

securities

**AST MONTH, THE** Reserve Bank of India (RBI) shocked the market by announcing a ₹2.10874-trillion surplus for government distribution — 141% higher than the FY23 surpluses of ₹87,416 crore, and much higher than the ₹50,000 crore budgeted in FY25. However, a study of its accounts from FY20 to FY24 shows the RBI has been earning and transferring significant surpluses to its own reserves, particularly the Contingency Fund (CF) — ₹3.82586 trillion over the last five years. In FY23, the CF allocation was ₹1.30875 trillion, which reduced to ₹42,819 crore in FY24. The RBI's earnings also include income from forex trading, which is uncertain and volatile, and could impact surpluses. Accounting for this as well, it seems the RBI is retaining significant surpluses, as detailed below.

#### An analysis of RBI accounts

The RBI's FY24 income statements indicate an annual interest income of ₹1.88605 trillion,with ₹1.03177 trillion coming from foreign assets. Earnings from average foreign currency assets (FCA) total ₹1.87471 trillion, but only ₹1.03177 trillion appears in the income statement. The remaining ₹84,294 crore was transferred to the Investment Revaluation Account-Foreign Securities (IRA-FS),aswas ₹91,831 crore in FY23.The RBI earned a 4.21% yield on average FCA in FY24, up from 3.73% in FY23, the improvement reflecting higher global interest rates on G-Sec securities. The RBI's accounting policy involves

daily marking-to-market (MTM) of foreign and rupee securities, with unrealised gains recorded in the IRA-FS and IRA-RS accounts. As of March 31, IRA-FS had a negative balance of ₹1.43220 trillion due to a decline in MTM value, and IRA-RS showed a negative balance of ₹7,090 crore. These balances are reduced from the Contingency Fund (CF) at year-end and reversed the next fiscal year. This is where TV MOHANDAS PAI **NISHA HOLLA** 

Respectively, chairman, Aarin Capital and technology fellow, C-CAMF

the RBI's accounting policies do not reveal the full picture.

The RBI also maintains a Currency and Gold Revaluation Account (CGRA) to manage currency risk, interest rate risk, and gold price movements. Unrealised rupee gains/losses from FCA and gold MTM aren't included in the income account. Due to the depreciation of the rupee against the dollar value of FS and increase in market prices of gold, both of which are initially accounted for at cost, cumulative

unrealised rupee gains are credited to CGRAwhich had abalance of ₹11.30793 trillion at the end of FY24 and ₹11.24733 trillion in FY23.

In essence, while changes in MTM values of FS and RS impact IRA accounts, increases in the rupee value of balance FS and gold due to rupee depreciation are credited to the CGRA. These unrealised gains or losses do

not appear in the income statement until realised, and negative IRA balances are deducted from the CF at each fiscal year's end. ₹ is the RBI's reporting currency.

#### Holding appropriate risk capital

For the RBI to manage its risk sufficiently, the Bimal Jalan Committee (BJC) recommended a policy of having a CF of around 5.5-6.5% of its total balance sheet assets (BSA) as of year-end, with allocations made from its surpluses annually. At the end of FY24, the total funds for contingency were ₹4.58095 trillion — 6.5% of BSA of ₹70.47703 trillion. Further, the

RBI must hold economic capital at 20.8-25.4% of BSA. At the close of FY24, its economic capital was ₹15.89059 trillion (22.43% of BSA). This is the equity capital the RBI has.

While these seem to be in line with the BJC recommendations, the startling revelation is that the economic capital is on MTM value of investment assets whereas the risk is carried on the historic rupee cost of investment assets. It is only when the carrying value of investment assets

declines to the rupee cost after setting off the CGRA that the risk crystalises on the historic rupee cost of assets for which the CF is created. On the BSA net of CGRA,totalling₹59.16739 trillion in FY24 (₹70.47703 trillion - ₹11.30793 trillion), the economic capital (₹15.89059 trillion) rises to 26.86%. For FY23, with BSA net of CGRA at

₹52.18668 trillion (₹63.44756 trillion -₹11.24733 trillion), economic capital (₹15.06768 trillion) revises to 28.74%.

Because of its complex accounting, the RBI is carrying surplus reserves — even by the standards of its own capital policy as a result of calculating the economic capital on the rupee value of MTM of its investment assets rather than calculating it net of CGRA. We estimate an additional reserve of ₹86,207 crore due to this accounting, which could have been distributed to the government. (26.86% -25.4% = 1.46% of BSA net of CGRA = ₹86,207 crore)

#### Transparency via simplified risk capital accounting

Currently, the RBI is over-calculating its contingency by not netting the BSA of CGRA. Further, the IRA (FS and RS) must be adjusted on CGRA rather than keeping it separate and reducing from the CF at year-end. When the IRA-FS and IRA-RS debited to the CF at the end of FY24 are added back, the total CF is ₹6.08406 trillion — 10.28% of its BSA net of CGRA. This is a healthy risk capital for the RBI. Its CGRA then reduces to ₹9.80652 trillion (by subtracting IRA-FS and IRA-RS).

The RBI must simplify its accounting practices and enhance the transparency of its financial statements. Key recommendations for achieving this include:

■ Computing risk on BSA net of CGRA and simplifying the CF computation by adjusting the IRA on CGRA, and increasing the CF to, say, 10% of BSA net of CGRA. ■ Accounting for full earnings on aver-

age FCA in the income statement itself. ■ Handling all adjustments to MTM value — decrease/increase in dollar value

and rupee translation — through CGRA instead of CF and IRA-FS. ■ Offsetting IRA accounts against CGRA at year-end, ensuring CGRA reflects the full increase in rupee value of foreign

assets. Any rupee appreciation should decrease CGRA accordingly. ■ Allocating surpluses from the income statement to the CF as required,

without making IRA-related adjustments. ■ Basing economic capital, including CF, on BSA net of CGRA.

As the RBI is wholly owned by the government of India (GoI), which can recapitalise if necessary, the risks on the RBI's balance sheet are essentially GoI's risks. Thus, the RBI's economic capital represents GoI's equity. Retaining excess capital on the RBI's balance sheets reduces government revenue, compelling the GoI to borrow unnecessarily, thereby increasing the fiscal deficit instead of using the capital it already controls.

## Pvt investment key to India's 2047 goal



**ARADHNA AGGARWAL** 

Professor at Copenhagen Business School and senior advisor to Team 'Skill, Technology and Trade' at NCAER. Views are personal

Addressing institutional shortcomings, promoting human development, and strategically leveraging regional economies are necessary to realise growth potential

NARENDRA MODI HAS taken charge of the office of Prime Minister at a time when India is poised to become a \$5-trillion economy, propelled by growth rates of 7-8% in most years over the past two decades. Amid concerns about China's economic slowdown and strained trade relations with the US and its allies, many experts and international entities have projected India as a potential new economic and political superpower. Bolstered by these projections, in 2023, Modi launched the slogan of "Viksit Bharat" or Developed India by 2047, which he has consistently reiterated after resuming office. The pivotal question is: Can he navigate India along this transformative path towards becoming a developed nation?

Reaching the high-income threshold of \$13,845 GDP per capita (as of 2022) within 25 years from India's current GDP per capita of \$2,090 (2022) requires substantial growth acceleration over an extended period. China's experience shows that despite maintaining impressive average annual growth rates of 8.5% in GDP per capita at constant 2015 USD for 41 years during 1978-2018, which peaked at 9.1% between 1982 and 2012, it has yet to surpass the high-income threshold. In comparison, analysing India's GDP showing over the past decade reveals mediocre performance with no acceleration in the annual growth rate. The average annual growth rate in GDP per capita at constant 2015 USD during 2014-2022 (4.6%) remains somewhat lower than the previous decade's rate (5.3%).

This mediocre growth performance is directly linked to a steady decline in private gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) as a percentage of GDP since 2011-12, dropping from 31% to 25% by 2021. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has also shown sporadic growth patterns despite India's potential to attract FDI due to economic and geopolitical conditions, and strained US-China relations.

Weak private investment has impeded the structural transformation of the economy, perpetuating structural underdevelopment. A significant share of the workforce (45.6%) and land (46%) remains stuck in low-value-added agriculture, which contributes only 15-16% to GDP and is responsible for around

one-quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. The share of manufacturing, which has the potential to pull labour out of agriculture, has been shrinking in GDP, while the rapidly growing service sector struggles to absorb labour due to its skillintensive nature. This has led

to a situation of jobless growth, marginalising the vast unskilled/semi-skilled workforce, and funnelling them into lowvalue-added formal/informal/uberised sectors, exacerbating inequalities and distress particularly in rural areas.

Sustained and substantial growth requires the economy to transform from an agrarian into an industrialised economy, which hinges on mobilising private investment. Many view policy reforms as crucial for mobilising investment. However, policy reforms alone are not a panacea for development challenges. Despite critical institutional reforms, infrastructure development, digital innovation ini-

tiatives, and improvements in the business environment such as a notable jump of 79 ranks in World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index, economic performance remains moderate considering the low base. Of primary importance are the challenges surrounding policy-making, implementation, and prioritisation that determine the structure of economic incentives. I highlight four critical areas that need immediate attention.

**Policy-making:** This faces hurdles such as silos (development of policies by various departments in isolation irres-

pective of their cross-cutting nature), lack of stakeholder Sustained growth engagement, frequent reverrequires the sals, and delays in decisioneconomy to making, undermining institransform from tutional trust among investors. Policies lack robust agrarian into mechanisms for monitoring industrialised and independent evaluation and are often subject to the

> leadership irrespective of the need, potential impact, and reactions. Rectifying these issues is imperative for fostering a conducive environment for investors.

whims and fancies of top

Weak policy implementation: This can erode the effectiveness of the most well-crafted reforms. The hype around the ease of doing business index has little substance as it focuses on rules and policies; actual implementation is not captured. Policy implementation, a key to mobilising investment, is hindered by issues like absenteeism, incompetence, indifference, and corruption within public service departments/agencies.Rampantcorruption hampers the effectiveness of initiatives like e-governance, eroding trust in institutions. This is exacerbated by the lack of interministerial/intergovernmental coordination. Countries that have strengthened implementation capacity, ensured accountability, and promoted transparency and efficiency are more successful in promoting investment than others.

**Human development:** This emerges as a crucial focus area with India's competitive advantage shifting towards skill intensive activities. Investment in education, health, innovation, and technological development is critical for maintaining global competitiveness and fostering productivity growth. Addressing deep-rooted societal divisions, which have diminished social capital, perpetuated nepotism and favouritism, and affected behaviour and attitudes at the workplace, can further enhance productivity.

Regional economies: In a globalised world, these garner increasing attention, necessitating spatial policies that leverage local competencies and target areas with high productivity potential. In this context, special economic zones are a potent instrument for fostering new regional economies, driving industrial concentrations, and catalysing transformation in cities. However, they have been long neglected by the government, and require immediate attention and support.

While India's growth trajectory holds promise, realising its full potential requires concerted efforts towards fostering inclusive and sustainable development This entails addressing institutional shortcomings, promoting human development, and strategically leveraging regional economies.

#### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

#### NTA accountability

While fixing accountability in the National Testing Agency (NTA) is now a rightful government concern, no change for the better can happen without raising tough questions on the entire process of centralised exams. From Common University Entrance Test to Joint Entrance Examination, National Eligibility-cum-**Entrance Test and University Grants** 

Commission-National Eligibility Test, there have been far too many errors, and big questions marks on the integrity and competence of the testing agency. The Centre must set up a credible high-level committee quickly. The panel should not only be given a strict deadline, but also have the freedom to raise questions including on the need for a such testing system. Heads must roll at the NTA to address accountability, but a

new team will not be effective without fixing the flaws of the old system. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

#### Geopolitical tensions

The Putin-Kim pact is bound to add to geopolitical tensions in the world. South Korea has already announced that it would consider sending more arms to Ukraine. Putin seems to want to keep the US and its allies in a permanent state of high alert. Only

New Delhi

time will tell if it has anything to do with the upcoming US elections. Russia, China, and North Korea seem to be natural allies with antidemocratic credentials and are a constant threat to the democratic world. Indian reliance on Russia and its history of friendship makes it hard for India to take an anti-Russia stance. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtras

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EDITORIAL **SATURDAY** 22.06.2024 **HYDERABAD** 

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

— Ramnath Goenka

#### **BUDGET NEEDS TO LOOK** AT DIRECT TAX CODE AND RATE RESPITE

NDIA'S direct tax collections are on a tear. During the current fiscal year so far, the provisional direct tax revenue grew by an annualised 22.19 percent to ₹5.16 lakh crore from ₹4.2 lakh crore in the corresponding period a year ago. Net of refunds, direct tax collections settled at ₹4.6 lakh crore as against ₹3.8 lakh crore, translating to a 21 percent jump over last year. While corporate income tax collections stood at ₹2.26 lakh crore, the personal income tax haul was higher at ₹2.8 lakh crore. Personal income tax exceeded corporate tax revenues in 2023-24 and is likely to do so in 2024-25 too, going by the interim budget estimates. The trendline shows that individual taxpayers are likely to contribute more to the exchequer in the coming years than corporates, notwithstanding the handsome corporate tax reductions in 2019.

From the government's perspective, this is just how it should be, and they expect personal income taxes to punch in higher than corporate tax collections, whose growth is likely to be 'moderate'. This is despite the significant cut in headline corporate tax rates from 30 percent to 22 percent in 2019 for companies foregoing exemptions and deductions. As for individuals, a reduction in rates remains elusive, though the government in 2020 introduced a new tax regime with altered tax slabs and concessional rates; but first, taxpayers must forego incentives. This caused confusion and as there were few takers, in 2023, the new regime was sweetened with changes including a higher tax rebate limit and a lower surcharge. It remains to be seen whether individuals are willing to part with tax reliefs in lieu of lower rates.

Regardless of whether there is acceptance of the regime, individual taxpayers are hoping for a respite in the Union Budget to be presented next month. There is undeniable frustration among the salaried class and any reduction in rates will alleviate their burden resulting from high inflation and stagnant incomes. The government must also initiate and hasten the process of replacing the existing Income Tax Act with a new Direct Tax Code. Such a move will help increase the tax-to-GDP ratio, reduce compliance costs, lower administrative burden and provide moderate rates to all taxpayers. By reducing ambiguities, it will broaden the tax base.

#### K'TAKA MUST BALANCE WELFARE WITH GROWTH

year into its tenure, the Karnataka government is beginning to feel the burden of its successful 'guarantee schemes'. With the Lok Sabha elections done, the Siddaramaiah government has set about raising resourcles to fund the schemes, which arguably are popular among the 5.10 crore beneficiaries. Having raised stamp duty by 200-500 percent earlier this year, it has now raised sales tax on fuel, making petrol and diesel ₹3 costlier. The fallout is a spike in inflation. There are also hints of an increase in water tariff and bus fares, leading to rumbles of discontent from the taxpaying public. The five guarantees cost the exchequer ₹36,000 crore in 2023-24, and are billed at ₹52,009 crore for the current year. Gruha Lakshmi (₹2,000 to woman head of family), Gruha Jyoti (200 units free power), Shakti (free bus travel for women), Anna Bhagya (10 kg rice per person) and Yuva Nidhi (₹3,000 to unemployed graduates, ₹1,500 to unemployed diploma holders) came as relief for people impoverished by the pandemic. To its credit, the government also cut domestic and commercial power tariffs.

Defending the rate increases, Siddaramaiah admitted that the government needed more funds for the schemes. Taking on a belligerent opposition, which has demanded a rollback of the fuel rate hikes, he argued that the state was finally on par with others. The Shakti scheme is delivering unexpected returns, with road transport corporations registering record revenues of ₹3,930 crore in 2023-24, compared to ₹3,349 crore in 2022-23. Mobility experts also advocate free public transport, which brings environmental, social and economic benefits, and is in vogue in more than 100 cities across 36 countries. Realising that the withdrawal of any scheme would be unacceptable, the government is now looking at generating funds. A private consultant has advised the government to monetise about 25,000 acres of land around Bengaluru; this planned urbanisation is expected to attract substantial investments.

It is all very well for politicians to adopt a welfare ideology, but they must realise that someone has to pay for it. Taxing Priya to keep Pradip's home fires burning has never made economic sense, though it keeps populists in power. The CM, known for his financial skills, will have to balance his pet schemes with visible development if he has to keep both Priya and Pradip happy.

#### QUICK TAKE

#### **LEARNING FROM TOURIST TAXES**

HE Calangute panchayat's decision to impose an entry tax on tourists who do not have hotel reservations could go some way in making one of the busiest and dirtiest beaches in Goa safer and cleaner. This stretch attracts a large number of day tourists and has recorded several cases of drowning over the years. While adopting the measure, the panchayat cited a similar tax in Maharashtra's Mahabaleshwar. Both taxes are a result of the thoughtless tourist's irresponsible behaviour. The other local governments across India that have proposed similar taxes will keenly watch Calangute on how it uses the collected tax to improve the area's infrastructure.

few weeks ago, I had written on the unstoppable Modi juggernaut and the impotent resistance from the opposition in the form of an INDIA bloc that was splitting at the seams even before it got a chance to

demonstrate its ability to fight. I underscored Modi's supreme confidence in his ability to win the battle by himself, with the BJP and the NDA merely applauding from the sidelines.

PM Modi exuded confidence in responding to the motion of thanks for the president's address in the previous session of parliament. Not only would the BJP and the NDA cross past majorities, but the former would win 370 seats out of an NDA tally of 400, he claimed. I felt that the miscalculations of the Congress and their inability to bring together the IN-DIA bloc could well presage a long period of uninterrupted BJP rule, the break-up of the Congress and the emergence of a Congress-mukt Bharat, the final destination the BJP wishes to reach.

I now have to eat my words. So does Prime Minister Modi, who suddenly finds himself with not even a majority for his party. To form a government, he needed the support of two seasoned warriors with long experience of political fights—sometimes winning, sometimes losing—knowing full well that nothing is static in politics and that today's enemies can become tomorrow's friends. As chief minister and as PM, Modi has never faced a strong opposition. He was convinced that 'Modi ki guarantee' alone would win the election.

He was so self-assured that he asked his officers to prepare a 100-day plan well before the election, so that he could hit the deck running. The expectation was that Modi 3.0 would be a seamless continuation of Modi 2.0, with the PM in a stronger position than ever before. The campaign became a glorification crusade.

Yet, the people chose to pull him back. This will have implications on policy and action. Further action on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens and the uniform civil code must be carefully considered by the new government and parliament before the next step is taken. India's second-largest community is no longer voiceless; it cannot be bulldozed into submission everywhere.

Significantly, the first file Modi handled after assuming office a third time related to farmers. The farm laws, hastily introduced as part of a "stimulus package" during the pandemic, cannot

The people's verdict has given Modi 3.0 limited space to manoeuvre. Winds of change are sure to blow across many policy terrains. Even the Finance Commission may not be immune

#### EATING MY WORDS ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF INDIA

**K M CHANDRASEKHAR** Former Cabinet Secretary and author of As Good as My Word: A Memoir



now be imposed on farmers without discussion within the coalition and with the position of farm laws frightened farmers, who now insist on legal guarantees for enforcing minimum support prices. This is not easy, as MSP covers a wide range of crops and the exchequer will not be able to sustain this burden.

In 2026, the time will come for parliament to look afresh at the question of delimitation of constituencies. If 3.0 had been a mere continuation of 2.0. delimitation would have gone through like a breeze. The current elections have made three changes, which makes this less facile. One, the BJP's presence in the north has declined, while they grew in vote share in the south and the east. Two,

within the government, while JD(U) supports delimitation based on population states and other parties. The sudden imaccording to the latest census, TDP stands to lose. And three, the government does not have a two-thirds majority and hence cannot push through a constitutional amendment on its own.

> The postponed census may have to be redesigned to include a caste census. The 'One Nation, One Election' report of former President Ram Nath Kovind could enter the ranks of government reports gathering dust.

> On the economic front, changes will become inevitable. Nirmala Sitharaman's heavily corporate-oriented economic policy—with some sops thrown in for the very poor—will have to be moderated. There will be and should be, more

demand-side economics focusing on the middle classes and the bottom half of the pyramid. The finance minister's firm conviction that growth can only trickle down from the top will have to be reviewed. Interestingly, this could lead to higher GDP growth, as increased demand will generate higher capacity utilisation, production, and significant investments from Indian and foreign firms. Besides, higher incomes will mean lower household debt and possibly eliminate a lurking danger to the banking system.

Modi 3.0 should also lead to greater synergy between the Centre and the states. Modi started in 2014 with grand ideas of building 'Team India'. This fell by the wayside. Instead, ministers proclaimed that a BJP-led government is a "double engine" that would get special deals from the Centre, while other states would have to fend for themselves. BJP leaders used this logic even in the recent Odisha assembly elections too.

The Centre will now have to find ways to continue discussions with states on critical issues to design and implement schemes, as successive governments did so effectively in the case of GST. This should also impact the work of the 16th Finance Commission. Chandrababu Naidu has, in the past, been an excellent finance minister. The Finance Commission will be constrained to look at the existing imbalance between the Centre and the states realistically and find ways of balancing them, particularly now that the use of Article 360 to "discipline state financial profligacy" has been rendered impotent by voters.

I also expect significant changes in law enforcement and the judiciary. Perhaps the central agencies will be used with greater discretion. The bulldozers and encounter specialists may have to take a back seat in light of the clear message sent by the people of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. The judiciary, particularly at the lower level, was confused during Modi 2.0 and was subjected to immense political pressure in some cases on which the Supreme Court and high courts commented adversely later. Now the line of command is clearer. The Supreme Court will hopefully prioritise scrutiny of such laws as the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, the laws enacted to emasculate the Delhi government and the vexing issue of Centre-state financial relations.

In short, governance will change. If it does not, there could be early elections. (Views are personal)

(kmchandrasekhar@gmail.com)

#### HOW THE LAW PLAYS CRUCIAL ROLE IN POLLS PAST & FUTURE

HE runway has been cleared for the prosecution of Arundhati Roy for utterances made 14 years ago, though no one has hit the ignition button yet. And Australian satirist Juice Media's 'Honest Government Ad: India', a YouTube short, has been blocked for highlighting what most foreign coverage of the election did not: that the government had weaponised the law to put critics, including opposition CMs, behind bars. In denial of its decline in parliament, the BJP is signalling that it's back to business as usual.

The most populous democracy is done with its national election. Now, the most powerful democracy is heading for polls in November. Like in India, there is no perceivable wave for or against the ruling dispensation or opposition in the US; neither side has a leader who commands the affections and trust of the majority. The divisive Donald Trump raises anxieties about internal strife among all but his core constituents. Defending champion President Joe Biden has alienated core supporters with his Israel policy. But like the Indian opposition, Democrat voters perceive this poll to be an existential struggle, and they will stand up and be counted.

The law plays a significant role in both elections. The Indian Supreme Court has shelved constitutionally important cases for years and disrespected the old dictum that bail is a right, and jail an exception. The especially important matter of electoral bonds was heard at the last moment, and it looked like a face-saver. The contest in the US promises to be even stranger than the Indian tournament, if such a thing were possible, due to courtroom dramas on both sides.

Biden is weighed down by his son Hunter, who has been convicted of felony for denying that he used controlled substances when he bought a handgun, though he did use hard drugs at the time. Being caught lying is still a serious offence in the US. He will also face a tax evasion case in September, which could end in another felony conviction. In a country where historically, family values have been venerated (even gender identity politics hasn't dismantled it, and Bill Clinton's career ended because of it), a troubled son spells electoral trouble.

Biden's opposite number is the first convicted felon to run for president who could actually win. Trump's first term ended in a transfer-of-power crisis featuring furry



easy to a surprisingly tolerant public

**SPEAKEASY** 

wild men, gouts of flame and a Bible. Nevertheless, he stands a decent chance of winning again, and it's completely legal because the US constitution, the world's oldest in written form, is a slim volume that is sparse on the details. It only speci-



Donald Trump was found guilty on 34 counts in a criminal case, and he still has a decent chance of winning the presidential polls this November. The US Constitution, the world's oldest in a written form, doesn't say anything against a president being a convicted felon

fies that the president must have been born in the US, must have lived there for at least 14 years, and must be at least 35 years of age. Its authors did not anticipate that citizens with a criminal record would be within striking distance of the White House, and the document is silent on the issue.

Trump was found guilty in May last year in a case brought by columnist E Jean Carroll, who had accused him of sexual assault. The court found him guilty, but it was a civil trial and Trump only had to pay \$5 million. He did not get a felony record, but had to face a defamation case when he pooh-poohed her initial charge. In total, he had to put up over \$88 million in damages, mostly for the charge of defamation.

Now, Trump has been found guilty on 34

counts in a criminal case featuring commercial sex and cash skimmed from his balance sheet for a cover-up. The list is long, and it was being read out on air and online with obvious relish: "Count one, guilty; count two, guilty... count 23, guilty... count 31, guilty..." It went on and on and people loved it—even those who would never dream of voting Democrat. It was like the response of the Indian press and social media to the humbling of Smriti Irani and the embarrassment of Kangana Ranaut. Even people on their side of the fence were trying hard to suppress grins. Audiences used to react like this, guiltlessly, to the slap scenes from the Trinity spaghetti Western films in the 1970s but now, we must conceal our little pleasures.

The possibility of constitutional crises is another common thread. Briefly, India seemed to be heading for one before counting day. Manipulated exit polls were predicting numbers which, if they had been true, could have been rejected in states in the south and east. In the US, Trump's sentencing could trigger a crisis, too. While there is no law against a convicted felon being elected president, the felon is required to perform as president after the event. Arvind Kejriwal tried to run his state government from a jail cell till he got bail, but a US president who must operate behind a firewall of secrecy spanning multiple institutions and departments cannot do so.

American constitutional experts fear the possibility of a crisis would urge the court to either not award Trump a sentence, which could be a miscarriage of justice, or suspend its operation until after he finishes his term, if he is elected. That is, POTUS would walk out of the White House directly into the cooler. Presumably, he could be holding the Bible and surrounded by furry men and purifying flames. While Indian politics has been fairly bizarre in the last decade, it has not faced such absurdities. There's some comfort in that.

(Views are personal) (Tweets @pratik k)

#### MAILBAG

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#### Rural tragedy

It's terrible to know of more than 40 people dying in Kallakurichi after consuming illicit liquor. This is the second major incident in the state since 2023, when twin hooch tragedies claimed 17 lives in Viluppuram and Chengalpattu districts. It's mostly people living in villages who lose health and money because of this habit. The government should take this matter seriously, act against those involved and safeguard rural families. V K S Krishnan, Kumbakonam

#### **Stern action**

Dereliction of duty on the part of government officials is responsible for the painful hooch tragedy in Kallakurichi. Remaining taciturn about such a horrendous event smacks of some politicians' indifference. Mere lip service would not be enough. Only stern action can put an end to loss of lives due to toxic inebriation. Venkat Desikan, Chennai

#### **Debate laws**

Ref: New criminal laws must go through parliament again (Jun 22). I am an assistant professor of law and am writing to thank you for the article on the three new criminal laws. I completely agree with the views in it and hope the government agrees to a wider debate and discussion on the issues. Sam J Abraham, Kolkata

#### **Delhi crisis**

For the past few weeks, millions of Delhi residents have been suffering from a severe water crisis. The situation in the national capital can tarnish the country's reputation globally, despite our desire to see India in a leading position. It is the government's responsibility to promptly address such crises, ensuring that citizens do not face difficulties and the pride of India is upheld. Jakir Hussain, Kanpur

#### **Mediclaim tax**

It would be good if the government considered removing GST on Mediclaim insurance premiums. As such, the government itself is offering many hospitalisation covers under social welfare measures. Such a move will boost the health insurance sector. Y K Krishna Kumar, Tirupati

#### **Exam overhaul**

The recent incidents of malpratice during examinations conducted by central agencies have put a question mark on the efficacy of the system administered by these agencies. It is time for a complete overhaul to help the students have a transparent and reliable means for achieving their dreams. V Padmanabhan, Bengaluru

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## **The Edit Page**

## NRIs of the World, **Keep on Depositing**

Favourable influences are expected to continue

Non-resident deposits are surging because the confluence of factors that define the risk-reward trade-off are broadly positive. The pandemic had globally reset households' savings patterns in favour of less-risky bank deposits. This worked to the advantage of the money the Indian diaspora parks in deposits back home. The NRI population overall had relatively even incomes during the Covid disruptions, which kept remittances strong, another positive influence on non-resident deposits. Emerging from the global economic crisis, interest and exchange rates moved steadily to make NRI deposits more rewarding. This was aided by temporary easing of interest rate flexibility, and risk provision allowed by RBI on such deposits. Finally, India has not been a contributor to global uncertainty in economic or political terms, which improves the risk profile of deposits held by NRIs in the country.



These favourable influences are expected to continue, making for secular growth in India's non-resident deposits. On the whole, NRI deposits are morestable than capital flows into equity. The key economic determinant encouraging this stable inflow - India's interest rate differential with advanced

economies—is on course to return to historic levels. The rupee's depreciation, too, has become more controlled with forex reserves resuming their climb.

NRI deposits have, by and large, kept pace with India's economic growth, but have trailed domestic deposit mobilisation. Going forward, domestic deposits are expected to outgrow NRI deposits. This limits vulnerability to episodic reversals of flow triggered by domestic events. India has made a smaller growth-inflation trade-off than most advanced economies, which lowers its chances of adding to volatility in financial flows. As inflation trends towards target, the economy will gain economic momentum. This should make NRI deposits more attractive to the diaspora. The diaspora numbers are themselves posting healthy growth, making both remittances and NRI deposits robust and stable. Global trends in immigration will widen the funnel of NRI deposits.

## India, React to Small, Modular Nuclear

Bill Gates isn't the first name that you'd think of after watching Oppenheimer. But TerraPower, the nuclear reactor engineering company the Microsoftwala founded in 2006, began constructing a micro nuclear reactor plant, Natrium, in Wyoming this month. This marks a quiet, commercially untested class of nuclear reactors: small modular reactors (SMR). SMR projects are in development in a dozen countries. In only China and Russia are they operational. Its viability test will come around 2030, when plants, including Natrium, will likely begin production.

As energy demands grow, nuclear power will be a necessary option. SMR is one. It's modular, replicable with standardised



design, and can absorb existing coal plant workforce. It has its fair number of challenges: capital costs, fuel sourcing and supply chains. Natrium will cost about \$4 bn, with half the amount borne by support under the US Inflation Reduction Act. But nuclear power, as an unsafe bogeytech, should go through an image makeover in the pub-

lic eye. There are at least six tech options at present. This has limitations on cost rationalisation and developing a regulatory regime. Besides, there are considerations of safety, use of spent fuel and disposal of waste. Building on its domestic nuclear programme, India should invest in SMR R&D, especially suited for local designs and needs.

India's growing demands in a climate-constrained world compel it to explore all options for clean, reliable, affordable, safe and sustainable energy. It must take an informed decision to make budgetary allocations, investment plans and building infrastructure for this. SMR is one option that deserves a serious dekho.

Online outragers serve an ameliorative purpose they'll never know about

## Learning to Roll With the Trolls

We live in the golden age of trolls and trolling. These cretins of the online universe skulk in comment sections, their malevolence tended by anonymity and an endless supply of snark. But before we sound predictably hifalutin, considerthis: could trolls have a purpose beyond raising our BP? Yet another herd of the most virulent form of the commentariat shrieks, threatens, abuses you for some opinion you've shared—or even a fact they think is complete rubbish. Annoying? Absolutely. But let's now admit this: their relentless sniping and pouncing on opinion-holders not holding their views have sharpened our skills. Suddenly, online people are triple-checking their facts, sweating over a turn of phrase lest it be misconstrued. Let's face it, feeling the sting of a troll's barbed comment is a crash course in empathy. You start to understand demented minds better. Maybe this will give rise again to that defunct form of communication

- irony - where trolls will think they have succeeded in cowing an opinionator down by sheer loudmouthery. Like mosquitoes that can't be eradicated, we must learn to coexist with trolls. They're the bitter meds that strengthen our immune system against criticism.

Disclaimer: This column is not an endorsement of trolling. Please refrain from creating your own troll persona. We have enough of those already.

India can be the great link joining the largest population of developers to Al's immense possibilities

## The SoftwAlre Convergence



Thomas Dohmke

ince the dawn of the computer revolution in the 1970s, software developers have established themselves as the architects of technological innovation, building digital solutions that drive economic and human progress in every country on the planet. India is now forecasted to be the fastest-growing G20 economy, and its digital economy contributes over 13% to the economy as a whole annually.

It's clear that where developers are, economic growth follows - and, very soon, India will follow no other. By 2027, India is slated to overtake the US as the largest software developer community on Earth. Although this figure alone signals a hopeful spring of economic opportunity, the possibilities go even further.

As evidenced by widespread adoption of generative AI tools, AI has begun to rapidly refound software development, fuelling up to 55% gains in developer productivity. By 2030, developer AI tools alone are expected to boost global GDP by \$1.5 tn.

As India's developer community burgeons, and Alfuels Industrial Revolution-like productivity gains, the country stands at the nexus of a great convergence between the world's largest population of developers, and the newfound possibility of AI. If enabled, this great convergence will drive unprecedented digital transformation for the people of India, generating a consequential economic boom that could be felt around the world for generations to come.

Here's how India can enable this great convergence into continuity: ▶ Launch early education efforts, skilling Indian developers in natural language programming For far too long, learning how to build software has been dependent on a basic understanding of English, as that language is the syntax base for most modern programming languages.

But, now, AI has struck a new fusion



Could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship

between human and machine langua-India to start programming in their own, vernacular language they're most fluent in before they've even studied English at school. Whether it be in Hindi, Bengali or Marathi, Indian developers will interpret and build with code—an incredibly complex abstraction layer

— in natural language. New Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 already initiates a mandate for coding classes for students from Claadoption of the cloud, ss 6 onwards. Now, in Class 6, and even earlier, students can learn how to code with an AI spectrum of economic assistant, all in natural language, as if they had their own calculator for computer programming This will help India seed a

the planet. More importantly, In-

prolonged groundswell of

developers that will susta-

in its lead as the largest

developer community on

dian students can stream their creativiges. This can empower every child in ty into code without first learning English, boosting early interest in STEM careers to every child, no matter what their social background is.

▶ Empower open source to build AI innovations AI will soon produce a new wave of global tech multinationals, just as the internet birthed the rise of companies like Amazon and Airbnb, which have now in-

> fabric of sectors like ecommerce and global travel. This next generation of AI startups

trinsically changed the

or innovations will be built and launchvelopers





in India - if they are enabled to collaborate openly and freely. Already, developers in India are the second-largest contributors to open source AI projects on GitHub.

What's more, open source communities are leveraging AI developer tools to build digital solutions that are helping save lives, such as the Open Healthcare Network in India. GoI should encourage domestic innovation through research funding and regulatory clarity across the open source community.

By giving Indian open source developers the resources and daylight they need to build creatively, India will foster AI innovation from the roots. This could both save lives and drive economic activity for generations to come.

► Enable enterprise-wide adoption of AI developer tools Whether you are a healthcare provider, an established banking institution or a local produce stand, every company is a software company. And, as such, every company is dependent on the software built and maintained by developers.

When software developers are building 55% faster organisation-wide, Indian enterprises will ship software faster than their global competitors, creating a competitive advantage for the nation at large. Organisations, such as Infosys, are well ahead on this journey, accelerating their speed of code with AI assistance.

As Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella stated recently, 'We've moved from talking about AI to applying AI - at scale. Just as with the adoption of the cloud, organisations that are early AI adopters will exist in another spectrum of economic growth entirely.

Mohandas Gandhi once said, 'The future depends on what you do today.' By enabling this great convergence between the software economy and emerging AI economy, India will not only cement itself as the global leader in the age of AI but will also extend the economic opportunity of building software to all its people.

The writer is CEO, GitHub

## Counter-Questions for the Asking

As with the

early Al adopter

organisations will

exist in another

growth entirely



**Mudar Patherya** 

I was brought up on the belief that the world's long-term fundamental trend would always be bullish because humans are wired to build, and all building would be positive for economies, sectors and investors. I'm not so sure now because of the following questions I've had over the last few years.

If the world is depleting more rapidly than ever, and if all wealth truly comes from Earth, how can global market valuations increase y-o-y? If most products are likely to get cheaper (absolutely or relatively), their markets could widen and consumption could increase. Won't we then strip the world's finite resources faster? If we earn more and spend more, won't our incomes make the world unliveable?

As the urban world warms, more ACs are used, and the more the world warms further (heat island effect), creating this Catch-22 situation. Each time we use the smartphone, we set the world back as we consume finite energy and generate data for processing in energy-hungry data centres.

Despite climate change being the biggest universal challenge in living memory, it didn't figure prominently in any Indian election manifesto. Addressing climate change warrants moderated personal consumption and relatively austere lives. How many of us are prepared for that? India's growing population, coupled

with higher disposable incomes and consumption, has already begun to devastate our carefully constructed cocoons without our realising it. Competitive manufacturing (leveraging economies of scale, procurement, branding and digitalisation) may be enticing more people to consume more (double effect), accelerating planet-stripping. Is our carbon accounting flawed, taking into account only what we can see (e.g., energy and water consumption), but not what we can't (upstream resource consumption)? Will political forces possess the courage to advocate lower mass consumption? There is a planet cost for RE, waste treatment and waste recycling. Who is accounting for that?

Use of AI could deepen unemployment, resulting in three-day weeks, lower incomes and declining popula-



Too much doublespeak?

tions because even a simple existence would be difficult to afford for most people. Should we celebrate that the world's 10 fastest cities are likely to come out of India? Or will someone actually sit up and say, "This is a cause for alarm." Is it time to entertain the concept of 'planned degrowth', so that we may manage expectations of the next generation, especially since, in some ways, their world may not be getting better? Are we likely to see the highest India temperature (52.3° C this summer) breach the 60° C mark a decade from now, transforming the affluent into seasonal climate refugees? Many of us suffering India's atrocious air quality

may need to choose between suffering from respiratory illnesses here, and living in a cleaner developed country. Is there a concerted global direction on how to moderate microplastic embedded in marine life (and even in human blood, as discovered recently) of

oceans, the world's biggest sewer? When will society mature to a point when individuals choosing and/or advocating a planned slowdown — lower incomes for all — will not be branded as 'anti-national'?

The declining use of fossil fuels could result in a number of countries and regions becoming economically irrelevant, with political and social instability. The world needs more low-cost RE generated considerably faster to feed the world's consumption engine that's likely to then grow even faster. Does it mean that environmental degradation will not just grow but accelerate? Perhaps it's time to question the theory that digital is cleaner than paper. Virtually everything digital funnels into energy-hungry AI or data centres, while paper can, at least, be recycled. Are we fretting more about what planet we will leave for our children,

will leave for the planet?

and not enough on what children we

The writer is CEO, Trisys

## Interpreting Misty, Musky Dreams



**Anil Nair** 

Tesla's annual shareholder meeting (ASM) on June 13 had all the ingredients of an Elon Musk event: hype'n' hope holding centre stage. Shareholders, investors—retail more than institutional—unhesitatingly approved ratification of Musk's \$56 bn performance-based pay package. A Delaware judge had rescinded his 'unfathomable package' in January. So, more legal battles could follow. Shareholders also approved the 're-domestication' of Tesla, relocating it from Delaware to Texas. The much-awaited Musk speech

didn't disappoint. As always, he talked tech way ahead of the curve: Look Ma, no hands Musk announced that self-driving car (SDC) technology is accelerating rapidly. True. But the promise of entirely unsupervised SDCs still has a serious way to go. Current full self-driving (FSD) software isn't robust enough to envisage all scenarios, and calls for a licensed driver to be alert and take control in case things go wrong. But Musk, a self-confessed pathological optimist said he's 'optimistic' about a 2-5 times performance delta between versions.

Musk also predicted that Tesla owners would be able to connect to a 'Robotaxi' fleet in the future, enabling a passive income. But, again, that's premature. Clarity on all aspects is yet to emerge. Governments aren't clear about the tech, or what regulations should be. So, deployment, to put it mildly, is some time away.

Take safety. EV battery fires can't just be doused, or starved out like ICE fires. Putting out such fires would take special equipment, millions of gallons of water, and many hours, even days, of effort. Moreover, battery cells release toxic fumes when they ignite, and can reignite hours or days later. Abundant caution is par for the course.

Keep on truckin' Tesla's durable, rugged, all-terrain vehicle, Cybertruck, was also talked (up) about. Musk spoke about it being equipped with adaptive air suspension to make the



Careful with the pinch of salt

ride most comfortable. Air springs also enable the vehicle to offer a payload of 2,500 lb (1,134 kg) and towing capacity of 11,000 lb (4,990 kg). Its stainless-steel exoskeleton is designed to minimise dents and corrosion. Being able to travel 547-odd km on a

single charge, using it to power your

home during a grid outage, and the

speed and handling of a sports car, does make the Cybertruck attractive. Musk announced that it would be in production next year. There's also talk about plans for a lower cost version. ► Semi-truckin' Musk made a compelling case for Tesla's electric semitrailer truck, underscoring huge cost savings over diesel truck hauling, including sustainability aspects. The Biden administration has been offering grants and subsidies for purchase of EVs. But Tesla has been in low-production mode, which it promises to step up. That PepsiCo, which ordered 100 semis in 2017 to transport its products to retailers, received only 36, exemplifies the challenge Tesla faces in becoming a player of volume in this business. Optimus prime Musk is optimistic about Tesla's humanoid robot 'but-

in a shipping container, and also a few at their Palo Alto offices. Next year, Musk predicts, there could be a few thousand working at Tesla. The Tesla boss anticipates a more than one humanoid robot per human

in the future. And that Tesla will have

ler'. Tesla reportedly uses a couple in

their factory at Fremont to take cells

off the production line and place them

of apparent design, engineering and supply chain superiority in terms of gearbox, sensors, power electronics and communication systems. Don't hold your breath just yet.

a major share of this market because

Repositioning? Musk has a knack of linking Tesla's goals to overarching societal goals. The pitch this time was about the path to a fully sustainable global economy — Tesla cars avoiding release of over 20 mn metric tonnes of emissions in 2023; its manufacturing processes using less water per vehicle than industry average; its Supercharger network using 100% RE; opening Supercharger to all EVs; and a truly circular economy for energy storage. Musk also talked about safety - how Tesla vehicles with driver-assist technologies had only 1 accident per 5.64 mn miles (9.07 mn km) driven, compared to the USEV average of 1 per 670,000 miles (1.08 mn km) driven.

▶ Value the valuation? Canny businessman that he is, Musk drew everyone's attention to Cathie Wood's ARK Invest report — released just a day before the Tesla ASM — which predicts a \$5 tn valuation for Tesla in 2029 based on vehicle autonomy. Musk added a \$20-25 tn in future valuation to that, based on what he believed was Optimus' potential.

No harm dreaming big—even with a somewhat 'flexible' timeline. Interpreting Musk's dreams is one thing. Seeing them take shape is quite another.

The writer is founder, ThinkStreet



#### THE SPEAKING TREE It's Only

#### **CHANDER GUPTA**

and focus.'

A Point

The legendary tennis player Roger Federer recently delivered the commencement address at Dartmouth, an Ivy League school, in Hanover. During the speech, he shared a few lessons that he had relied upon with the Class of 2024. He titled the second lesson, 'It's only a point.' Here is what he said: 'When you lose every second point, on average, you learn not to dwell on every shot. You teach yourself to think, 'It's okay if I double-faulted. It's only a point....' When you are playing a point, it is the most important thing in the world. But when it's behind you, it's behind you. This mindset is not just crucial; it's a game-changer because it frees you to fully commit to the next point... with intensity, clarity

Just like tennis, in life, you must give your best shot at whatever you are trying to achieve. At Wimbledon, Federer's single-handed backhand which he used to perfection for dispatching the ball down the line, was one of the most potent tools he used to score a point. Sometimes, he would rush to the net to make short work of the challenge on the court. What it teaches us is that it is imperative to create effective strategies and tools that enable us to achieve our goals, be it achieving a sales target or meeting a tight production deadline. But don't get disheartened if they fail. Failure does not define who you are. It teaches you important lessons that you need to succeed in life. It is no surprise that with such a positive mindset, Federer won a record eight men's singles Wimbledon titles.

#### A Car Window **Dressing Down**

Three men on a business trip in Rajasthan are in the middle of a desert when their car breaks down. For their longish hike to the nearest town they each decide to take one thing with them.

The first man takes a bottle of water out of the back seat The second man takes out a

had kept

for sna-

cks. The



one of the car doors and takes it with him.

the window."

The first man says to the last man, 'I'm bringing the water because if we get thirsty, we can take a drink. And, of course, it makes sense to bring the samosas in case we get hungry. But why bring a car door?" The last man replies, 'If we get hot, we can just roll down

#### Taxpayer Strikes!

A thief stuck a pistol in a man's ribs and said, 'Give me your money!" The gentleman, shocked by the sudden attack, said, 'You cannot do this, I'm in government!" The thief replied, 'Well, then, give me MY money!"

#### **Chat Room**

#### **Grim Reminder By** The Grim Reaper Apropos the news report, '38 Dead,

100 Hospitalised After Consuming Illicit Liquor' (Jun 21), it is sad that the head count of spurious liquor tragedy victims in Kallakurichi district has crossed 50, but the solatium of ₹10 lakh given by the TN government is objectionable. The DMK government, on May 16, 2023, had given solatium in a similar case for 13 victims already on DMK's record for spurious liquor trade. When the Sahitya Akademi and Jnanpith awardees receive a lower sum. the offenders who don't care for their life carrying ₹10 lakh on their head needs to be reviewed seriously. Governments, instead of dismantling the spurious liquor trade that they have miserably failed to even control, are only happy to use the taxpayer's hard-earned money to provide solatium to the victims' families.

**APTHIRUVADI** 

Chennai



#### A thought for today

No arrest can be made because it's lawful for the police officer to do so. Existence of the power to arrest is one thing. Justification, for the exercise of it, quite another

SUPREME COURT

## Cops, Stop & Think

Courts critique random arrests. Is police listening?

egardless of which law police invokes, courts have repeatedly held that any arrest should be the last option, and that indiscriminate arrests violate human rights. In the latest reiteration of this principle, Allahabad HC granted anticipatory bail to a man accused in a cow slaughter case, observing that arrests should only be carried out when custodial interrogation of an accused is required.

Restraint in exceptional cases | Allahabad HC said that "courts have repeatedly held arrest should be the last option" and that "irrational and indiscriminate arrests are gross violations of human rights." Supreme Court, in several cases, has stressed that even in exceptional cases, the need for arrest should be proportional to the gravity of the alleged offence.



Sanctity of due process | HC's call comes barely a month after SC emphasised in the Prabir Purkayastha (NewsClick founder) vs State (NCT of Delhi) case the paramountcy of *procedural safeguards* 

that flow from the Constitution to ensure arrests are not arbitrary. Colonial mindset | India's plethora of preventive detention laws have arbitrariness almost inbuilt in terms of their loose wording and expansive interpretation. Given the burden of undertrials across India's prisons, SC in 2022 even urged Centre to frame a law to restrain probe agencies from arresting any accused "unnecessarily". It said indiscriminate arrests reflect a "colonial mindset" and create the impression of a "police state".

Social media arrests | Perhaps no "sector" has seen as many arbitrary FIRs and arrests as social media posts. If arrests of students celebrating a Pakistan match win were jaw-dropping, various state police forces have criss-crossed the country to swoop down on young people over their online POVs, taking them into custody on the flimsiest of excuses. Eventual bail or quashing of charges is not the point. The point is police get away scot-free for the trauma they induce, working only to please political masters – across party lines.

## The Wealth Effect

Giving away money won't create prosperity

Tews of an Austrian heiress giving away most of her \$27mn fortune makes for a great story no doubt. Criticising the absence of taxes on wealth and inheritance in her country, Marlene Engelhorn holds that democratic values call for redistribution of wealth.

**Inequality as villain** | Given similar talk in India during the recently concluded poll season, it is important to bust some misconceptions in this context. There has been a growing focus on inequality of late, as if economic disparities between people is the most impor-



tant problem of all. Such a discourse forgets that entrepreneurs create wealth not just for themselves but society at large by generating jobs, backing innovation. And, to borrow from Milton Friedman, it ignores the danger that redistribution could destroy the incentive to create wealth.

Tackle unemployment | Our policy planners and political parties would be expending their energies better if they got to the root of the problem:

unemployment. In a country where 7-8mn young people are added to the labour force each year, youth account for 83% of the unemployed workforce. Tackling the problem requires sound economic policy that targets labour-intensive sectors, where India holds a competitive advantage. And it needs investment in education and skilling that allows young people to work those jobs.

Read the verdict in recently concluded LS polls: voters were angry at lack of opportunities, not because a few Indians are very rich.

## **Are Plants Intelligent?** Yes, But Not Like We Are

Plants can hear, take in and process info, and act on that

**SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS** 

ow do plants sense, what do they feel? The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of ▲ Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth by Zoe Schlanger is a study of the controversial world of plant

intelligence. Many of us have heard claims about plant feelings, the kind of music they prefer and so on. All this comes from a 1973 book, called *The Secret Life* of Plants, which still haunts botany. Globally popular but scientifically unsound, it is the reason researchers and funders are wary of the field.

But the wrangle is all about how intelligence is defined. For long, we

located intelligence in creatures close to us in evolutionary terms, like dolphins, dogs and primates. But now we know more about nonhuman intelligences, like that of the octopus, how a powerful cunning can evolve quite independent of our own.

The mechanics and the purpose of plant intelligence are still a mystery. How does something without a brain coordinate responses to stimuli? They clearly sense gravity: their roots go down and

shoots go up, even if you tip a plant over. Experiments show that when a plant is nicked, its biochemistry

changes instantly. Plants engage with frequency and vibration, almost like they have ears. They register the sound of a caterpillar chewing. Since they're rooted in place, and can't flee or seek, hearing is a useful sense to have. In one bit of research, a sound cue caused a plant to produce its own pesticide: imagine the implications for agriculture if this were pursued. Could they release their pollen to a recording of buzzing bees, or could the sound of thunder prepare us too.

them for rain? Could the tiny hairlike structures on their leaves, called trichomes, function as antennae?

If they hear, could they speak? Chemical signalling is now established, but could there be a sound-based plant language, like bat sonar? They can even remember: some plants in the high Andes adjust their pollen by remembering when the pollinator last visited. These are 'memory flowers', they learn from experience. Apple and peach trees won't flower or fruit without a memory of winter.

Is this a form of intelligence and consciousness? If robots can be called intelligent based on these signs, why not flowers? It is not mere automatism. It is taking in information,

processing, making decisions and acting. The plant's entire body reflects its conditions, its response to its environment, to obstacles, nutrients

and light. Plants communicate with other species too: starving bees bite leaves, making flowers bloom early, sating their hunger and serving the plant's purpose. Some plants hire ants, to fight off their enemies like flea beetles. Interspecies chatter is constant, and

invisible to human perception. Plants have a social life too. Some are altruistic, some prefer solitude, some are nice to their family but hostile to others. They pass on wisdom to their children, not slowly through

genetics, but dramatically within generations, morphing to survive their environments. Discussions of plant intelligence need nuance; we need to resist casting them in our image. The book urges us to look at the marvel of plants on their own terms, and then see the rich interrelated web of life that entangles

## Capitalism: We Need More, Not Less

Govts' policy of providing a constant stimulus to economies has slowed growth, created zombie companies and skewed income distribution. Capitalism needs room to work

**Ruchir Sharma** 



Across the developed world, voters are angry with an economic system that feels rigged against the little guy and in favour of giant corporate oligopolies, and their billionaire owners. Capitalism is losing favour, particularly with the

young and the left. By a margin of 2 to 1, American Democrats under 30 are more likely to have a "positive" view of socialism than of capitalism.

They need to beware what they wish for. I was born in mid-1970s when India was staggering under its homespun brand of socialism. By nationalising big businesses, expelling foreign ones, govt was spending on welfare programmes without the revenue to pay for them. Shortages were routine; per capita income growth was below the global average. I was drawn as a young rebel to capitalism as the answer.

In 1991, I got in to see the maiden parliamentary address of finance minister Manmohan Singh. With India on the verge of default, he promised a series of big-bang reforms that finally gave Indians more economic freedom. I was so exhilarated.

That was 1990s. "Liberalisation" was cool. Singh became a global celebrity, but at home, as the crisis passed, the still deeply socialist political elite began lobbying him to slow reform. Singh complied. India's progress slowed.

To this day, the standard Indian excuse, when compared to China, is that the world's largest democracy can't force much development the way Communist China once did. But democracy is not the problem; many democracies have grown much richer than India. It is India's lingering attachment to a state that overpromises

The irony now is that America's headed the way of India. Leading Indian businessmen tell me they see in America's turn to economic statism under Biden a dismaying echo of India in 1970s. Biden is effectively building on a govt that, in virtually all measurable respects, has been growing for almost a century.

US govt spending has risen from 3% of GDP in 1930 to 36%. What changed under Reagan was that US govt started paying for its own expansion by borrowing, not taxing. Deficits went from rare to routine and US public debt has quadrupled since 1980 to more than 120% of GDP.

Today, the young are turning to socialism because the standard histories of capitalism say it went wrong in an "era of small govt", dating to Reagan. But since 1980, welfare spending has

risen in most of the developed economies and has risen faster than the average in US.

Even before Reagan, US govt had abandoned the original Keynesian idea that govt should save during recoveries, so it could spend heavily to ease recessions. Instead, US has run significant deficits in good times and bad, averaging 4% of GDP in recessions, and 3% in recoveries – basically, constant stimulus.

By 1990s, Federal Reserve had joined the constant stimulus project, first by holding its own interest rates at historic lows. When crisis hit in 2008, Fed could not lower its rates much further, so it tried lowering borrowing costs a new way, by buying bonds and other debt in public markets in multi-trillion-



is "socialised risk": state guarantees against economic pain for anyone. This growing tendency - to regulate,

> stimulate and rescue - peaked in the pandemic. The resulting crisis of capitalism is clear and present in the insidious ways overactive govt is widening the key flaws of modern capitalism - slower growth, less fairly distri-

Behind the slowdown is a collapse in the rate of growth in productivity, or output per worker. Before the pandemic, it had fallen by more than half since 1960s, and mounting evidence traces this decline to a business environment thick with govt regulation and debt, in which mega firms thrive and more corporate deadwood survives each crisis.

Though "Big Tech" gets all the attention, three of every four US industries have ossified into oligopolies, dominated by three or four names. Worse, these oligopolies are more and more often the "bad kind", prospering by lobbying regulators and killing off competitors, not innovating.

Easy money also spawned "zombie companies", which don't earn enough to cover even interest payments on their debt, and survive by taking on new debt. Zombies barely existed outside Japan before 2000, and now account for as many as one in five public companies in US. Zombies also tend to hobble the performance of rivals in the same industry by sucking up talent and financing.

Squeezed from the top by oligopolies and from the bottom by zombies, the corporate middle has stagnated. Before the pandemic, US was generating new firms at a little over half the rate and shutting down old ones at two-thirds the rate of early 1980s.

Throughout, income inequality was rising, but after 2000, it was no longer explained by the rise of CEOs. Now it stems from superstar firms like Google, where every employee is making more than peers at weaker firms.

To work, capitalism needs space for the small and new to rise up and creatively destroy old concentrations of power. As oligopolies spread, more local labour markets came to rely on one big employer. Other than Britain, America is the nation where people are least likely to earn much more than their parents.

I was one of the many who came to US inspired by Reagan's vision of the "shining city on a hill", and I still marvel at its allure. Among the 100 biggest US companies, 10 of the CEOs were born in India, testimony to a capitalist meritocracy. Yet I worry about where America is taking

Its politicians are status quoists, hoping that the same old strategy - bigger govt - will produce better results. Instead, they are likely to get more billionaires and oligopolies, more popular anger. They should be seeking a middle ground between 1920s-style liquidationists and today's liquefictionists. Help for the unemployed during downturns, and for markets when they are frozen by fear, makes sense. But authorities need to stop stimulating during recoveries, and leave financial markets free enough to falter on occasion. Their experimental quest for constant growth is a utopian step too far.

Though politicians now speak of the economy as an "engine" subject to "fine tuning", it is more like a natural ecosystem in which humans meddle at great risk to the system and themselves. Their thinking needs to change, before the overconfidence of modern economics - not nearly so hard a science as many imagine-does more damage. Capitalism is still the best hope for human progress, but only if it has enough room to work.

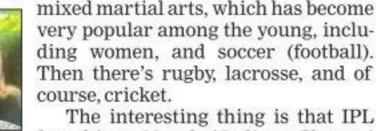
The writer is an author and global investor. This essay has been adapted from his book What Went Wrong With Capitalism

## 'Future of America's cricket league bright...NRIs, passionate about the game, are good at professionalising sport'

Ottawa-based Amit Gupta is an academic of many parts. An expert in international security who taught at USAF Air War College in Alabama, he has also written extensively on the globalisation of sports, including IPL and WPL. In an interview with Avijit Ghosh, he talks about the future of cricket in US and more:

US has performed extremely well in T20 World Cup 2024. In July, Major League Cricket's (MLC) second edition will be held. How do you think the two events will impact the game in US?

In US, the top four sports are baseball, basketball, American football and ice-hockey. That's where the multi-million-dollar salaries are. Below that comes mixed martial arts, which has become





franchisees Mumbai Indians, Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders have bought teams in MLC. BCCI has a vested interest in making them succeed. This is different from

other cricket leagues, as in South Africa. In US, the Indian diaspora and all other cricketplaying diasporas can bring in a lot of money into the sport. Don't think of cricket competing with NBA. Look at it as a semi-professional sport with a passionate audience. No American has the time and patience to understand the subtleties of cricket.

#### An estimated 200,000 play cricket in 400 local leagues. Is it enough to run a sports league?

America has a population of 330mn. My demographic of all cricket-playing South Asians plus those from other cricket-playing countries would be roughly 10mn. Think of it this way. Denmark has a

successful pro-league football with 5.5mn people. Norway has one with 4.5mn and Portugal with 10mn. So, you can have a professional cricket league with 10mn. If you price tickets reasonably, people

would love to watch MLC. There are enough players \square who have played semi-professional cricket elsewhere who can play for the national team. Saurabh Netravalkar is the best example. You can see how the US team has been embraced by Indians as their H1B team.

So you are optimistic about MLC's future prospects. Right?

It will succeed because they are being clever about it. They are using the MLS (Major League Soccer) model to start with to build a fanbase and making sure that wherever they have the ground they also have the licensing rights. In 1970s, they had a soccer team, New York Cosmos, for which Pele played. They played on rented grounds and whatever they made from merchandising,

a large chunk went to the owners. With MLS, which Sunil Gulati, an Indian. ran successfully for many years, they did the merchandising. It is the same thing with MLC. Indians are extremely good at professionalising sport. The Toronto cricket league used to be run by West Indians who ran it more like a social event than a serious cricket league, where you had jerk chicken and met dates.

Enter the Indians! They set up matches and schedules and so on, and now you have a professional Toronto cricket league. The point is every degree Australia, needs money. Even Pat Cummins has signed a four-year contract to play for San Francisco Unicorns. If I were BCCI, I would send MS Dhoni and

cricket-playing nation, except India and to some

Sachin Tendulkar during the league on a four-week holiday to US, all expenses paid. Those are the stars whom the Indians of a certain generation want to see, it is nostalgia and it resonates. Once you get star power, you get crowds.

#### India might bid for 2036 Olympics. Is it a good

It's not a smart idea. Olympics are hugely expensive, costing an estimated \$100bn. Rich countries don't want to host Olympics. Superrich Sweden turned down the offer to host Winter Olympics, saying they can't afford it. Victoria in Australia refused to host Commonwealth Games for similar reasons. Olympics can bring you bad publicity.

The moment you say we are hosting Olympics, world media pounces on everything scandalous and problematic in the country.

India should try to host World Cup football. The games can be played at night and there's no need to build major infra, unlike Olympics. WC stadiums don't create infra white elephants. Football stadiums can be used by different teams, hold any event, from political rallies to music concerts. But remember that people aren't going to come unless it is tourist-friendly.

> As a friend of mine says, India is for travellers, not tourists. You need to build a safe environment. Amsterdam has 900,000 people and gets 17mn tourists annually. India's population is about 140cr and it gets about 11mn tourists a year. Think about that!

#### **Calvin & Hobbes**









## **Sacred**space



Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet vou

there. When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about.

## Yog Teaches Us To Control Modifications Of Mind

Swami Sivananda

Tog, in a generic sense, refers to Karma Yog, Bhakti Yog, Raj Yog, Jnan Yog, Hath Yog, Mantra Yog, Laya Yogor Kundalini Yog. In a restricted sense, it means the Ashtang Yog or Raj Yog of Patanjali Maharishi only.

The word yog is also applicable in a secondary sense to all those factors and practices that are conducive to the final achievement or fulfilment of yog, and as such indirectly lead to final freedom or perfection. Similarly, though the one who has reached the final asamprajnata samadhi or union with Reality is called a yogi, one who is attempting to get perfection in yog is wherein there is neither imagination

also called a yogi.

Yog philosophy is one of the six systems of Hindu philosophy. Unlike so many other philosophies of the world, it is a philosophy that is wholly practical. Yog is an exact science based on certain immutable Laws of Nature. It is well-known to people of all countries of the world interested in the study of Eastern civilisa-

tion and culture. It is held in awe and reverence as it contains the master-key to unlock the realms of peace, bliss, mystery and miracle. Yog is that state of Absolute Peace

nor thought. Yog is control of mind and its modifications. Yog teaches us how to control the modifications of the mind and attain liberation. It teaches us how to transmute the

> unregenerate nature and attain the state of Divinity. It is the complete suppression of the tendency of the mind to transform itself into objects, thoughts, etc.

THE SPEAKING TREE misery and tribulation. It gives you freedom from the round of births and deaths...bestows upon you all the Divine Powers and final liberation through super-in-

Yog kills all sorts of pain,

tuitional knowledge. Equanimity is yog. Serenity is yog. Society

Skill in actions is yog. Anything by which the best and the highest in life can be attained is also yog. It is thus all-embracing, all-inclusive and universal in its application, leading to all-round development of body, mind and soul. Yog is primarily a way of life, not something which is divorced from life. Yog is not forsaking of action, but is efficient performance in the right spirit. Yog is not running away from home and human habitation, but a process of moulding one's attitude to home and society with a new understanding. Yog is not a turning away from life; it is the spiritualisation of life.

Courtesy: Yoga, The Divine Life Trust

#### The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

#### Kashmir outreach

PM Modi ticks the right boxes

RIME Minister Narendra Modi ticked all the right boxes during his visit to the Kashmir valley — he not only chose the Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Centre on the banks of the Dal Lake to lead the nation's International Yoga Day celebrations, but also reassured the people of Jammu and Kashmir that Assembly elections would be held soon and plans were afoot to restore J&K's statehood. In his first trip to the Valley after assuming office as the PM for the third time, Modi termed the recent terror attacks 'last-ditch efforts of the enemies of Kashmir's progress' and asserted that India would teach them a befitting lesson.

The PM's decision to tour Kashmir and showcase India's soft power through yoga — days after the attacks in Reasi and Kathua districts — was also aimed at boosting the morale of the security forces, which are fighting a pitched battle with terrorists in the Jammu region. It will be a big challenge for the Union Government to conduct the polls by September 30, the deadline set by the Supreme Court, if the security situation does not improve over the next couple of months.

The PM has praised the voters of Kashmir, and rightly so, for turning out in large numbers in the recent Lok Sabha elections. The Centre must build on the renewed faith of the Kashmiri people in democracy to fast-track the process of holding the Assembly elections. At the same time, counter-terror operations need to be stepped up so that peace and progress are not disrupted in J&K and people can become part of the democratic exercise in an environment devoid of fear, chaos and uncertainty. The Modi 2.0 government repeatedly described the 2019 abrogation of Article 370 as its major achievement. However, the job will remain half-done until sincere and sustained efforts are made by the Modi 3.0 dispensation to fulfil the aspirations of the people of J&K.

#### Child labour

Madhya Pradesh case a wake-up call

HE harrowing case of child labour that has come to light in Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh is a wake-up call. As many as 58 minors, including 19 girls, were found working in appalling conditions at a liquor factory by a team of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) last week. Many had sustained terrible chemical burns. Now, 39 of those rescued have gone missing. The NCPCR chairperson says the case involves not just child labour, but also human trafficking. Questions are being raised about gross negligence and the collusion of corrupt officials. The regulatory bodies are under the scanner. Stringent action against the factory owners is a must. Any laxity will reinforce the perception that tackling child labour is low on the state's priority list, and that the rule of law can easily be subverted.

According to the International Labour Organisation, more than 16 crore children are working as child labourers globally, and the number is only going up. Cases of human trafficking have seen a rise since the Covid-19 pandemic. Vulnerable families were further pushed into poverty and a large number of children dropped out of school, exacerbating the risk. The data also points to an increasing number of children being subjected to abuse and violence. Child labour and trafficking are organised crime. The Raisen case is a reminder that efforts must be redoubled to rein in the perpetrators. Rehabilitation of the children remains an underserved aspect.

Eradicating child labour should be a shared moral responsibility of civil society, businesses and governments alike. In India, 11 per cent of the workforce is said to be underage. Child labour laws have proven to be ineffective. Whatever the justification that is offered, the moral quotient is entirely absent from the social sanction to child labour in the country.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

#### The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 1924

Lala Lajpat Rai's way out

THE remarkable article which Lala Lajpat Rai contributed in the New Leader, and which we reproduced in these columns yesterday, is a masterpiece of sober presentation of facts of almost judicial impartiality in handling them, and of close reasoning as regards the conclusion that is drawn from the premises. It is in a way a continuation of the important speech which Rai made some weeks ago in reply to an address of welcome presented to him by Indian students in London. In that speech, Rai described the situation in India at great length and stated his own position and that of those with whom he was most in agreement in regard to it. In this article, he sums up in the fewest possible words a most important aspect of India's political situation, which he justly describes as official lawlessness, traces this lawlessness to its true cause, and suggests the only possible remedy for it. In describing the story of official lawlessness, Rai rightly confines himself to noticing measures, both legislative and executive, as to which there is complete unanimity among all reasonable and fair-minded persons in India. The three legislative measures he chooses for his attack are Regulation III of 1818, the Seditious Meetings Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act, all of which involve an unwarranted and utterly unjustifiable interference with the primary, lawful rights of the people and are in consequences universally regarded in India as lawless laws, and all of which have again and again been used by overzealous officials for the deliberate purpose of suppressing the natural aspiration of the people by punishing their legitimate expression.

## Why Delhi is shaken and stirred

In the high-stakes global game, India is a quarter of a step down today



JYOTI MALHOTRA EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

RIME Minister
Narendra Modi's
stranglehold on politics and the BJP's
Hindutva citadel have
been both shaken and stirred by
the recent election results, and
the coming monsoon session of
the 18th Lok Sabha will surely
be a teaser of things to come.

But in the great game that is being played out in the rest of the world, in which the US, Russia and China remain key poles, it will be interesting to see how these countries respond to India's assertion that it is a stabilising power in a chaotic region.

First things first. Earlier this week, National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval — the powerful 79-year-old former intelligence chief, now in his third term as NSA — and his US counterpart, Jake Sullivan, met in New Delhi to underline the importance of the transfer of critical technologies from the US to India.

The important thing about this meeting, however, is the one that happened before the delegationlevel talks — when Doval and Sullivan met without aides, without note-takers or anyone else in the room, for at least 30-40 minutes. For sure, there would have been recording devices embedded in the lamp-base or behind expensive art work — we all know this from the James Bond movies we are addicted to - and both would have later related the key points of their conversation to their respective officers.

But make no mistake. No conversation on critical technologies, known as iCET, or the call on PM Modi or the half-hour 'chai pe charcha' between Sulli-



ALLIES: NSA Ajit Doval (right) with his US counterpart Jake Sullivan during a meeting in New Delhi this week. It is important to ask what kind of a relationship India wants from the US — and vice-versa. PTI

van and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar would have been as important as this one (note that Kurt Campbell, the US Deputy Secretary of State and America's top diplomat on China, was also in town).

And that is because when all the bells and whistles recede into the background — including the fine dining at Delhi's beautifully appointed Hyderabad House, the venue for all diplomatic engagements at the highest level — it is the exercise of hard power that courteously asserts itself.

Some of that conversation definitely revolved around India's alleged attempt to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a pro-Khalistan activist in New York. According to the US indictment, Indian national Nikhil Gupta — whom the Czechs gave up to the Americans even as Doval and Sullivan talked in Delhi - was allegedly hired by a co-conspirator called 'CC-1', whom The Washington Post recently revealed to be an official of India's external intelligence agency, R&AW, by the name of Vikram Yadav.

We know all this by now We also know that the Indians, in an attempt to mollify the AmeriWith Chinese troops still sitting on the LAC, PM Modi probably believes it's better to avoid the avoidable pleasantries.

cans—when the smelly garbage was hitting the fan—repatriated Yadav to his parent cadre, the CRPF. He is now believed to be back in Chhattisgarh, allegedly swatting both flies and would-be Maoists.

The alleged hit job was supposed to have been undertaken exactly a year ago, on June 22 of course, it was foiled by the Americans, which is how Pannun is still alive, probably chomping on bagels-and-cheese or even aloo ka paratha back home in New York. In the recent Lok Sabha elections, he was reduced to sending Punjabi voice notes urging people to support Sikh radicals like Amritpal Singh; sure, he won from Khadoor Sahib, but that had far more to do with Punjab's forever angst against Delhi, rather than any persuaded emotions of separatism. The point is, dead or alive, Pannun is irrelevant.

Sullivan and Doval would have gone all over this, in their own way. Doval is not the type to apologise—no self-respecting intelligence officer ever does, and why should he, pray—but all sides know that in this high-stakes game in which all nations measure one another up for brains, brawn and potential, India is a quarter of a step down today.

But the Indians also have a long memory. There is the matter of Rabinder Singh, the R&AW agent who was exfiltrated by the Americans in 2004. No one in Delhi has quite forgotten how he was smuggled out, via Nepal, even though both countries had, by then, sworn to be 'natural allies'. Those of you who are spy movie addicts should watch Vishal Bhardwaj's Khufiya today, if you haven't already — and know

that the real story is dirtier, sadder and far less glamorous.

The more important question today, as Modi has taken charge for the third time, is what kind of a relationship does India want from the US — and vice-versa. And then there is the small matter of New Delhi asserting its relationship with Russia, both because it continues to get cheap oil from there - which it not so quietly re-exports to the refineries of Europe, which are desperate for cheap Russian oil they have been prohibited from buying since the Russian war against Ukraine began two years ago - and its continued dependence on Russian weapons. It's also why, as Delhi has made clear, it is walking the middle path on Ukraine.

Thus, it seems more than likely that Modi will travel in October to Kazan in the heart of Russia - a city that symbolises the 1552 victory of the Russian Orthodox Tsar, Ivan the Terrible, over the Mongols and the massive expansion of Islam, like no other - for the BRICS summit, the acronym for the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa organisation, that has now been expanded to incorporate players like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Remember that Ivan's victory took place only 26 years after Babur becomes the

Emperor of Hindustan in 1526.

Modi, sort of, owes it to Vladimir Putin — the PM hasn't visited Moscow since Putin came to Delhi in December 2021 — and especially since Modi isn't going to the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, in July. Putin will be in Astana, of course — Kazakhstan is part of Russia's near-abroad — as will Xi Jinping. But with Chinese troops still sitting on the LAC with India, Modi probably believes it's better to

Guess who will be watching closely when Modi goes to Kazan? From Washington DC to Delhi, via Moscow and Beijing, the great game is certainly alive and well.

avoid the avoidable pleasantries.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The thing I learned as a diplomat is that human relations ultimately make a huge difference.—Madeleine Albright

## Give your mind a chance to zone out

Narayani Ganesh

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Sa young girl, I knew the words 'tired' and 'stressed', but had never heard them used in my family or circle of friends. The first time I heard my sister's father-in-law ask her when she returned home from work, 'Are you tired?', I wondered if she were ill. Why should she feel tired? I asked her, and she just shushed me with a shy smile. I then realised that this was her new family's way of expressing concern and affection for their daughter-in-law.

I knew if I had said to my mother that I was tired, she would have glared at me and ordered me to finish my homework. No affectionate cluck-clucking here, so one had no option but to do as told. When did we, as a species, begin articulating words that expressed fatigue, exhaustion, tiredness, stress and boredom? I suspect the trend came much later to India, when it was already very current in the Western world.

Nowadays, mental health has exploded into a major issue across age groups and demographics. Again, the wave that began in the West has now begun to engulf South Asian and East Asian countries, where traditionally, a whack on the bottom would resolve any show of mental disequilibrium. I don't intend to trivialise serious mental health challenges that are sometimes clinical and at other times psychological, and even weather-related, and these do need to be treated by experts. The question is: are we getting carried away by the mental health bandwagon by lumping any minor challenge as a mental health issue, finding that to be a convenient excuse to justify almost any omission and/or commission?

The stigma attached to the act of going to a psychiatrist or therapist is on the wane, which is a very good thing, as it encourages us to come out with our worries and problems, airing them out, instead of suppressing them and suffering alone. Yet, one cannot help wondering if some of these issues could untangle themselves just by talking to friends and family, or even by taking a break from one's mundane routine and from working long hours. Sometimes, what one needs is a breath of fresh air, a wider angle that puts things in perspective.

Just as the body tends to feel tired after a lot of strain, the mind also gets overwhelmed with too much mental activity and therefore needs to be given space, some 'me time' — basically, to zone out and get rejuvenated. Listening to soothing music, doing something different, practising meditation and regular deep breathing exercises could all contribute to centring both mind and body. If day-to-day mental challenges can be resolved with simple home remedies and exercises, that would free up space for the truly serious mental health patients to get properly treated and cared for. The danger lies in taking too far the wonderful thought: 'It's OK to not be OK'. Part of the answer lies not in suffering in silence but in sharing your thoughts and fears with people you are close to. And if you think you need to consult a professional, do go for it.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Row over Kejriwal's bail With reference to the news report 'Kejriwal gets bail'; the (now stayed) bail for the Delhi CM in the money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam had come as a huge relief for not just Kejriwal but his whole party. AAP had rightly hailed it as a victory of the truth. The case against him is alleged to be politically motivated. Pertinently, under Section 45 of the PMLA, the accused has to prove in court that he is prima facie innocent to get bail. Besides, he must also convince the judge that he would not commit any offence while on bail. So, the grant of bail to the AAP national convener was a

massive blow to the credibility of the ED. ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

#### Reconsider move to cancel exam

Refer to the editorial 'Pariksha pe charcha'; the cancellation of the UGC-NET
exam has come as a rude shock to the over
nine lakh candidates. The rationale behind
the Centre's decision is unclear, especially
when there were no complaints about the
conduct of the exam from any quarter.
Irregularities in the NEET-2024 exam do
not necessarily mean that there was foul
play in the UGC-NET exam as well. The
cancellation of the test without valid reasons can severely affect the morale of the
aspirants. The government must reconsider its decision and declare the results of the
UGC-NET exam conducted on June 18.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

#### Change in mindset need of hour

Refer to the editorial 'Honour killing'; such incidents are a blot on Indian society. It is unfortunate that even though it has been over seven decades since Independence, girls are still being killed by members of their own kin in the name of family honour. Introducing more stringent laws to curb the menace is not enough. The need of the hour is a change in the mindset of people living in rural areas. The elderly and youth alike must be educated. The mainstream media can also play a vital role in bringing about an attitudinal shift.

Shift.

GAURAV BADHWAR, ROHTAK

#### Nothing honourable about it

With reference to the editorial 'Honour killing', the two cases are a grim reminder that casteism is still prevalent in Haryana. It would be wrong to refer to the slaying of innocent girls over who

in Haryana. It would be wrong to refer to the slaying of innocent girls over who they choose to marry as 'honour killings', as there is nothing honourable about it. Such crimes smack of a sick and twisted patriarchal mindset. It is not just the perpetrators of the crime who are guilty of such killings; all those who justify them are also complicit. There is an urgent need for more stringent legisla-

tion to rein in such heinous offences.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES, MUMBAI

#### Scourge of rail mishaps

Despite a rise in rail mishaps in recent years, no lessons have been learnt. Every time a tragedy strikes, a minister visits the site, apparently to take stock of the situation. But nothing is done to prevent more rail accidents. Politicians offer nothing but tall promises and rhetoric. Massive funds have been spent to introduce fancy and ultra-fast trains on Indian tracks. The money should instead go towards upgrading rail safety measures and improving the quality of services on passenger trains. The focus of the authorities must be on ensuring the safety of travellers.

BAKHSHI GURPRIT SINGH, JALANDHAR

#### Resurgence of the Gandhis

The resurgence of the Gandhis - Rahul potentially as the Leader of Opposition and Priyanka as an MP from Wayanad is welcome. After Rahul's twin wins from Raebareli and Wayanad, the party has made a wide decision by letting Priyanka contest from the seat in Kerala. The Congress must now focus on converting the rising momentum into growth in its voter base. The party will do well to follow a similar strategy in Bihar, UP and Maharashtra. The Gandhi family can contribute immensely to boosting the Congress party's electoral prospects. A bit of restructuring in the party is the need of the hour.

MONA SINGH, BY MAIL

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

## Judiciary-military discord worsening in Pakistan



RANA BANERJI FORMER SPECIAL SECRETARY, CABINET SECRETARIAT

ESPITE the tabling of a forward-lookeven tough budget designed to satisfy the International Monetary Fund and conclude a stafflevel agreement for Pakistan's next aid tranche by July, the Shehbaz Sharif government is looking increasingly insecure and lacklustre in its day-to-day functioning.

After the Supreme Court advised incarcerated former Prime Minister Imran Khan to seek avenues for political negotiations, he has resorted to the devious stratagem of pushing in Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party veteran Mahmood Khan Achakzai to be his frontman for any possible contact with either President Asif Ali Zardari or the Sharif brothers. These negotiations are going nowhere as Imran has told the sizeable contingent of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) legislators to continue agitating for the restoration mandate. They are threatening street protests, with possible roping in of disgruntled Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JuI-F) cadres of Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), while supporting the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) from the outside, has expressed unhappiness at not being consulted in the budget formulation. It has been demanding space in the provincial government in Punjab, but Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz seems to be in no mood to oblige.

Meanwhile, ever since six

judges of the Islamabad High Court wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) in March this year, alleging interference and intimidation by Pakistan's omnipotent Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the judiciary has been up in arms to rid itself of the age-old taint of being a handmaiden of the military establishment. Partly, this bravado stems from support among the younger judges for deposed PTI leader Imran's pop-

ulist narrative. The Army leadership has been disapproving of these moves. Addressing a passing-out parade at Pakistan Air Force's Risalpur Academy on May 2, Army Chief Gen Syed Asim Munir observed that the army was "well aware of its constitutional limits" and "expected of the February 8 electoral others to prioritise the Con- in the country. It noted with



EVENTFUL: Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa (right) administered the oath of office to President Asif Ali Zardari in Islamabad in March, Isa's tenure as CJ has been marked by travails, AP/PTI

stitution as well". On May 7, as the anniversary of last year's 'Black Day' violence (May 9) approached, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) clarified that any dialogue with the PTI could happen only if it "earnestly apologises publicly in front of the nation", promises to adopt "constructive politics" and forgoes "politics of anarchy". After the May 29 Formation Commanders' Conference, the ISPR reiterated that without bringing the planners, perpetrators, abettors and facilitators of the May 9, 2023, violence to justice, there would be no stability

The Pakistan People's Party has been demanding space in the provincial govt in Punjab, but CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif seems to be in

concern that politically motivated and vested digital terrorism unleashed by 'conspirators' Imran's troll bands) was inducing despondency and discord among national institutions, especially the armed forces, which would not be tolerated.

Despite these warnings, the courts have been ruling in favour of Imran, holding the procedures and haste employed to imprison him before the February 8 elections violative of natural justice. His indictment in the cipher leaks case was struck down. All these cases have been appealed against. A CJ Qazi Faez Isa is hearing a suo motu case regarding agency interference in judicial functions. No hearings have been scheduled in the past couple of months. Another CJ Isa-led Division Bench is set to hear the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) petition challenging the Lahore High Court's decision to appoint six more tribunals to settle election disputes in Punjab. Sargodha Anti-Terrorism

of the Supreme Court led by

Court judge Muhammad Abbas has complained to the Lahore High Court Justice, Chief Malik Shahzad Ahmed Khan, about the alleged role of the ISI in damaging water and electricity meters outside his house. CJ Ahmed Khan, whose elevation to the Supreme Court was announced only recently, has issued showcause notices to police officials concerned. He did not hesitate to profess at a public gathering in Islamabad recently that the days of 'agency intimidation of judges' would soon be a thing of the past. He was summoned before the Supreme Court Chief Justice a few days later for a possible admonition.

The Election Commission's decision not to assign reserved seats of the National Assembly to the Sunni Ittehad Council, to which elected PTI legislators now seven-member larger Bench adhere, was upheld by the tions for Pakistan politics.

the name of Hindu nation-

Peshawar High Court, but it has been challenged by the PTI in the Supreme Court. Deliberations by a full court Bench there have remained inconclusive. If the SC upholds the ECP's decision. reserved seats in Parliament and provincial legislatures will be allocated to the ruling parties and the JUI-F, enabling the government to pursue constitutional amendments. Reports are rife about the government planning to extend the tenure of the Supreme Court CJ and other judges by two years.

Isa's term of office as CJ lasts up to October 25. Ascending to this post has not been without travails for him as he had to face references against his integrity before the SJC, brought at the behest of Imran, prodded perhaps by military leaders of the day (Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and then Director General, ISI, Lt Gen Faiz Hameed). His January 13 ruling, depriving the PTI of its election symbol (cricket bat), has also been under adverse public scrutiny. He has been responding in a restrained manner to all this venting of ire against the agencies by judges from lower courts. After the Eid vacation, all eyes will be on how the Supreme Court deals with these cases, which could have significant implica-

## The govt must commit itself to undoing injustice

no mood to oblige.



**NEERA CHANDHOKE** POLITICAL SCIENTIST

HE first International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture was held in Paris from June 21 to 25, 1935. Writers aligned with the Left, surrealists, the avantgarde, liberals and pacifists denounced the rising tide of fascism in Europe before an audience of thousands. The speakers were 'engaged writers' - those who believe that art and politics go hand in hand and that one cannot exist without the other. Held at the Palais de Mutualite, a traditional meeting site for the Left Bank and progressive intellectuals, the conference was swamped by Parisians. This was the same city that had witnessed anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus affair in the late 19th century.

By the 1930s, political solidarity among intellectuals could no longer be confined to cafes of radical neighbourhoods. Anxiety over fascism in Europe produced international solidarity. André Gide, a famous French writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1947, memorably said that each one of them had a "right to inspect his neighbour's territory".

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights delivered the same message. When regimes violate the basic rights of a section of their citizens, other states and international agencies have the "right to inspect their territory". In effect, the declaration legitimised concern for the rights of all people, even if they live in faraway lands. Rights are universal. Intellectuals, wherever they may be, must speak up against fascism and the harm it causes to vulnerable groups.

Over the past decade, a number of international organisations have reported that the authorities in India have violated the rights of minorities, jailed civil liberty activists and journalists and suppressed civil society. In September last year, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues described the deteriorating rights situation in India as massive, systematic and dangerous'. At a meeting of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, the rapporteur, Fernand de Varennes, stated that India risked becoming one of the world's main generators of instability, atrocities and violence. He described the massive scale of violations and



DISCRIMINATORY: The Citizenship Amendment Act rules were notified earlier this year, ANI

abuses that targeted Muslims, Sikhs and Christians as symptomatic of religious nationalism. He especially referred to major violations of basic rights in Manipur, particularly the degrading treatment meted out to two women from the Christian Kuki community.

Numerous human rights organisations have expressed concern about hate speech against Muslims, the destruction of their properties and the fundamentally discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act. The Human Rights Watch, in its World Report 2024, stated that India had undermined its

DOWN

Foolhardy (8)

6 Rebuke angrily (4)

7 Deep wrinkle (6)

11 High fashion (5,7)

18 Unrestricted admission

19 Without loss of force (8)

22 Relative importance (6)

8 Site (6)

15 Chilly (5)

(4.4)

16 Unrefined (5)

21 Espionage (6)

26 Capital of Peru (4)

27 Small and weak (4)

Pungent culinary herb (8)

Unweave at the edges (4)

Be very expensive (4,3,5)

Reparative justice demands that the balance between social groups be re-established, relationships repaired and fraternity rebuilt.

aspirations for world leadership as a rights-respecting democracy with persistpolicies discriminated against and religious stigmatised minorities. We find more of the same in other reports that assert a legitimate right to "inspect their neighbour's territory" to identify injustice.

The leadership and the cadres of the ruling party should learn a lesson from its diminished mandate in the recent General Election. Hopefully, the government will launch a project of reparative justice to right the wrongs committed in the past 10 years in

alism. Reparative or corrective justice is different from the principle of redistributive justice. Redistributive justice is a norm that governs the fair allocation of resources in a society. Reparative justice concentrates on the harm done to citizens - violation of physical integrity through lynching and murder and affronts to human dignity caused through slurs and hate speech — and tries to rectify the wrongs. This avatar of justice identifies the offender as well as the person or group that has been harmed. The offender in this case is the government, which inflicted harm through the indiscriminate imprisonment of dissenters and condoned violence unleashed on citizens.

The concept establishes a relationship between power elites who harm or tolerate harm and those who have been harmed. It focuses on the restoration of justice in a society that is composed of many social groups, many of whom are extremely vulnerable to majoritarianism. The logic of reparative justice is to repair the harm done to the minds and bodies of citizens. Reparative justice is, thus, the conceptual companion of redistributive justice. In the case of the former, the government accepts responsibility for past wrongs done for morally arbitrary reasons.

Throughout history, many regimes have apologised for the harm done. But an apology is not enough. An erring government has to commit that these harms will not be repeated and that the dignity and physical integrity of all citizens will be respected. Reparative justice demands that the balance between social groups, fragile at best, be re-established, relationships repaired and fraternity rebuilt.

This is important because, as BR Ambedkar told the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, liberty, equality and fraternity "form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy... Without fraternity, liberty and equality would not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them." Indian society, he said, lacks fraternity: "What does fraternity mean? Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians - of Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life." The results of the General Election have resoundingly established that the people of India do not want this trinity to be disturbed. The NDA government has to understand the popular mood and launch the project of reparative justice.

# **OUICK CROSSWORD**

ACROSS

- Confirm formally (6) Contemptuous (8)
- 9 Pen for livestock (6) 10 Taught to a select few (8)
- 12 Chief part in play (4)
- 13 Spiteful (5) 14 Lacking cordiality (4) 17 A boost (4,2,3,3)
- 20 Spotlessly clean (5-3-4) 23 Sympathetic sorrow (4)
- 24 Sealant for window-glass (5)
- 25 Rebuff (4) 28 Machination (8)
- 30 Delicate filmy material (8)
- 29 To inconvenience (3,3) 31 Of mixed origin (6)

#### Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Spoof, 4 Scratch, 8 Rut, 9 Barefaced, 10 Taffeta, 11 Ethos, 13 Meadow, 15 Strain, 18 Padre, 19 Opossum, 21 Underfoot, 23 Abe, 24 Potency, 25 Notes.

Down: 1 Stratum, 2 Out of hand, 3 Fibre, 4 Serial, 5 Reflect, 6 Tic, 7 Hades, 12 Head start, 14 Overrun, 16 Numbers, 17 Colony, 18 Plump, 20 Often, 22 Dot.

#### SU DO KU 9 6 4 9 3 5 3 6 3 8 6 8 6 9 EASY

#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 1 9 6 8 3 4 2 5 5 3 9 7 4 6 8 6 8 4 2 5 1 9 7 3 1 9 6 5 4 8 7 3 2 8 3 2 1 9 7 5 4 6 4 7 5 3 6 2 8 1 9 5 4 1 8 2 6 3 9 7 9 2 7 4 3 5 1 6 8 3 6 8 7 1 9 2 5 4 CALENDAR JUNE 22, 2024, SATURDAY ■ Shaka Samvat 1946 Aashadh Shaka Aashadh Parvishte 9 Hijari 1445 ■ Shukla PakshaTithi 15, up to 6.38 am ■ Krishna PakshaTithi 1, up to 5.14 am Shukla Yoga up to 4.45 pm ■ Moola Nakshatra up to 5.54 pm ■ Moon in Sagittarius sign ■ Jyesth Pumima ■ Sant Kabir Jyanti Gandmoola ends 5.54 pm

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FORECAST

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

#### Yoga for self and society

PM Modi celebrates International Yoga Day in Kashmir, emphasising Yoga's role in fostering peace and unity

n June 21, 2024, International Yoga Day gave new meaning to the people of Kashmir as the Prime Minister celebrated it with them. Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked a momentous occasion by celebrating International Yoga Day in the scenic valley of Kashmir. This event was not only significant as a global celebration of yoga but also as a powerful symbol of peace, unity and cultural heritage in a region that has seen its share of strife and conflict. Kashmir, often referred to as 'Paradise on Earth' due to its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural tapestry, was chosen by PM Modi as the venue for this year's International Yoga Day celebration. The event was held at the iconic Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar. International Yoga Day, celebrated on June 21 each year, was established in 2015 following a resolution proposed by PM Modi at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. The day aims to raise awareness about the benefits of practising yoga, a 5,000-year-old tra-

dition that originated in India. It emphasises the integration of body, mind and spirit, promoting a balanced and harmonious lifestyle. This year's theme, yoga for self and society resonated deeply in Kashmir, a region known for its complex socio-political chal-

By celebrating Yoga Day in Kashmir, PM Modi aimed to convey a message of reconciliation and the potential for a peaceful future. Indeed, Prime Minister Modi has always used the symbols very effectively and conveyed the message to the people, celebrating Yoga Day in Kashmir was no exception. The choice of Kashmir as the venue for this significant event is

laden with symbolism. The region, which has faced decades of conflict and unrest, witnessed an outpouring of support for the celebration, reflecting a desire for peace and normalcy. PM Modi's presence and the enthusiastic participation of residents is a step towards healing and bridging divides. This was PM Modi's first trip to the union territory since being re-elected for a third consecutive term. During this visit, PM Modi launched several significant developmental projects and participated in International Yoga Day 2024 activities. PM Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for various developmental projects valued at over Rs. 1,500 crores. The Prime Minister addressed the gathering. He underscored the importance of yoga in promoting health and unity. The Prime Minister took this occasion to send a strong message across the border that all acts of terrorism would be thwarted. Indeed, the trip did reinforce the confidence of the people as it came just weeks after the Jammu attacks. This would also be a message to the security forces also to beef up the security. PM Modi's visit underscored his commitment to the development and integration of Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed, the event was not just a display of yoga poses but a concerted effort to promote wellness and unity of the State.



People perform yoga in the Yamuna river on the 10th International Day of Yoga, in New Delhi

## NEET: Malice extends beyond a flawed exam



The Supreme Court's recent directive to the Govt to meticulously address any lapses in the NEET examination underscores the critical nature of the fiasco

lans do go awry. Who could say this better than Moḋi Sarkar 3.0? Prime Minister Narendra Modi had planned a blitzkrieg of the first 100 days of good governance. It doesn't seem to be happening as of now. First the number of BJP members elected to Lok Sabha did not sufficiently pile up, forcing a toned-down deportment of the Government.

Worse has been the marks manipulation controversy generated around the results declared by National Testing Agency (NTA) of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to the undergraduate courses in the medical colleges across the country. The Supreme Court on June 18 told the Union Government and the NTA to ensure that even '0.001 per cent negligence' in conducting the NEET-UG 2024 exams be looked into with all seriousness considering the immense labour that the candidates have put in for preparing the nationwide examination. Thankfully, we have a mature leader like Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister, who is expected to steer through the crisis and not a Smriti Irani or a Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank camping at the Shastri Bhawan. the seat of the Ministry of Education. Pradhan has so far shown the patience and perseverance in handling this gargantuanlike crisis. The mess around NEET is much

deeper than just the alleged malpractice in the conduct of the examination and the manipulation of marks. It's a question of the very high financial and emotional stakes involved, given the limited number of the seats available in the medical colleges.

Over 15 lakh students appear for the NEET annually to fight over about 83,000 seats available. Less than half of these seats are available in the Government-run colleges. More than half of the seats in these colleges are allotted under various quotas. Thus, many deserving candidates are unable to secure admission to Government colleges.

colleges in India are unbelievably



STAND AGAINS

Thus the medical college market in countries like China, Ukraine, Russia Kyrgyzstan. Here the cost of education at the best is less than half of what the private medical colleges charge. No wonder if there is COVID happening in China, war happening in central Asia or hooliganism in Kyrgyzstan, miserable State of the Indian students makes news.

The problems of these students don't end here. Even on the successful completion of the course, an uncertain future awaits them. The medical degrees obtained from foreign universities must be recognised by the National Medical Commission of India (NMCI). Even if the college is recognised, the medical graduates need to clear the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE) conducted by NMCI to practice in India. The pass rate for FMGE is relatively low.

This shortage of seats explains the repeated noise of corrup-The fees in the private medical tion around the medical entrance tests for several years



THE SHORTAGE OF MEDICAL SEATS IN INDIA, COUPLED WITH HIGH FINANCIAL AND

EMOTIONAL STAKES. **FUELS CORRUPTION** IN ENTRANCE EXAMS AND DRIVES STUDENTS TO SEEK MORE AFFORDABLE **EDUCATION OPTIONS ABROAD** 

now. The most prominent among the many fallouts of this situation are higher prices, long wait times and increased competition for the limited available resources.

परीक्षा

When shortage occurs, an environment is created where individuals or stakeholders may be willing to pay bribes to secure access to the limited resources.

Today, in the NEET eco-system, there aren't just the students and testing agencies who are participating. It can be safely said that the financial stakes at this examination is much higher for the horde of coaching centres and admission counsellors than the students themselves. Then there are the people

who manipulate the system to make entrance into an Indian college 'convenient' lest the candidate ends up selling family silver for an admission in a private college in India or go through the rigmarole of enrolling in a foreign medical college and face an uncertain

Dharmendra Pradhan in the current crisis would be to provide an immediate relief to the injury and pain caused to the lakhs of students by the NTA, which con-

ducted NEET 2024. The larger relief would only come by investment in the health infrastructure sector.

With The

**Future Of** 

Lakhs Of

Increasing the number of medical seats in Government and private colleges, in the higher numbers in the former category, would lessen the need for students to seek education abroad or the manipulators having a field day. This requires substantial investment in medical infrastructure

and faculty. This would not come by the mere initiative of either Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan or the newly-appointed Health Minister JP Nadda. There has to be a Government vision and more importantly the political will to break the cartel of the

private medical colleges. The management of these colleges maintains a Octopus-like stranglehold over the medical education system through its various arms like the coaching centres and the counsellors. The 'costly' admission process is the first step towards the The expected role of Education crass commercialisation of the medical sector in this country.

> president, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice, views

About it on some other day.

(The writer is author and

#### India's solar industry is a goldmine for investors GAUTAM MOHANKA



The surge in global demand for renewable energy has placed solar power at the centre stage, particularly in India

ndia's solar energy sector is shining brighter than ▲ever, emerging as a goldmine for investors and entrepreneurs. The market, valued at \$38 billion in 2021, is set to grow exponentially, reaching \$238 billion by 2032, driven by an impressive 40 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR). The surge in global demand for renewable energy has placed solar power at the centre stage, particularly in India. With supportive Government policies, technological advancements and an increasing shift towards sustainability, the solar energy sector is witnessing unprecedented growth. Entrepreneurs and investors capitalise on this momentum, prioritising their goals to reap substantial benefits in the coming years.

**Tech Advancements** Technological innovations are

at the heart of the solar industry's success. Commercial solar panels have gotten way better at turning sunlight into electricity, cranking up the power they can produce per square foot. The switch from polycrystalline to more advanced bifacial solar panels, which can generate power from both sides, shows how



the industry is focused on squeezing out as much efficiency as possible.

In recent years, PERC (Passivated Emitter and Rear Cell) technology has been predominant in India's solar panel market. However, due to efficiency limitations in mass production, there is a gradual shift towards more advanced technologies like TOPCon (Tunnel Oxide Passivated Contact) and HJT (Heterojunction Technology).

**Government Policies** The Indian Government's policies have played a crucial role in transforming the solar energy landscape. The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, with substantial financial allocations (PLI-I with Rs. 4,500 crores and PLI-II with Rs. 19,500 crores), are designed to boost domestic manufacturing of solar

Further bolstering the "Make in India" initiative, the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) was reinStated on April 1, 2024, ensuring quality control and encouraging the use of domestically manufactured modules. Various projects by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), such as the CPSU Scheme Phase-II, PM-KUSUM Component B and the Gridconnected Rooftop Solar Programme Phase-II, mandate the use of Domestic Content Requirement (DCR) solar panels, providing subsidies to promote the adoption of solar energy.

Environmental Impact

The solar industry in India isn't just about fulfilling energy requirements - it's also helping the environment. By using more solar power and relying less on fossil fuels, the solar industry is assisting in eliminating greenhouse gas

emissions and fighting climate change. Shifting towards renewable energy, like solar power, is super crucial for India's climate goals and ensuring a sustainable future. Market Potential and **Investment Opportunities** 

India's solar energy market presents a plethora of opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs. The sector's rapid growth and the increasing acceptance of solar power for both commercial and personal uses underscore its potential. With Government support and ongoing technological advancements, the barriers to entry are diminishing, making it an attractive proposition for new ventures. Besides, technological advancements enhance efficiency and reduce costs, increasing profitability. Entrepreneurs can explore various segments within the industry.

On a larger front, the global shift towards sustainability ensures a steady demand for solar energy solutions, providing businesses with a longterm growth trajectory. Moreover, India's solar industry's robust market potential, Government support and technological innovation make it a compelling opportunity for those looking to invest or start a venture in

renewable energy.
(The writer is the CEO, of Gautam Solar, views are

#### **WILDLIFE FIRES IN UTTARAKHAND**

Madam — Apropos the news story "Forest fires are a grim environmental reality," published on June 21, this is my response. The recent wildlife fires in Uttarakhand highlight a pressing environmental and societal issue. These fires are not just a natural calamity but a reflection of human irresponsibility and systemic failures. Environmental pollution, an unrestrained culture among youth and weak law enforcement have contributed to these destructive events. Global warming, largely driven by hydrocarbon fuel use, has exacerbated the situation, similar to patterns seen in Australia and the USA.

Local industries and vehicular pollution have significantly warmed the atmosphere, making the naturally fire-prone Chir Pine forests even more vulnerable. Additionally, reckless behaviour, such as setting fires for social media fame and illegal activities like unauthorised construction and tree felling, further fuel these disasters. The media often needs to delve more deeply into such incidents' root causes and preventive measures. A more profound understanding, perhaps through the lens of Vedic Physics, could offer comprehensive solutions by integrating ancient wisdom with modern scientific approaches.

#### **ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS**

Madam — Apropos the news story "Benefits of integrating offline and online channels," published on June 21, this is my response. The management of offline and online channels often operates in silos, with little intersection in their strategies. This separation ignores the fundamental fact that consumers are people whose decisionmaking spans both realms.

Consumers today engage with brands through multiple touchpoints—retail stores, social media, online reviews and influencer videos-making integrated channel management essential. The AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Decision, Action) highlights the need for a coherent strategy across channels, as purchases

#### **UGC** to revamp higher education

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** 

propos the news story "UGC set to revolu-Ationise higher education in India," published on June 21, this is my response. The University Grants Commission's decision to allow biannual admissions in higher education institutions is a significant move. It aims to increase student intake and introduce new programs in emerging areas, aligning Indian education with global standards. This policy mirrors the successful biannual admissions in Open and

Distance Learning and Online modes, which saw nearly half a million additional enrollments. While this decision offers flexibility and opportunities for students, especially those aspiring to study abroad, it raises concerns about infrastructure and faculty requirements. Educational experts worry about maintaining quality amid increased quantity. However, the global model of continuous education and skill upgrading, seen in countries like Germany, highlights the potential benefits. In India, there is a need to change the mindset towards vocational training and practical experience. Successful examples, like ITI graduate Mr Khatri, show that determination and expertise can lead to significant achievements. For the biannual admission system to succeed, policymakers must focus on engaging students and providing practical, hands-on learning experiences Bittu Jaat | Jind

ly spend 76.2 per cent of their time on

can occur either offline or online. Structural issues and managerial specialisations contribute to the disjointed approach, but evolving consumer behaviour demands integration. While offline channels have a long-standing command-and-control structure, online channels are rapidly gaining significance. Companies must adopt integrated thinking to enhance customer experience and ensure sustainable success.

Mitali | Noida

#### **WOMEN AND UNPAID WORK**

Madam — Apropos the news story "The Unseen Burden of Women's Unpaid Labour," published on June 21, this is my response. The early 60s saw Canadian writer Alice Munro dismissed as a mere "housewife who finds time to write short stories." Munro's eventual Nobel Prize in 2013 underscored the absurdity of this condescension. Economist Claudia Goldin's research reveals that women's careers are often constrained by societal expectations that idealise their roles as unpaid caregivers. This has tangible impacts: women global-

unpaid care work, three times more than men. In regions like the Pacific and Asia, men contribute the least.

The burden of unpaid care work keeps 606 million working-age women out of the labour market, compared to just 41 million men. This disparity is reflected in economic metrics; for example, women's unpaid work could be worth up to 40 per cent of GDP in some countries. Additionally, the "motherhood penalty' persists, reducing women's career prospects and earnings. Conversely, men often receive a wage bonus upon becoming fathers. To bridge this gap, significant investments in childcare and care industries are crucial. Research shows that such investments could create millions of jobs and significantly boost women's employment rates. Meeting these needs is essential to achieving gender equality and fulfilling global commitments to women's economic justice.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com

#### **FIRST COLUMN**

#### THE ART OF ANGER **MANAGEMENT**

Anger or an outburst is an emotion which invariably leads to antipathetic results



RAVI VALLURI

eons ago lived a sagacious teacher who adopted unusual techniques as part of his pedagogy while imparting knowledge to his students. One day he provided his students with an empty jar and a bagful of pebbles.

He directed them to fill the jar with as many pebbles as they could. The students fretted as they struggled to insert the pebbles in the jar, but eventually managed to insert them.

Subsequently, the teacher gave them a bag of sand and guided them to pour it into the jar. The sand filled in all the gaps between the rocks. Eventually, the teacher gave them a pitcher of water and asked the students to pour it into the jar which filled in all the remaining gaps. It was then pronounced that the jar represented our lives and the pebbles, sand and water typified what we live with.

The teacher went on to State, "If we fill our lives with anger (represented by the pebbles), there will not be any room for anything else. But if we focus on the important things (represented by the sand and water), we could discover a State of happiness and bal-

Among the students lived a boy who was disposed with a foul temper. He would get angry at every little issue. One day, the sagacious teacher gave him a bag of nails and told him, "Every time you get vexed, hammer a nail into that front wall." And thus began the activity. On the first day, the boy hammered 50 nails. The following day, he hammered 40. Each time he went up to the wall, he repented being piqued.

It was quite a challenge to hammer a nail into the bricks of the wall! Slowly, the stripling discovered that controlling his rage was easier than hammering countless nails into the wall. The strapping youth had already become a laughing stock of his batchmates performing this wasteful exercise. Over a period, the number of nails hammered began to diminish much to the amazement of the student and his friends



Eventually, came a day when he was not cross and became joyous about the fact. The perspicacious teacher assigned the student yet another task, "If you do not get provoked the entire day, remove one nail from the wall." After many days, eyebrows were raised as all the nails were extricated from the wall.

Finally, the teacher took the student near the wall and asked him what he saw. The student replied that he could view holes in the wall. "These holes are like the scars that one leave's on individuals when a person gets exasperated. No matter how many times you apologise, the scar does not vanish."

"Thus, I suggest you to do two things; realise that words once uttered linger on. Your irascibility hurts others and leaves a dampener on all." He continued, "Each time you feel outraged, 'hammer a nail' in the wall. The simplest thing you can do is to carry a pocket diary and draw a line each time you get annoyed. At night, count the number of lines drawn for that day. If you make this a habit, each time you would become waspish, you would be reminded to note it

"Once you follow this regimen, your awareness and memory muscle about the damage you were inflicting among the people with whom you interact would increase." The student had learned his lesson, through this ingenious teaching imparted by his teacher.

(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)

## India faces a severe groundwater crisis



KOTA SRIRAJ

The groundwater clock is ticking towards day zero. India needs a combination of strategy and investment to safeguard and revitalise the same



ccording to the India Water Portal, India uses 25 per cent of all groundwater extracted globally, ahead of the USA and China. Nearly 70 per cent of the water supply in Indian agriculture today is groundwater. For a resource that is under such heavy use, India still lacks a contingency plan when India still lacks a contingency plan when it comes to dealing with groundwater depletion and over-exploitation. Predictably, the writing on the wall is becoming increasingly clear. On June 19th, 2024 the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) dropped the shocking news that Delhi has already extracted 99 per cent of its available groundwater.

The latest CGWB report revealed a decline in both annual recharge and available groundwater for extraction in THE GOVERNMENT the city. According to the CGWB's findings, Delhi's net annual groundwater recharge in 2023 was measured at 0.38 billion cubic meters (bcm), with only 0.34 bcm available for extraction. Shockingly, nearly all accessible groundwater has already been extracted, totalling 99.1 per cent. The concerning aspect here is the increased rate of extraction despite reduced groundwater recharge.

These trying conditions come at a time when Delhi is already reeling under the worst heatwave in the last 120 years which has claimed 192 lives so far. Śadly the issue of water distressed cities is becoming a worrying trend across India. Bangalore hit rock bottom earlier this year with over 500 million litres of water deficit daily with over 7000 borewells running dry. Coupled with abnormally harsh summers the water scarcity conditions can not only take a toll on human lives but also bring the urban economy to a grinding halt. This trend of drying up groundwater may, unfortunately, become the norm for



INDIA'S WATER RESOURCES FACE A BLEAK FUTURE: MUST ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH A NATIONWIDE WATER BODY CENSUS, RAINWATER HARVESTING AND INNOVATIVE **TECHNOLOGIES** 

most cities in India unless urgent remedial measures are taken. But sadly, most of the action taken is at best knee-jerk and impulsive with neither long-term strategy nor investment attached to it. Consecutive Governments, both at the State and central levels have always dealt with groundwaterrelated issues on a passive basis instead of a proactive basis. As a result every year the nature of the problem not only becomes complex but also more difficult to

The future of India's water resources looks bleak and the Government must deploy a plethora of measures to ensure that the future generations have enough of this precious resource. As a first step, the central Government must conduct a nationwide satellite-assisted natural water body census along with the measurable extent of the water body. This will not only quantify the number of water bodies but will also capture any encroachment of the same. Additionally, steps have to be taken to rejuvenate and revive these water bodies.

This can be done by removing the vegetation and setting up artificial groundwater recharge points such as percolation wells. Apart from this, the roping in of local municipal authorities, especially the anti-encroachment departments can help remove unauthorised occupation from the water body

The central Government in asso-

such as metered borewells to monitor and regulate groundwater extraction. The concept of metered borewells is not new. The State of West Bengal has metered borewells for a while now and as a result, the State has been experiencing better levels of ground water. The same can be replicated across India, especially in Karnataka which is witnessing over-exploitation of groundwater. Yet another measure that needs sincere application is rain-water harvesting(RWH). Even though a much-talked-about concept, RWH has seen minimal imple-

mentation in India. Bangalore is an apt example of the extraction and smart groundwaabysmal application of RWH. ter pressure sensors that maintain According to Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) data, only 1.8 lakh out of the 19 lakh eligible properties in Bengaluru baya inetalled arrivalled arri in Bengaluru have installed rainwater harvesting systems. Experts have opined that the city harvests only 10 per cent of the rainwater while the rest 90 per cent drains away wasted. Conditions such as these point towards the unfortunate reality of hyped concepts that receive very little implementation. The Government must try and understand the latent potential of RWH and ensure that not only residential but commercial properties across India implement RWH and the same must be enforceable by law.

However conventional remedial measures may still not be able to rein in the runaway groundwater scarcity problem. Since the scale ciation with State Government of the problem has risen, the

ments in innovative technologies to bolster the efforts to revive and boost the groundwater table in India. Efficient farming technologies that rely less on water for instance can make a huge difference.

Investments in precision agritechnology for the usage of groundwater for irrigation are an ideal solution for providing optimal water usage. This saves water compared to traditional flooding methods which increases output while conserving resources and reducing water wastage.
Similarly, App-driven water

meters that automatically regulate critical and minimum water lev els can all help alleviate the burdens weighing on groundwater. With water scarcity spreading region-wise across India and with a rapidly increasing water use the structural imbalance between water supply and demand continues to widen. Therefore it is time that the Governments in association corporate under corporate social responsibility schemes (CSR) must increase capital expenditure on smart technologies that can actively provide solutions to water scarcity and water quality issues besides improving sustainability of water resources.

The groundwater clock is ticking towards day zero. India needs a combination of strategy and investment to safeguard and revitalise the same.

(The author is a policy analyst.

#### Generative AI revolutionises smart wearable technology

#### By leveraging AI for coaching and healthcare, wearables are setting new standards in user experience and functionality

decade ago, wearable technology was just taking early strides. Today, generative AI — a subset of artificial intelligence — is making its presence felt across diverse domains such as fashion, health, entertainment and

With smart wearables gaining greater popularity worldwide, the fusing of fashion and innovative technology is permitting smart devices to function as icons of personal styling, connecting every element of users' lives. As these aspects play out, generative AI is steadily showcasing several novel dimensions of personalisation and functionality.

#### Personalised Insights

The rising popularity of AIenabled wearables is partly because of their ability to offer



personalised insights and recommendations based on the user's data. Through sensors embedded in the wearables, data is analysed to provide real-time advice and feedback that helps users improve performance, maximise productivity and prevent injuries. In an era where most people want to stay fighting fit, generative AI goes beyond mere-

ly counting the steps taken and

monitoring their heart rate. By

advanced fitness trackers analyse the user's data to provide personalised insights and coaching. A dynamic, bespoke approach is adopted in managing the user's health and well-being as the smart device adapts to each person's preferences, goals and individual fit-

For instance, an AI-driven coaching algorithm, Zepp Coach, offers customised guidance so its users can train and recover more effectively. A user simply needs to enter his or her physical characteristics, exercise experience level and preferred number of training days each week into the app. The app then builds a personalised training regime for every user. As the days progress, the

employing AI algorithms, each person's fitness level, fatigue threshold and current training status. Based on this data, it recommends a reduction (or increase) in training

#### Wearables in Healthcare

Besides personal training, generative AI-linked wearables are deployed in healthcare with a similar model of leveraging user data to provide personalised counsel and insights. For example, the WHOOP Coach app uses a generative AI feature to offer extremely personalised, precise advice and suggestions by using GPT-4 the most advanced generative AI system of OpenAI. Thereby, WHOOP can discover patterns and connections in the data of users and then offer instant, conversational, cus-Zepp Coach app monitors tomised responses to their



health and overall well-being. Since they come equipped with generative AI, such smart wearables are revolutionising the field of healthcare monitoring. Instead, they deploy predictive analytics to forecast potential health problems based on historical data. Thanks to this proactive ences. Such smart clothing

employ preventive measures. Propelled by the power of predictive analytics, smart wearables are driving a steady shift from a purely reactive to a proactive healthcare model. Taking these capabilities one level higher, generative AI is empowering wearables with the capability to sense and react to the emotions of users. These emotion-sensing algorithms can analyse facial expressions, monitor heart rate variability and check other physiological cues to assess the emotional State of users.

#### **Immersive Reality**

Then there is smart clothing with adaptive features that respond to environmental circumstances and user preferapproach, both users and offers temperature-regulating

healthcare practitioners can textiles and dynamically adjustable apparel tightness for maximum comfort, especially when users engage in physical activities. Or consider language translation earbuds that offer contextual understanding. Backed by generative AI, these language translation earbuds go way beyond mere word-for-word translations. Through advanced contextual understanding, these earbuds can comprehend the idioms, cultural references and nuances of a specific language. By eliminating language barriers, this smart innovation facilitates seamless and efficient cross-cultural communi-

> Another exciting wearables category is immersive AR (augmented reality) glasses. Generative AI has allowed

these glasses to take a giant leap forward by delivering immersive experiences for users, seamlessly blending the virtual realm with real-world

surroundings. This is not all. Generative AI has even revolutionised navigation-aiding wearables for visually impaired people. Through AI algorithms, smart navigation devices can interpret the environmental data to offer real-time details about any obstacles, the surroundings or necessary directions. With these wearables, visually challenged users can enjoy enhanced mobility and a certain level of independence that is not possible otherwise. (The writer is CEO of PR

Innovations, brand custodian of Amazfit India, views are personal)