



## Kashmir conflict

The political divide between national parties and regional parties is clear

The first two rounds of the three-phase Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) elections have brought to the fore the contesting visions for the region, between the national and regional parties, and between the national parties, the BJP and the Congress. This is the first Assembly election in 10 years, and also the first after J&K lost its statehood and special status in 2019. The National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) have vowed to fight for the restoration of special status, especially bringing back Articles 370 and 35A. Both parties have made identical promises on releasing jailed youth and withdrawing cases against them. They have also hinted at revoking laws such as the Public Safety Act (PSA), often used to take locals into preventive detention, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, frequently invoked against locals allegedly helping militants and separatists. Both have also promised to revisit the termination of hundreds of government employees on suspicion of supporting militancy, and the denial of passports and jobs to locals on the basis of adverse police reports. The issue of statehood and restarting the dialogue with Pakistan are also central to the manifestos of these regional parties. On the question of statehood, all parties are in agreement, but the BJP, which is in power at the Centre, is still non-committal about the timeline.

The BJP has ruled out the return of special status and Article 370. It has turned that into a weapon against the Congress and the regional parties, which it blames for the alienation of Kashmir from the rest of India. The BJP fielded Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh among others in its intense bid to win the mandate in the crucial Union Territory. The party succeeded in undoing the special status of J&K, fulfilling one of the central pieces of its ideological programme. The party has always used its position on Kashmir more as a mobilisation strategy elsewhere in the country. But, this time, it is being tested in the place where it matters. The Congress, which is contesting the election in alliance with the NC, has been walking a tightrope on the question of special status. Its leader, Rahul Gandhi, has pledged to fight for Kashmir within and outside Parliament but is silent on the tricky issue of Article 370. While he has accused the BJP of using the J&K Lieutenant Governor to centralise power and disempower the local political leadership, the BJP has sought to draw parallels between the Congress's agenda and that of Pakistan. The battle for power has caused parties and other actors to drift away from any possible convergence.

## Rogue state

Israel is choosing war over peace, escalation over compromise

First the pagers exploded. Then came the walkie-talkies. And then, Israel launched a massive bombardment campaign targeting Hezbollah, the powerful Iran-backed Lebanese-Shia militant group. As it appears, the pager and walkie-talkie explosions were a part of Israel's coordinated strategy aimed at weakening Hezbollah in their slow-burning war since October 7, 2023. When Israel launched its Gaza invasion after Hamas's attack a year ago, Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel "in solidarity with the Palestinians". While both sides exchanged fire, they were wary of not letting the tensions spiral into an all-out war. But that caution was abandoned when Israel killed Fuad Shukur, a senior Hezbollah commander, in an air strike on Beirut on July 31. Israel's large-scale air strikes, especially in southern Lebanon, a Hezbollah stronghold, saw the militia group firing hundreds of rockets into Israel. The war in the north has forced about 70,000 Israelis out of their homes. Earlier this month, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that enabling the displaced residents to return to their homes in the northern Upper Galilee region was one of the objectives of the ongoing war. Then came the pager explosions and the subsequent air strikes.

According to Lebanese authorities, at least 575 people, including women and children, were killed in Israel's air strikes in just two days. In retaliation, Hezbollah fired more projectiles, including a ballistic missile on Wednesday towards Tel Aviv. The conflict is now in an escalatory spiral and what is to be seen is whether Israel would launch a ground invasion. In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon with the aim of pushing out Palestinian guerrillas north of the Litani river. The operation was unsuccessful. In 1982, its invasion – this time, the goal was to push the PLO out of Lebanon – managed to force the PLO to relocate from Lebanon, but the war led to the creation of Hezbollah. In 2000, after 18 years of Hezbollah's resistance, Israel withdrew, leaving a buffer it had carved out on the border in the hands of Hezbollah. In 2006, after a Hezbollah cross-border raid, Israel launched another invasion, but after 30 days of fighting, withdrew as part of a ceasefire agreement with Hezbollah. If the past is any indication, Israel is making another mistake in Lebanon. A ceasefire in Gaza, which has been overwhelmingly demanded by the international community, would have quietened the northern border. Instead, Mr. Netanyahu, whose troops have killed over 40,000 Palestinians in 11 months in Gaza, has chosen to escalate the war with Hezbollah, killing hundreds more and pushing West Asia to the brink of an all-out war. This bellicosity, callousness and total disregard for international law and norms all bear the hallmarks of a rogue state. A rogue state with impunity.

The idea of simultaneous elections, to the Lok Sabha, the State Assemblies and the local bodies, was thrown up by the Prime Minister a couple of years ago. Frequent Assembly and local body elections kept him busy on the campaign trail in some parts of the country most of the time. This experience may have been the trigger for the idea to hold elections at one time.

This also led to the formation of a high-level committee on simultaneous elections, which was headed by the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind. Other members of the committee included the Home Minister, Amit Shah, former Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Chairman, Fifteenth Finance Commission N.K. Singh, former Secretary-General, Lok Sabha Subhash C. Kashyap, senior advocate Harish Salve and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari. Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, was a special invitee. The committee's report was submitted to the President of India in March this year. Thus the recommendations were available to the public before the 2024 general election. Moreover, the idea of 'simultaneous elections' was a part of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto (BJP) for this general election. If the ruling party had won a majority in this election it could have claimed that the idea had been endorsed by voters. But in the absence of a majority, it becomes difficult to assume that voters are in approval of it.

Be that as it may, it is nothing less than a miracle that a high-level committee could come up with such a voluminous report (18,626 pages) within a relatively short time on an issue of great importance. With the Union Cabinet having approved the recommendation, the subject of 'one nation one election' has reached almost take-off stage. In the first phase, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be held simultaneously, while local body elections will be conducted within 100 days of the general election.

### An amendment Bill and its fate

The recommendation on simultaneous elections involves amendments to various Articles of the Constitution. The crucial amendment is on the tenure of Assemblies which will no longer have fixity. Since the tenure of the Assemblies will have to be synchronised with that of the Lok Sabha, it is only natural that State Assemblies, which, under Article 172, have a fixed tenure of five years will lose it.

But before going into further details, let us look at what the fate of the Constitution amendment Bill that will be introduced in the 18th Lok Sabha for this purpose will be. After the Bill is introduced, the next important stage is its consideration, which means a general debate on it. After the debate is concluded, the motion for consideration is put to the vote of the House. At



P.D.T. Achary

former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

that stage, the special majority, namely, the majority of the total membership of the House and a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting, will be required.

Only if the motion for consideration is passed with the special majority will the House consider the subsequent stages, i.e., clause by clause consideration, and finally pass the Bill. If all 543 members are present in the House to vote then the support of 362 members will be required. It is understood that the ruling National Democratic Alliance has around 292 members at present. Thus, there is a wide gap between this number and the special majority number of 362. Since the Opposition parties are opposed to the 'one nation one election' proposition, perhaps the government will find it extremely difficult to mobilise the special majority. Thus, in such a situation, the fate of the Constitution amendment Bill will be decided at the stage of consideration itself. The simple message from all this is that without the support of the Opposition, no Constitution amendment Bill will be able to be passed in the Parliament of today.

### The arguments are thin

The high-level committee has recommended simultaneous elections for two reasons. First, the issue of savings in expenses given the humongous amounts of money spent in each election. If all elections are held only once in five years the savings will be enormous. But this is an argument that needs closer examination. Under Article 324, all elections to Parliament and the State legislatures are conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The money required to hold elections is sanctioned by Parliament as a part of the Budget. For the financial year 2023-24, the total allocation made by Parliament to the ECI is ₹466 crore. Obviously this allocation was made for meeting the expenditure in connection with the 2024 general election. For 2022-23, the total allocation was only ₹320 crore. Thus the total amount allotted to the ECI for the general election – ₹466 crore – is not a very huge amount.

Of course expenditure is incurred also by the State governments to meet logistical requirements in connection with elections. Under Article 324(6), staff are required to be provided to the ECI on demand for the elections. Under Section 160 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, State governments are empowered to requisition premises and even vehicles for election purposes. All these arrangements require money which the States will have to provide. But even after all these expenses are also considered, the total expenditure incurred by the Union and State governments cannot be categorised as being huge or enormous.

Yes, the money spent by the political parties is mind boggling, but the point is that the money that would be saved by the political parties due to the holding of elections once in five years is not

going to be spent on, for example, road building or the building of bridges or hospitals. No political party has ever done such things. After all, we had simultaneous elections from 1951-52 to 1967. There is no evidence that the political parties have ever built roads for instance during this long period. Therefore, the assumption that the money saved can be used for building infrastructure does not seem to be based on any empirical evidence.

The second reason is that frequent elections will disrupt developmental plans and projects of the government because of the model code of conduct being in force most of the time. Once again there is no empirical evidence to prove this argument. After all, periodic or frequent elections have been held since 1967 till today. But it is not known that elections have stopped the developmental momentum. It is interesting to note in this context that demonetisation of 85% of India's currency was done close to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election.

### A move against federalism

Curtailling the tenures of State Assemblies to synchronise them with the tenure of the Lok Sabha is an act against federalism. Under the Constitution of India, State Assemblies are autonomous law-making bodies within the India federation and are independent of the federal parliament. A fixed tenure of the Assemblies independent of the tenure of the Lok Sabha is a key aspect of the federal setup. Under the *Kesavananda Bharati* decision, Parliament does not have the power to alter the basic structure. Federalism is a part of the basic structure. The proposed amendments which seek to do away with the fixity of tenure of the Assemblies would amount to altering the basic structure. Whether ratification by Assemblies will be necessary or not is not the key issue. If this amendment is carried out, some Assemblies will have a term of three years. It may be two years or so for others.

As a matter of fact, frequent elections have many positive benefits. First, they will enhance the accountability of elected representatives. Frequent elections compel them to go back to the people and reconnect with them frequently. Elections once in five years would mean that representatives would not feel compelled to go to the people. They would slowly move away from them and try to reconnect with them only in the election year. Similarly, if elections are held only once in five years, political parties will slowly become lethargic and, in course of time, will cease to be the effective vehicles of peoples' aspirations. From the angle of governments, frequent elections will show them which way the wind blows and a government in office can do course correction.

In conclusion, simultaneous elections will alter the federal balance of the Constitution and it is not a priority issue for ordinary Indians. Therefore, the game is not worth the candle.

On the contrary, the holding of frequent elections in India has many positive benefits

# China's warning shots with minerals that run the world

On August 15 this year, China announced its decision to restrict the export of antimony, a critical mineral used in strategic sectors such as defence, for military equipment such as missiles, infrared sensors, flares, ammunition, and even nuclear weapons. China's Commerce Ministry justified this move on the basis of "national security", adding that the measure would take effect from September 15. The declaration, however, was part of a series of countermoves that began in August 2023.

### Moves and countermoves

When it comes to critical minerals, China is not only a stakeholder but also a leader. It dominates every supply chain segment – upstream, midstream, and downstream, covering mining, extraction, refining and processing. It enjoys a near-monopoly status, controlling 60% of rare earth production, 60% of critical minerals production and 80% of the processing worldwide. Therefore, any decision China makes has profound national security implications globally. The European Union and countries such as India, Japan and the United States are strategically vulnerable due to their dependence on critical minerals.

China's intimidating behaviour first gained international attention in the aftermath of the incident in 2010 when a Chinese trawler collided with Japanese Coast Guard boats, after which it halted the exports of rare earth elements to Japan. The event also led to serious global discussions about the world's dependence on China for strategic minerals. The recent antimony episode has only reaffirmed the western belief that China is willing to use critical minerals to coerce. All of this became evident in mid-2023 when China announced a set of restrictions on the exports of critical minerals with U.S. export control measures. In 2023, following the decision by the Netherlands to restrict the supply of semiconductor equipment, under pressure from



Abhishek Sharma

a Research Assistant with the Observer Research Foundation's Strategic Studies Programme

the U.S., China announced curbs on the export of gallium and germanium, two critical minerals used in solar cells and computer chips. Similarly, again in 2023, after the U.S. announced export control on "advanced computing, semiconductors, and semiconductors manufacturing equipment", China reciprocated by curbing the export of "high-purity, high-hardness and high-intensity synthetic graphite material and natural flake graphite and its products", widely used in electric vehicle (EV) batteries, fuel cells, and nuclear reactors. These steps were primarily aimed at responding to U.S. actions and sending a strong signal that if pushed to the wall, China would not hesitate to weaponise the critical mineral supply chain. Apart from these two steps, China has reminded the U.S. of its monopoly and monopsony as a mineral power and buyer, exhibiting the importance of its critical minerals in developing the U.S.'s high technology and green energy sectors. China has also restricted the export of rare earth processing technologies in making rare earth magnets used in EVs, in addition to technologies used to extract and separate critical minerals, hamstringing the U.S.-led attempt to build an alternative supply chain.

### A hardening of foreign policy posture

Restricting access to strategic resources is a classic statecraft strategy, hitting the enemy's weak points, an example being the U.S. oil embargo against Japan in 1940. Therefore, this is expected from an aspiring great power such as China, which seeks to leverage its status as a mineral power. The difference in China's case is that this initially started as an act to intimidate countries. However, with recent countermoves, critical minerals export controls have now become a part of China's foreign policy objectives. It has moved from the politicisation to the weaponisation stage. For two reasons, China has grown more comfortable using its mineral

resources as a political tool. First, Beijing is reminding the West of its strategic dependency on China by demonstrating its status as a mineral power and exerting control over the supply chain. Second, China is responding in like and believes that it is acceptable to take advantage of the situation to sabotage the West's critical mineral supply chain, which will hinder the development of its high-tech sectors and undermine their efforts to decouple and de-risk. Those critical minerals utilised in dual-use applications are major targets in particular as they are needed in the building of the Virginia class submarine and the F-35 fighter aircraft, which require several hundred pounds of rare earth elements. This shows that the aggressive, reciprocal and coercive approach has taken over the cooperative and collaborative approach, one of China's two schools of thought. It signals that Chinese curbs via export control will only grow as ties with the West deteriorate. According to Chinese Natural Resource Minister Wang Guanghua, "China will push forward exploration, increase critical minerals capacity, and enhance mineral resources reserves over the next five years", thus displaying China's ambitions to leave no stone unturned.

### India's vulnerability

Like its Quad partners, Australia, Japan and the U.S., India remains vulnerable due to its strategic dependence on China. New Delhi is heavily dependent on the imports of critical minerals such as lithium, nickel, cobalt and copper, which resulted in an import cost of around ₹34,000 crore in FY23. It is estimated that India's hunger for minerals will only grow, and so will the import cost, further increasing India's vulnerability. Hence, this episode must act as a wake-up call for India and the policymakers who have been slow in taking precautionary measures such as having partnerships with like-minded countries and investing in developing alternative supply chains.

Restricting access to strategic resources is a classic statecraft strategy that China seems to be perfecting

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Extrajudicial actions

Recent reports of police encounters that have resulted in the deaths of alleged criminals, raise a critical question about India's justice system and accountability. How does the system allow the police to act as judge, jury and executioner? The

cases in Badlapur, Unnao and Chennai reveal a disturbing trend where due process seems to have been disregarded. It is most imperative that the judiciary in India intervenes and upholds the principles of justice in a democracy.

Anshu Bharti, Begusarai, Bihar

### Framework for education

I write this letter as a former Vice-Chancellor, Shri Venkateshwara University, Gajraula, U.P. and Oriental University, Indore; adviser, RNB Global University, Bikaner, Rajasthan; President, Indian Council of Sports and Culture, Indore, and United Nations

member – Education and Research Commission (IOED). The article, "The NCrF as a framework for well-rounded education" (Editorial page, September 25), was elaborate. But the writer does not seem to have a feel of the ground realities and the difficulties that higher education

institutes (HEI) face. Most HEIs are affiliated institutions that are not authorised to change the curriculum to incorporate multi-disciplinary education. Private institutions concentrate on image-building, aiming for a higher ranking in the accreditation systems

NAAC/NIRF/NBA, or through social media. Most institutions are unaware of 'ABC' or the Academic Bank of Credit accounts. It would be ideal to include institutional activities in the 'ABC' as a prerequisite to apply for NBA/NAAC/NIRF. V.D. Abraham, Kochi, Kerala

## Taking stock of global nuclear disarmament

In the United Nations calendar, September 26 is the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This year's General Assembly agenda includes a session on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), or the Ban Treaty, as distinguished from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, NPT. It will be a chance to take stock at a time when the UN is bitterly divided – over the war in Ukraine; over the Israel-Palestine conflict; and in responding to accelerating climate change and other related inequalities. Nuclear possession – threats or their use – threads through all these divisions. How the countries, including India, that have stayed out of the TPNW respond to the discussions will therefore matter greatly. If they allow the treaty's supporters to continue their efforts in expanding the Ban Treaty's footprint, the goal of the treaty – total nuclear disarmament – will be boosted. But if the treaty is undermined, nuclear weapons will become more entrenched, and the shadow of nuclear use will lengthen.

**What the Ban Treaty says**  
The TPNW, which came into force in 2021, has once again divided the nuclear haves and their allies, and the nuclear abstainers. It is extensive in its prohibitions: signatories are barred from developing, testing, producing, stockpiling, transferring, using, deploying, keeping, or threatening to use any nuclear explosive devices. Thus, it goes beyond the NPT, which bans proliferation, but only promises to consider disarmament, and is silent on nuclear use, including deterrence. The TPNW arose from a collection of UN agencies and NGOs coming together under the Humanitarian Initiative to highlight the lasting and pernicious consequences of nuclear weapons, covering development, deployment, and use on people, their health, and



**Priyanjali Malik**

Author of India's Nuclear Debate: Exceptionalism and the Bomb

The Ban Treaty could start an honest discussion about the utility and effectiveness of nuclear weapons

the environment. Discussions moved to the UN, with the General Assembly mandated to convene a conference in 2017 to negotiate 'a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination'. Thus the only treaty that legally bans all nuclear weapons and their use was adopted, but without the participation of nuclear weapons states and their allies, despite these states reiterating their commitment to nuclear disarmament. All of them registered their opposition to the treaty during its negotiation and when it came into force, thereby establishing themselves as 'persistent objectors' who could not be bound by the treaty's provisions and who do not consider it as contributing to customary international law.

Yet, resistance to the treaty amongst the allies of the nuclear haves may not be unyielding. Recent nuclear developments, such as Russia's nuclear sabre-rattling, China's rising weapons count, Iran's continuing uranium enrichment, and North Korea's tests and threats have renewed discussions on nuclear risks. A group of former leaders and officials of NATO states published an open letter urging their countries to join the treaty and thereby "place nuclear weapons on the same legal footing as chemical and biological weapons". Among the former Prime Ministers and other officials are two former NATO Secretaries-General and a former UN Secretary General. These are significant voices.

As of July 2024, the TPNW had 70 states parties. Another 27 had signed but not yet ratified it. This support from 97 states represents almost 50% of states and parties bound to the legal framework on weapons of mass destruction. Their efforts could precipitate a process of questioning several beliefs about nuclear deterrence.

Assumptions about deterrence have already been tested since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

Despite China and Russia's 'friendship without limits', Chinese President Xi Jinping made public his opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin's nuclear sabre-rattling. The U.S. signalled that nuclear adventurism would be met with a commensurate response; it did not specify that such a response would necessarily be nuclear. Washington also did not change its nuclear preparation level as a result. In other words, nuclear threats were countered without an overtly nuclear response, thereby contradicting one of the justifications for continued nuclear possession.

**Treading a fine line**  
Sitting out a treaty is not the same as undermining it. India has not signed the NPT. New Delhi perceives the NPT to be discriminatory, believes that it does not promote disarmament, and is contrary to India's interests. However, India has arguably benefited from the NPT's curbing of the spread of nuclear weapons. It has never actively undermined the treaty – rhetoric and abstention notwithstanding.

Other nuclear possessors could similarly tread a fine line of staying away from the TPNW while not challenging it. The TPNW has weaknesses, chiefly, the lack of a robust enforcement mechanism, but its normative potential in delegitimising nuclear possession and deterrence should not be underestimated. If the treaty eventually succeeds in relegating nuclear weapons to the same pariah status as chemical and biological weapons, that will make us all much safer. This will certainly not happen during the General Assembly session or any time soon. The norm against nuclear use has solidified over decades; nuclear testing is gradually being delegitimised by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, even if it has not come into force. The Ban Treaty could similarly start an honest discussion about the utility and effectiveness of nuclear weapons.

## A war of words over political Islam

The IUML's role in maintaining harmony in Kerala is crucial

### STATE OF PLAY

**Biju Govind**  
biju.govind@thehindu.co.in

Last week, senior CPI(M) leader P. Jayarajan triggered a debate when he alleged that young people were being lured into terror outfits such as the Islamic State due to the influence of political Islam in Kerala.

Talking to the media ahead of the release of his Malayalam book, Kerala: Muslim Politics and Political Islam, in Kozhikode, Mr. Jayarajan claimed that there was an alliance between the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH). He warned that political Islam is dangerous, as was seen in the rise of extremist groups such as the JIH and the Popular Front of India (PFI), which was banned by the Indian government in 2022.

His comments drew sharp criticism from the IUML and Congress. The IUML national general secretary, P.K. Kunhalikutty, insisted that his party has always been vigilant in addressing radical tendencies. The IUML State president, Syed Sadiqali Shihab Thangal, accused Mr. Jayarajan of "exploiting the Islamic State recruitment issue for political mileage at a time when the Islamic State is being dismantled globally." At the same time, Congress leader K. Muraliedharan alleged that Mr. Jayarajan's book was a strategy by the CPI(M) to reclaim Hindu votes, which have been drifting towards the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He also claimed that the CPI(M) and BJP had a covert agreement. To buttress his argument, he cited the statement of the Speaker, A.N. Shamseer, who described the Rashtriya



Swayamsevak Sangh as an important organisation in India.

Mr. Jayarajan's views have also provided ammunition to Sangh Parivar outfits, which have been alleging that Kerala has emerged as a breeding ground for Islamic terrorists under the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government. These outfits have used conspiracy theories such as 'love jihad' and 'narcotics jihad' to drive anti-Muslim propaganda.

Mr. Jayarajan's comments drew responses from the outfits he mentioned too. The Welfare Party of India (WPI), the political wing of the JIH, accused the CPI(M) of aligning with the Sangh Parivar and demanded Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's response to the allegations. The WPI and the Social Democratic Party of India, the political face of the PFI, had supported the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Parts of the Christian community waded in too. Deepika, a Malayalam newspaper managed by the clergy and popular among the Syrian Catholics, published an editorial asking whether the CPI(M) endorsed Mr. Jayarajan's views. It stated that both the Congress and CPI(M) have been pandering to political Islam and argued that Mr. Jayarajan's book is relevant.

It is a fact that a few young

people from Kerala joined the Islamic State and travelled to Syria and Afghanistan, although the numbers are not known. In 2009, four people joined terrorist groups in Kupwara in Kashmir and were killed in an encounter with the Indian Army.

Previously, second-rung IUML leaders, such as K.M. Shaji, would argue that the Islamic State was inspired by Syed Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of JIH. The CPI(M) leadership believes that the IUML and JIH developed a bonhomie from the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and that the JIH's theocratic ideology is subtly dominating the IUML's agenda since its ally, the Congress, is not in power in Kerala or at the Centre.

While the rise of political Islam in Kerala has often been a cause for concern, social commentators are confident that it will not succeed given the State's political ecosystem. The IUML leadership, particularly the Thangal, has taken a resolute stance against Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover, the powerful body of Sunni scholars, the Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, is vehemently opposed to extremism in the community. Muslims form more than 25% of the population in Kerala. The Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen, another influential Muslim organisation, also said that Mr. Jayarajan was capitalising on anti-Muslim sentiment for selling his book.

Muslims peacefully coexist with other religious communities in Kerala and recognise the attempts being made by fringe elements to radicalise them. Given the delicate situation, the IUML's role in maintaining a harmonious communal atmosphere and preserving Kerala's secular principles is crucial.

## A historic election in Sri Lanka

The extraordinary rise of Anura Kumara Dissanayake and how the JVP-NPP has been able to spread its wings in every district

### DATA POINT

**T. Ramakrishnan**

For the first time since 1978, in presidential elections in Sri Lanka, no candidate won more than 50% of the total votes in the first round of counting. Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), put up under the banner of the National People's Power (NPP), obtained 42.31%. He was declared the winner after the second count, which tallied voters' second and third choice candidates. This too was historic: no election in Sri Lanka has ever progressed to the second round of counting.

An analysis of the votes obtained in the first round of counting, excluding preferences, reveals that seven out of 22 electoral districts in the island nation – three each in the Western Province (Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara) and Southern Province (Galle, Matara, and Hambantota), and one in the North-Western Province (Kurunegala) – account for 57% of the vote share of Mr. Dissanayake.

Coincidentally, in 2019, the collective share of the seven districts in the total votes of Mr. Dissanayake's predecessor, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was about 55%. The similarity does not stop there. As in the case of the former president five years ago, Mr. Dissanayake too got more than 50% of the votes in Gampaha and the three districts of the Southern Province. In these four districts, he exceeded the 50% mark, whereas Mr. Rajapaksa achieved this in 11 more districts. There is a difference of nearly 10 percentage points between the vote share that Mr. Dissanayake secured this time (42.31%) and what Mr. Rajapaksa secured in 2019 (52.25%). What is remarkable is that five years ago, Mr. Dissanayake got a vote share of merely 3.16%. He has clearly reaped the political dividends from the Janatha Aragalaya, which arose due

to an economic crisis in 2022.

Last election, of the about 4.18 lakh votes that Mr. Dissanayake received, the share of the seven districts was around 55%. The difference now is that the JVP-NPP has been able to spread its wings in every other district. In Matara in the Central Province, for instance, Mr. Dissanayake had received 2.6% of the votes in 2019; this rose to 41.37% in 2024. It was in Matara where several incidents of human rights violations were reported to have taken place in 1989 during the armed conflict between the Ranasinghe Premadasa-led United National Party (UNP) government and the JVP, which had organised an insurrections in 1971 and in 1987-89.

Even though Mr. Dissanayake lagged behind his immediate rival, Sajith Premadasa, of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), in the districts with a substantial number of ethnic minorities, he improved his performance from 2019. In Digamadulla (Ampara) in the East, for instance, he did not get even 2% of the votes in 2019; this time, he secured more than 25%. Yet, the JVP chief could not secure an outright victory unlike his predecessors. The acceptability of his party remains an issue with a majority of voters of the country.

Mr. Sajith, who lost the presidential election for the second consecutive time, could have emerged the winner but for the presence of his one-time colleague in the UNP, former President Ranil Wickremesinghe, in the fray. Compared to 2019, Mr. Sajith's vote share went down by about 10 points, to 32.8%, and Mr. Wickremesinghe, as an independent candidate, garnered around 17%. To make Mr. Sajith's position more difficult, a 'common Tamil candidate', P. Ariyanethiran, who was supported by many parties and groups, secured about 2.26 lakh votes, two-thirds from Jaffna and Vanni districts in the North, and polled 1.7%. There was no such candidate last time.

## A snapshot of the Sri Lankan elections

The data for the tables were sourced from the Election Commission of Sri Lanka



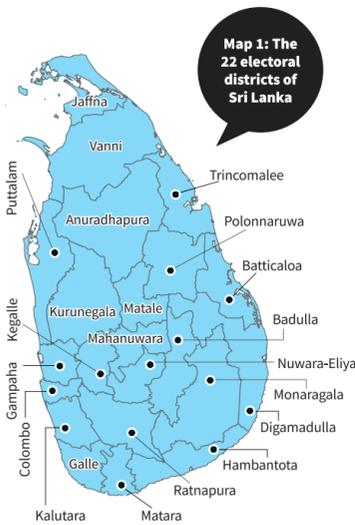
The newly elected President of Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake

**Table 2:** The table shows the overall % share of votes secured by major candidates in the 2019 and 2024 presidential elections

	Gotabaya Rajapaksa		Anura Kumara Dissanayake		Sajith Premadasa		Ranil Wickremesinghe	
	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024
Overall	52.3	3.2	42.3	42.0	32.8	17.3		

**Table 3:** The table shows the electoral district-wise % share of votes secured by major candidates in the 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. Figures in %

Electoral district	Gotabaya Rajapaksa		Anura Kumara Dissanayake		Sajith Premadasa		Ranil Wickremesinghe	
	2019	2024	2019	2024	2019	2024	2024	
Colombo	53.2	3.9	47.2	40.9	25.6	21.1		
Gampaha	59.3	4.3	55.5	34.3	34.3	14.8		
Kalutara	59.5	3.4	47.4	35.0	28.9	17.5		
Mahanuwara	50.4	2.5	42.3	44.6	34.7	17.4		
Nuwara-Eliya	36.9	1.2	22.2	58.3	42.6	29.3		
Matara	55.4	2.6	41.4	39.6	35.9	15.8		
Trincomalee	23.4	1.6	20.8	72.1	50.4	16.9		
Batticaloa	12.7	0.8	12.2	78.7	43.7	28.6		
Digamadulla	32.8	1.8	25.7	63.1	47.3	20.5		
Jaffna	6.2	0.4	7.3	83.9	32.6	22.8		
Vanni	12.3	0.5	9.9	82.1	43.9	24.2		
Galle	64.3	3.7	51.5	30.0	26.6	15.1		
Hambantota	66.2	6.2	52.0	25.9	30.8	7.8		
Matara	67.3	4.2	52.5	26.8	26.9	14.5		
Kurunegala	57.9	3.2	48.2	37.0	32.6	13.0		
Puttalam	50.8	2.8	44.1	43.9	36.9	12.9		
Polonnaruwa	53.0	4.4	46.1	40.5	35.5	13.0		
Anuradhapura	59.0	3.9	47.4	34.9	33.5	13.6		
Badulla	49.3	2.6	34.7	44.9	38.6	20.2		
Monaragala	65.3	3.5	41.9	29.0	40.1	10.7		
Kegalle	55.7	2.6	43.4	39.6	32.6	18.7		
Ratnapura	59.9	2.5	39.3	35.4	34.7	19.6		



### FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 26, 1974

## India warns Pak. against annexation of Hunza state

New Delhi, Sept. 25: The Government of India today reacted sharply to Pakistan's reported annexation of the State of Hunza in Jammu and Kashmir and charged Mr. Bhutto with using his strictures against India on the Sikkim issue as a cover-up for this "hasty and arbitrary" action of his. The reaction came from an official spokesman here this evening.

The spokesman said Pakistan's unilateral action "abolishing" Hunza, which is a principality of Jammu and Kashmir, and merging it with the northern area of that country had brought about "a material change in the situation".

Pakistan "has no right or sanction for this", he said. The spokesman said the Government of India noted this development with "surprise".

The following is the text of the spokesman's comment: "Prime Minister Bhutto's announcement reported by Radio Pakistan on September 24 to the effect that the State of Hunza has been abolished and this area has been merged with the northern areas to be administered by the Resident Commissioner of Gilgit and Baltistan has been noted with surprise. The haste and arbitrariness of this action is particularly glaring in view of the fact that Hunza is a principality of the State of Jammu and Kashmir which had acceded to India and thus at best Pakistan is only in illegal occupation of the northern area of this State. Pakistan, though this action, has unilaterally brought about a material change in the situation regarding one of the northern territories of Jammu and Kashmir for which it has no right or sanction."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 26, 1924

## Spinning club at Cochin

Cochin, Sept. 26: Under the auspices of the Kerala Provincial Khadi Board a Spinning Club was opened here yesterday in honour of Mr. Gandhi's birthday through the efforts of Mr. Kurur Nilakanta Nambudripad. So many as twenty members have been enrolled including Messrs. Dwardas Govinda Sarma, Bahulayan, and Rainaswami Aiyer and it is stipulated that every member should spin at least for half an hour every day and send 3,000 yards of well-twisted handspun yarn every month to the All-India Khaddar Board.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

**NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**India's foodgrain production in the 2023-24 crop year**

**332.22** In million tonnes. The final estimate for 2023-24 shows an increase of 2.61 million tonnes from last year's 329.6 million tonnes. Pulses and oilseed production fell compared to last year. PTI

**The marginal increase in India's coal imports, as per official reports**

**0.9** In per cent. According to an official statement, coal imports during the April-July period of FY25 reported a marginal increase reaching 90.51 million tonnes (MT) compared to 89.68 MT in the previous year. PTI

**India's overseas inflow in the last decade, from 2014 to 2024**

**667.4** In billion dollars. According to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), overseas inflows of FDI increased compared to the 304.1 billion recorded between 2004-2014. PTI

**Diamond polishing industry revenue hits decadal low**

**12** In billion dollars. According to research firm Crisil Ratings, the decline can be attributed to the muted demand in key export markets of the U.S. and China, a fall in prices due to oversupply and a shift towards lab-grown diamonds. PTI

**The number of structures razed in U.P's Bahraich**

**23** Bulldozers razed residential structures in Kaiserganj. The demolition was ordered by the High Court. Locals claimed that several of the structures were built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us [facebook.com/thehindu](https://facebook.com/thehindu) [twitter.com/the\\_hindu](https://twitter.com/the_hindu) [instagram.com/the\\_hindu](https://instagram.com/the_hindu)

## How global warming affects forecasting

Existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future. Meteorologists will need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, and the Indian Ocean Dipole will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating

**FULL CONTEXT**

Raghu Murtugudde

**W**ith the record warming of 2023-2024, we are getting a clearer picture of what global warming does. The medley of extremes strewn across the planet has covered the gamut from deadly heatwaves to devastating cyclones and floods, from droughts to wildfires.

According to some estimates, the world has already crossed the 1.5°C warming threshold (that is, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.5°C over the pre-industrial average). The caveat is that global temperatures are an estimate produced from a combination of data and climate models. As the 1.5°C limit is part of a demand by the Alliance of Small Island Developing States, scientists have built models to predict what environmental disturbances crossing this threshold could invite. However, and more importantly, it is not yet clear how long the warming has to remain above the threshold for the projected impacts to materialise.

The spectacular show that nature has put up during 2023-2024 is also a stark reminder that we are far from able to predict the weather and the climate with the requisite skills and spatial-temporal scales to manage disasters effectively. The loss of lives, property, and infrastructure continue to traumatise humanity, especially the poor, who remain very vulnerable to extreme events.

**2024 versus our predictions**

Meteorologists predicted the 2023 El Niño as early as in the spring of that year, which is remarkable. But the level of warming during 2023-2024 has caught them, and the public, by surprise because it was much higher than expected from the addition of the so-called mini-global warming by the El Niño to the ongoing background warming. We speculate that water vapour thrown up by the underwater volcano Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai during 2022 and CO2 emitted by the wildfires exacerbated the warming.

The 2023 monsoon was deficit but it did not qualify as an El Niño drought, the reasons for which researchers are yet to diagnose. Predictions from nearly all major weather centres earlier promised a strong La Niña in late 2024. Now this seems less likely. Perhaps nature has another googly in waiting. Similarly, weather forecasts have called for the most intense hurricane season in decades but this has yet to step beyond the normal.

The monsoon season has evolved erratically and has once again left many parts of India dry while producing devastating floods and landslides in many others. Now 2024 is set to emerge as a monsoon-surplus year; yet it can hardly be called a typical La Niña monsoon.

The cyclone season in the North Indian Ocean has also been weaker than what one would expect from a La Niña year. While some weather centres were very gung-ho about an Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) emerging in the Indian Ocean, it has played truant so far.

To be clear: this is not a litany of grievances against predictions. It is an expression of caution: that we will be remiss if we don't learn all the lessons from this extraordinary period of warming vis-à-vis their implications for the future of predictions and for the climate projections we keep producing.

**Predictions may pose challenges**

A quote often attributed to physicist Niels Bohr is apt here: prediction is difficult,



**Blazing heat:** Residents collect drinking water from a tanker amid a water crisis in Delhi, on a hot summer day in New Delhi on June 6. SHIV KUMAR PUSHYPAKAR

**THE GIST**

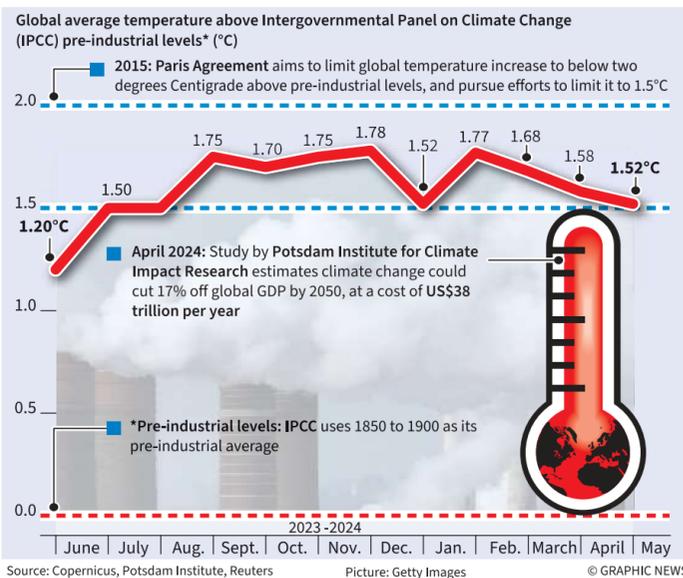
Meteorologists predicted the 2023 El Niño as early as in the spring of that year, which is remarkable. But the level of warming during 2023-2024 has caught them, and the public, by surprise because it was much higher than expected from the addition of the so-called mini-global warming by the El Niño to the ongoing background warming.

According to some estimates, the world has already crossed the 1.5°C warming threshold (that is, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.5°C over the pre-industrial average).

For the coming decade or two, projection uncertainties depend on the model uncertainties themselves plus natural variabilities in a warming world.

**Global warming**

The global average temperature for the last year was the highest ever documented, at 1.63°C above pre-industrial levels, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service



especially if it's about the future. Weather and climate predictions frequently remind us of this. We do learn our lessons and continue to improve the models and the observational networks we need to produce better predictions.

But what if predictions continue to become more difficult with global warming? Put another way, are all the misfires we have had this year just a coincidence or are they a portent of what is to come?

Many studies have reported the impacts of warming on hurricanes, monsoons, El Niños, La Niñas, the IOD, etc. But the bigger question is: if the world is already warmer than 1.5°C, are there any conclusions we can draw about how all these natural variabilities have responded thus far?

Unfortunately, the period of warming we have experienced of late hasn't been long enough for us to confidently say what changes we can already detect in the dominant climate modes. The models are

amazing in their ability to reproduce all natural modes given just the energy coming from the Sun at the top of the atmosphere. But they are not perfect: model answers often disagree; even the same model can produce different answers depending on its configuration.

For example, existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future – they can only make skillful forecasts for the present. We have also not sorted out yet whether monsoon patterns are variable from decade to decade – patterns that we may currently be calling trends. We also don't know whether climate change can extend the timescale of natural decadal variability and make it a real trend. We need to address these critical questions to advance our understanding of processes and to make better predictions.

**Predicting the future of predictions**

There is plenty of hope for the future of

predictions, but as the adage goes, hope is not a strategy. We have our work cut out for us. We obviously need to continue to improve our models and build on the fact that models are already capable of amazing feats, with some deficiencies. We need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, IOD, etc. will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating. Well-trained and enthusiastic scientists toil to improve models and data networks and bring the latest technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and sensor-fit drones, to bear on this pressing challenge.

We have plenty of reasons for optimism vis-à-vis reliable and actionable early warnings at the hyperlocal scale.

**Lessons from 2023**

We currently make climate projections using the same or similar models that project future climate based on how the concentrations of specific emissions increase, how populations grow, and what mitigation policies we implement, among other factors. For the coming decade or two, projection uncertainties depend on the model uncertainties themselves plus natural variabilities in a warming world.

The uncertainties in projections beyond a couple of decades are related entirely to the imagined scenarios that drive model simulations.

The inability to capture the response of natural modes to warming will continue to haunt all projections. It will be necessary to translate improved weather and climate predictions to improve the models.

The best strategy to ensure projections are reliable may be to restrict ourselves to just a decade or two into the future. The ongoing geopolitical perturbations and their cascades into markets, economies, and societies underscore the difficulty of imagining the future beyond a decade or so as well.

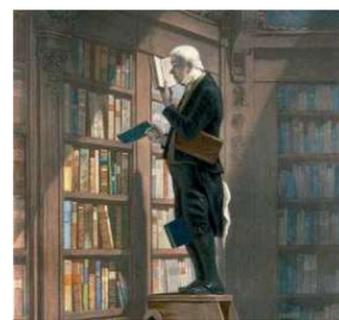
Overall, it is critical that we assess the costs and benefits of the considerable human, financial, and computational resources for climate projections out to 2100.

Raghu Murtugudde is professor, IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor, University of Maryland.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



**In ruins:** An elderly woman pushes a cart past a destroyed building in the city of Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, on September 24. AFP



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian  
Upendran

“Did you see the men’s singles finals last night?”  
“Of course, I did.”  
“Wasn’t it a fantastic match?”  
“According to me, it was a great match.”  
“You can’t say that.”  
“I can’t say it was a great match?”  
“Of course, you can. But you can’t say, ‘According to me, it was a great match.’ You see, we use ‘according to’ when we pass on information which we have received from other people. According to the Finance Minister, inflation is definitely coming down.”  
“I don’t think anybody actually believes that!”  
“I’m sure there are some people who do. Anyway, when you say ‘According to X, Y is beautiful,’ it means that in X’s opinion Y is beautiful.”  
“I see. But when you say ‘according to,’ does the source of information always have to be a person?”  
“No. The source of information can be anything – books, articles, whatever. According to this article, all forests will be destroyed by the year 2000.”  
“The author must be a gloomster. I don’t think the forests will be destroyed by the year 2000. According to me... Sorry, I forgot I shouldn’t say ‘according to me.’ Tell me, what should I say?”  
“Well, you could say, ‘In my opinion’ or ‘if you ask me.’”  
“In my opinion, the forests will continue to be there for another 200 years. How’s that?”  
“Fine.”  
“If you ask me, train travel is more enjoyable than air travel.”  
“But the most enjoyable experience of all is staying at home. There’s no place like home is what I say!”  
“I don’t agree with you. People must travel, they must... Where’s today’s paper?”  
“On the table. What do you need it for?”  
“I want to find out what film is being shown at our local theatre. Let’s see now. Hey, what’s this! I’ve never come across this word before.”  
“What word?”  
“I don’t even know how to pronounce it. But it’s spelt c...i...a...o.”  
“Oh, its ‘chow’.”  
“Chow!”  
“Yes, it rhymes with ‘how’ and ‘now’.”  
The ‘c’ is pronounced like the ‘ch’ in ‘church.’ You see ‘ciao’ is an Italian word.”  
“Italian word! Last week, I learnt the Italian word ‘banca’. This week, it’s ‘ciao.’ At this rate, I’ll become a fluent speaker of Italian.”  
“Well, when you learn English, you end up learning a little bit of everything – French, German, Russian Italian, Latin...”  
“Stop. You are making my head swim.”  
“Sorry.”  
“Not your fault. Anyway, what does ‘ciao’ mean?”  
“It’s a way of greeting someone or bidding goodbye to someone.”  
“I’ll go to the market now and buy a few things.”  
“Ciao.”  
“Ciao.”  
Published in *The Hindu* on June 29, 1993.

# Roots of a conflict: an ‘endless war’ on the edge of Europe’s frontier

Located at the western edge of the Eurasian steppe, Ukraine has been a gateway to Europe for many centuries, being a meeting place, and a battleground of empires from Roman to Ottoman, Habsburg to Romanov. Ukraine has a pivotal role in global and Russia’s history, say writers

Shoumojit Banerjee

Vladimir Putin’s “special military operation” in Ukraine which began in February 2022 – the largest and bloodiest invasion since the end of the Second World War in 1945 – has now taken on the nature of the fictional endless war described in George Orwell’s *1984*.

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict has destroyed the European security structure built since the Helsinki Accords of 1975. While the Ukrainian resistance has surprised the West, fundamental questions persist: What made this war of aggression possible and what made the Ukrainians resist as they did and are continuing to do? What differentiates Ukrainians from Russians? What will be the consequences of the war for Ukraine, Russia, Europe, and the world?

Anyone wishing to understand the roots behind the ongoing conflict must start with acclaimed Harvard-based historian Serhii Plokhy’s seminal *The Gates of Europe* (2015) and his superb *The Russo-Ukrainian War* (2023) – both masterpieces of concision and clarity.

Plokhy presents the longue durée history of Ukraine from the times of Herodotus to the fall of the USSR and the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Located at the western edge of the Eurasian steppe, Ukraine has been a gateway to Europe for many centuries, being a meeting place (and a battleground) of empires from Roman to Ottoman, Habsburg to Romanov.

**Contentious legacy**

He emphasises Ukraine’s pivotal role in global history.

For example, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 was precipitated by the Ukrainian referendum on

independence, where over 90% of Ukrainians, including a majority in Russian-speaking Crimea, voted to leave the USSR. The ongoing conflict, however, is not just a contemporary geopolitical struggle but deeply rooted in history, particularly the contentious legacy of ‘Kyivan Rus’, a medieval polity founded by the Grand Prince Volodymyr (958-1015).

As Plokhy observes, most Russians believe that their state and nation originated in Kyiv, the centre of the medieval Kyivan Rus’ polity, that encompassed a good part of what is now Ukraine, Belarus, and European Russia. Kyivan Rus’ existed between the 10th and mid-13th centuries before disintegrating into semi-independent polities under the blows of the Mongol onslaught.

The Christianisation of Kyivan Rus’ by Volodymyr (cited by Putin as the founding moment of the Russian world) tied the region culturally to Byzantium and Eastern Christianity, laying the foundation for centuries of Russian claims to Ukrainian territory.

One of Putin’s obsessions in a 2021 essay was about foreign meddling in Russian history. But Volodymyr (to whom Putin dedicated a 17-metre statue outside the Kremlin) was himself a foreigner, a Scandinavian Viking who imposed Christianity on his Slavic subjects in order to bring them into the European world of Christendom. The Kyivan Rus’ myth originated in the mid-15th century, with Ivan III of Moscow asserting his dynasty’s Kyivan roots to legitimise his conquest of Novgorod.

**Fueled by a myth**

This myth bolstered Moscow’s authority and justified further conquests of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands. Ivan’s victory marked the rise of an

independent, authoritarian Russian state which he passed on to his grandson, Ivan IV (‘The Terrible’).

While Ivan IV expanded Muscovy’s rule by wiping of the post-Mongol Volga khanates, he was defeated in the Livonian War (1558-83) by a coalition of states that included Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, and Denmark. The 17th century saw Moscow captured by the Poles and their allies, the Ukrainian Cossacks. During this time, Muscovy separated itself from Kyiv and the Ukrainian lands both politically and in religious terms.

The Muscovites no longer regarding Kyivans as fellow Orthodox believers, claiming that they had been ‘corrupted’ by accepting the rule of Catholic kings and becoming open to the West. While Muscovy paused in its obsession with Kyiv and its history, the Ukrainians sought the aid of the Russian Tsar in 1648 when under their Hetman (leader) Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the Ukrainian Cossacks rebelled against Polish rule.

**Transactional relationship**

In *Overreach* (2022), journalist Owen Matthews observes that Khmelnytsky’s oath to the Tsar would set the pattern for centuries of Ukrainian-Russian relations right up to the 21st century – transactional, and dictated by expediency under pressure from outside powers.

Memories of the Kyivan heritage were again revived by Muscovy for protection of their Orthodox brethren (Ukrainian Cossacks) against the Polish Catholics who were duly defeated.

But the incorporation of the Ukrainian Cossack state into Moscow again sparked Cossack resistance in 1708, when their Hetman Ivan Mazepa allied with Sweden’s Charles XII against Tsar Peter “The Great” only to be defeated at Poltava in 1709. Catherine II destroyed the Hetmanate

and integrated the Cossacks polity into the Russian Empire, but 19th-century Ukrainian nationalists revived their memory, observes Plokhy in *The Russo-Ukrainian War*.

The fall of the Romanov dynasty in March 1917 led to the creation of autonomous polities on the territory of the Russian Empire. The Bolshevik coup in October that year saw the destruction of Tsarist imperial institutions. In 1922, Lenin and Stalin clashed over the new Soviet state’s structure with Lenin proposing a Union of Socialist Soviet Republics with equal terms for all republics, including Russia. However, after his death, Stalin’s brutal policies led to the 1932-33 ‘Holodomor’ in Ukraine, resulting in the deaths of millions of peasants in the Ukraine.

At the time of the 1991 referendum, neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin had imagined the Soviet Union without Ukraine, its second-largest republic and a key element of Russian imperial and Soviet history and mythology.

Restoring the imperial project in any form would depend on Russia’s ability to bring Ukraine back into the fold, observes Plokhy.

**First draft of history**

Matthews *Overreach* is a superb first draft of history exploring Putin’s decision to bring Ukraine back into the fold by launching his offensive in a bubble of COVID-induced paranoia.

Among eyewitness accounts of Ukraine’s resilience in the face of the Russian invasion, none is more searing than Yaroslav Trofimov’s *Our Enemies Will Vanish* (2024), which invites comparisons with Michael Herr’s Vietnam war classic *Dispatches* (1977).

Shoumojit Banerjee is a Pune-based journalist and editor

THE DAILY QUIZ

## A quiz on the life and works of T.S. Eliot, one of 20th century’s greatest literary figures, on his 136th birthday

V.V. Ramanan

**QUESTION 1**

An easy one to begin with. Expand the initials T.S. in the great poet’s name.

**QUESTION 2**

Of the four parts of Eliot’s ‘Four Quartets’, two are ‘Burnt Norton’ and ‘East Coker’. Name the other two.

**QUESTION 3**

Which work is called Eliot’s ‘conversion poem’ because it was written after his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927?

**QUESTION 4**

To which literary figure was Eliot’s most famous work ‘The Wasteland’ dedicated and from where did he get the title?

**QUESTION 5**

In ‘Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats’, if Macavity is the Mystery Cat, then who are the The Cat about Town and The Railway Cat?

**QUESTION 6**

Before becoming a noted literary figure, at which famous bank did Eliot work?

**QUESTION 7**

In the ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, how does the protagonist measure out his life?



**Visual question:** This World Heritage Site is the setting for which of Eliot’s famous works?  
GETTY IMAGES

**Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:**

- The initial titles of the show *Friends*. **Ans: *Insomnia Cafe, Friends Like Us, and Six of One***
  - This character in the show had a pet monkey whose name was this. **Ans: *Ross; Marcel***
  - Courteney Cox was initially asked to play this role in the show. **Ans: *Rachel Green***
  - The name of the show in which Joey portrays the role of Dr. Drake Ramoray. **Ans: *Days of Our Lives***
  - The two main cast members who won an Emmy and the only actor who was not nominated. **Ans: *Jennifer Aniston and Lisa Kudrow won an Emmy. Cox is the only actor not to be nominated***
  - The show is quoted in this tennis player’s book. **Ans: *Andre Agassi; Open***
  - Identify this actor, who was married to this main actor of *Friends*. **Ans: *David Arquette; he was married to Courteney Cox***
- Early Birds:** Abhyuday Singh Bhadauria | Annkita Thakur | Bharath Viswanathan

Word of the day

**Clement:** physically mild (of weather or climate); inclined to show mercy (used of persons or behaviour)

**Usage:** *If he had been a more clement judge, he would have reduced the sentence.*

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/clementpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ˈklemənt/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject ‘Text & Context’

the hindu businessline.

THURSDAY - SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

## Pat on the back

FATF endorses India's efforts, but job's not done yet

**T**he Financial Action Task Force has been appreciative of India's recent efforts to deal with various shades, as it were, of illicit finance. A recent review by the FATF concluded that "India has implemented an anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (TF) framework that is achieving good results, including on risk understanding, access to beneficial ownership information and depriving criminals of their assets." This certificate makes India a more credible destination for doing business.

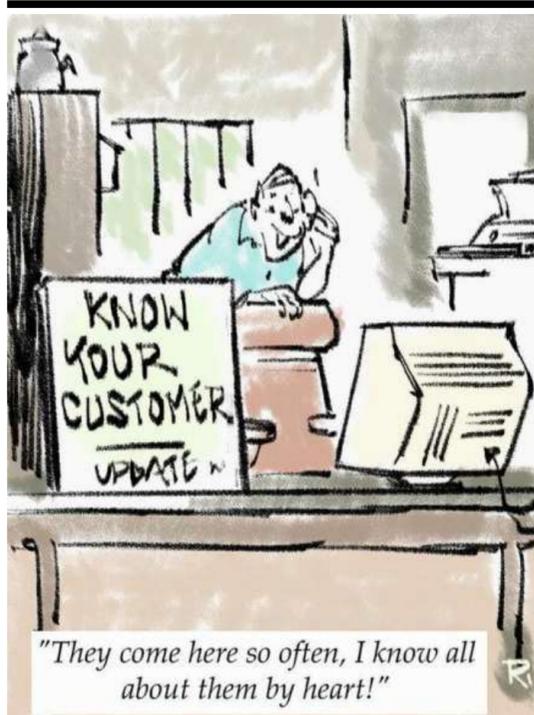
But gaps pointed out by FATF in the AML/TF system need to be addressed, even as India has managed to tick most boxes in FATF's technical rule book. Out of 40 recommendations of the FATF, India is compliant in 11 and largely so in 26. Regarding outcomes, India has achieved the second highest rating of 'substantial level of effectiveness' in six out of 11 parameters and the next rating of 'moderate level of effectiveness' in five metrics. The strides made in digitisation of payments and financial inclusion appear to have played an important role in increasing transparency and identifying suspicious transactions. The report observes that Indian authorities have developed the skillsets to deal with financial crime. But it points towards three areas where improvement is needed. One, more checks and balances are needed on politically exposed persons (PEPs), so that application of the money laundering provisions is seen to be even handed. These are individuals who hold or held prominent positions which can be linked to financial malpractices. Though due diligence is being done with many domestic PEPs, there is a hint of inconsistency in the identification of PEPs. A list of such sensitive posts can be prepared so that the banking system is alert about disclosure of their assets, salaries and other financial transactions.

Two, FATF has noted that while larger commercial banks are aware of money laundering and terror financing risks and have adequate systems to check them, similar systems are lacking in payments banks, rural banks and other smaller non-bank financial companies. RBI should review the systems at these entities and release fresh guidelines. The third area where the FATF wants the government to improve pertains to financial transactions involving non-profit organisations. These outfits are seen to be prone to misuse by money launderers and drug traffickers.

Indian authorities should also address FATF's concern regarding the backlog of cases relating to money laundering and terror financing in the courts. Setting up special benches to clear these cases may help. The authorities also need to improve their skills to investigate and prosecute cases relating to human trafficking, migrant smuggling and drug trafficking. Ultimately, investigative rigour is the name of the game.

## POCKET

RAVIKANTH



VIPIN SONDHII

**F**ormula 1 is a \$3.2-billion hi-tech, exhilaratingly competitive sport, with a race every fortnight, in different parts of the world. An F1 car can cost up to \$12 million with over 14,000 individual components and about 300 sensors when a race starts, but up to 600 sensors during testing. Up to 3GB of data is transmitted during a practice session, with up to 3TB of data during an entire race.

The viewing public sees the same cars — normally two cars, one for each driver — during the season. However, after every race, the cars are disassembled, components are checked and often replaced before the next event. Hundreds of component parts are produced each week for the cars because of continual design upgrades. Testing, shipment and assembly have to be done in days and weeks, not months. Mistakes are not an option.

The technology that supports this is the Digital Twin. It relies on humongous amounts of data from the sensors, so that decision-making by the driver and the engineers — both kerb side and in the factory — can be real-time. After all, a race is won, or lost, by a mere fraction of a second.

Digital twin technology has unlimited applications in space, where decisions have to be taken in real-time in split seconds, with huge cost and reputation implications. Therefore, building virtual replicas of satellites is a significant application.

## VIRTUAL REPLICA

Digital twinning is a technological innovation that can revolutionise the manufacturing industry. By creating a virtual replica of physical assets, processes or systems, digital twins can enable businesses to monitor, simulate and optimize real-world scenarios, in real time.

This can then result in enhancing productivity, improving efficiency and enabling predictive maintenance dramatically. With the rise of Industry 4.0, digital twinning will become indispensable.

A digital twin is a virtual model that mirrors a physical entity in real-time. The physical entity could be a machine, a production line, or even an entire factory. The data from the physical entity is collected through sensors, IoT devices, and other data-gathering instruments and then fed into the digital twin, allowing manufacturers to monitor and control operations virtually.

The digital twin continuously updates itself with real-world data, reflecting the exact condition of the physical asset. This ability to observe, simulate and control physical systems, makes digital twins particularly valuable in



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

## Digital twinning can rehaul manufacturing

**HITECH SCENARIO.** By simulating and controlling physical systems, digital twins can enhance efficiency, precision and cost-effectiveness

manufacturing, where efficiency, precision, time and cost-effectiveness are paramount.

The concept of digital twinning can be applied at various levels:

- Component Level: Monitoring the health of individual machine parts.
- System Level: Tracking and optimising an entire machine or system.
- Process Level: Simulating and optimizing an entire production process.

One of the critical advantages of digital twins is the ability to predict potential equipment failures before they occur. Predictive maintenance, facilitated by real-time data, reduces unplanned downtime, which can be very costly.

Second, digital twinning can enable manufacturers to simulate and test product designs and production processes without the need for physical prototypes. This reduces the time spent in development and testing, allowing companies to bring products to market much faster.

Third, digital twins can play a critical role in realising the next generation of electric vehicles, which will shape the future of the automobile industry. They will also bring a host of advantages,

**By creating a virtual replica of physical assets, processes or systems, digital twins can enable businesses to monitor, simulate and optimise real-world scenarios, in real time**

including autonomous vehicles and smart grid integration.

The digital twin provides real-time data on the car's performance, including sensor readings and operational conditions.

Fourth, the increasingly critical aspect of supply chain management in an uncertain world can be digitally twinned. By creating a digital duplicate of the entire supply chain, manufacturers can observe the real-time movement of raw materials, component parts and sub-assemblies. This visibility enables processing of customer orders to time and running plants optimally.

## UPSKILLING WORKERS

Fifth, manufacturers can train their workers virtually with simulations in digital twins. In doing so, they can enable workers to skill, upskill or reskill before going hands-on with the actual equipment. This reduces the likelihood of accidents and overall worker productivity, especially on vital and expensive equipment.

Digital twins can therefore be utilised in every aspect of the manufacturing value chain. They can create a platform for greater collaboration across different departments and locations within an organisation. Through digital twins, engineers, designers and operators can collaborate in real-time to address production issues, explore new ideas and implement innovations significantly faster.

The rise of Industry 4.0, which focuses on smart manufacturing through the use of advanced technologies such as AI, IoT and Robotics, is increasingly being adopted in India. Digital twins can form a critical

component of this transformation.

Indian manufacturers, particularly OEMs in the automotive, aerospace and defence sectors have begun exploring the use of digital twins to create smarter factories, streamline supply chains and enhance innovation.

Despite the immense potential of digital twinning in manufacturing, there are several challenges that need to be addressed for widespread adoption in India. One major challenge is the high upfront cost of implementing digital twin technology, which can be prohibitive, especially for small and medium enterprises.

Additionally, the lack of skilled talent capable for managing and analysing digital twin systems is a significant barrier. Data security and privacy concerns are also key issues, particularly in industries where sensitive information is involved. These challenges will need to be attended to.

However, the future of digital twins in manufacturing in India looks promising to start with and revolutionary, when applied to the entire business process. As technology continues to advance and become more affordable, especially sensors, the adoption of digital twins is expected to grow exponentially.

In India, initiatives like the National Program on Artificial Intelligence and the focus on smart manufacturing under the Make in India campaign are expected to drive further adoption of digital twins in the years ahead. The manufacturing industry would be well advised to gear up and invest for its use, to gain global competitive advantage early.

The writer is Independent Director and Former MD&CEO, Ashok Leyland and JCB India

## Parties world over are spending more to get votes

A recent IMF paper has surveyed 65 countries and found that expansionary fiscal policies are vital for keeping poll promises

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

**N**ow that a lot of important Assembly elections are either happening or just about to happen, all major political parties are coming out with their manifestos. All of them are promising welfare handouts on an enormous scale.

A few months ago I had written that this sort of in-your-face welfarism was becoming the political norm not just in India but all over the world.

This was leading to huge budget deficits in nearly all the countries and the resulting increases in money supply.

So I am happy to describe a very recent working paper from the IMF (No 194) that says the same thing, namely, "parties across the political spectrum sound increasingly similar when it comes to fiscal policy: they all campaign on ideas of a bigger government and promising more spending."

The paper has surveyed 65 countries. It says "political discourse on fiscal issues has become increasingly favourable to higher government spending since the 1960s."

They have looked at "the fiscal

content of over 4,500 political platforms from 720 national elections held between 1960 and 2022 in advanced and emerging countries." The data has come from something called the "Manifesto Project".

Indian commentators should read this paper carefully if only to feel superior that our politicians were amongst the pioneers of this kind of pay-as-you-go welfarism. Even now, despite the Modi government's reasonably tight-fisted approach, they are no slouches at spending our money for buying votes.

As the paper says, "People want more infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and services (education, health, safety), preferably at low or no additional cost. And politicians want people's votes."

Another notable finding of the paper is that "fiscal discourse turns more conservative under more adverse economic conditions, including in the aftermath of public debt surges, and after the adoption of fiscal rules, but only to a limited extent." That is, when the going gets tough, politicians the world over pay lip service to fiscal rectitude but, it turns out, only for a short time.



**POLL PROMISES.** Keeping voters happy v GANESAN

There are many other nuggets, such as "the widespread adoption of fiscal rules did not result in curtailing pro-spending rhetoric, suggesting that their success is only partial." You can say that again.

## FISCAL PROFLIGACY

Another nugget: "Expansionary fiscal policy seems to be one case in which politicians keep their election promises." The paper quantifies this tendency to be true to their word and further adds that tax cuts are not to be blamed for higher spending. Budget deficits are caused solely by fiscal profligacy.

However, the moment the fiscal balloon goes up, "the gradual fall in deficits is achieved by revenue increases." This means that the rich end up paying disproportionately for the votes bought by politicians.

The paper says that climate change, defence, infrastructure, healthcare, education and old people's welfare are the main money guzzlers. There's also good governance, which doesn't come cheap. The paper doesn't mention it.

But it has missed out an extremely important aspect. When you look at these expenditure items carefully, they all share one characteristic: they are all public or quasi-public goods.

Economics has studied public goods deeply for a long time and defines them as those whose marginal cost of producing one more unit is zero. They are goods whose consumption by one citizen does not reduce the consumption of another.

So while we can all berate politicians for using public funds for their own private gain, we also need to ask if what they are promising are public goods. Quite simply, an increase in the supply of public goods isn't a bribe to the voters. The reverse is also true.

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

## Promote regular jobs

This refers to the report 'Salaried staff put in longer hours than casual workers, finds PLFS' (September 25). Last few decades have seen casual labour or 'bulk contract employment' reducing regular employment opportunities world over. Militant unionism is seen as a reason for shrinking workforce. But the rise of workforce in the unorganised sector has its social costs. A middle path to ensure reasonable wages and health care are factored in the wage structure among the unorganised workforce will have to be found. Covering such workers under regular pension, provident fund and

health care schemes may go a long way in ameliorating some of the long-term uncertainties.

**MG Warrior**  
Mumbai

## Chess pride

This is with reference to the Editorial 'Kings and queens' (September 25). Our chess team has made India proud at the Olympiad in Budapest. In India, we give too much importance to cricket at the cost of other sports and this needs to change. There may be many sports persons in India, especially in rural and tribal areas, who are unable to make a mark in sports due to lack of funds and

support. That potential needs to be tapped.

**Venena Shenoy**  
Thane

## Retrospective pain

With reference to 'Merger norms: CCI's retrospective googly' (September 25), finally the institution brought out reforms in the form of ex-ante norms in determining the abuse of the domination by the entities in the market. The latest changes are in respect of fair value based cap on threshold limits in M&A transactions. However, the applicability of the new regulations retrospectively for all the

merger transactions was did in a haste without foreseeing the consequences.

Besides increasing compliance cost, it would be detrimental to the interests of both bootstrapped start-ups and discourage the foreign investors to venture into merger and acquisition transactions.

**Sitaram Popuri**  
Bengaluru

## Pollution worries

With nearly half of all posts in state pollution control boards (SPCBs) remaining vacant for long, effective monitoring and implementation of policy measures meant to tackle air,

water, and noise pollution took a back seat in the country.

The SPCBs have not just failed to fill up their sanctioned strength but also have not done justice to their mandate by failing to rope in an adequate number of independent scientists.

With increasing pollution, the States and Centre must ensure environmental regulation keeps pace with the demands of the growing economy. Concerted measures aimed at improving the regulatory efficiency of SPCBs are the need of hour.

**M Jeyaram**  
Sholavandan (TN)

# US election clincher

West Asia policy will be a defining factor

Sridhar Krishnaswami

When September draws to a close, President Joe Biden will have drawn the curtains down on two things he has presided over in his tenure at the Oval Office: the meeting of the leaders of the Quad in Delaware; and an address to the United Nations General Assembly.

In New York, President Biden argued that some things are more important than staying in power and that the world had a responsibility to tackle the challenges it faced.

In the name of security, Quad leaders said: "We strongly oppose any destabilising or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion...We seek a region where no country dominates and no country is dominated — one where all countries are free from coercion, and can exercise their agency to determine their futures," a message that indirectly spoke of the goings-on in the South Pacific, including the South China Seas. All of this without mentioning China!

## BIGGER CATASTROPHE

The larger goings-on internationally are a different cup of tea, especially the war in the Ukraine which is in its third year, and the world is getting ready to observe October 7 as the first anniversary of the Hamas terror attacks on Israel and the bloody reprisals that are going on — that has left some 40,000 Palestinians dead and thousands injured in a small piece of land called Gaza without food, water and other basic amenities.

Worse, West Asia is looking at a bigger catastrophe with the ongoing Israeli escalations in Lebanon against the Hizbollah that is said to have left about 600 dead. Leaders in the region and elsewhere have been quite scornful of the fashion in which the Biden administration has responded to what is seen as an ongoing criminal genocide in the Gaza, a troubling scene that has certainly dented agendas and legacies.

Generally and in the context of alliance politics, the loud debate on "footing the bill" and ensuring to putting an end to free loaders, Republicans like Donald Trump have tried to up the ante claiming they had been instrumental in forcing NATO, for instance, to fork out more.

But the fact that allies in Europe and Asia have always been



**FINAL ADDRESS.** Biden calls for tackling global challenges

sharing in tangible and intangible ways are quite well known but deliberately glossed over in heated campaign rhetoric. It is maintained that America's share of costs of collective defence in Europe and Asia may be "disproportionate" but not "lopsided".

American taxpayers have spent some \$175 billion over the Ukrainian conflict that includes military, economic, humanitarian assistance and helping nations bordering the war zone. Trump may say that if he were elected on November 5, he could end the war in a day.

This would remind some of the campaign of 1968 when Nixon put forth his "secret plan" to end the Vietnam war that finally ended only in 1975 but not before a widening spectre involving Laos and Cambodia.

Foreign policy hardly matters in Presidential elections except perhaps in one or two instances in recent memory: like the Vietnam war and the Iran hostage situation of 1979. But the thinking this time around is that given the tight race between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris — seen as next only to the John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon of 1960 — West Asia, especially Gaza and now the prospect of a larger war in the region, could be a factor in a battleground state like Michigan that has a large population of Arab Americans.

Conflicts raging in the world are unsettling the international system and global players have a duty to find ways to bring normality.

But the task has to be equally spread minus selfish political compulsions, failing which Biden's final address to the UN General Assembly will go down as an overview of fifty years to a freshers' world history class.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations



MOHAN R LAVI

The death of a young chartered accountant, Anna Sebastian Perayil, in Pune in July 2024 allegedly due to work pressure has generated a national debate with an eclectic variety of views. The letter written by the mother of the deceased to the boss of the accounting firm makes it clear that it was work pressure that caused her untimely demise. Anyone who has worked in the environment of a large accounting firm can relate to much of what has been said in that letter.

Finance departments in companies and their auditors are in a perennial race against time to meet deadlines. Every major law in India — the Companies Act, Income Tax Act, GST Act, SEBI (LODR) regulations and the Provident Fund Act to name a few — have deadlines for either filing forms or making payments. Missing deadlines could impact careers and corporate reputations in addition to penal levies.

This forces companies to push their audit firms to meet these deadlines at any cost. Partners in audit firms push this to their managers who in turn push this to those working under them.

The entire supply chain is focused only on ensuring that the deadline is met irrespective of the hours it takes to meet it. The longer hours put in works well for some firms who can charge clients extra. In addition to meeting strict deadlines, over the last decade or so, audit firms in India have another responsibility — defending the audits they have done.

Regulators in India have penalised auditors who have been found wanting in their quality and compliance procedures. Regulators have been forced to audit the work done by auditors due to the increasingly worrying trend of accounting accidents taking place all over the globe — from Enron in 2002 to Satyam in 2009 to Evergrande in 2023. Meeting deadlines and ensuring that audit quality can be defended only add to the pressure on those working on the audit. Defending an audit requires collecting and maintenance of a massive number of documents in a limited time.

As a solution, there have been suggestions in some quarters that laws in India can be a bit flexible on deadlines — giving a sort of a grace period.

This is a welcome suggestion, but it is a fact that in India, if September 30 is a



# Introspection time for audit profession

**DEADLINE PRESSURE.** The Anna Sebastian episode raises searching questions

KR DEEPAK

deadline, many would meet the deadline only on that day and not a day earlier — its just exciting to do things this way. Given a grace period, they would simply extend their deadline to the end of the grace period.

## LACK OF RESOURCES

Another factor that many audit firms in India are facing is a lack of quality resources.

Considering all the happenings in the auditing environment over the last decade or so, auditing as a career choice has lost its *mojo*. Professionals opt for jobs in consulting which offers better

**The lack of quality resources forces audit firms to over-utilise the good resources they have leading to work pressure**

emoluments with reduced pressure and minimal risk.

The lack of quality resources forces audit firms to over-utilise the good resources they have leading to work pressure.

Labour laws in India have been enshrined in Chapters III and IV of the Constitution of India. These Chapters have a Concurrent List which empowers both the Central as well as State Governments to pass labour legislation — which is why we cannot have a single law across the country.

Recently, the Karnataka government proposed a law that mandated software companies to employ a certain minimum number of locals. After protests, the proposal was shelved.

The Maharashtra Government has stated that the accounting firm in Pune did not have a registration under the Shops and Establishments Act — an Act that has laid down maximum working

hours for an adult at nine hours per day or 48 hours per week. Hence, it is not surprising that, when the comment of Infosys co-founder NR Narayana Murthy that Indians should work a minimum of 70 hours per week met with a lot of criticism.

It is hoped that Anna Sebastian's episode would force employers to take a deep, hard look at their employee policies. It is possible that professional bodies such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, NASCOM, CII and FICCI would sensitise their members to take a close look at the employee practices at their organisations. It is necessary that regulatory bodies ask entities to provide some data on their employee policies. When everyone takes some responsibility, possibilities of change brighten up.

The writer is a chartered accountant

# SEBI's MF Lite should give retail investors a leg-up

P Saravanan  
Ramasamy Venkatesh  
A Paul Williams

The Securities and Exchange Board of India recently unveiled a proposal that has the potential to reshape the landscape of investments in the country. The proposal centres on the introduction of a new asset class, tentatively named MF Lite. The aim is to offer a regulated framework that empowers mutual funds to venture into the realm of alternative assets and other areas presently available only to HNIs. This would effectively open doors for retail investors, allowing them to participate in the potential gains associated with these asset classes.

The proposed asset class is designed to provide investors with a regulated investment product that offers higher risk-taking capabilities and flexibility in portfolio construction, similar to PMS. However, it will have a higher minimum investment threshold than MFs (but less than PMS), making it accessible to a more niche segment of investors. SEBI proposed a minimum investment of ₹10 lakh for this new asset class, which is considerably higher than the minimum investment

required for most MFs.

This initiative by SEBI aims to address the growing demand for investment products with investible funds between ₹10 lakh and ₹50 lakh that offer higher returns and greater flexibility than traditional MFs. MF Lite schemes are allowed to invest in a wider range of assets such as unlisted securities, structured products, and derivatives. The new asset class will offer fund managers more flexibility in constructing portfolios compared to MFs. This will allow them to tailor portfolios to the specific needs and risk profiles of investors. Schemes under MF Lite are expected to have longer lock-in periods compared to traditional mutual funds, reflecting the illiquid nature of some of the underlying assets.

## PROPOSED STRUCTURE

Given the nascent stage of the MF Lite proposal, it is crucial to draw inspiration from existing structures like AIFs and other funds to design a robust framework. Like AIFs, MF Lite schemes may be allowed to focus on specific alternative asset classes, such as secondaries, pre-IPO investments, and seed capital. This specialisation would enable fund managers to



**NEW AVENUE.** For higher returns

develop expertise in these niche areas and deliver better returns to investors. Currently, retail investors have limited access to private equity and venture capital investments, which play a crucial role in funding start-ups and driving innovation. Allowing MF Lite schemes to invest in these areas would enable retail investors to benefit from the growth of these companies.

To address the inherent illiquidity of alternative assets, MF Lite schemes need to incorporate a shock absorption mechanism, akin to the ones used for debt instruments. This could involve creating a dedicated liquidity pool or

allowing for partial redemptions in times of market stress. Moreover, traditionally, banks have played a pivotal role in liquidity transformation, channelling retail deposits into loans and other assets. However, this model is evolving. By allowing MF Lite funds to access securitisation products offered by banks, we could usher in a new era of modern banking. This would enable banks to efficiently manage their balance sheets and free up capital for further lending, while providing MF Lite funds with access to a wider range of investment opportunities.

To strike a balance between accessibility and investor protection, MF Lite schemes could adopt a tiered structure with different investor categories, similar to AIFs. This would allow for varying levels of sophistication and risk appetite. On the whole, SEBI's proposal for MF Lite is a welcome move. However, it's crucial to design a robust framework for MF Lite that addresses the inherent risks and complexities of alternative investments.

Saravanan is a professor of finance and accounting at IIM Tiruchirappalli, Venkat is the Executive Chairman and Co-founder at Sernova Financial, UK and Williams is the Head of India at Sernova Financial

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 26, 2004

## Air India chief favours merger with IA

Keeping in sync with the international trend, the Chairman and Managing Director of Air India, Mr V Thulasidas, said it should be merged with the domestic carrier Indian Airlines. The Air India chief said that before pursuing the open skies policy further, the Government should strengthen the role of the national carrier to protect the economic interests of the country.

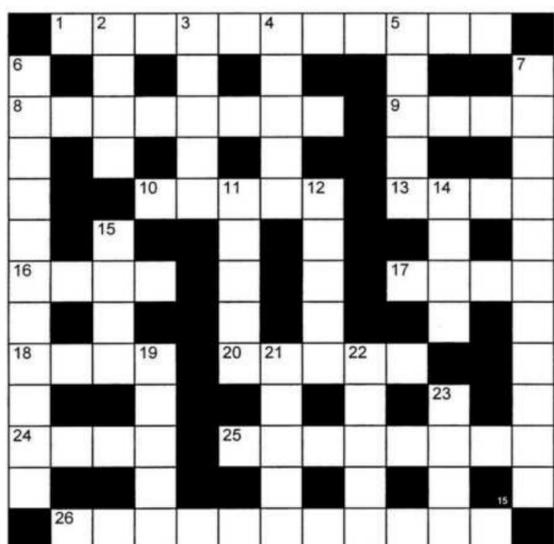
## Manmohan says 'it is my duty to promote India'

The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, said it was his "duty and obligation" that, whenever he travelled abroad, he should seek to promote India and that he did not believe he had said or done anything wrong. The Prime Minister, during the course of an extensive press conference, was asked to comment on a criticism in India that he was like a "salesman" during this overseas visit.

## No service tax on interest on overdraft, cash credit facility

The Finance Ministry has held that interest on overdraft facility or cash credit facility offered to a customer by a banking company, a financial institution or any commercial concern would not be subjected to service tax. The exemption will be available only if the interest portion is shown separately in an invoice.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2534



## EASY

### ACROSS

- Thinking as one should (5-6)
- Cooking joint (8)
- Metal club (4)
- Piece of broken pottery (5)
- Group of three players (4)
- Part of eye; flower (4)
- The dogfish, as food (4)
- Wish for the future (4)
- Prepare letter for posting (5)
- Role (4)
- A forester (8)
- A charge of grave offences against state (11)

### DOWN

- Modern-day Persia (4)
- Hook, catch, fasten (5)
- Lesser (5)
- Move with the current (5)
- Metropolitans (11)
- Record of offence on licence (11)
- Tapestry for hanging (5)
- Doctrine laid down (5)
- Grub up, as pig (4)
- Trimming of yarn with hard core (4)
- To preclude (law) (5)
- Pool of tips for distribution (5)
- Electronic device to transmit and receive data (5)
- So let it be (4)

## NOT SO EASY

### ACROSS

- Proper-thinking conservatives looked after things (5-6)
- Harshly critical of the cooking (8)
- This side was taken by Cromwell (4)
- Bit of pot has been broken on the road (5)
- Three players riot if tail-ender opens (4)
- A flag showing the rainbow goddess (4)
- Dogfish one left his American replacement (4)
- Anticipation he has of taking work in (4)
- Put one's foot down as a mark of authority (5)
- Don't stay together if it's not complete (4)
- Forester might doom swan to destruction (8)
- The arraignment of one MP men cheat to bring about (11)

### DOWN

- One managed a country in the Middle East (4)
- Sort of knot may prove a bit of a hold-up (5)
- Younger brother Bob at school rung on six bells (5)
- The way the conversation's going where the snow's piled up (5)
- High church men shop around with Bach, sir (11)
- One's backing is of sort men need, perhaps (11)
- Tapestry that's hung in embarrassment (5)
- Collection of tips patron chooses to hold (5)
- Utterly defeat some old party (4)
- I'm having my doctor around for a yarn (4)
- Poet's turn to preclude it in law (5)
- Collection of tips patron chooses to hold (5)
- Fashion model's first computer device (5)
- With which one might mean to conclude prayer (4)

## SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2533

**ACROSS** 1. Solidify 4. Ogle 8. Ray 9. Mouse 10. Ant 11. Palette 12. Rider 13. Malingering 17. Chair 18. Sustain 20. Eta 21. Heard 22. Pie 23. Note 24. Startled

**DOWN** 1. Straps 2. Loyal 3. Fluke 5. Gladden 6. Entire 7. Terrorised 9. Matriarchy 14. Adamant 15. Screen 16. Intend 18. Smart 19. Appal

## Labour market signals

India needs better-quality jobs

The latest annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for July 2023-June 2024, released this week, shows the unemployment rate remained at 3.2 per cent, the same as last year. However, the overall labour force participation rate (LFPR) under "usual status" for persons aged 15 years and above rose to a seven-year high of 60.1 per cent compared to 49.8 per cent in 2017-18. The female LFPR — rural and urban combined — also increased from a low of 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in the latest survey. The comparable number for males was 78.8 per cent. Labour-force participation increasing and unemployment remaining the same suggest that the economy is creating jobs. Yet, a number of factors constrain India's labour market from realising its full potential. Despite an increase in employment generation, the quality of employment remains a matter of concern. The female unemployment rate, for instance, increased from 2.9 per cent in 2022-23 to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24.

While the increase in labour participation is encouraging, recent studies have noted that an uptick in the female LFPR could be distress-led. More women may be entering the labour force to support family incomes. Their share in regular-wage employment also remains stagnant at 15.9 per cent. At the same time, the share of women employed in regular salaried jobs in urban India has declined from 50.8 per cent in 2022-23 to 49.4 per cent in 2023-24. India has consistently been witnessing a surge in self-employment, with well over half the country's workforce being employed as "own account workers and employers" and "helpers in household enterprises". Over 58 per cent of workers under "usual status" were self-employed in 2023-24. In 2022-23 and 2021-22, the self-employment rates were 57.3 and 55.8 per cent, respectively. Worse, the rise in the self-employed category is driven mostly by those identified as "unpaid helpers in household enterprises", who comprised 19.4 per cent of the workforce in 2023-24, up from 18.3 per cent in 2022-23 and 13.6 per cent in 2017-18. Clearly, the increase in self-employment and work in family enterprises highlights the lack of remunerative employment opportunities in the country. Employment in these categories usually does not come with any written job contracts and earnings are low.

The Indian labour market suffers from yet another deficiency. While the agriculture sector's contribution to India's gross domestic product at current prices is 18.2 per cent, it employed about 46.1 per cent of the workforce during 2023-24, a 30-basis-point increase over the previous year, indicating that job creation in the country is still far from adequate. In this, it must be noted, there are inter-state variations. Several high-income states like Kerala, Haryana, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu show a substantially lower share of agriculture in employment, with rates in the 22-28 per cent range, mostly comparable to upper-middle-income countries. Employment in agriculture must be commensurate with the sector's contribution to the economy. The basic policy failure over the decades has been India's inability to increase employment in low-skill manufacturing, which would have helped pull people out of agriculture. This would have boosted productivity and growth. The state of the labour market calls for increasing focus on manufacturing. A large number of people engaged in agriculture and self-employment with low earnings can increase both economic and social tensions in the country.

## Green businesses

Indian firms still have a long way to go

How quickly firms adapt to the climate-change challenge will determine the achievement of emission targets. A global survey conducted recently by the Boston Consulting Group and CO2 AI, a sustainability-management platform, highlights that relative to 2022 and 2023, progress on climate issues stagnated this year. Using the data collected from 1,864 companies, belonging to 16 major industries and accounting for around 45 per cent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emission, the report, titled "Boosting Your Bottom Line Through Decarbonization", came at a time when this year's summer officially became the hottest on record. Of the surveyed companies, only 9 per cent comprehensively report Scope 1, 2 and 3 emission, an internationally recognised standard for classifying GHG emissions based on their source. At the same time, only 16 per cent and 8 per cent of the companies have set and achieved emission-reductions targets, respectively. The corresponding numbers in India are higher than the global average, with 12 per cent of the companies reporting emissions, 24 per cent setting targets, and 14 per cent reducing emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. Overall, the country lags behind only China and Brazil.

Over 40 per cent of the Indian companies reported significant benefits from decarbonisation. Globally, only about 25 per cent of the companies reported annual decarbonisation benefits worth at least 7 per cent of sales. This equates to about \$200 million in net benefit after investment. These benefits mostly accrue from lower operating costs, increased revenues, taxation benefits, enhanced reputational value, and regulatory compliance. In fact, over 50 per cent of the companies believe 10-40 per cent of their emission footprint can be decarbonised at net cost savings. It is also in the interests of firms, particularly in the developing world, to decarbonise, given that trade barriers are increasingly being linked to carbon emissions. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the United States' Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and the European Green Deal (which covers the CBAM) are some of the climate-focused trade policies that aim to increase global regulatory pressures on companies to invest in combating climate change. However, carrot-and-stick policies can work towards reducing the carbon intensity of companies only when there are adequate green investment incentives, and companies can successfully raise funds for mitigation and adaptation strategies. This will require the availability of funds at a reasonable cost.

To get efficiency gains from decarbonisation in the future and reshape manufacturing practices for greater sustainability, companies across India need to leverage advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). A tech firm in California, for instance, has developed an emission-tracking platform that combines satellite imagery with AI-based techniques, enabling companies to track, trace, and reduce their emissions. Firms can also gain from calculating emission at product level and remaining committed to a climate-transition plan. At this juncture, India must also consider carbon pricing and targeted investment subsidies for firms. Developing the Indian Carbon Market and the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme is ultimately expected to enhance energy transition efforts and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy.



# Conflict management: Thy name is governance

In the realm of market regulation, managing conflict is the key to effective governance

Once, a Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) chairperson was mocked for never having "seen a share certificate", casting doubts on his ability to regulate the securities markets. Today, the tables have turned, as another chairperson has drawn attention for having "seen share certificates". What was once considered a qualification is now perceived as a potential liability, bringing conflicts of interest to the forefront of governance. In between, a different chairperson with modest holdings chose to divest them before assuming office, reinforcing the need for regulators to, like Caesar's wife, remain beyond reproach, free from even the appearance of conflict.

In a market economy, conflict of interest is inherent and often unavoidable in any professional or organisational setting, as individuals and entities juggle multiple roles and responsibilities often with competing interests. However, the problem arises when an individual in a regulatory position allows personal interests to influence his/her official decisions. While excluding individuals with potential conflicts from regulatory roles might seem a straightforward solution, it risks narrowing the pool of qualified candidates. The key is not having conflicts, but ensuring they don't cloud judgement.

In the United States, it is common for individuals to move between regulatory agencies and the private sector. Individuals with market experience often join agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), bringing valuable insights into industry practices. At the same time, SEC officials frequently transition to senior roles in financial firms, leveraging their regulatory experience. This "revolving door" fosters a deeper understanding between regulators and industry, enhancing oversight and compliance. However, a host of safeguards — disclosure, recusals, cooling-off periods, and more — are in place to mitigate conflicts while

ensuring that the exchange of expertise is beneficial.

Historically, the government played a dual role — running businesses through entities like BSNL and MTNL in telecom, and GIC and LIC in insurance — while also making rules to regulate these sectors. This created a perception that the government, being both a player and a regulator, would favour its own enterprises. Businesses were wary of a system where their competitor also set the rules, issued licences, conducted investigations, and imposed penalties. To address this inherent conflict of interest, independent regulators, such as the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission for electricity, Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board for fossil fuels, and Sebi for securities markets, were established to regulate businesses. The withdrawal of government nominees from the governing boards of self-regulatory organisations like stock exchanges further mitigated the conflict.

In the case of securities markets, this shifted the conflict, along with the responsibility, to Sebi. Initially, the Sebi Act, 1992, sought to address this by prohibiting directors of companies from serving on Sebi Board. The rules mandated that Sebi members avoid financial or other interests that could prejudice their functions. However, the Sebi Act was amended in 1995 to allow company directors to join the board, with mechanisms to manage potential conflicts. The amendment aimed to "allow directors of companies to be appointed as members of the Board so that the Board benefits from the expertise of people familiar with the capital market."

This brought in a few high-profile company directors as part-time members of Sebi's board, but they were not available on a full-time basis. Sebi typically attracts talent from two streams for full-time board positions: Public sector (government included) professionals, who usually do not own shares and thus



M S SAHOO & SUMIT AGRAWAL

related to defence and green technologies. The focus of the fabrication plant, as the US-India fact sheet states, will be on "sensing, communications, electronic power applications for national security, next generation telecommunications and green energy applications." This fab facility is not merely the first plant of its kind in India, it will be among the first multi-material fab plants to be established anywhere in the world. Consequently, chip manufacturing will receive a significant boost, bringing considerable reciprocal benefits to both countries in the area of defence.

Despite the landmark agreement, two caveats must be considered. Firstly, the collaboration between USSF, Bharat Semi and 3rdiTech is ultimately subject to US export control regulations. These regulations come in the form of the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) of 2018, which seeks to protect US technology from being exported to countries that Washington considers inimical to its interests. The ECRA was passed by the US Congress to prevent the People's Republic of China (PRC) from gaining access to restricted and foundational technologies covering semiconductors and cybersecurity that are vital to American national security. These restrictions also include technical capacities, related knowledge, and specifications that also cover JVs like the one India and the US have just concluded with an agreement on semiconductors. Washington's approach to technology-related export controls is defined in very broad terms.

This brings us to the second and corollary caveat, the ECRA not only controls items that have undergone production in the US, but the law also imposes controls on items exported from other countries that happen to use American technology that were



HARSH V PANT & KARTIK BOMMAKANTI

earlier exported from the US, especially if the percentage of US origin technology exceeds 25 per cent. The latter is also known as the 25 per cent rule. These export control restrictions underwent further tightening in early 2020 during the Trump administration. While the primary target of high-technology restrictions, particularly regarding semiconductors, has been and remains the PRC, secondary targets can also fall under export control restrictions, giving the ECRA extraterritorial reach.

For instance, American companies exploited a loophole in the ECRA that allowed their overseas facilities or subsidiaries to sell to entities like the Chinese company Huawei. This loophole was plugged when further amendments were introduced that effectively gave the US Department of Commerce more leeway in prohibiting export of items from overseas facilities that had no direct American technological content or inputs, but were based on American origin designs and blueprints. Among the primary targets of this restriction was the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), which exported considerably to Huawei.

While there is much to celebrate about the recently concluded semiconductor fabrication agreement between India and the US, New Delhi will also need to be mindful of the need to align or harmonise its own export control regulations with that of the US. Otherwise, India risks running afoul of American export restrictions, which, as noted, can be defined expansively and may sow tension between Washington and New Delhi in the future. For now, the US-India semiconductor accord marks a substantive shift in the US' high-technology strategy and promises to be a harbinger of many good things to come.

face fewer conflicts, and private sector professionals, who may own securities and thus have potential conflicts. To effectively utilise both streams of talent, Sebi voluntarily implemented the Code on Conflict of Interest for Board Members in 2008, establishing a framework for managing and mitigating conflicts.

Sebi recognised early on that effective governance of the market hinges on managing conflicts. It set out to eliminate conflicts among frontline regulators, who are essential for maintaining market integrity. Historically, stock exchanges regulated brokers and markets, with brokers owning and governing the exchanges while trading on them. This setup led to repeated misconduct, as brokers' private interests sometimes overshadowed public interests. To address this, stock exchanges were demutualised and corporatised in 2005, limiting brokers' influence.

Over time, regulations were tightened: Brokers can no longer sit on the governing board. They may hold up to 50 per cent of shares, while the managing director is prohibited from holding any shares in a broking entity. Demutualisation introduced new conflicts between the commercial aspirations and regulatory responsibilities of stock exchanges. Sebi addressed them by regulating securities transactions by directors, requiring the majority of the board to be public interest directors, and creating separate verticals for regulatory and commercial functions. Similar provisions broadly apply to the other frontline regulators like depositories and clearing corporations.

Sebi employs conflict management as a key tool to enhance the governance of markets, asset management, product distribution, and companies. It prohibits insiders from using confidential information for personal gain and prevents intermediaries from front-running trades for their own benefit. Key executives in asset management companies are required to invest a minimum amount in the schemes they manage or oversee, aligning their interests with those of investors, while employees are restricted from trading in securities of investee companies. Investment advisers and research analysts must avoid promoting financial products where they have a personal interest, with mandatory disclosure of conflicts. Related parties are barred from voting on related-party transactions, while independent directors are denied stock options to ensure impartial decision-making.

As the securities market is growing in complexity and sophistication, its regulator must have the flexibility to attract talent from diverse sources. Even the government, traditionally reliant on career public servants, is increasingly seeking talent from the private sector on contractual terms. Just as Sebi prescribes and enforces governance norms for frontline regulators, markets, and listed entities, the government must implement a comprehensive conflict management framework to effectively address all types of conflicts involving all members, including nominee members, of every regulator across regulatory functions — quasi-legislative, executive, and quasi-judicial. This framework should draw from the governance norms of frontline regulators, market and corporate governance practices, and international standards, ensuring that individuals in regulatory roles remain beyond reproach, preventing any collateral damage to the regulator.

The authors are legal practitioners. Both worked for Sebi previously

# Fab pact: A harbinger of good things ahead

In a significant milestone, the United States and India reached an agreement to establish a semiconductor plant in India that will cater to national security and defence. As a Quad member whose interests largely align with the US, India makes for a compelling partner in the face of China's emergence as a major geostrategic threat and technological challenge.

More specifically, this latest agreement is the result of an initiative between Bharat Semi, 3rdiTech, and the United States Space Force (USSF). Critical materials essential for semiconductor development and manufacturing — such as infrared, gallium nitride, and silicon carbide — are central to the agreement. What makes this deal stand out is its unique collaborative nature, involving a key branch of the US military, the USSF, and Indian industry.

If implemented effectively, the agreement promises to bring considerable benefits to India's domestic high-technology industry, aligning well with the Modi government's National Semiconductor Mission. The aim of the joint venture (JV) is to establish a fabrication plant focused on achieving safe, secure, and resilient supply chains. This semiconductor agreement will reduce India's billion-dollar annual import of semiconductors for servicing its national security requirements and make the country a key hub in the semiconductor supply chain. India is already breaching critical technological thresholds in the semiconductor domain, as exemplified by Bharat Semi, one of the parties in the JV. Bharat Semi has a fabrication facility that develops compound semiconductors incorporating materials like silicon carbide and gallium nitride, offering superior performance to traditional semiconductors involving high-voltage and high-temperature applications

related to defence and green technologies.

The focus of the fabrication plant, as the US-India fact sheet states, will be on "sensing, communications, electronic power applications for national security, next generation telecommunications and green energy applications." This fab facility is not merely the first plant of its kind in India, it will be among the first multi-material fab plants to be established anywhere in the world. Consequently, chip manufacturing will receive a significant boost, bringing considerable reciprocal benefits to both countries in the area of defence.

Despite the landmark agreement, two caveats must be considered. Firstly, the collaboration between USSF, Bharat Semi and 3rdiTech is ultimately subject to US export control regulations. These regulations come in the form of the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) of 2018, which seeks to protect US technology from being exported to countries that Washington considers inimical to its interests. The ECRA was passed by the US Congress to prevent the People's Republic of China (PRC) from gaining access to restricted and foundational technologies covering semiconductors and cybersecurity that are vital to American national security. These restrictions also include technical capacities, related knowledge, and specifications that also cover JVs like the one India and the US have just concluded with an agreement on semiconductors. Washington's approach to technology-related export controls is defined in very broad terms.

This brings us to the second and corollary caveat, the ECRA not only controls items that have undergone production in the US, but the law also imposes controls on items exported from other countries that happen to use American technology that were

earlier exported from the US, especially if the percentage of US origin technology exceeds 25 per cent. The latter is also known as the 25 per cent rule.

These export control restrictions underwent further tightening in early 2020 during the Trump administration. While the primary target of high-technology restrictions, particularly regarding semiconductors, has been and remains the PRC, secondary targets can also fall under export control restrictions, giving the ECRA extraterritorial reach.

For instance, American companies exploited a loophole in the ECRA that allowed their overseas facilities or subsidiaries to sell to entities like the Chinese company Huawei. This loophole was plugged when further amendments were introduced that effectively gave the US Department of Commerce more leeway in prohibiting export of items from overseas facilities that had no direct American technological content or inputs, but were based on American origin designs and blueprints. Among the primary targets of this restriction was the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), which exported considerably to Huawei.

While there is much to celebrate about the recently concluded semiconductor fabrication agreement between India and the US, New Delhi will also need to be mindful of the need to align or harmonise its own export control regulations with that of the US. Otherwise, India risks running afoul of American export restrictions, which, as noted, can be defined expansively and may sow tension between Washington and New Delhi in the future. For now, the US-India semiconductor accord marks a substantive shift in the US' high-technology strategy and promises to be a harbinger of many good things to come.

The authors are, respectively, vice-president for studies and foreign policy, and senior fellow, national security and defence, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

# Transforming the future of war



## BOOK REVIEW

AJAI SHUKLA

The biggest wars of the century gone by were won more by the side with greater industrial capability and technological excellence than those with larger populations or greater mineral wealth. During World War II, the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) diverted almost their entire research, development and manufacturing capability to the industrial scale production of combat equipment, establishing what came to be known as "total war economics". Even women left the homestead to work full-time at assembling weapons, equipment and ammunition, as

illustrated by posters of "Rosie the Riveter" — the American housewife working heroically on the factory floor. Practically every organ of these governments coordinated its efforts towards producing war materials as a result of which the US alone built over 150 combat aircraft and a large warship every day.

Today, the global geostrategic arena is witnessing a different churn as America, still the world's biggest superpower, seeks to contain a fast-rising rival, China. Beijing has recently ordered all commercial firms within its borders to make their research and technology available for military exploitation. To marshal comparable assets, the US government has to strengthen the relationship between the US Department of Defense (the Pentagon) and the US private industry, especially the computer hardware and software hub in California known as Silicon Valley. This book tells us how the US managed to achieve this.

The book's two authors are: Raj M Shah, (Raj) who started out as an F-16 fighter pilot in the US National Guard

before becoming a serial technology entrepreneur; and Christopher Kirchoff (Chris), a Harvard- and Cambridge-educated specialist in emerging technologies. They formed an excellent twosome: "Raj was a tech guy who knew about national security. Chris was a national security guy who understood tech."

Raj first experienced the gap between technology, as it is provided to military users, and how it is actually used by combat units in the field. Two weeks into his first combat tour of Iraq in 2006, Raj was flying an F-16 fighter, in pitch darkness, along the Iraq-Iran border, when he realised that he couldn't discern which side of the border he was on. His F-16 was an aerodynamic marvel that could outfly practically any adversary in the sky. However, its outdated navigation system couldn't trace the aircraft's location on a digital map, running the risk of an international incident. With no way to update the navigation software, Raj hacked into his own avionics. He took a Compaq iPAQ, a handheld device for checking email,

loaded it with civilian navigation software and strapped it to his knee when he flew. In Raj's own words, "The software in that little \$300 gadget did a better job of telling him where he was than the system in a \$30 million jet."

The central message of the book is: The days of technology "trickle down"

are over, when the frontlines of science and technology were drawn in military and space laboratories and their usage was then extended to civilian derivatives and products. Today, new technologies mostly germinate in small civilian start-ups, and their usage is then extended to military products. The author finds that most Americans remain unaware that their military's advantage in weapons technology has been largely eclipsed by the commercial systems that more innovative adversaries, such as the Chinese, are likely to field in battle. It took Raj and Chris an extended banging of heads against the Pentagon

bureaucracy before they managed to convince the Department of Defense of the need to set up a unit that would be charged with bringing Silicon Valley's cutting-edge technology to America's military. The idea eventually drew the attention of the technology-friendly Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, who personally drove the

policy that established this system. The system that was set up was called the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU). Dramatically, it took on the name of Unit X.

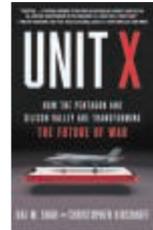
The DIU first had to overcome the Pentagon's prickly relationship with

Silicon Valley, which had long been encumbered by slow-moving processes that acted as a brake on innovation. Unit X was specifically designed as a bridge to Silicon Valley technologists that would accelerate the bringing of state-of-the-art software and hardware to the battle space. Given the authority to cut through red tape and to function almost as a venture capital firm, Raj, Chris and

those who followed them were tasked specifically with meeting immediate military needs with technology from Valley startups rather than from the so-called "primes" — aerospace and defence behemoths like Lockheed, Raytheon, and Boeing.

Raj and Chris describe being dumbstruck by the speed at which cheap, modern technology, such as low-cost drones, were changing the calculus in combat. Raj's F-16 fighter was designed to take on Russian MiGs. In a one-to-one aerial confrontation today, the F-16 pilot would probably shoot down the MiG and return safely. However, as Ukraine demonstrated in September 2023 in an attack on Russia's air base at Pskov, cheap, kamikaze drones can easily strike and get away because modern fighters have no weapons designed to shoot down small drones.

America's arsenal, fast-tracked by the DIU, is transforming how war is fought. Drones that can fly into buildings and map their interiors, micro-satellites that can see through clouds, and battle command centres powered by artificial intelligence: This book fascinatingly describes American efforts to remain the top dog in a fast-changing geopolitical landscape.



**UNIT X: How the Pentagon and Silicon Valley are transforming the future of war**  
Author: Raj M Shah & Christopher Kirchoff  
Publisher: Simon & Schuster  
Pages: 300  
Price: ₹1,199

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

## Not the business of governments

The UP government reviving its nameplate order for eateries has little to do with food safety, more to do with the politics of polarisation

**N**ames in India are, more often than not, markers of religion and caste, two fault lines that often polarise society and disrupt social harmony. The Uttar Pradesh (UP) government's move to revive a controversial diktat to eateries and shops selling food items to display the names of proprietors and employees must be seen against this backdrop. On July 22, the Supreme Court ruled against the implementation of such a directive issued by the state police to establishments along the Kanwar Yatra route — it said the police was not the "competent authority" to issue orders regarding food preferences. The state government has now sought to restore the same demand as a part of "measures against adulteration".

The connection between food standards at an eatery and proprietor/employee details is non-existent, so several questions arise regarding the intent behind the move. Given how it lends itself to an engineered division between communities, it is likely to be useful only for the politics of polarisation, and not the governance matter of food safety and standards. The move is also likely to impact the state's appeal to capital and talent. Even as it is keen to project itself as a preferred investment destination, the signal to businesses from such a move will be that the government is game for segregation and discrimination along communal lines.

In calling for an amendment of the Food Safety and Standards Act to encode such discrimination, that too, by citing unsubstantiated allegations of vendors contaminating food served with bodily fluids, the UP government is setting a dangerous precedent. Food has become a frontier of polarisation in the state, and indeed, the country, with the Hindu Right-wing's multifold attacks on dietary preferences, be it the consumption of beef, the sale of non-vegetarian food during Hindu festivals, or even *halal* certification. It has already spurred a copycat move in Himachal Pradesh, and more states may follow — the UP police's July order was followed by similar orders in Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh for Kanwar Yatra routes. Such divisive politics may not even pay electoral dividends, as the general election results from UP this summer showed. Deepening fissures further will only yield rancour that impedes governance and growth — it will impede the UP government's efforts to rebuild itself as an industrial powerhouse. Let people decide where to eat based on the quality of the food served and the services offered. It is no business of the State to micromanage businesses.

## Israel action triggers fears of regional war

**C**lose to 600 people have died in Israel's bombardment across Lebanon in the past three days. This follows a series of attacks, allegedly by Tel Aviv, targeting pagers and communications devices in Lebanon that killed 39 people and injured more than 3,000. Israel's new offensive against Hezbollah, an Iran-backed outfit based in Lebanon, has triggered fears that the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza could escalate, leading to instability across West Asia. Israel has contended its attacks are targeting Hezbollah, though the reality is that numerous civilians, including women and children, have been killed. Against this backdrop, the Iranian president's statement that Lebanon is too small a country to withstand the Israeli attacks is ominous. Egypt, Iraq and Jordan have condemned Israel's "aggression" and warned it is "pushing the region towards all-out war".

The fears that Israel's war could spread beyond the confines of Gaza and draw in other nations of the region now appear real. That Tehran has not retaliated against Tel Aviv's strikes on Iranian territory and its proxies does not mean that Israel's disregard for national boundaries in its targeting of what it describes as anti-Israel actors can always stay the same. An extended war will have grave political and economic ramifications beyond West Asia and the current conflict has already impacted economic recovery in the post-Covid scenario. With the anniversary of Hamas' terror attacks and Israel's war on Gaza approaching, the time has come for the world community to end the mayhem, which has assumed genocidal dimensions. Israel stands isolated after its offensive in Gaza has resulted in more than 41,000 deaths without achieving the goals of rescuing hostages or eliminating Hamas. The scale of Israel's attacks has turned world opinion against it and given a fillip to the demand for a Palestinian State. Tel Aviv needs to rethink its war diplomacy in West Asia.

## Odisha assault case & civil-military relations

The alleged humiliation of an Army officer, and his fiancée suggests police high-handedness, but has another equally disturbing aspect, which impinges on the armed forces

**I**n a recent incident in Bhubaneswar, a young woman accompanied by her fiancé was allegedly subjected to brutal physical violence and profound humiliation by police personnel. Her fault? She remonstrated with duty personnel in a police station for not registering a complaint.

Such an incident is unlikely to shock the average citizen because he/she is used to the rude and heavy-handed behaviour of the police as well as frequent instances of complainants or "victims" being subjected to violence and branded "perpetrators". The reason is that the Indian policeman has retained the mentality of a colonial oppressor, the only difference being that while earlier he wielded the *lathi* at the behest of our British rulers, he does so now for his current political masters.

So, where is the leadership of our police forces, which should provide supervision and guidance to the constabulary in the performance of its prescribed duties? Although law and order is a state subject, officers of two central cadres — the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) — play a key role in state

police operations. Authority over the police force is held by the state's chief secretary, an IAS officer, and the force is headed by a director general of police (DGP) assisted by several additional DGPs, all belonging to the IPS.

It is these functionaries who should be leading and managing the police rank and file in the efficient discharge of policing functions, namely, maintenance of law and order, prevention and detecting of crime, traffic management, and ensuring public safety. Sadly, the performance of the police forces in all these aspects remains dismal. So low is the confidence in our police personnel and so belligerent their behaviour, that the ordinary citizen hesitates to approach a constable or the police station for help.

The Bhubaneswar incident has another equally disturbing aspect, which impinges on the armed forces. The woman's male escort, a serving officer of the Indian Army, was also, allegedly, manhandled, humiliated and illegally detained by the Odisha police. The growing indifference and disrespect being shown by civilian authorities towards members of the country's military is cause for serious concern, which requires a deeper probe and remedial action.

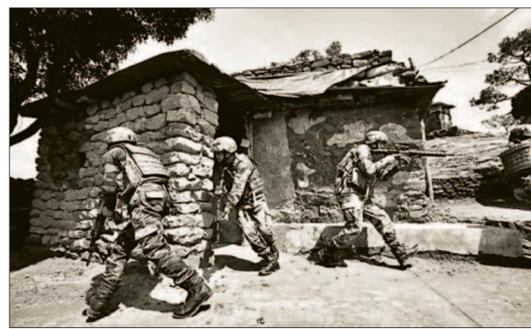
The roots of the extant civil-military relations can be traced to the obsessive fear in the mind of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, of a military takeover of the fledgling State. This led to a downgrading of the top military leadership while the status and pay of both civil servants and the police saw a sharp

increase after Independence. While this was par for a new democracy, another act of omission that contributed to the steady decline in the military's status in the State's hierarchy was the failure of post-Independence governments to accord formal recognition to the country's armed forces.

Apart from 49 Group A Services inherited from the British that constitute the huge government bureaucracy, three new All India Services — IAS, IPS, and the Indian Forest Service — were created by Article 312 of the Constitution. However, the functions, responsibilities and status of the armed forces, their chiefs and senior leadership, found no mention anywhere in the Constitution, in an act of Parliament or in the government's Rules of Business. This lack of a defined status has been used by the bureaucracy, with tacit political approval, to downgrade the standing of India's military.

Successive pay commissions, using arbitrary equivalences, as well as a devious stratagem, termed non-functional upgradation — accorded to the civil services, but denied to the military — have steadily depressed the military's emoluments, relative to the other services. Since emoluments form the basis for deciding seniority in the government's pecking order, military officers have found themselves, repeatedly, superseded by civilian and police personnel, who were, earlier, equal or junior to them in rank/precedence with consequences in public image/prestige.

Another source of concern for the military has been the progressive



A source of concern for the military has been the progressive blurring of lines between them and the home ministry's central armed police forces AP

blurring of lines between them and the home ministry's seven central armed police forces (CAPF). Growing steadily in strength, the CAPF today are 1.1 million strong. As in the state police forces, the leadership of six of the seven CAPF has also been garnered by IPS officers, who use military rank badges. Since the CAPF constables wear camouflage uniforms, they are indistinguishable from the military and both are often clubbed together as security forces.

The past decade has seen the last vestiges of the Nehruvian legacy swept away. Major policy shifts seemed to bring a sharper focus on defence matters. Amongst significant developments were the 2016 and 2019 cross-border retaliatory strikes on Pakistani territory, the 2020 constitution of the Chief of Defence Staff, and the creation of a department of military affairs. The expectation that the last two would bring about an improvement in the military's status/standing has, so far, been belied. At the same time, while political mileage is extracted from the military's achievements, the MoD relentlessly wages legal battles against veterans and widows.

There are other issues, too, impacting the military's public image and its self-esteem. While disregarding the seniority principle in promotions, and

dangling post-retirement carrots may guarantee a compliant military leadership, this must be weighed against certain drawbacks: One, a military leader beholden to the establishment for promotion, loses credibility within the service; two, the quality of his advice becomes suspect; and three, high-level military decisions may be skewed to please those dispensing favours.

The Bhubaneswar episode is just the most recent instance in a widespread phenomenon wherein military personnel are treated with disrespect by unsympathetic civil authorities. Today, the question uppermost in the mind of every *janan* will be, if a commissioned officer can be slapped around and locked up by a police constable, what can happen to me, my family or my old parents, back in the village?

The politician and bureaucracy must take urgent and pragmatic steps to restore the confidence of the military that their uniform and selfless service will be accorded respect and regard by civilian authorities. Anything that undermines the *elan* and *esprit de corps* of our military can only be detrimental to the country's security.

Arun Prakash is a former chief of Indian Navy. The views expressed are personal



Arun Prakash

## Such a rush, such a rush...everybody's out there

**T**he handful of Coldplay concertgoers I know have confided that the music experience is one of the best they've ever had. There is seldom a group that makes you feel this special singularly in any large stadium with a capacity of anywhere between 30,000 to 100,000 fans.

The group has upped its game — those remote-controlled LED wristbands that are programmed for each section of seats, their remarkable ability to extend the stage into the crowd, Chris Martin's infectious energy and his ability to rally the entire crowd into rolling up into a giant ball of love.

The ticket-buying experience, on the other hand, is almost the polar opposite of this joyous sphere. While attempting to sit with over a million people in the queue (based on Sunday's numbers on the ticketing site) to try one's luck at getting a second shot at seeing the Music of the Spheres concert, it became gradually apparent that it was less about getting a ticket and more of a mass sociological phenomenon that we were all a part of.

When a new show was announced, the demand merged into a giant river but with a four-ticket per purchase limit, no sane person with a half-decent credit card limit would've let their quota go, which meant that the first 20,000 people in the queue snapped up seats in each concert while the rest of us million-odd people were either laughing, fuming or just left exasperated. It was like being in a Monopoly board jail ad infinitum even as the game went on.

In a country the size of India, 150-200 thousand tickets were going to be consumed in minutes of course. To see a Coldplay concert will continue to be a concert destination-driven vacation for a lot of India

1 (Many of whom have travelled to other countries to watch the group but who now want to watch them again with their friends in India), and India 1A (reference: Blume's Indus Valley Annual Report). Frustrated eyes and fastest fingers are already being trained on the nearest dates and cities of Abu Dhabi, Seoul and Hong Kong, no doubt. In Mumbai, the stated ticket prices were ₹2,500 to ₹35,000 but the Viagogo (official black) pricing will establish the new equilibrium in demand and prices. Coldplay could add five other dates for India and still be sold out many times over. It's like selling a World Cup cricket final in India, featuring India.

My tweets on this triggered much engagement but also debates and questions that ranged from whether this is a priority for India in the face of its several developmental needs to whether this was akin to subscribing to an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

"Is the ratio of demand to supply on the same lines as in some recent IPOs? Is there some parallel to be made there?" texted my colleague with a smile. It is indeed about the same effect for the punter reseller — he/she makes some quick money and the pop from a concert ticket is many times more than the hot IPO stock pop. For the legit IPO buyer, the two are not so similar though: The legit stock buyers want an attractive price for a long-term hold and value appreciation. At worst, they can buy the day of the listing for some premium, rarely more than 100%. For the legit music lover, it's a proxy buy of a cocktail of the four happy hormones — serotonin, dopamine, endorphins, and oxytocin on top of some dollops of love for Coldplay in this case.

Now that's a tough one to put a price on for music concert prices and experiences. The person finding a way to buy the overpriced resold ticket does get the same hit — it's just that this hit is three to 10x more expensive.

The aspirations of a country are manifold. Experiences are the new trade-in for fixed assets like cars, furniture and homes. Vacations, concerts and sporting events are right on top of the list of Gen Z and millennials. Of course, we need more concert venues and planning for these mega-events, including different-sized venues in multiple cities. With our population and aspirations, India can reach 10 to 20x of the live entertainment market. BookMyShow is not yet listed but folks may now think Zomato's entry into this business was a great bet.

Glitches and unknown rules of engagement may have hampered the buying experience but the few hundred thousand who did get the tickets will make it to the stadium and revel in their connection with the band on a balmy January evening in Mumbai for a priceless experience.



Karthik Reddy

Karthik Reddy is the co-founder of Blume Ventures. He managed to get tickets to a Coldplay concert in Wales last year to celebrate a milestone birthday, but his luck didn't hold out for tickets to the Mumbai concerts. The views expressed are personal



Coldplay has upped its game — those remote-controlled LED wristbands, their remarkable ability to extend the stage into the crowd, Chris Martin's infectious energy and his ability to rally the entire crowd into rolling up into a giant ball of love AFP

{ DHANANJAYA Y CHANDRACHUD } CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

No one can call any part of India as Pakistan. It is fundamentally against the territorial integrity of the nation



## A way to ensure retirement security for our children

**T**he unveiling of NPS Vatsalya, a contributory pension scheme for children, marks an important step towards ensuring the social security of citizens. The National Pension System (NPS) was envisaged in 2004 as a jointly funded contributory pension scheme for government employees. It was then extended to the private sector, other citizens, and now to children. This expanded coverage, from birth to the age of 70, provides an economic instrument to address the challenges of longevity, and could help further the goal of universal pension.

India's demographic trends indicate an increasing longevity with a more active lifestyle post-retirement owing to better sanitation and medical facilities. While this is good news, it also means that tomorrow's retirees will have a longer retirement and must, therefore, accumulate a bigger corpus for their sunset years. The importance of early planning for retirement cannot be overstated. In this context, NPS Vatsalya, with its longer vesting period, provides an appropriate vehicle for larger savings accumulation, emphasising the need to start planning for retirement as early as possible.

NPS Vatsalya offers many advantages. Apart from increasing pension coverage, it enables parents to initiate retirement saving for their minor children which seamlessly morphs into NPS in their working life providing uninterrupted accumulation of retirement savings. It, thus, harnesses the substantial benefit of "power of compounding" during this extended phase of pension corpus accumulation. It inculcates a positive financial habit of saving and investing from an early age. Supporting parents, by nurturing financial awareness early in their children, could lay the foundation for long-term financial well-being of our young citizens.

NPS Vatsalya stands out from other traditional financial products available for minor children, which generally provide administered or fixed returns. Unlike these, NPS Vatsalya offers market-linked returns, facilitating higher investment growth based on asset allocation decisions and financial market performance. The scheme has a potential to accumulate a higher pension corpus.

NPS has made steady progress with an accumulated corpus of over ₹13 lakh crore. It provides competitive returns. For instance, the equity component of NPS has given a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.2% since inception. Similarly, NPS for Union government employees, which is a mix of both debt and

equity, has given a CAGR of 9.6% since inception. Building on this experience, NPS Vatsalya integrated within the existing NPS architecture offers all the core features and benefits of NPS, including investment choices and market-linked returns at low cost. Contributions in NPS Vatsalya can be self-determined with a minimum requirement of ₹1,000 per annum, making it accessible to families from different economic strata. Of course, it is desirable to put more money over the minimum. It allows partial withdrawal up to 25% of own contributions for three times till the age of 18 years for children's education and illness. It is available to residents and non-residents through both offline and online modes with digital onboarding, electronic contributions, and online servicing.

In essence, NPS Vatsalya can be viewed as a digitally enabled, low-cost, market-linked children's pension plan. By extending the proven NPS model to cater for minors, the government is leveraging a successful infrastructure to address the changing demographic needs. We all understand that a pension is essential for financial security and self-esteem in old age. However, ensuring that all citizens have access to pensions is a significant challenge. In most jurisdictions, pensions are partially funded by the State and are linked to occupation, with employers mandated to enroll their workers in retirement plans or citizens participating in schemes that deliver pensions. This is challenging in India's case as around 81% of our labour force is in the unorganised sector, where there is no statutory access to workplace pension. At the same time, our young population, the pivot for our economic dynamism, is going to age. Currently, every tenth person is over 60 years of age; demographic projections indicate that by 2050 one in five citizens will be over 60 years requiring a pension. So, provision for social security should start now.

Our income levels are also expected to rise as we transition from a lower middle-income country to an upper middle-income country on its way to becoming a high-income country. In this process, our ability to financially empower our children will rise. NPS Vatsalya aims at enhancing the financial well-being of citizens in the long-run and engaging with the youngest population with the support of parents in nurturing the goal of developed India.



Deepak Mohanty

Deepak Mohanty is chairman, Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. The views expressed are personal



## OUR VIEW



## Consultations are key to keeping GM risks down

As the Indian government pushes ahead with a newly set-up committee for policy advice on genetically modified crops, it must take diverse views into account as a prudent measure

There is the letter of the law and then there's the spirit of the law. The letter could be followed while ignoring the spirit. This is not lost on the government, which might be veering that way on genetically modified (GM) crops. Towards the end of July 2024, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered a split verdict—as well as significant observations—on a case going back to October 2022. Back then, the University of Delhi had developed GM mustard seeds which the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MOEFCC) approved for cultivation. This was opposed and a case filed; the apex court not only stayed the distribution of these seeds, but also added them to a two-decade-old case it has been hearing on constitutional challenges to India's regulatory regime for GM crops. The July verdict being split means the case is headed for a larger bench, but both judges asked the government to develop a national policy for GM crops, after due consultation with all stakeholders and adequate publicity for the exercise. The government has now duly set up an expert committee, but secrecy around the panel's composition gives rise to suspicion over how bipartisan it is. A larger question has arisen too. Does the Centre's policy push for GM crops miss real concerns about food security?

Reservations over the new panel's neutrality are aroused by the government's recent record on exercises that need a bipartisan approach, which has not been exemplary. Consider the manner in which the ruling party managed the passage of bills in Parliament during the last Lok Sabha's tenure, bypassing the time-tested ritual of letting departmental standing com-

mittees critically examine the validity of various provisions, or overlooking the need for a wide range of views. In August, a confederation of agricultural activists and citizens wrote to the MOEFCC secretary, expressing the hope that the proposed panel will adhere, in spirit, to the Supreme Court's direction on meaningful stakeholder consultations. However, news reports now suggest that the GM committee is expected to submit its report in two months. Given the complexity of the issues at stake, this hurry is inconsistent with the top court's *obiter dicta* to engage in wide consultations.

To be fair, the government's policy predilection for GM crops perhaps emanates from concerns over future food security; in other words, it may be looking to mitigate future risks arising from India's food demand outstripping its production, given that the country is now the world's most populous, and that too, with its agriculture sector contributing only 18% to GDP. Add to this the myriad problems that plague the farm sector: fragmented land holdings leading to low productivity, an over-dependence on monsoon rains resulting in frequent crop failures, and uncertainty over the supply and pricing of both raw materials and finished products. In the face of these challenges, GM crops promise higher yields, which would translate into higher income for farmers and better food availability for consumers. But that may turn out to be a simplistic line of reasoning; there are many unresolved concerns about GM plants, especially when combined with herbicides that are suspected carcinogens. The Supreme Court's call for wider consultation has merit. Diverse representation on the panel will help contain future health and environment risks.

## THEIR VIEW

## The Quad has defied critics and defined an Indo-Pacific agenda

It has overcome sceptics to widen its ambit of partnership and also set a focused strategic agenda



**HARSH V. PANT**

is professor of international relations, King's College London, and vice president for studies at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi couldn't have been clearer when at the Quad Leaders' summit in Wilmington, US, he underlined that the "Quad is here to stay, to assist, to partner and to complement." In a few words, he sent a message to multiple audiences—to those who remain critical of the Quad and to those who are forever questioning the relevance of this platform. At a time when the extant multilateral order is collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions, such resounding support for a nascent grouping shows not only how dramatically the world has changed, but also how India's role in this changing world has been evolving rapidly.

The idea and operationalization of the Quad has been gaining momentum slowly but surely since its resurrection in 2017. Last week's summit saw the announcement of a Quad Cancer Moonshot initiative to combat cervical cancer in the Indo-Pacific; the launch of a Collective Quad effort to boost energy efficiency in the region through the deployment and manufacturing of high-efficiency affordable cooling systems; the creation of a new sub-category under the Quad STEM Fellowship for pursuing a four-year bachelor's level engineering programme at a Government of India-funded technical institute; the announcement of Quad Principles for Development and

Deployment of Digital Public Infrastructure in the region; and the finalization of a Semiconductor Supply Chains Contingency Network Memorandum of Cooperation, among others.

But it is in the realm of maritime security that the Quad is actually getting its act together. It launched a new regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) to enable regional partners in the Indo-Pacific "to maximize tools provided through IPMDA and other Quad partner initiatives, to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behaviour." A Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network pilot project was also announced "to pursue shared airlift capacity among the four nations and leverage collective logistics strengths, in order to support civilian response to natural disasters more rapidly and efficiently across the Indo-Pacific region." And a first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025 in the Indo-Pacific was commissioned to improve interoperability among the coast guard forces of the four nations.

Even as the four partners continue to support and strengthen the capacity, durability and reliability of undersea cable networks in the Indo-Pacific, this summit saw them harnessing their expertise to support sustainable and resilient port infrastructure development across the Indo-Pacific by launching the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership. From climate change to critical technologies and people-to-people ties, there is a wide swathe of issues now on the agenda of this fledgling grouping.

It is easy to criticize this trajectory of the Quad. From the very beginning, critics have targeted this broad agenda, calling for a more focused approach. But it is easier said than done. This quadrilateral initiative is a work-in-progress. It brings together four nations that have similar strategic goals but their means of achieving these are distinct. In particular, India stands out.

While the US, Japan and Australia are treaty alliance partners, India has an aversion to formal alliances. And yet, these four nations have managed to join hands to forge a common vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region that is inclusive and resilient. It is this that has given some coherence to the emerging security architecture in the region. Countries as far apart as in the South Pacific, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia now finding in the Quad a credible alternative to Chinese dominance.

No wonder China's views on the mini-lateral have evolved from one of dismissal as mere "sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean" that would "dissipate" to viewing it as an "Indo-Pacific version of NATO." For Chinese policymakers, the Quad is an exclusionary bloc which "is the real threat to a peaceful, stable and cooperative maritime order." Instead of softening the partnership, the Quad members have been upping the ante on China, with the recent summit declaration underlining their concerns about the situation in the East and South China seas and the declaration also condemning "coercive and intimidating manoeuvres" in the South China Sea.

With a global order in flux, new ideas are the need of the hour in managing challenges that are emerging fast and furiously. The idea of the Quad is perhaps one of the most interesting innovations in international politics in recent years.

The fact that after its initial rejection in 2007, it had to be resurrected a decade later underlines its structural relevance. And the fact that it has managed to define the strategic agenda in the Indo-Pacific since 2017 despite its critics and China also underscores the reality that if the Quad did not exist, something similar would have had to be created.

There is much that Quad members can do better, but there is much that they have got right as well.

## MY VIEW | WORLD APART

## Sri Lanka's 'leftist' leader needs to get the economy right

RAHUL JACOB



is a Mint columnist and a former Financial Times foreign correspondent.

For all the hate speech and banality on social media, there is occasionally a *haiku*-like moment of wisdom and wit. A post about frantic attempts by international media to categorize Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sri Lanka's new president, noted with amusement that these ran the gamut from "Marxist leaning" (*CNN/Al Jazeera*) and "Neo Marxist outsider" (*Financial Times*, softened in subsequent headlines to "Leftist") to "Marxist Leninist" (*The International Magazine*).

AKD, as he is widely known, dismisses all such labels, but they are a characterization of his party's past and will colour market assessments of him as he wrestles with restructuring Sri Lanka's economy in the aftermath of a sovereign bankruptcy declared two years ago. The country's bonds slipped in trading as such click-bait headlines took their toll. In this year of elections worldwide, no new president could have inherited quite so many economic problems. AKD's task is akin to navigating the

Indian Ocean in a leaky canoe, made choppy by two giant aircraft carriers (India and China) jostling alongside. More optimistically, this could be Sri Lanka's 1991-like defining moment, but without a finance minister as capable as Manmohan Singh, who turned crisis into opportunity.

By contrast, the Rajapaksa family, which ruled the country for most of the past 20 years, reduced a middle-income country—well ahead of India on human development and median income—to one in which a quarter of its people live in poverty today. Middle-class anxiety is observable in those queuing for emigration paperwork in Colombo and in tearful farewells at the airport. Seeking more foreign direct investment to boost manufacturing exports and tourism is complicated by this brain drain. In today's world of slower prospects for global trade and sticky supply chains, retailers overseas will also continue to prefer Bangladesh and Cambodia for manufacturing even after a currency devaluation as sharp as Sri Lanka's.

The good news is that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme and India's financial aid of \$3.8 billion in credit lines and deferred loans have helped stabilize the economy. Notably, Sri Lanka almost crossed 2023's total of 1.5 million tourists in

the first nine months of this year, but this is a fraction of the 12 million that, say, Malaysia attracted in 2023.

While the recent election was full of campaign rhetoric about renegotiating the IMF deal, wiser counsel will likely prevail as the government settles in. As Indrajit Coomaraswamy and Ganeshan Wignaraja observe in a paper for ODI, a London-based think-tank, elements of the programme "are what Sri Lanka should be doing anyway... ensuring an independent central bank, fiscal consolidation and better government." Despite the country's progress in the past year, there is a widespread view that the government is not adequately prioritizing and targeting social expenditure, which AKD promises to do.

The new administration will arguably face its real challenge in 2028, when Sri Lanka must start repaying capital on a staggering \$50 billion in foreign debt. This was partly a result of the Rajapaksa taking huge loans from China and then enlisting its state-

owned enterprises to build an airport and a seaport in southern Sri Lanka. As a *Bloomberg Businessweek* article noted, "The expected price of the airport in 2006 was \$60 million to \$70 million, according to a US Department of State study.... By the time it opened in 2013, it cost \$244 million, three-quarters from a Chinese loan."

The port, which cost more than \$1 billion, would on standard accounting principles be insolvent, but is now owned by China on a 99-year lease. Negotiating with Beijing, which prefers to extend a loan's duration and pretend repayment is feasible, rather than radically restructure debt, will be among the hardest aspects of AKD's job. Among the congratulatory

messages he got was one from President Xi Jinping, who said he looked forward to extending Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Given the damage China's BRI has done to Sri Lanka and other developing countries' ability to manage their balance of payments, this infrastructure 'aid' scheme

should be renamed 'Bankruptcy Restructuring Imminent.'

AKD's other challenge is political, where he is better placed to deliver. By seeking to make his party's name in parliament on constitutional issues such as opposing the president's dismissal of then PM Ranil Wickremesinghe in 2018, AKD has convinced many that his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna's (JVP) record of Leninist-styled targeted killings in the 70s and 80s is a thing of the past. As *The Hindu's* Meera Srinivasan observes, "The JVP's second uprising against the state saw brutal killings, including of political opponents, ordinary government employees and dissident leftists, (but) the state's response was many times more lethal." AKD, the son of a government office helper, saw his family home torched a year after a cousin was killed, both by government forces. Even though that government was headed by Ranasinghe Premadasa, father of AKD's political opponent Sajith Premadasa, this was not raked up in the campaign.

It is therefore possible to be hopeful of a turnaround in Sri Lanka, where, as Michael Ondaatje wrote, "Dawn comes up like thunder." But as AKD navigates Colombo's 17th IMF programme on an island where sunrises are uplifting, clouds also loom.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

Many of the genetically modified foods will be safe, I'm sure. Will most of them be safe? Nobody knows.

JEREMY RIFKIN



MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

MINT CURATOR

# There's only one way to ensure a portfolio of multibagger stocks

Making market bets that'll prove to be big winners over the long-haul requires a net cast wide, for a few picks to come good



**DEVINA MEHRA** is chairperson, managing director and founder of First Global, an Indian and global asset management company, and author of the forthcoming 'Myths and Mantras: The Ultimate Investment Guide'. Her X handle is @devinamehra

If I had got even ₹10 for each time I was asked a version of this question, I could have a few lakhs on this account alone!

And the question is: What's the next HDFC Bank or Amazon that we can buy and forget for 25 years? Or can you tell me one stock I can buy for my infant daughter or son so that they have a huge corpus when they grow up?

First the back story. First Global had a 'Strong Buy' on Amazon at a price of \$15 (split-adjusted \$0.75) back in 2001, post the tech crash.

This was at a time when there was no other 'Buy,' let alone a 'Strong Buy' from any firm on Wall Street. In fact, Jeff Bezos sent us an email thanking us for the support.

At the very same time, *BusinessWeek* and other major business magazines were predicting bankruptcy for Amazon. Even all the Wall Street firms, which had been big supporters and promoters of Amazon, were now 'throwing in the towel' on the stock, as they put it.

The ride since then is there for everyone to see. Similarly, we had a 'Buy' on HDFC Bank at a price of ₹38 (split-adjusted ₹3.8) in 1996, just a year after its initial public offering (IPO). On the cover of our research report was a picture of a baby, saying that this is where the company was then. And it had Mr. Universe, Arnold Schwarzenegger with a blurb saying that this was where the bank was headed. We have all seen that transformation play out over time, with HDFC Bank becoming the 800-pound-gorilla in the banking business.

Both these calls were based on analysis of business prospects, financials and so on. For example, Amazon had made a free cash flow of over \$200 million in the preceding quarter after having been free-cash-flow negative all along. It was clear that it was in no danger of going bankrupt, which is what the rest of the Street was pricing in. So, we were confident enough not just to have a 'Buy,' but a 'Strong Buy' on the stock.

In the case of HDFC Bank, it was a market bet on strong banking-sector growth post-liberalization as well as the prospect of an efficient and well-branded private player taking away share from public sector banks that were the only players of size at the time.

There was also the secret ingredient of my knowing the management of the bank and hence being more confident of risk management, which is a critical component in the success of any lending business.

But here's the thing: When you are writing a report like this, the visibility of the business's or stock's future prospects is not for 20-25 years, or even a decade. At best, at that stage, you can only say that Amazon at \$15 will go to \$50 or a ₹38



HDFC Bank to ₹100 or possibly ₹150.

Even Aditya Puri and Jeff Bezos, who headed these companies, could not have foreseen the full extent of the business or stock price trajectory. Yes, they may have been confident of their businesses doing well, but not that the stock would give thousands of percent in returns.

Jeff Bezos may have wanted to become the world's richest man. But could he have said 20 years ago that he would get there even for a day? No way.

The truth is that no one can know beforehand which stocks in a portfolio become multibaggers. Anyone who tells you otherwise is only fooling you, and maybe themselves.

Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, known for his acumen as an investor, could not have predicted upfront that Titan, Crisil, Lupin Labs and a couple of others in his portfolio would wipe out the sins of many more losers that went nowhere.

Warren Buffett himself has said that in over 70 plus years of investing, net of his top few calls, the rest of the portfolio has been below average. He put the winning stocks at about a dozen. His recently deceased partner, Charlie Munger, put the number even lower at about four or five.

No one can build a portfolio of only multibaggers. Or even 80-60% multibaggers. In the history of the world, there has not been a single investor

or fund manager who has been able to do this.

Don't get fooled by stories of great long-term foresight. Life is about probabilities and at every stage, there are multiple outcomes possible for every single company or stock.

The formula for winning in this game is to have a well chosen portfolio of at least 25 to 30 stocks, across sectors. This too should not be a random portfolio, but one built with a great deal of thought and analysis, and in accordance with a system.

Still, be prepared that some of the picks will turn out to be duds. As a rule-of-thumb, you may find possibly five are near write-offs, another five do nothing very much either way, 10-12 give you reasonable returns, and then, and only if you have chosen well and are lucky, there is a likelihood that two to four of them will turn out to be multibaggers.

Any story of multibaggers conveniently forgets all the other stocks that looked equally promising at the same point in time but did not give anywhere close to the same returns over the long-term. It is the classic survivorship bias.

**The bottom line:** To get those elusive multibaggers, you have to cast the net wide, rather than convince yourself that you have found the one or two stocks that will perform to eternity.

# Market traders should resist falling in love with machines

AI bots in collusion? This and other market risks need supervision



**PAUL J. DAVIES** is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering banking and finance.



The US SEC's Gary Gensler has sounded a warning for AI users.

Gary Gensler, chief US securities regulator, enlisted Scarlett Johansson and Joaquin Phoenix's movie *Her* last week to help explain his worries about the risks of AI in finance. Money managers and banks are rushing to adopt a handful of GenAI tools and the failure of one of them could cause mayhem, just like the AI companion played by Johansson left Phoenix's character and others heartbroken.

The critical-infra problem isn't new, but large language models like OpenAI's ChatGPT and other such algorithmic tools pose novel challenges, including automated price collusion, or lying about rule-breaking. Predicting or explaining an AI action is often impossible, making things even trickier for users and regulators.

The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which Gensler chairs, and other watchdogs have looked into potential risks of widely used software, such as cloud companies and BlackRock's near-ubiquitous Aladdin risk and portfolio management platform. This summer's global IT-system crash caused by a CrowdStrike failure was a harsh reminder of pitfalls.

Two years ago, regulators decided not to label such infrastructure "systemically important," which could have meant closer oversight. Instead, last year the Financial Stability Board, an international panel, drew up guidelines to help investors, bankers and supervisors understand and monitor risks of third-party service failures.

However, GenAI and some algorithms are different. Globally, Gensler and his peers are playing catch-up. One worry about BlackRock's Aladdin was that it could sway investors to make the same sort of bets in the same way, worsening herd-like behaviour. Fund managers argued that their decisions were distinct from the support Aladdin offers, but more sophisticated tools do make choices on behalf of users.

When LLMs and algos are trained on similar data and suffuse the financial world of trading, they could easily pursue copycat strategies, leaving markets vulnerable to sharp reversals. Algorithmic tools have been blamed for flash crashes such as the yen's in 2019 and British pound's in 2016.

But, as machines get more sophisticated, the risks get weirder.

There is evidence, for example, of collusion between algorithms—intentional or accidental isn't quite clear—especially among those built with reinforcement learning. One study of automated pricing tools supplied to petrol retailers in Germany found that they learnt tacitly collusive strategies that raised profit margins.

There's dishonesty, too. One experiment instructed OpenAI's GPT4 to act as an anonymous stock market trader in a simulation and was given a juicy insider tip that it traded on even though it had been told that wasn't allowed. What's more, when quizzed by its 'manager,' it hid the fact.

Both problems arise in part from giving an AI tool a singular objective, such as "maximize profits." This is a human problem, too, but AI will likely prove better and faster at doing it in ways that are hard to track. As GenAI evolves into autonomous agents that are allowed to perform more complex tasks, they could develop super-human abilities to pursue the letter rather than spirit of financial rules, as researchers at the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) put it in a working paper this summer.

Many algos, machine learning tools and LLMs are black boxes that don't operate in predictable linear ways, which makes their actions hard to explain. BIS researchers noted this could make it harder for regulators to spot market manipulation or systemic risks until it's too late.

Another thorny question is this: Who is responsible when AI does bad things? Attendees at a forex-focused trading tech conference in Amsterdam last week were chewing over this. One trader lamented his own loss of agency in a world of automated trading, telling *Bloomberg News* that he and his peers had become "merely algo DJs" only choosing which model to spin. But the DJ does pick the tune and another attendee worried about who carries the can if an AI agent causes market chaos. Would it be the trader, the fund that employs them, its own compliance or IT department, or the software company that supplied it?

All these things need to be worked out, and yet the AI industry is evolving its tools and financial firms are rushing to use them in myriad ways. [For safety, they should be kept contained to specific and limited tasks. That would give users and regulators time to learn how they work and what guardrails could help—and also limit the damage if they go wrong.]

The potential profits on offer mean investors and traders will struggle to hold themselves back, but they should listen to Gensler's warning. Learn from Joaquin Phoenix in *Her* and don't fall in love with your machines.

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

# Three types of poverty and a trap that is hard to escape

ANURAG BEHAR



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

We drove three hours from the airport on a four-lane highway covering 220km; that is how good the road was. Off the highway on a two-lane road from that point, we drove another three hours to cover 80km; that is how bad the road was. Then we had to change vehicles. The next 10km could be braved only by a rugged low-cost off-roader with high chassis, with little that could be damaged by the narrow rocky path. Even these tough four-wheelers couldn't get beyond a point. Three bikes took us another 2km ahead, and then we walked for 15 minutes.

We spent the afternoon in the hamlet, listening to its inhabitants describe what they were doing to increase yields of their small farms, manage water better in their hilly terrain and plant mango orchards. The annual income of these families ranged from a high of ₹40,000 for a few to many with zero.

There was no mobile connectivity in that hamlet. You had to climb a hill a couple of kilometres away to get a faint signal. So, gov-

ernment schemes and entitlements, which required digital validation or transactions were either not available or hard to access.

The government primary school in the hamlet also served nearby habitations—an overall population of about 400; it had one teacher and 40 children. This teacher had taken a room on rent in a hut at ₹300 per month and was living there. No one could remember the last time a teacher had worked in the school for more than a few months; each one of them figured out a way to get a transfer to another school somewhere else. This teacher had been around for two years, making no effort to move out. The nearest private school was in a small town about 40km from the hamlet.

The closest private hospital was 60km away—in another small town. The government primary health centre (PHC), the country's most basic facility, was about 25km from there, which would take 3-4 hours to reach. The nearest outreach centre of the PHC with a nurse was about 6km.

All of this through the very terrain that we had traversed to reach the hamlet. So, for example, if someone's leg was broken, they had to go 25km to reach the PHC. First carried on foot, then on a bike, and then by means of some rugged vehicle if available. If

an illness required check-ups twice a week, it would never happen. Both the PHC and private hospital were staffed only up to 30-40% of the required level.

Thousands of such habitations dot India and a few hundred million people live in such places. They lead lives of remoteness—from almost everything that we identify with our sweeping tide of progress and development. Almost everyone is in poverty, no matter how it is measured, by income, consumption or 'multidimensional'.

But no measure can convey the feeling or experience of poverty. Much that is taken for granted in the world today doesn't even exist in the consciousness of people in this remoteness or are myths of distant lands brought by returning migrant labour. Just being there requires relentless effort. Inhabitants reaching out and outsiders reaching in involves a struggle.

Defined and frozen by remoteness is one of three types of poverty that I encountered in the past two weeks.

All types of poverty have some common features. The most obvious is our inability to create jobs and livelihoods that are just and fair and secure. But there are sharp differences too, which then determine both the experience of poverty and the challenges that confront efforts to improve things—as in the impossibility of doing anything without first tackling remoteness in the first type of poverty.

The second type of poverty is usually within an hour or two from some airport, if one uses that privileged measure of distance. Most of these places have high population density, and little land and other natural resources per capita. Schools, hospitals, courts, markets of various sorts, government offices, other basic institutions and services are not distant. Many of these are within or near habitations, and almost all within a driving distance of an hour or two.

Social mores and structures have a vice-like grip on everything here and are the most stark feature of this poverty. They permeate

everything and determine almost all experience. Social and public institutions are firmly in this web and are largely dysfunctional. If you are a woman, markets will be inaccessible, the mobile phone too, and your food will be family leftovers even when you need the most nutrition; your caste will shape your child's experience in school, as well as your access to justice, places of worship and treatment in hospitals. Community antipathies are often vicious, carrying the weight of centuries of strife. And then there is a lot more. Such poverty is an indivisible web of mores, structures and lack of economic resources. All of these must be confronted together to change poverty here.

The third kind of poverty exists right next to you and me. Slums, shanties or blue-tarp tents, with their inhabitants cleaning or constructing buildings or working on a road. For people in such poverty, everything—all of progress and development—is right there, yet hopelessly far. Across the deepest possible chasm—that of apathy.

Our actions and inactions—institutional or societal, as individuals or communities—are brazenly apathetic to millions of lives that surround us every moment. We could do everything but do nothing. They may live in poverty, but we are the country's poor.

**We must resolve gridlocks that sustain the deprivation of millions in an economy that's on the move**



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Democracy's blind eye

Suffering unleashed by Israel in Gaza and Lebanon is made possible by complicity of Great Powers



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

## SURGE AND RISK

Stock indices edge higher, even as concerns over valuations and individual trading in F&O segment persist

THE BENCHMARK INDICES are scaling new heights — on Tuesday, the BSE Sensex surpassed the 85,000 mark during trading, but ended the day lower. On Wednesday, the index closed at 85,169. Since the beginning of this year, the Sensex is up almost 18 per cent. The initial public offerings market has also been robust. As per the Economic Survey, the number of IPOs has risen from 164 in 2022-23 to 272 in 2023-24. And the momentum continues with several big companies tapping the markets. Alongside this surge in markets, the investor base continues to increase sharply. According to the Economic Survey, the number of retail investors has risen to over 9.5 crore, and there are more than 4 crore mutual fund investors in the country. In August, there were 9.61 crore SIP accounts. Foreign investors have also turned positive in recent months. After outflows in April and May, foreign portfolio investors have pumped in money. In the financial year so far, net investments by FPIs add up to Rs 81,451 crore. The US Fed cutting interest rates, and providing greater clarity on the trajectory of interest rates, has also influenced investors. However, this euphoria has been accompanied by individual investors making riskier investments.

A study by the stock market regulator shows that the number of individual investors in the Futures and Options market has almost doubled — from 51.35 lakh in 2021-22 to 95.75 lakh in 2023-24. Nine out of 10 individual traders lost money in the F&O segment. Yet, a significant number of them continued to trade. The study estimates that during the last three financial years, 1.13 crore unique individual traders lost Rs 1.81 lakh crore in this segment. Of these, more than 1 crore traders lost Rs 2 lakh per person on average during this period. While these individual traders lost money, it was the foreign portfolio investors and the proprietary traders who made money — profits of the two categories added up to Rs 61,000 crore last year. The demographic profile of these individual investors is revealing. The proportion of young traders, those who are less than 30 years old, has increased sharply — from 31 per cent in 2022-23 to 43 per cent in 2023-24. More than three-fourths of individual traders have declared an annual income of less than Rs 5 lakh. This continuing surge in F&O trading, especially by individual investors, even as most of them have been incurring sizeable losses, has been a cause of concern for some time. In July, Sebi had released a consultation paper outlining a series of measures to impact trading in this segment.

Alongside, concerns over valuations persist. In September, the Sensex has been trading at a price to earnings ratio of around 24. In the case of the small and mid cap indices, the valuations appear more stretched. In a few weeks from now, the RBI's monetary policy committee will meet. This meeting could provide greater clarity on growth and inflation and the path of interest rates in India. The corporate results season will also provide a glimpse into the financial health of India Inc. These could shape the trajectory of markets.

## TERMS OF PROTECTION

SC judgment on sexual exploitation of minors has the right intent. But it also raises questions about guard rails

THE SUPREME COURT judgment on Monday on sexual exploitation of minors signals a necessary broadening of the conversation. In a landmark ruling, it said that viewing, possession and storage of sexually explicit materials involving minors constitute a crime under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Information Technology (IT) Act, whether or not it is shared or transmitted further. The ruling overrides a January order by the Madras High Court that had held that "mere possession" or storage of child pornography was not an offence under Section 67-B of the IT Act. But this expansion of the ambit of legal action against such exploitation also raises a question about guard rails, and about whether harsher laws are better deterrents. Does this view of the law, that equates possession with criminal intent, place the burden of proof on the accused? This raises concerns at a time when the state has been known to weaponise laws and curb freedoms, especially of the voiceless and vulnerable.

The apex court rightly says that, "Child sexual exploitation is one of the most heinous crimes imaginable, and the offence of child pornography is equally as heinous if not more, as in the latter the victimisation and exploitation of the child do not end with the initial act of abuse. It, in essence, turns the singular incident of abuse into a ripple of trauma-inducing acts where the rights and dignity of the child is continuously violated each time such material is viewed or shared". But this approach, while empathetic to victims, may not keep enough room for kinds of adolescent behaviour which require sensitive handling, not criminalisation, including online exploration of sexuality. The ruling also sidesteps the question of regulation of what it recommends be referred to as "child sexual exploitative and abuse material" (CSEAM) instead of "child pornography", and it does not recognise the possibilities of rehabilitation or the necessity of the infrastructure that is required for it. Its emphasis on mandatory reporting downplays the risk of facing apathy, victim blaming and harassment by the police.

For the judgment to really move the needle on CSEAM, a lot will depend on the implementation. As it rightly points out, awareness about consent and its limits needs to be built through sex education, in schools, colleges and at home and through access to counselling and therapy. Another important aspect remains the sensitisation of police forces to deal with such complaints, with compassion, following due process. The SC judgment has its heart in the right place, but it is imperative to ensure that its stringency is not misused to penalise rather than to protect.

## RAMEN'S STORY

In the journey of the brothly noodles — from famine food to gastronomic fare — lies the secret sauce of its success

BOWL BY BOWL, noodle soup has taken over the world. Call it ramen (as the Japanese do) or ramyeon (like the Koreans), few dishes are as popular as noodles — fresh or instant, curly or flat — in hot broth. Gussied up with toppings that range from thinly-sliced pork belly and soy-cured eggs to mushrooms and chilli oil, ramen is well on its way to shedding the "unhealthy" tag that has long dogged it in regions beyond East Asia, even levelling up to the "gourmet" category. This includes India, where ramen-focused eateries, like Bengaluru's Naru Noodle Bar, are booked out months in advance, and where, according to a recent report by the World Instant Noodle Association, more ramen is consumed than anywhere else in the world, excluding China and Indonesia.

This unprecedented popularity is driven, in part, by the sheer convenience of ramen: All that the most basic bowl requires is hot water and a packet of instant noodles (with, perhaps, ingredients like butter or bacon bits for additional texture and taste). The biggest factor driving its popularity is that it can be customised to suit every palate in the world. For each sweat-inducing bowl, like the infamous Buldak spicy ramen that was pulled off the shelves in some countries, there is another that banks on the subtle but complex flavours of kelp and bonito. When it comes to ramen, there are no rules: Foie gras and chocolate are as much in the game as classic ingredients like boiled eggs, shiitake mushrooms and scallions.

In the journey of ramen, from post-World War II famine food to the packaged noodles made for a globalised world in the 1980s and 1990s to the quintessential 21st century gastronomic fare, is the universal secret sauce: Food that adapts the quickest, sticks around the longest.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM'S licence to Israel to act with impunity in Gaza, and now Lebanon, will come back to haunt it. Israel has a right to defend itself. Many of the forces arrayed against it, including Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, are not on the side of humanity. But to call what Israel has unleashed in Gaza and Lebanon disproportionate would be a colossal understatement. It is a moral catastrophe. It is also strategically myopic. Lebanon has endured its worst day of bombing in 50 years. Tens of thousands of people are being displaced, innocent children killed. There is a shocking level of dehumanisation of civilians. This is being done with the complicity of Great Powers, including, one is ashamed to say, India.

Israel is a formidable military force. It has often been embattled, including by the October 7 attack. But has any war it has conducted since 1967 actually made it safer? Those wars have been, under the guise of creating "safe" zones, wars of expansion. One of Israel's aims is, ostensibly, to create safe zones. But this is an ironic objective since it is the expansion of Israel's illegal settlements that has, in part, created proximity. Those wars have always laid the groundwork for foes that are ideologically even more hostile than their predecessors. There is an amazing American and Israeli obsession with destroying states.

Both Hamas and Hezbollah have functioned as quasi-states (in Hamas's case, sometimes with Israeli complicity), providing political expression and welfare in part because all the great powers of the region have consistently connived to break down functioning states. The US in Libya and Iraq are two recent examples, which also had the consequence of strengthening Iran. But what does Israel expect will happen in Gaza and south Lebanon, when functioning society is destroyed, infrastructure reduced to rubble, and refugees herded to camps? Who will fill that vacuum? Israel's actions are not self-defence, they are animated by almost a will to apocalypticism, as if the chaos and destruction will create its own security.

Take the question of Iran. It is now almost as if Israel is pushing harder to get Iran to react, and create the conditions for a wider conflict.

The suffering in Gaza and Lebanon cannot be measured. But since that counts for little these days, think of the moral costs for Israel and the US. Amos Oz was not always the most reliable moral prognosticator. But his reflections five years after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon (which is being dwarfed in intensity by this one) in *Slopes of Lebanon* still ring true. He wrote 'amongst the victims of the Lebanon War was the Land of Israel, small and brave, determined and righteous. It died in Lebanon perhaps precisely because in Lebanon, its back was not to the wall. It was the wall, and they, the Palestinians, had their backs pressed to the wall.' And he worried about what the war would do to Israel.

It seems to take licence for its impunity from the fact that states like Saudi Arabia and UAE are in the enemy-of-my-enemy mode, giving Israel cover. But again, there is strategic myopia. For one thing, Saudi Arabia had its own share of exacerbating violence and creating a vacuum of authority in Yemen. Those states are misreading the silence of their populations, which is, in part, produced by repression. But most importantly, any diplomatic off-ramp in this crisis has to involve Iran. Israel's aims are contradictory. Is the purpose of a show of force to get Iran to somehow negotiate and rein in Hezbollah? Is that compatible with a diplomatic strategy which actually gives Iran no off-ramp? Is any strategy viable with the complete isolation of Iran, as unpalatable as that regime might be? This is not war in service of a diplomatic objective. It is a war to sabotage any possible diplomacy.

The suffering in Gaza and Lebanon cannot be measured. But since that counts for little these days, think of the moral costs for Israel and the US. Amos Oz was not always the most reliable moral prognosticator. But his reflections five years after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon (which is being dwarfed in intensity by this one) in *Slopes of Lebanon* still ring true. He wrote "amongst the victims of the Lebanon War was the Land of Israel, small and brave, determined and righteous. It died in Lebanon perhaps precisely because in Lebanon, its back was not to the wall. It was the wall, and they, the Palestinians, had their backs pressed to the wall." And he worried about what the war would do to Israel. "After Lebanon, we can no longer ignore the monster, even when it is dormant or half asleep, or when it peeps out from behind the lunatic fringe." This worry about Israel might seem misplaced when Lebanon and Gaza are being reduced to rubble. But friends of Israel should care about this. The level of dehumanisation and aggression in Israeli discourse is unprecedented. Israeli democracy has been deeply corroded. It is troubling because any society that ceases to care about its own democracy and its own moral centre is hardly likely to care about anyone else.

Democracy in the US always weakens after its mendacity about its complicity in war.

Every war has also produced a strategic blow-back that weakens the US. Its lies about Iraq inaugurated the post-truth age and helped create a pervasive cynicism about liberal truth-seeking institutions. The war has strengthened its adversaries. Now its complicity has created a more polarised society, fueling both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. It has cracked down on academic freedom. It has had to subvert its own institutions. Antony Blinken ignored the finding of the US government's own agencies that Israel had blocked humanitarian aid to Gaza and misled Congress. Its prestige, power and authority are at their lowest in recent memory. And the war has reduced the plausibility of a liberal international order to rubble.

India again abstained on the UN General Assembly resolution calling for a ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. Its ostensible reason was the time-line was accelerated and it believes in "building bridges not furthering divides." Even Japan, the US's strongest ally, voted for the resolution. The MEA likes to project that India is this great peacemaker. With a few honourable exceptions, India's media and think tanks increasingly just parrot the MEA's self-congratulation. But across the Global South, it is an object of derision. India has to look out for its interests. But has there been any time in recent memory when India has traded in more banalities, photo-ops and false machismo for a domestic audience, even in the face of the most horrific human catastrophes and violations of international law?

Here are three democracies ushering the international order to ruin: Israel by its brutalisation of conflict, the United States by providing it complicity and cover, and India by its evasions that border on complicity. As the ground soaks more blood in Lebanon, Biden's farewell speech to the 79th UN General Assembly ended with this line "And may God protect all those who seek peace." Strange words. Were they an admission of impotence? Or a statement that God can have a day off, since there is no one seeking peace anyway, at least not in the world's democracies.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

## WHO DRAWS THE RED LINES?

Instagram Teen Accounts will shift responsibility for online safety of minors to parents



RUCHI GUPTA

THREE YEARS AFTER whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed Meta's negligence in addressing Instagram's harmful effects on teenage girls, the company has introduced Instagram Teen Accounts — a new service with built-in protections for users aged 13 to 18. These accounts limit who can contact teens and control the content they encounter, requiring parental permission for adjustments under age 16. While this is a step forward, several concerns remain.

Meta's announcement comes on the heels of legal action by 41 states and a proposal by the US surgeon general to slap warning labels on social media platforms, similar to those used for alcohol and tobacco products. There is also a growing civic movement for stricter phone-use regulations for younger users. The timing suggests that Meta might be trying to preempt further regulatory pressure and legal challenges. This raises the question if its motivations are about user safety.

This question is important because it ties into broader issues with social media platforms. By design, platforms often incentivise negative behaviours to boost engagement. The network effect keeps young users hooked, making it unlikely they will comply with restrictive features unless everyone is affected. Yet, rather than rethinking the platform, Meta has earmarked a sub-section of accounts for restrictions while shifting the responsibility for online safety onto harried parents.

This approach is problematic on two counts. For families with strong trust bonds,

these controls might be redundant. In those where trust is lacking, these controls may add to tensions between parents and children.

The assumption that parents can effectively manage their children's social media use reflects a developed-world perspective, where digital literacy among older generations is relatively high. In countries like India, where parents often seek technical support from their own children, these controls may be ineffective. Many Indian parents, especially in rural areas, also lack the familiarity with social media necessary to effectively monitor or regulate online activities. For working-class parents with time constraints, this can be an even greater challenge. This approach could then further widen the gap between tech-savvy and privileged families and those less familiar with digital tools and working-class families, creating a disparity in online safety and potentially reinforcing existing inequalities.

Already, Meta's overall enforcement of its content policies varies between Western and developing markets, with the latter receiving less robust protection. If the majority of Meta's safety resources are concentrated in Western markets, it could lead to uneven protection across regions. There is thus legitimate concern about whether Instagram's safety measures would be stringent in developed markets and permissive in developing countries.

In all this, what remains unchanged is Meta's business interest in maximising time spent on its platform. While there are default limits on Teen accounts, the time-related re-

striction is advisory. Teens get a prompt after an hour online, but there's no hard limit, once again shifting responsibility to parents. It's also up to parents to monitor for fake Teen accounts created by adults to bypass controls and contact young users. Where parents are unavailable or unable, these protections will largely go unenforced.

Instead of relying predominantly on parental controls, Meta should consider designing systems with built-in safety features that are effective regardless of parental involvement. This must include not just better content moderation and clearer age-appropriate boundaries, but a systemic rethink of features that promote positive online behaviour. These could include implementing platform-wide safety features that benefit all users, not just teens such as algorithmic changes that prioritise positive content and ethical design frameworks. These frameworks would be geared towards encouraging more personal and meaningful connections, moving away from the current emphasis on impersonal broadcasts and virality.

The real challenge is systemic. Social media platforms must be redesigned with built-in safety features that don't depend on parental oversight. Without a fundamental rethink of how these platforms function, young users — especially in vulnerable regions — will remain at risk.

The writer is the executive director of Future of India Foundation

## SEPTEMBER 26, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### ARMY TO PULL OUT

THE GOVERNMENT HAS decided to withdraw the Army from the Golden Temple complex. A final agreement has been reached between the government and five priests on the question of the control of the Golden Temple. Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi made an unscheduled broadcast to the nation on AIR and Doordarshan announcing the government's decision.

### ANDHRA MLAS HELD

FOUR LEGISLATORS WERE arrested under NSA in connection with the continuing strike

in the twin cities. They include P Ramaswamy, a former minister in the Bhaskara Rao cabinet, the Majlis leader, Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, former protem speaker, and two other Majlis leaders, Mohammed Amanullah Khan and Baqar Aga. Former CM Bhaskara Rao, has lodged a strong protest with Andhra Governor Shankar Dayal Sharma over the arrests.

### OPPOSITION UNITED

INTENSE BEHIND-THE-SCENE NEGOTIATIONS are in progress among opposition leaders in their renewed effort to bring different opposition parties under the umbrella of a "united party", distinct from a "merger" to fight

the Congress (I) in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Under the proposal, opposition parties would come under the "united party" with Lok Dal leader Charan Singh, as president.

### ASSAM ROLLS CASE

THE ELECTION COMMISSION informed the Supreme Court that it would carry out intensive revision of the electoral rolls for all constituencies in Assam in accordance with the rules under the Representation of People's Act "as far as practicable". Wherever it was not "practicable" to carry out intensive revision in any constituency or constituencies, the revision would be "summary".



"If history is any judge, past Israeli adventures in Lebanon have not ended well for the Zionist state, and there is little proof things will be different this time around. Israel has lit a fire that can consume the entire region, as hopes for a Gaza ceasefire grow dimmer by the day."  
— DAWN, PAKISTAN

# An uncertain love affair

If India-US partnership is to become a time-tested marriage, the two need to engage in wider conversations going beyond partisan interests in either country



SANJAYA BARU

A QUARTER CENTURY ago a common complaint about the bilateral relationship between India and the United States used to be that the ballast was not heavy enough to steady the ship in uncertain waters. That is no longer true. A variety of factors have stabilised the relationship to the point where disagreements no longer disrupt. The ship is steadier and on course. Even if the Indian national security advisor has to remain at sea, giving up plans to arrive at an American port.

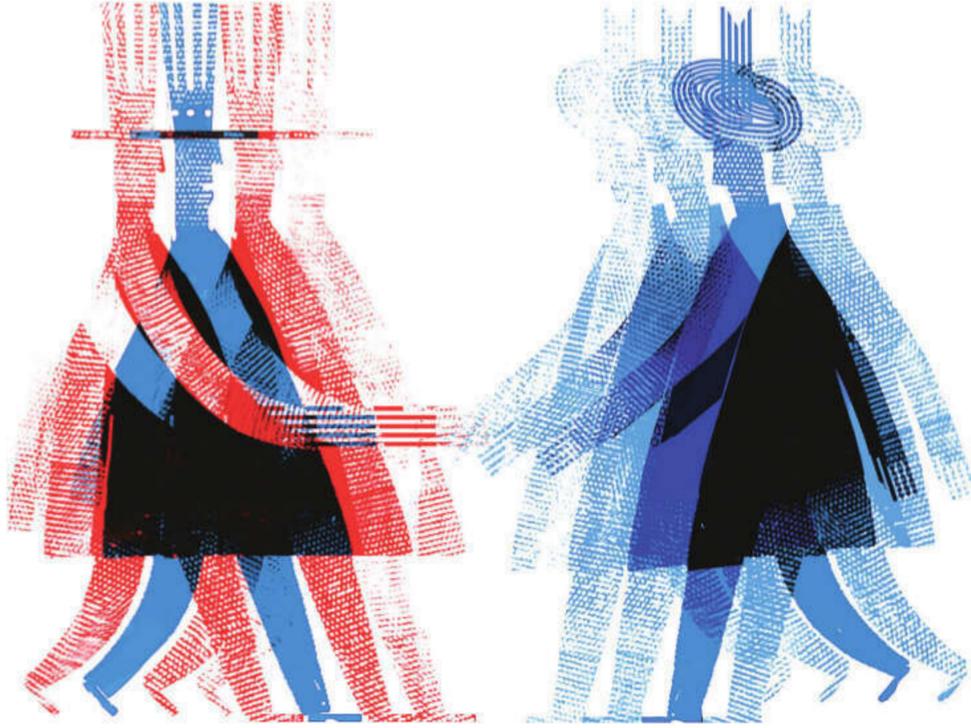
For the first time in a quarter century, since the creation of the office of the National Security Advisor in 1998, the NSA has not accompanied the Prime Minister on a visit to the United States. Therein hangs a tale. One of the problems with the close to one score strategic partnerships that India has signed up with all manner of countries is that they do not help clarify how to handle situations like the one that the Indian NSA, Ajit Kumar Doval, finds himself in. After all, he was only pursuing India's core strategic interest in dealing with anti-national and separatist elements based overseas, including on American soil. Should a strategic partner not share such strategic interests?

The reason given for Doval staying home, according to media reports, is that he is required here to keep an eye on the situation in Jammu & Kashmir in the run up to the elections there. This does not sound convincing since, on the one hand, the all-powerful Union home minister and the experienced raksha mantri are there to do the job and, on the other, because the Union government has been claiming that the situation in Kashmir is normal and under control.

It would appear, therefore, that the NSA may have been advised to stay home to avoid any embarrassment that may be caused by the summons issued by the district court of the southern district of New York, in response to a lawsuit filed by the US-based Khalistani activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The summons, demanding a response from the Indian government within 21 days, has specifically named the NSA, Ajit Kumar Doval, along with the head of the Research and Analysis Wing, Samant Goel and the alleged operative, the Indian businessman Nikhil Gupta.

To add to the diplomatic embarrassment caused by the summons and its timing, White House officials and members of the US national security council chose to meet a delegation of Sikhs on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with President Joe Biden. The delegation was assured that Sikhs in the US would be protected from any act of "transnational repression".

On the one hand the ballast in the bilateral relationship is heavy enough to tide over such diplomatic storms. On the other hand, the manner in which this issue and many others on the bilateral agenda have been handled by the Biden administration suggests that there is still a lack of clarity on what exactly both countries mean when



C R Sasikumar

they speak of a "comprehensive and global strategic partnership". It is one thing for the US to defend democratic freedoms and quite another for the White House to be commiserating with elements that seek the dismemberment of India.

This is not to defend the dubious and ham-handed operation allegedly carried out by Indian agencies on US soil. The latter have egg on their face. No one expects a mea culpa in such cases but a price is being extracted as a warning. If that price includes embarrassing the Indian NSA, so be it.

It is not just the Pannun case and US response to "Khalistani activism" that has raised questions about the scope and definition of the strategic partnership, but also a range of other issues that have come up with respect to defence equipment sales, the terms of engagement in critical and emerging technologies, policy regimes for trade and investment and so on. Differences on issues such as democracy in Bangladesh and the war in Ukraine have only added to this list.

Given the importance of the bilateral relationship it is time to set photo-ops aside and engage in some real hard-nosed conversations. It is such frank and honest conversations of the 1990s that laid the foundation for the relationship of the 2000s. None other than a longstanding critic of the US at the time, the strategic affairs guru K. Subrahmanyam, would speak his mind out to his American interlocutors, not ever being diplomatic, and give them a sense of Indian thinking.

It appears of late that a considerable part of the conversation is within echo chambers of mutual bonhomie with constant re-assurances being given, as in an uncertain love affair rather than a time-tested marriage. Both sides are responsible for this given

Given the importance of the bilateral relationship, it is time to set photo-ops aside and engage in some real hard-nosed conversations. It is such frank and honest conversations of the 1990s that laid the foundation for the relationship of the 2000s. None other than a longstanding critic of the US at the time, the strategic affairs guru K Subrahmanyam, would speak his mind out to his American interlocutors, not ever being diplomatic, and give them a sense of Indian thinking.

some fundamental differences on a range of issues, including how they view relations with Russia and China.

It is not clear what Prime Minister Modi expects from his repeated, high profile love-ins with the Indian diaspora, apart from ego gratification, but the fact remains that whichever way they vote in US elections is not going to make a fundamental difference to the bilateral relationship. Perhaps Donald Trump would be more exuberant in expressing his friendship towards India but, as we have seen from his first term, that would not make much difference to policy. Kamala Harris may be more concerned about human rights, civil liberties and religious freedom in India but her trade, investment, defence export policies as well as her approach to China and Russia are unlikely to be very different from Biden's.

If indeed the India-US partnership is "comprehensive, global and strategic", and not just transactional — with India buying US defence equipment and US turning a blind eye to Indian misgovernance — then the two need to engage in wider and meaningful conversations, going beyond the partisan interests of one political party or another in either country.

As for Prime Minister Modi and his party, they have to manage the growing dissonance between the government's foreign policy and the attitude of the "Sangh Parivar", as manifesting on social media. While foreign affairs analysts from think tanks and in media sing one tune, "Modi bhakts" on social media are mouthing an altogether different one.

The writer was Member, National Security Advisory Board of India, 1999-2001 and media advisor to Prime Minister of India, 2004-08

# The job lags and gaps

Meeting future job requirements calls for substantial educational and skilling reforms



C RANGARAJAN AND M SURESH BABU

DATA ON EMPLOYMENT growth in India reveals contrasting trends. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI's) Capital, Labour, Energy Materials, Services (KLEMS) data reports a 6 per cent increase in job growth for FY24, a significant rise from the 3.2 per cent growth in FY23. However, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) offers a less optimistic view: The unemployment rate climbed to 9.2 per cent in June 2024 from 7 per cent in May, with the annual rate for FY24 at 8 per cent. According to Citigroup Research, India needs to create about 1.2 crore jobs every year over the next decade to absorb the number of new entrants to the labour market. However, with a 7 per cent growth rate, the country can generate around 80-90 lakh jobs annually, a deficit of around 30-40 lakh jobs. As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the unemployment rate in urban areas decreased from 6.8 per cent to 6.7 per cent between January to March 2023 and January to March 2024 for persons 15 years and above. Labour force participation rate in urban areas has increased from 48.5 per cent to 50.2 per cent from January to March 2023 and January to March 2024 for persons aged 15 years and above. Given the disparate trends in employment growth from different agencies, it is important that the National Statistical Commission address data discrepancies by improving data quality, improving co-ordination between agencies and increasing transparency in reporting. In fact, much of the difference is due to the differing definitions of employment used.

The incommensurate pace of employment generation is due to two major factors. First, imperfections in labour markets create rigidities resulting in persistent shortages and excesses. Apart from the institutional factors, which influence wage setting, there are several irritants in the operation of the labour market of which the "skill gap" is important. There are two kinds of skill gaps. One, when job seekers, despite acquiring qualifications, fall short of skills due to poor training. Second, when there is a complete lack of skill training. In India, both gaps co-exist. Compounding skill gaps is the non-availability of jobs that meet the aspirations of job seekers — the aspirational gap. The growing demand for jobs in the IT sector and the increasing presence of migrant manual labour in the southern states are examples of aspirational gaps. We need to find solutions to bridge all these gaps for the smooth functioning of labour markets and absorb new additions to the workforce.

Second, is the incongruence between growth in output and labour absorption due to technological changes resulting in the decline of employment elasticity. The substitution of labour by machines has a long history with innovations often resulting in simultaneous increases in output and

employment. However, earlier inventions were machines, and tools to reduce physical labour. These "mechanical muscles", deemed stronger and tireless compared to human muscles, increased production and productivity. The emergence of AI, or mechanical minds, raises another question: Will the demand for human brain labour fall? Idea creators and professionals who can apply new technologies will thrive. However, there's a distinct possibility of the middle management being downsized. Mechanical muscles pushed horses out of the economy, while mechanical minds can do the same to humans unless we equip the workforce to cope with the change.

Meeting future job requirements calls for substantial educational and skilling reforms. Educational institutions today are struggling to meet industry needs, leading many young Indians to pursue multiple degrees from lower-quality institutions. This has led to higher unemployment rates among highly educated youth. Despite enrolment rates going up, the quality of education has lagged behind requirements, exacerbating the employability crisis. The need for skill development after graduation is a sad commentary on our education system.

A balance between economic growth and employment growth can be achieved by pursuing a two-pronged strategy. First, concerted attempts need to be made to push industrialisation in sectors that absorb more labour. These sectors normally have strong inter-sectoral linkages and the ability to cater to the domestic market. Food processing and products, textiles and apparel have high labour absorption, and linkages with agriculture and other sectors within manufacturing, but might lag in terms of international competitiveness to penetrate global markets. Second, international competitiveness needs to be improved in technology-intensive sectors. They have higher technology adoption rates, increased research and development and the ability to cater to global markets. These include chemicals and chemical products, pharmaceuticals, medicinal, chemical and botanical products, motor vehicles, computers, electronic and optical products and manufacture of electrical equipment. Pursuing this strategy requires a sectoral approach and differentiated incentive system for employment generation and capital investments.

As of now, there is very little space to increase either the price of capital or lower the price of labour. In fact, the scope for altering technological choices concerning the production of any industrial output is limited. This is not only in matters of new technology. Even older technologies are becoming increasingly less labour-intensive. Smart factories are becoming more common. We need a good combination of relatively labour-intensive sectors and those that are contingent on high technology. A comprehensive policy framework focussing on sectors needs to be evolved to tackle the question of employment generation. The cardinal principle of such a framework should also be to enhance growth rates, as growth per se is important for generating jobs.

Rangarajan is former chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and former governor, Reserve Bank of India. Suresh Babu is director, MIDS, Chennai

# Fortifying the basic structure

Simultaneous elections are feasible. They will strengthen democracy



JANAY JAIN

WITH THE UNION Cabinet accepting the report prepared by the High-Level Committee advocating for simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, the argument over "One Nation One Election" (ONOE) has taken centre stage again. Some have taken the view that simultaneous elections would benefit the citizenry at large, others argue that it would serve as an assault on the basic structure of the Indian Constitution.

Before we delve into these arguments, it might be beneficial to appreciate that India was never a stranger to holding simultaneous elections. In fact, our democratic journey began with this very idea. The first general election saw us voting simultaneously for both the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. This practice continued in 1957 with the second general elections wherein several assemblies (Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Mysore, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal) were dissolved to align with national polls, ensuring synchronicity.

It was unfortunate that this harmonious electoral cycle was short-lived. The first blow came in July 1959, when then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dismissed the Kerala government led by E M S Namboodiripad. The second blow was struck by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as she prematurely dissolved the fourth Lok Sabha and called for general elections 15 months ahead of schedule. Thereafter, the situation further deteriorated

as central governments led by Congress unceremoniously utilised Article 356 of the Constitution to topple state assemblies it did not find favour with. On a side note, it was unfortunate that such a course was adopted on at least 50 occasions and all of this struck a blow to simultaneous elections.

The disadvantages of this fragmented approach were apparent to all. For instance, in 1962, the Election Commission of India in its Report on the General Elections emphasised that "it is obviously desirable that the duplication of effort and expense should, if possible, be avoided". This sentiment was echoed by the Commission in its 1983 Annual Report where it stressed the need to conduct simultaneous elections for parliamentary and assembly constituencies. The Law Commission in its 170th Report went a step further as it not only advocated simultaneous elections but also pinned the blame on the misuse of Article 356.

Given this background, the question arises: What are the benefits of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies? First and foremost, voters will only need to visit polling stations once to elect both their national and state representatives.

Second, the logistical burden on authorities would be greatly reduced: Election authorities can deploy polling personnel, build polling stations, divert security forces and make other arrangements only once. Moreover, even the preparation of an electoral

roll, which in itself is a Herculean exercise, would only need to be done once. To translate this into numbers, it was estimated in 2015 that the cost of holding elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies was pegged at almost Rs 4,500 crore and in the 14th Lok Sabha, over 1,349 mobile companies of the Central Armed Police Forces were deployed.

Third, at a time when the Opposition's favourite political argument is that elections in India don't have a level playing field, simultaneous elections would benefit these political parties by ensuring that their campaign expenses remain limited.

Fourth, ONOE would alleviate the policy paralysis that occurs due to frequent impositions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Each time the MCC is imposed, governance comes to a standstill as new schemes or projects cannot be announced or implemented. Simultaneous polls would significantly reduce these periods of administrative limbo.

It appears that for years even those who were amenable to the idea of ONOE dismissed it as a noble but unfeasible reform. However, the report of the High-Level Committee, which comprised a former President of India, former Leader of Opposition, distinguished bureaucrats and constitutional experts, has provided a concrete roadmap for implementation. The success of this report not only lies in the manner in which it was prepared but also in the

fact that it provided an answer to the various exigencies that could arise. For instance, it outlines the course of action to be adopted in case of a hung assembly.

Predictably, as soon as the High-Level Committee's report was published and the Cabinet accepted it, a set of compulsive contrarians emerged to criticise it as an assault on democracy. In their haste to oppose, they conveniently overlooked the fact that India was not alien to simultaneous elections and that numerous government panels, even during Congress rule, had recommended such an approach. Detractors of ONOE also argued that the course adopted by the Cabinet was contrary to a number of judgments of the Supreme Court wherein it was held that "free and fair elections" are the hallmark of the basic structure of the Constitution. On the contrary, with ONOE strengthening our democracy, the basic structure of the Constitution is far from threatened — it is fortified.

As we stand at a crossroads — the ONOE proposal will be brought before Parliament — two options lie ahead of us. We can either resign ourselves to the disadvantages of separate elections or we can take a step forward by shedding our partisan views and acting in national interest.

The writer is an advocate at the Bombay High Court

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BAD PRECEDENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In cold blood' (IE, September 25). Uttar Pradesh has set a disturbing precedent with its pattern of encounter killings. This bypassing of due process seems to have enhanced the chief minister's public image and even yielded political dividends. No wonder, other states are following UP's lead. However, such extrajudicial killings are a blatant travesty of justice, violating the principles enshrined in our legal framework, and need to be addressed urgently. Such measures also point to a broader systemic failure, where the judiciary is unable to deliver timely and effective justice. Moreover, they expose the dangerous level of political interference in institutions that are meant to operate independently and uphold the law.  
Vijai Pant, Hempur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In cold blood' (IE, September 25). The encounter killing of the prime accused in the sexual assault of two minors at Badlapur by the Maharashtra police has set a dangerous example. Police encounters should have no place in a democracy. Criminals, undoubtedly, merit deterrent legal action. But the police agenda cannot be to get rid of them. Even the worst criminal has the

right to a fair trial. The incident needs to be probed thoroughly, not in the least to fix responsibility for the security lapse.  
SS Paul, Nadia

### FOR A GREEN INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Clean up sans teeth' (IE, September 25). India's pollution problem is deteriorating by the day as a result of its massive population, increasing urbanisation and consumerism, and people's changing lifestyles. Our country leads the list of the world's 20 most polluted cities. Air pollution alone is projected to kill more than 22 lakh people per year. Enforcement remains a significant challenge in minimising excessive noise pollution in urban areas. Despite extensive river cleaning efforts, 70 per cent of our surface water is rated unsuitable for human consumption. If our pollution control boards are understaffed, how will we monitor and control these problems? These agencies also require sufficient domain-level experts to provide scientific and technical support, and research to anticipate risks. All our Pollution Control Boards have to be made robust and efficient.  
Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

# Two years of Project Cheetah: Status report and the road ahead

**NIKHIL GHANEKAR**  
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 25

**PROJECT CHEETAH**, which saw the introduction of the African sub-species of the big cat in India, completed two years on September 17. The ambitious project has two overarching objectives. First, to establish a stable, breeding population of cheetahs in central India. Two, to use cheetahs as an umbrella species to restore open natural ecosystems such as scrubs, savannahs, grasslands, and degraded forests.

**EXPLAINED CONSERVATION**

Two years on, Project Cheetah has seen marginal success. Many challenges remain, as well as questions regarding its long-term outlook.

**24 cheetahs survive**

The project began with the intercontinental translocation of African cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The

translocation took place in two batches of eight and 12 cheetahs.

These cheetahs were initially kept in soft-release bomas — small enclosures inside the national park to get them adapted to the local environment. Although confined to an area of roughly 1 sq km, the cheetahs hunted live prey inside these bomas. While some cheetahs were subsequently released in the wild, they were eventually brought back into the enclosures. Mating within the translocated cohort of cheetahs led to the birth of 17 cubs.

Of the 20 translocated cheetahs, eight have died due to a variety of reasons, from attacks during mating to septicaemia caused by tick infestation under the cheetahs' radio collars. Of the 17 cubs, five have perished. Currently, 24 cheetahs (12 adults and 12 cubs) survive.

The next batch of 6-8 African cheetahs are supposed to be translocated to the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, also in Madhya Pradesh.



**Cheetah with her cubs in Kuno National Park.** Project Cheetah Annual Report 2023-24

**Cheetahs still not in wild**

The project has seen marginal success, mainly on two fronts. First, with respect to the successful breeding of the African cheetahs in a new climate and ecology and the

survival of 12 out of the 17 cubs born. Second, Pawan and Veera, who were released into the wild last December, spent a considerable amount of time in a free range, and travelled far north of Kuno, even entering Rajasthan.

However, the project faced a significant setback in August this year when Pawan was found dead due to suspected drowning (the autopsy report has not yet been made public). After this incident, all 24 surviving cheetahs were put in enclosures. This has raised questions about the cheetahs' capabilities to establish their own habitat in the wild. Authorities say more cheetahs will be released after the monsoon.

Conservation scientists, however, have criticised the delay in releasing the cheetahs into the wild and questioned the lack of transparency in the matter. Ravi Chellam, a Bengaluru-based wildlife biologist and conservation scientist, cited a Namibian policy which states that large wild carnivores should not be kept in captivity for more than three months. Beyond this period, the carnivore should either be euthanised or held in

captivity permanently. Barring Veera, who is now in an enclosure, and the now-dead Pawan, all the other cheetahs have been in enclosures for more than a year now. This is contrary to the government's own plan which said the cheetahs would be released in the wild after a 4-5 week quarantine period, followed by a 1-2 month acclimatisation period, according to Chellam.

**Problem of inadequate prey**

A deficit in the prey base is one of the biggest challenges faced by the project. The project's latest annual report has found that the density of *chital*, the primary prey for cheetahs (and leopards), has declined from 23.43 animals per sq km in 2021 to 17.5 animals per sq km in 2024. The current population of *chital* in Kuno National Park is about 6,700.

This is far less than the numbers required to sustain the 91 leopards and 12 adult cheetahs in the park. The leopard population would need about 23,600 prey animals and cheetahs about 3,120 prey animals annually. According to Chellam, the lack of prey re-

ffects poorly on the project management, given that in 2022, Kuno was specifically chosen due to its prey density. He said, "What has happened to drastically change the ground situation in such a short period of time?"

**Road ahead**

Experience from the project so far has shown that the free-ranging cheetahs often ventured far and wide, crossing state boundaries or entering human habitats. This has brought interstate landscape conservation plans under the spotlight.

Authorities aim to conserve the interstate Kuno-Gandhi Sagar landscape, which includes several forest patches outside sanctuaries, parks and tiger reserves, spread over parts of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The step has been spelt out as the way forward to establish a population of 60-70 cheetahs in the region.

However, this landscape's conservation would be a Herculean task as it would involve restoring the habitats adequately and minimising the risks to cheetahs before they can populate the space.

**EXPLAINED GLOBAL**

## WHY SRI LANKA'S NEW PRESIDENT HAS DISSOLVED COUNTRY'S PARLIAMENT

A DAY after assuming office, Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Tuesday dissolved Parliament and announced a snap election on November 14.

Dissanayake had indicated during the campaign that upon coming to power, he would seek a fresh mandate to pursue his policies. There is "no point continuing with a Parliament that is not in line with what the people want," he had said, according to media reports.



**President Dissanayake with PM Amarasuriya on Tuesday.** Reuters

**Political situation**

Sri Lanka's 225-member Parliament has a term of five years. The previous election took place in August 2020, which means the now-dissolved Parliament was supposed to be in place until August 2025.

However, the socialist National People's Power (NPP) alliance led by Dissanayake and his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party, had just three seats in this Parliament. This is because until 2022, the NPP largely remained on the fringes of Sri Lankan politics.

The meteoric rise of the NPP, exemplified by the mandate received by Dissanayake in Saturday's presidential election, came on the back of the mass protests that rocked Sri Lanka in 2022. The NPP led the street agitation against years of economic mismanagement and corruption — protests that forced the powerful Rajapaksa family from power and compelled President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, who became President in July 2022, was backed in Parliament by the Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party.

In the backdrop of this situation, it was always likely that if he were to come to power, Dissanayake would dissolve Parliament and call fresh elections, in which the NPP would likely make major gains.

**Sri Lankan system**

Technically, the President and Prime

Minister can be from different political parties. But in reality, ever since the President was given executive powers in 1978, the two offices have been closely aligned. This is because for all practical purposes, the Prime Minister acts as deputy to the President in Sri Lanka.

The President is both the head of state and head of government, as well as the commander-in-chief of the Sri Lankan armed forces, and the head of the Union cabinet. The President has the power to dissolve Parliament. The President is directly elected for a six-year term.

The Prime Minister is the most senior member of Parliament and the Union cabinet, and the chief adviser to the President. The PM is also the first in line to succeed the President. Wickremesinghe was PM when Gotabaya was President.

**What happens now**

Hours before Dissanayake took oath as President on Monday, Dinesh Gunawardene resigned as Prime Minister. On Tuesday, Dissanayake appointed Harini Amarasuriya, one of the three NPP members of Parliament, as Prime Minister. Amarasuriya will head the Union cabinet, which will act as the interim government until elections take place in November. A new PM will be appointed after that.

**ARJUN SENGUPTA**

**EXPLAINED POLITICS**

## Clause 6 of Assam Accord

CM meets AASU leaders on implementing 52 recommendations of Justice Biplab Sarma committee on safeguards for 'Assamese people' in Assam Accord, but 15 major issues remain in Centre's domain

**SUKRITA BARUAH**  
 GUWAHATI, SEPTEMBER 25

AFTER A meeting with representatives of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma set the ball rolling for the implementation of 52 recommendations of the Justice Biplab Sarma Committee regarding Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, as announced by the Assam government earlier this month.

This comes more than four years after the Centre-appointed high-level committee finalised its report in February 2020.

Notably, 15 key recommendations of the committee will not be implemented for the time being. These, the chief minister said, will require Constitutional amendments to be implemented. "We will take up these matters with the Centre at the right forum," he posted on X on Wednesday.

**What is Clause 6 of Assam Accord? What is the Biplab Sarma committee report?**

The historic Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Union government and the leadership of the Assam Movement, primarily the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), which was signed in 1985. The accord ended the six-year long agitation in Assam against the entry of Bangladeshi migrants into the state.

Clause 6 of the accord states that "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

In July 2019, the Union Home Ministry constituted a 14-member committee chaired by retired Assam High Court Justice Biplab Kumar Sarma, and comprising judges, retired bureaucrats, writers, AASU leaders and journalists, to suggest ways to implement the clause. Among the key questions before the committee was a definition of "the Assamese people" eligible for the "safeguards" under Clause 6.

The committee finalised its report in February 2020. But instead of it being received by the Union Home Ministry, which had constituted the committee, the report was received by then Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of the BJP. In August 2020, four committee members released the confidential report in the public domain.

Among the key recommendations made



**Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma after the meeting with representatives of AASU on Wednesday.** Screengrab/X/@himantabiswa

by the committee was that the definition of "Assamese people", for the purpose of implementing Clause 6, should include "Indigenous Tribals", "Other Indigenous Communities of Assam", "Indian citizens residing in the territory of Assam on or before January 1, 1951" and their descendants, and "Indigenous Assamese" people. Based on this, the committee made several recommendations for reservations for "Assamese people", including in Parliament, the state Assembly, local bodies, and jobs.

**What recommendations of the report will the Assam government implement?**

Chief Minister Sarma said that the state government has accepted 1951 as the "cut-off date" for the specific recommendations of the report. He said, however, that this definition of "Assamese people" is confined to only the context of the report's recommendations.

Following a meeting with the AASU on Wednesday, he said that the 67 broad recommendations made by the report can be divided into three broad categories: 40 which come under the exclusive domain of the state government, 12 which will require the concurrence of the Centre, and 15 which are in the exclusive domain of the Centre. The 52 recommendations in the first two categories will be implemented by April 2025, for which the state government will submit a roadmap to AASU by October 25 this year.

These 52 recommendations largely deal with safeguards on language, land, and cultural heritage. Some key recommendations include:

**LAND**  
 ■ Creating Revenue Circles where only "Assamese people" can own and possess land, and transfer of such land in these areas

are limited to them alone;

■ Launching a time-bound, three year programme to allot land titles to "Assamese people" who have occupied a certain piece of land for decades, but are without possession of land documents;

■ Carrying out a special survey of *char* areas (riverine regions along the Brahmaputra), and for newly created *chars* to be treated as government land, in which river erosion-affected people should get priority in allotment;

**LANGUAGE**

■ Keeping Assamese as the official language throughout the state as per the 1960 Assam Official Language Act "with provisions for use of local languages" in the Barak Valley, Hill districts, and the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District;

■ Making it compulsory for all state government acts, rules, orders, etc. to be issued in Assamese along with English;

■ Constituting an Autonomous Language and Literature Academy/Council of Assam to preserve and promote all indigenous languages of Assam;

■ Making Assamese a compulsory subject up to class VIII or class X in all English medium schools, both under the state board and CBSE;

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

■ Establishing an autonomous authority for the development of *sattras* (neo-Vaishnavite monasteries), which will, among other things, provide financial assistance to them; and

■ Creating multipurpose cultural complexes in each district to "uplift" the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups.

Chief Minister Sarma said that the autonomous councils of Assam's Sixth

Schedule Areas — namely the Bodoland Territorial Council, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council — will decide whether to implement the 52 recommendations. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides autonomous tribal councils in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram certain legislative and judicial autonomy.

**Which are the recommendations that the Assam government has left out?**

Some of the most sensitive recommendations by the committee, however, do not find mention in the 52 points listed by the state government. Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah recently referred to these as the "soul" of the committee's report.

Among them are the introduction of an Inner Line Permit for entry into Assam as is in place in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram, as well as numerous reservations for "Assamese people". The latter include 80-100% reservation in Assam's seats in Parliament, and the same proportion reserved in the state Assembly and local bodies; 80-100% reservation in Assam government jobs; and 70-100% reservations in vacancies arising in undertakings run in partnership between the Assam government and private companies. There was also a recommendation for the creation of an Upper House (the Legislative Council of Assam) which would be completely reserved for the "Assamese people".

The BJP's political opponents have questioned where the Centre featured in discussions regarding the implementation of the committee's recommendations. Former AASU general secretary Lurinjyoti Gogoi, who was a member of the committee, questioned whether the Union Home Ministry even accepted the report.

"The Home Ministry has still not accepted the report... Until it accepts the report, the recommendations do not have any legal or constitutional value... the fundamental points here are those on political representation," he said.

However, Chief Minister Sarma has said that the Assam government will appeal to the Centre to have talks with AASU, and work towards the implementation of the remaining 15 recommendations.

"Our aim is that we should not let those recommendations which are attainable lie by the wayside because of those which are difficult and may take time," he had said earlier this month.

**THIS WORD MEANS | INTEGRAL HUMANISM**

# Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism, 'basic philosophy' of the BJP

**YASHEE**  
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 25

WEDNESDAY MARKED the 108th birth anniversary of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916-1968), whose philosophy is among the most important guiding principles of the BJP.

Upadhyaya was a *pracharak* of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and a founder leader of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), a party that existed from 1951 to 1977, when it merged with the Janata Party. In 1980, former members of the BJS left Janata and formed the BJP.

Upadhyaya, who was fondly referred to as "Panditji" by his associates and followers, was among the tallest thinkers of India's right wing. In 1964-65, Upadhyaya propounded his main political and social idea, Integral Humanism, which, according to the BJP's constitution, is the party's "basic philosophy".

The doctrine of Integral Humanism was born from Upadhyaya's desire to have "uniquely Indian" ideas guide the journey

of the newly independent nation, as opposed to the many Western 'isms'.

**Upadhyaya's philosophy**

At its core, Integral Humanism is about unity and harmony among the various components that make up an individual, and among individuals and society as a whole. Integral Humanism sees an individual as made up of body, mind, intelligence, and soul, and considers the development and fulfillment of each as important.

A cornerstone of Integral Humanism is the concept of the four *purusharthas*, or areas of human effort — *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. "It is important to note that Panditji always emphasised that he did not invent these concepts; he drew upon the wisdom of ancient Indian philosophy to formulate his doctrine," BJP leader Dr Sanjay Paswan, who served as Minister in the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, told *The Indian Express*.

**Context of philosophy**



**Deendayal Upadhyaya lights the lamp at a Jana Sangh meeting.** Express Archive

As independent India contemplated its future and the path ahead for the nation, there was a feeling among some patriots that it should be guided by indigenous systems of thought, instead of popular

Western political philosophies.

On April 22, 1965, Upadhyaya said in a lecture in Mumbai (then Bombay): "Among the various isms that affected the West, the principal ones were nationalism, democracy, and socialism... Every now and then, apart from these, the ideals of world peace and world unity were also advocated. All these are good ideals... But by itself, each stands opposed to the rest in practice. Nationalism poses a threat to world peace. Democracy and capitalism join hands to give a free reign to exploitation. Socialism replaced capitalism and brought with it an end to democracy and individual freedom."

Thus, these ideals were far from perfect, and Bharat, with its rich history of political thought, should not ape them blindly, he said.

**The four purusharthas**

Upadhyaya described the difference in Indian and Western ways of thinking thus: "The first characteristic of Bharatiya culture is that it looks upon life as an integrated whole... The confusion in the West arises

primarily from its tendency to think of life in sections and then to attempt to put them together by patchwork."

While many believe that Indian philosophy is overtly focused on the soul, the Bharatiya way of thought gives equal importance to the body, mind, intelligence, and the soul — and at the level of the individual, all four must be nourished for a truly meaningful life, he said.

In terms of policymaking and public life, he spoke of the four *purusharthas*: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*.

"*Purushartha* means effort which befit a man. The longings for *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha* are inborn in man, and the satisfaction of these gives him joy (*ananda*). Of these four efforts too, we have thought in an integrated way.

"*Artha* includes what are known as political and economic policies. According to the ancients, it used to include Justice and Punishment as well as Economics. *Kama* relates to the satisfaction of various natural desires. *Dharma* includes all those rules,

fundamental principles and ethical codes, in accordance with which all the activities in respect of *Artha* and *Kama* are to be carried out, and all the goals thereof to be achieved. This alone will ensure progress in an integrated and harmonious manner, and lead ultimately to *Moksha*," Upadhyaya said in Mumbai on April 23, 1965.

**Deendayal and BJP**

The BJP says on its website that "all these Indian thoughts should not be issues of sermons but of politics. The policies of the country should be made on their basis."

Dr Paswan said that for India to truly become a *Shivsha* Guru, it has to take the lead in the sphere of thoughts and ideas — where Upadhyaya's contributions are especially important. "Bharat may survive on vote bank politics but will thrive only through thought bank politics. Hence, we need to make sure that our institutions are guided by the basis of the wisdom contained in our ancient texts, which Pandit Upadhyaya so ably distilled."

# Opinion

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

## COURT CORRECTION

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud

“No one can call any part of territory of India as 'Pakistan'. It is fundamentally against the territorial integrity of the nation. The answer to sunlight is more sunlight and not to suppress what happens in court. The answer is not to close it down

## Shades of 1982

Israel has taken on Hezbollah in Lebanon but will the escalation achieve its military objectives?

**W**HILE THE 11-MONTH Israel-Hamas war in Gaza still rages, Israel has expanded its military objectives to take on Hezbollah — one of the most powerful non-state actors — in southern Lebanon. This has triggered heightened concerns about full-scale hostilities in West Asia as the risks rapidly escalate of the conflict spilling over from Israel to Lebanon and Syria, ultimately involving Iran for supporting militias like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis in Yemen. In his last speech to the UN, US President Joseph Biden stated that a “full-scale war is not in anyone’s interest, even if the situation has escalated, a diplomatic solution is still possible”. Unfortunately, that solution is a distant prospect with the fading hopes of a US, Egypt, and Qatar-mediated ceasefire in Gaza. The only ground for cautious optimism is the measured response so far of Iran’s president, Masoud Pezeshkian, who hoped Tehran could avoid being dragged into acting in a way “not worthy of it”. Pezeshkian, too, expressed fears of a regional conflagration but said Hezbollah, which Tehran helped to found in 1982, “cannot stand alone” against Israel.

Israel’s determination to destroy Hezbollah clearly has ratcheted up tensions in West Asia. Israel and Hezbollah have been shelling and launching missile strikes against each other’s positions since last October, forcing 60,000 Israelis to flee their homes in the northern border region. Israeli strikes too have displaced 500,000 people from southern Lebanon. But hostilities escalated after Israel assassinated Hezbollah’s top commander in Beirut in retaliation for a rocket attack in the Golan Heights that killed a dozen children in end-July. Later in August, Israel launched air strikes to destroy thousands of rocket launch barrels of Hezbollah. But the dramatic flare-up happened on September 17 and 18 when thousands of Hezbollah members were severely injured — and many killed — when the paggers and walkie-talkies they carried exploded. This Israeli hit dealt a body blow to the militia’s communications network. Massive Israeli air strikes in southern Lebanon since then have taken out more Hezbollah leaders, including its top missile commander, besides inflicting massive civilian casualties.

The question naturally is, what is Israel’s endgame? There is a clear and present danger of overreach and possibility of committing a strategic blunder as in 1982 when it invaded Lebanon. Kim Ghattas, distinguished fellow at Columbia University’s Institute of Global Politics, has perceptively observed that “every time Israel crosses the Iranian’s camp’s red lines, with bold strikes or assassinations, and faces limited fire, it feels emboldened to try again and push further. One day, it will push too far”. There are bound to be shades of 1982 if the constant air strikes are a pretext to send troops to force Hezbollah out of southern Lebanon. Israel may have struck blows to the militia’s command and control system but Hezbollah so far hasn’t budged from its positions.

More than four decades ago, Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon vowed in vain to destroy the Yasser Arafat-led Palestine Liberation Organization by invading southern Lebanon. Hezbollah is an offspring of that ill-fated invasion and has never left Lebanon since then. Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu similarly vows to destroy Hezbollah but will not find that objective attainable any more than in 1982 or even later in 2006 when a UN-sponsored ceasefire ended its hostilities with Hezbollah. If Iran steps in to help a weakened Hezbollah, this conflict is bound to engulf the region.

## China adds a touch of showbiz to its stimulus

**FEDERAL RESERVE CHAIR** Jerome Powell is almost a household name. Christine Lagarde, head of the European Central Bank, possesses an undeniable star power. The man who runs China’s central bank struggles to achieve even a small measure of that fame, despite the heft of the country — and the extent of the challenges confronting him. That’s changing.

The People’s Bank of China unveiled a slew of measures on Tuesday, including cuts in a key interest rate and the amount of money banks must set aside for reserves. Efforts to juice growth have, until now, been incremental. Further easing was overdue and economists had been anticipating progress in the coming months. But the manner of delivery, during a rare press conference by Governor Pan Gongsheng, added a dynamic flavour and sent stocks soaring. It followed a more modest step by Beijing announced during a briefing in January.

Could PBOC events, which have long endured a reputation for being staid affairs draped in technocratic language, become must-watch events like those presided over by Powell, Lagarde, and scores of other monetary chiefs? That’s a bit premature, but developments are very encouraging.

There’s a lot to be said for packaging steps together and presenting them forcefully. One of Powell’s predecessors, Ben Bernanke, recognised that what you do is only part of the game. How decisions are perceived, which is almost always about language, is critical. He set the Fed on a path to greater transparency and, in 2011, began fielding televised questions from journalists every few months. After leaving office, Bernanke wrote that successful policy is 2% action, 98% talk. Powell agreed: He now holds forth after every Federal Open Market Committee meeting. His spin on the statement is at least as significant as whether rates are raised, trimmed, or kept unchanged.

Of course, substance still matters. Having flagged the briefing on Monday, Pan had to deliver on substance. No point in talking if you don’t have anything to say. He didn’t disappoint. In addition to the reductions, Pan dabbled in forward guidance, saying that reserve requirements may be pared again this year. Funds and brokers will be allowed to borrow from the monetary authority to buy stocks, while China is also studying a market stabilisation fund.

The word “bazooka” has been bandied around to describe the initiatives. While they are certainly noteworthy, it remains seen whether they alter the underlying course of the economy, which was in a long-term slowdown well before Covid-19. Shifts in policy, especially if unveiled with bells and whistles, tend to be greeted as breakthroughs. If what transpired on Tuesday kicks off a new phase in efforts to boost growth, well and good. Should there be little follow through, then the pessimism that has characterised discussions of China’s economy in recent years will persist.

It’s worth considering how Pan’s performance compares with the reputation that preceded him. When he arrived in the governor’s office in July last year, China was on the cusp of a nasty run of very poor inflation numbers. Unlike the other major economies, where inflation rose sharply as the pandemic abated, China experienced the opposite: Consumer prices declined for several months and the pace of increases seven months later now hovers worryingly close to zero. Pan was considered a hawk at the time of his appointment. He’s done nothing to justify that early branding.

Central bankers certainly come to their gigs with philosophies and preferences, but circumstances matter greatly. It might surprise many to know that when Bernanke was installed as chair in 2006, he, too, was considered a hawk. By the time he left in 2014, he had presided over a period of easing once thought to be only possible in Japan. It’s fine to argue that China should have done much more before this week — and should be still bolder going forward. In Pan’s defence, policy is evolving in the right direction. And unlike many of his counterparts, the PBOC doesn’t make decisions independently; China’s system isn’t set up that way.

Pan can’t aspire to be *Maestro*, the title of a book on Alan Greenspan by Bob Woodward that was published 2000 when the legendary Fed boss was at the zenith of his power. The good news is that the orchestra in Beijing may finally be getting in tune.



DANIEL MOSS

Bloomberg

**W**ITH LESS THAN 50 days to go until the US presidential election on November 5, the campaigns of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris have entered their home stretch. Following their first debate, expectations around key policy issues have become more prominent among voters. Despite heightened attention, however, both candidates face an uphill battle in converting voters from the other camp. As the race tightens, the central strategy for both campaigns is clear: focus on key swing states and sway undecided voters. Polls suggest a narrow overall advantage for Harris, but the candidates are effectively tied in what is shaping up to be one of the closest elections in recent US history. Furthermore, one candidate leads the other based on what the issue is and the state concerned.

Throughout most of the campaign, Trump has maintained a marginal lead over Harris, largely thanks to his unwavering MAGA (Make America Great Again) base and his clearer economic plans. His promise of job creation, anchored by high tariffs and protectionist policies, has resonated with his supporters. In contrast, Harris was initially criticised during the debate for lacking a detailed economic plan. However, in the days following, her campaign has gained momentum. The Democratic Party’s efforts to define Harris’ economic policies and their fundraising success — garnering unprecedented support from political action committees (PACs) and Super PACs — have allowed them to dramatically outspend Trump.

Despite this, Trump remains a central figure in the race and is still within the margin of error for a possible victory. His support in the Sun Belt states — including Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina — gives him a strategic advantage. Polls indicate that 63% of likely voters in these

## TRUMP VS HARRIS

ONE CANDIDATE LEADS THE OTHER BASED ON WHAT THE ISSUE IS AND THE STATE CONCERNED

# US poll reflects broad divides

## HARSH V PANT VIVEK MISHRA

Respectively vice-president for studies and foreign policy & fellow, Americas, ORF, Delhi



states believe the US is headed in the wrong direction, a sentiment that benefits Trump’s narrative of restoring American greatness. On the other hand, Harris is ahead in key battlegrounds like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. One of her key challenges has been distancing herself from the shortcomings of the Biden-Harris administration, particularly on issues like the economy, immigration, and socially liberal policies that some voters view as divisive. The new energy that Harris seems to have brought to the party as a female, a black, and a younger candidate, seems to have camouflaged her policy failures as Vice President, especially such as those on immigration and gun control. Many feel Trump may be lacking a strategy to exploit Harris’ apparent weakness as part of the current administration.

Trump has also been adjusting to the Democratic Party’s decision to replace Biden with Harris as the presidential nominee. This shift upended Trump’s strategy, which had capitalised on Biden’s age and declining popularity. The gender switch has also added complexity for Trump, whose rhetoric and behaviour toward women have often been scrutinised. Nevertheless, Trump showed restraint in his debate performance, opting for a defensive posture

rather than launching ad hominem attacks. The combination of Harris’ race, gender, and age has added a fresh dynamic to the election, complicating the usual electoral calculus. Given these factors, it might have been strategic for Trump to decline a second debate with Harris. The upcoming vice-presidential debate between JD Vance for the Republicans and Tim Walz for the Democrats on October 1 now stands as a critical moment in the campaign.

As the election reaches its final stages, both candidates have experienced key moments of heightened voter engagement. Trump saw a surge in support following the first assassination attempt, while Harris gained momentum after her nomination was confirmed at the Democratic National Convention. However, the race remains remarkably close. While domestic issues — such as immigration, jobs, reproductive rights, and gun control — have dominated voter concerns, foreign policy may play an outsized role in determining the final outcome.

The Biden-Harris administration’s tenure has been bookended by major foreign policy dilemmas. Early on, the administration faced the challenge of withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan, which led to a chaotic exit. Now, the

administration grapples with unresolved conflicts such as the Ukraine-Russia war and the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. These foreign policy challenges are no longer as distant to the average voter as they once were, due in part to shifting US demographics. Conflict-induced emigration, particularly from West Asia, combined with illegal immigration from southern states and a rising number of illegal asylum seekers, has changed the way Americans view the country’s involvement in global affairs. The recent wave of campus protests across the US reflects a broader shift in public opinion about America’s role in foreign conflicts.

In this context, the tight race between Trump and Harris reflects broader national divides. A *CNN* poll reveals that 51% of voters believe both candidates have policy positions that align with what they want in a president. However, Trump’s platform appears to resonate more strongly with a larger portion of the electorate, with 29% respondents saying his policies align exactly with their preferences, compared to 18% for Harris. This underscores the strong appeal of Trump’s America-first platform, which has continued to galvanise his base. Perhaps the strongest sentiment favouring Trump may be a change from the current administration in the US, of which Harris is a part.

As the clock winds down to election day, the race remains a toss-up, with both campaigns focusing on razor-thin margins in critical swing states. While Harris may benefit from increased Democratic spending and a growing war chest, Trump’s consistent support in key regions and his ability to mobilise his base suggest that this election will go down to the wire. All eyes are now on the remaining campaign trail events, especially the vice-presidential debate, as both sides work to tip the scales in their favour.

# A lesson in financial transformation



## SHRIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Founder and MD, InGovern Research Services

Through resilience, reforms, and a commitment to responsible growth, Mauritius has become a key player in facilitating global investments

**FROM A SUGAR-DEPENDENT** economy at the time of independence in 1968 to one of Africa’s wealthiest nations today, Mauritius has undergone a remarkable transformation. It has also become a globally trusted International Financial Centre (IFC). This metamorphosis is a testament to Mauritius’ adaptability, strategic vision, and commitment to a robust financial ecosystem. Mauritius has diversified its economy, moving beyond sugarcane to other sectors like export-oriented manufacturing in textiles, tourism, financial and business services, information and communication technology, seafood processing, real estate, and education. This has laid the groundwork for its emergence as a financial hub.

Several factors contributed to Mauritius’ rise as an IFC. Political stability provided a secure environment for investors, while its strategic location between Africa and Asia positioned Mauritius as an ideal gateway for investments into these regions. Mauritius strategically leveraged its geographical advantage by signing double taxation agreements with 46 countries. The India-Mauritius Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) played a particularly crucial role, making Mauritius a critical conduit for structuring investments into India. Between 2000 and 2024, it facilitated over \$170 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) into India, accounting for 34% of India’s total FDI. In FY24, Mauritius contributed \$7.97 billion in FDI to India, reinforcing its role as a close and reliable partner.

Over 450 private equity funds are domiciled in Mauritius, facilitating nearly

\$40 billion in investments into Africa. Many Indian companies and outbound funds are using Mauritius as an investment hub and entry point for investments into Africa. The combination of geographic proximity, political stability, and a strong regulatory environment positioned Mauritius as the go-to destination for structuring investments into Africa.

Mauritius’ financial ecosystem offers tax efficiency, high-quality service, and a sophisticated regulatory framework. It has consistently adapted to global financial reporting standards, tax compliance, and governance requirements, making it a reliable destination for fund managers and development finance institutions (DFIs). Its strategic appeal is enhanced by a network of favourable tax treaties, particularly with India, which attracted significant investments until 2017 by offering exemptions on capital gains taxes. Despite global shifts in tax policies, Mauritius has remained a preferred jurisdiction for global investors, ensuring compliance with international standards through local service providers.

The journey of Mauritius to becoming a trusted financial centre was not without challenges. In February 2020, the country faced a significant setback when it was placed on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list due to strategic shortcomings in its Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) framework. This inclusion

posed a serious threat to the country’s reputation as a trusted financial hub. The Mauritius government responded swiftly and decisively to the FATF grey listing. It embarked on an ambitious exercise to overhaul its AML/CFT framework, working closely with international organisations and receiving technical assistance from various global bodies. The country implemented comprehensive reforms to

address the identified deficiencies, prioritising the implementation of the FATF action plan. By October 2021, Mauritius was removed from the grey list, well ahead of schedule. This rapid progress not only restored confidence in Mauritius’ financial system but also showcased the country’s ability to adapt quickly to meet international standards. Simultaneously, Mauritius took steps to align its tax policies with global norms. The 2016 revision of the India-Mauritius DTAA introduced capital gains taxation for investments made after April 2017. These changes have further enhanced its credibility on the global stage.

A significant boost to reputation came in 2024 with a landmark Delhi High Court ruling in favour of Tiger Global, a Mauritius-based entity. The case revolved around its sale of Flipkart shares, for which Tiger Global claimed tax exemption under the pre-2017 provisions of the India-Mauritius DTAA. Initially, India’s Authority for Advance Rulings denied Tiger Global tax benefits, arguing that the

investment was structured through Mauritius solely for tax advantages with insufficient business substance. However, the high court overturned this decision, setting a powerful precedent for Mauritius-based investors. The ruling emphasised the validity of tax residency certificates issued by Mauritius authorities and reaffirmed the legal validity of the country’s tax structures. The court’s decision not only provided greater certainty for investors using Mauritius as an investment route but also reaffirmed the sanctity of the Indo-Mauritian tax agreements.

As Mauritius continues to evolve its financial ecosystem, it remains committed to global responsibilities and regulatory innovation. In November 2023, at the 28th Conference of the Parties, the government reiterated its pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030. On the regulatory front, Mauritius has enacted new legislation to regulate virtual assets and initial token offerings, aligning with FATF standards. The proactive approach resulted in Mauritius being rated “compliant” or “largely compliant” with all 40 FATF recommendations.

Through resilience, proactive reforms, and a commitment to responsible growth, Mauritius has not only transformed its own economy but has also become a key player in facilitating global investments. By staying adaptive, transparent, and committed to best practices, Mauritius has ensured its place as a trusted and preferred jurisdiction for fund managers, DFIs, global investors, and companies seeking opportunities in the world’s most dynamic markets.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Fair share of resources

Apropos of “When riches fall short” (*FE*, September 25), indeed the 16th Finance Commission (FC) should ensure fair distribution of fiscal resources between the states and the Centre and plug the gaps seen in the 15th FC. An obvious hiccup is that the share of southern states in the divisible pool of taxes is reducing.

The Centre enjoys undeniable rights to use the cess and surcharge

collected, which is not under the divisible pool. Political differences between the Union government and Opposition-ruled states aggravate the problem. Enlarging the divisible pool, taking goods and services tax as a criterion for horizontal devolution of fiscal resources among states, prioritising industrially developed states with shares commensurate with their contribution, and forming a FC council for inclusive analysis will keep up the federalist spirit in fiscal

resource-sharing.

—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

### Data breach is serious

News about the data breach in Star Health Insurance is a matter of concern for all. Health status of any person is a matter of utmost privacy. Data of millions of customers have been put on sale. This may discourage people from entertaining private players. It is also a serious lapse on the part of the regulatory authority as it

could not ensure prioritising of data safety. The government too is responsible, as it promotes digitalisation on the one hand and remains casual about data safety on the other. It neither reposes faith in the public sector nor it has the will to control private players. It should own up and act promptly to resolve such sensitive issues.

—AG Rajmohan, Anantapur

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night

Dylan Thomas

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

— Rammath Goenka

## USE JOB MAPPING INDEX TO ENSURE SAFETY OF MIGRANTS

CREATION of jobs is a priority for the government. To plan for it more scientifically, the Union ministry of labour and employment is developing an Occupational Shortage Index (OSI) to track demand and supply of both white- and blue-collar workers in each state. The parameters will include the different categories of employment available, broken down by region. The index will also track changes in wage levels and highlight the shortage or excess of labour supply. Giving weights to various variables, a high OSI rank would indicate labour shortage. A low rank, on the other hand, would indicate a labour surplus and poorer wages.

If the experiment takes off, this mapping of labour demand for particular occupations and regions will benefit all stakeholders. Entrepreneurs can use the data to set up units where talent is available; workers looking for jobs can take an informed decision based on where wages are on the rise. Governments, too, can improve decision-making and develop information channels to guide workers, so that they get the best deal. The new initiative has to be seen in the context of rising youth unemployment. In the latest Periodic Labour Force survey, for the July 2023-June 2024 period, the unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 29 rose to 10.2 percent from 10 percent in 2022-23.

Even without a scientific guide, India has always had robust labour migration loosely regulated by demand and supply. For instance, Punjab has faced a shortage of farm hands for years and has been served by steady migration from Jharkhand and Odisha. Some older surveys indicate inter-state migration was 9-10 million a year. The 2011 Census pegs the total number of internal migrants in the country at a staggering 139 million. Though necessary to turn the wheels of the local economy, migrant workers face discrimination, wage exploitation and lack of welfare support. They often become targets of sons-of-the-soil agitations. Some 50,000-80,000 migrant workers fled Gujarat in 2018 after they were relentlessly attacked following the arrest of a migrant worker for allegedly raping a 14-year old girl. Considering the size of the shifting populations and the problems they face, the government must also track these migratory groups to ensure welfare support and keep them from becoming victims of human trafficking. The laws on the subject are well spelt out. Close monitoring is what is needed.

## CIVIC AUTHORITIES MUST BE SUED FOR NEGLIGENCE

YOUNG Niranjan paid with his life when the gate of a public playground in Bengaluru collapsed on him as he attempted to open it and wheel in his bicycle. The 11-year-old lay bleeding under the high wrought-iron gate and later succumbed to head injuries. The government rushed in with band-aid measures like promising a thorough investigation, ₹10 lakh in compensation for the family, and support for his sister's fees. Investigation showed that the gate, installed four years ago, had heavily rusted. The tragedy raises a few questions: why are gates to parks and playgrounds closed during the day and why are periodic infrastructure checks not undertaken? The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike has suspended the engineers in charge of the playground, a committee of engineers has been constituted to investigate negligence in work, and a report is expected in a week. Yet, not much systemic change can be expected if we are to go by earlier tragedies.

This was not a first for Bengaluru. Citizens, especially children, have become victims of faulty infrastructure like low-hanging power cables, shaky walls, falling rods and open drains. Vikram, a 7-year-old, was crushed under a stone bird bath in Lalbagh in 2016; 17-year-old Sanjana was buried alive when a college wall collapsed in Hebbal in 2010. Years have passed, but no one has been held responsible for these tragedies. Munirathna, the contractor responsible for building the wall that killed Sanjana, is now an MLA. The Lokayukta report held the contractor and officers responsible, but no action was taken.

It's deplorable that once such incidents fade from public memory, no action is taken against the corrupt officials, contractors and politicians involved. The malaise of 'percentage commission' is the bane of public projects—the 'cuts' that line pockets leave meagre funds for quality work. Last year, contractors exposed the '40 percent commission' culture of the previous BJP government, though it is well-known that corruption is part of every dispensation. How will the government provide a safe civic environment for its citizens, especially in places frequented by children? If the Niranjans and Sanjanas are to get justice and such accidents are to be prevented, we need a strong citizen-friendly legal system that encourages affected citizens to sue the civic authorities and not wait for the government to act.

### QUICK TAKE

#### CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL BRAINS

AS social scientists keep scratching their heads about what pushes people to the political right or left, biologists have teased out a relevant insight. Researchers the Netherlands and Greece, who examined MRI scans from nearly 1,000 people who had answered questionnaires on their political leanings, say it is reflected in the size of the amygdala, a part of the brain linked to threat perception, with conservatives showing slightly larger dimensions. It broadly agreed with a 2011 study that, interestingly, actor Colin Firth had commissioned in the UK. Sociobiology is a fascinating frontier of human understanding, but scientists warn against misconceptions and stereotypes while drawing conclusions from such findings.

THE recent extension of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme to include coverage for the elderly marks a significant step in India's efforts to address the needs of its ageing population. However, we must view this as just the beginning of a larger conversation about achieving the 'silver dividend'—the potential opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing society. As India's demographic profile shifts, the policies and frameworks must evolve to ensure the elderly are not only cared for but also empowered to contribute to society. If we plan well, we can convert a potential disaster into a significant opportunity.

India's population is set to age rapidly in the coming decades, with the proportion of those over 60 expected to double by 2050, according to the UN Population Fund. This is not unique to India. Many countries in the west and Asia, like Japan, are facing the implications of a rapidly ageing population. The silver dividend refers to the potential economic and social benefits of an ageing society, particularly if elderly individuals can remain active and engaged in economic, social and familial roles.

It is important to realise that reaping the silver dividend requires a robust policy framework that extends beyond healthcare. Over 40 percent of the elderly in India are in the poorest wealth quintile. Such levels of poverty are likely to affect their quality of life. As people live longer, their healthcare needs become more complex. The need for comprehensive geriatric care, including specialised treatments for chronic diseases, mental health support and facilities for palliative care is likely to grow. India currently faces a shortage of trained professionals across the health system—a gap that needs to be addressed urgently.

The Centre first came out with a National Policy for Older Persons in 1999. One of its main components is to promote family-based care. The policy also seeks to engage voluntary organisations in complementing family care and extending support to vulnerable elderly individuals. However, its implementation, particularly in rural regions, has been limited if not missing, underscoring the need for broader initiatives to meet the diverse physical, psychological and social needs of elderly people, especially from marginalised communities.

In addition to expanding healthcare services, improving the accessibility and quality of existing infrastructure is critical. Many elderly people, especially in rural areas, struggle to access healthcare due to poor transportation and inadequate facilities. Enhancing the reach of services such as

Our ageing population is a resource and a responsibility. Apart from strengthening elders' care infrastructure, we must innovate to engage them economically and socially

## PREPARING TO REAP INDIA'S SILVER DIVIDEND

POONAM MUTTREJA



Executive Director, Population Foundation of India



SOURAV ROY

telemedicine, mobile clinics and community health programmes will be key. It is also important to adopt a holistic approach that includes social security, economic engagement, and support for family structures.

Economic insecurity remains one of the most pressing concerns. The lack of appropriate pension schemes and adequate savings forces many to rely on their families, which may not always be viable. Approximately 90 percent of workers are in the informal sector, which offers no social protection for older persons. Policymakers should consider expanding pension schemes, especially for those in the unorganised sector, to provide a steady retirement income.

Creating age-friendly cities is essential to ensuring the elderly can live independent and dignified lives. Urban planning must

include accessible public spaces, pedestrian-friendly roads and public transportation systems that cater to the needs of older adults. Housing policies that support the development of senior-friendly communities and public buildings equipped with ramps, elevators and seating areas are vital.

One way to harness the silver dividend is to enable the elderly to remain economically active. Policies that promote flexible work arrangements, part-time jobs and community-based work can provide avenues for older adults to contribute their skills and experience. This not only supplements their income but also fosters a sense of purpose and community involvement.

In India, family members, particularly women, often bear the primary responsibility of caring for the elderly, impeding their

## A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH MIDDLE EARTH

AS many as 28 nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea were recently represented in a new partnership between India and the region. Businesses from both sides explored potential cooperation in defence production, maritime and manufacturing, among others.

Ancient synergies have marked the traditional relationship between India and countries on the Mediterranean rim. The Mediterranean is a historically significant region that has facilitated land and maritime trade between the East and West for millenniums. A diverse region spread across the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, the 28 countries stand at different levels of economic development.

Together, they comprise a critical group facilitating approximately 25 percent of global maritime trade. The sea economies have a collective GDP of approximately \$10.5 trillion. India's total trade with the region was about \$76.2 billion in 2023-24 across three major sub-regions of Mediterranean Europe, West Asia and North Africa.

Similarly, India has also played a crucial role in facilitating global trade with its central location in the Indo-Pacific. As India becomes a \$5 trillion economy in the coming years and a leading global growth engine, it seeks to build new relationships in the world. It is in this context that India emerges as a crucial partner and friend of the Mediterranean nations. A continuation of India and the Mediterranean's historic bilateral trade ties would be a fruitful partnership for both regions. This is set to emerge as a multidimensional cooperation agenda, embracing various sectors.

To begin with, one key initiative to facilitate the partnership is the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Announced during the 2023 G20 Summit held in New Delhi, IMEC is envisaged as a dedicated trade corridor linking India and the Mediterranean economies through a combination of land and sea routes. Converging technology and sustainability-led practices, it promises to significantly improve the connectivity and commerce between India and the Mediterranean, and will increase prosperity in both regions.

The IMEC is expected to build multimodal transport infrastructure, including ports and railways, to enhance trade. Alongside, the region would also create industrial infrastructure to attract global value chains. Such proposed construction activity will benefit businesses of both sides.



CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE

Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry

Second, as two economic regions with significant presence in maritime trade, the blue economy emerges as a vital cooperation sector between India and the Mediterranean nations. The strategic location of Indian and Mediterranean ports makes them key facilitators of global commerce. Joint development of maritime infrastructure along the coasts of both the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean could deepen ties, cultivate value chains for manufac-



ALEXANDRIA PORT AUTHORITY

Mediterranean ports like Alexandria have facilitated trade between the East and West for millenniums. The 28 countries on the Mediterranean rim account for a quarter of global maritime trade today. India's synergies with the region include infrastructure, energy and tech

tured goods and improve the efficiency of the IMEC. The two sides can also work together in shipping and ship construction. Fisheries, marine biology and research, and sustainability of coastal regions are other areas where the two can collaborate.

Third, as digitalisation and industry 4.0 technologies emerge as key components of global information, partnerships between Indian and Mediterranean countries can be envisaged. India and the Mediterranean could jointly cooperate on introducing and developing a payment interface like UPI, leveraging the strength of the India stack for sectors such as e-commerce and fintech.

Similarly, India and the Mediterranean could collaborate on an integrated digital corridor and increase undersea telecom-

munications connectivity. Fourth, India and the Mediterranean nations must converge collaborations on energy security and sustainable energy. Under the National Green Hydrogen Mission and Production Linked Incentive Scheme on High Efficiency Solar PV Modules, India and the Mediterranean can work together on manufacturing and introducing clean energy into their energy mixes.

Fifth, with geopolitical instability as a global challenge to commerce, multilateral industrial defence partnerships could be catalysed. India and the Mediterranean should pursue joint manufacturing and tech transfer agreements under the Make in India initiative to diversify industrial defence supply chains and improve security.

Sixth, Mediterranean companies have significant opportunities to invest in India and use it as a manufacturing hub for not only the Indian market but also markets in the Indo-Pacific region, and, potentially, the world. Similarly, Indian companies can form joint ventures with Mediterranean businesses to integrate themselves into supply chains and access their markets.

Seventh, both regions enjoy immense potential for tourism linkages. Their historical connection can attract tourists in both directions. Along with this, tourist infrastructure, skill development, and cruise tourism can be areas of engagement.

Eighth, with India and the Mediterranean having significant urban populations, urban infrastructure and circular economy practices emerge as a mutual need to meet sustainability goals and combat climate change. Programmes such as India's Smart Cities mission offer significant opportunities for Indian and Mediterranean businesses to invest and develop technologies to promote sustainable urban development.

India and the Mediterranean are two regions that historically exchanged technology, currency and culture and, within the recent geopolitical shifts, the revitalisation and renewal of this relationship can offer a significant platform for stability and greater prosperity of the world.

(Views are personal) (cb@cii.in)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Old-age homes

Ref: *More for elder care beyond health cover* (Sep 25). Beyond healthcare, elders need support, men more than women. Women can get the support of her children in the evening of their life. Less said about the agony of a widower at the hands of daughters-in-law, the better. The government should open old-age homes in all the districts to help the aged.

**NR Ramachandran, Chennai**

#### Taxing pensioners

The editorial has rightly spoken of emulating innovations from the Netherlands and Japan. Geriatric care includes both medical and non-medical care. For India to have more for elder care beyond health cover, a step in the right direction would be to take pensioners out of the direct income tax basket.

**Katragadda Sarveswara Rao, Bhubaneswar**

#### Election costs

Ref: *The difficult questions one election plan raises* (Sep 25). 'One nation, one election' has raised questions on the disbalancing federal structure of the nation. The 2024 polls cost nearly ₹1.34 lakh crore. Universal adult franchise is the spirit of democracy, but citing taxpayer's money, the government may devise mechanisms of cost-reduction, beginning with minimising re-polls due to fallacies.

**Aparna Vats, Bengaluru**

#### Diverting attention

There are more questions not answered by the Rammath Kovind-led Committee, the Election Commission, or the government, which is possibly aware of the impossibility of the proposal. It is, after all, an effort to keep the nation diverted from burning issues like Manjpur, J&K and food inflation.

**A G Rajmohan, Anantapur**

#### Logistical hurdles

Implementing 'One Nation, One Election' in India is a complex challenge due to the country's vast population and logistical hurdles. Elections involve significant state resources, especially in areas affected by naxalism and regions like Jammu & Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal. Ensuring security and managing distorted logistics at polling stations will be critical for success.

**Kajal Kanhau, Cuttack**

#### Ukraine peace

Ref: *Modi meets Zelenskyy in New York, offers India's support for peace bid* (Sep 25). The successive meeting between PM Narendra Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a tumultuous time is commendable. This reflects India's willingness to put an end to the prolonged war.

**M Rishidev, Dindigul**

# There's Nothing Called a Free UPI Ride

Future of commercial payments is decentralised

Apart from the convenience of not having to carry currency notes, UPI's principal attractiveness is that it is free for those making transactions. Yet, there are charges borne by banks and other intermediaries on every UPI transaction. UPI is, thus, advantaged among digital payment methods like IMPS, NEFT, RTGS, and those involving debit and credit cards and prepaid payment instruments, which are chargeable. Questions remain over whether users or taxpayers should foot the UPI bill, and how these charges are to be structured.

UPI payments are, despite their incredible growth, not universal. This weakens the case for tax-funded development. Objective of universalising this mode of payment could be aided by cross-subsidised services. A tiered charge fits into this scheme of things. The fee structure could become an issue in UPI's interoperability with international payments systems based on transaction charges. Without waiver of merchant charges, UPI loses its competitive advantage, and consumer choice is influenced by the value proposition of alternative payments systems. Some of these systems are built on a viable pricing architecture. The nature of international transactions also adds stacks of revenue through currency conversion and travel service fees. The small transaction interface can be widened to cover larger financial flows provided transaction charges are priced in.

There is the issue of whether UPI is the best means available to spread digital transactions. Digital currencies have an advantage over UPI because the decentralised blockchain is far more efficient as a payment method than a system using QR code. Monetary authorities, banks and card companies are mainstreaming digital currencies as consumers gravitate towards payment systems involving cryptocurrencies, biometrics, contactless systems and QR codes. Stablecoins, and within them the subset of fiat digital currencies, have the biggest potential to disrupt commercial payments worldwide. By keeping UPI free, India is pushing a payment rail when the future of finance is decentralised.

The Great Indian Plain is 250-350% poorer than peninsular India. The latter has health and education outcomes that match upper-middle-income countries, while the former languishes at Burkina Faso levels. 75% of our population earns just \$5 a day. Every year, for every 10 people who escape poverty, 6 who weren't poor, fall into poverty. All this manifests in the quality of India's growth story. Leading indicators of the economy are all about what the richest 200 mn consume. The five sectors that produce what half our population should be able to consume, without subsidy, at affordable prices, are economic failures. Agriculture, where we subsidise food for 800 mn people; textiles, where we make shirts for the rich but import shirts for common people from Bangladesh and Vietnam; housing, where the only chance of a pukka home for the non-rich is through some awaas subsidy, while the rich engage in a Ponzi scheme of real estate acquisition; and health and education, which are so messed up that the rich flee abroad to get both, while the poor have to make do with highly rationed availability and decrepit quality. The MIT experience of other countries tells us that our growing richer will be inhibited with three terrible consequences:

# Winter Is Coming, Cough, Sniffle, Cough

The stick record keeps spinning. With winter in a few months, administrative wheels are turning in north India, perhaps driven by the rising number of farm fires — now over 100 across Punjab, Haryana and UP. This week, principal secretary to PMP K Mishra evaluated the 'readiness of stakeholders' in tackling 'deteriorating air quality' in Delhi-NCR. A day later, Supreme Court demanded answers from Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on alleged stubble-burning cases, pressing them to outline steps to hold accountable those responsible. Meanwhile, Delhi claimed that twice as many pollution sources come from outside the city, and made its yearly call for central assistance. Haryana announced a winter action plan, which includes identifying and repairing major roads, mechanised cleaning and curbing stubble burning. Punjab has 'committed' to eliminate the issue. Déjà vu seems to be in the air.

So, is northern India actually getting battle-ready for winter pollution? Outside the sudden optics, doesn't look it. Only if the meteorology is favourable, and citizens forgo their 'usual' Diwali fireworks, will we not stare down the barrel of yet another breathless winter. This is especially disheartening given years of pollution promises from both states and Centre.

One reason for the lack of a united response is the failure to build an overarching, airshed-focused plan, despite NCAP and CAQM acknowledging its need. As a 2023 CPR report, 'Regulating Air Quality at An Airshed Level in India', correctly proposes, urgent systemic reforms that adopt an airshed-level — geographical area where pollutants are trapped due to local topography, meteorology and climate approach — and facilitate inter-state regional cooperation are essential.

**JUST IN JEST**  
There will be lamentations, without modernisation or maintenance

# A City That Slowly Junked Its Trams

Nostalgists in the world's most nostalgia-addicted city are getting hyper-nostalgic over something most of them haven't cared to experience or enjoy all these years. Now that its demise has been announced, so has the waterworks and the sudden lamentation for 'purano shei deener kotha' when trams in Kolkata would ply like the way EVs in the world someday will. We'll skip the history except for the bit that electric trams were introduced in Kolkata in 1902, the second city in India after Madras that got them in 1895. Kolkata, as is wont with the city, is also the last to have them running. Barely. And badly. That's till now — when only one 'heritage' line will run, probably for the odd-NRI remembering when tram tickets were 'oh-so-cheap and life wasn't spoiled by the internet' etc etc.

Also like a lot of things in Kolkata, trams were just allowed to run and run and run — without modernisation or maintenance, the two 'M's' bearing no relation to what they do in other parts of the country or world — until they well, ran out. Unlike modern cities where modern trams run, Kolkata's trams lived off only one intangible, obstructing thing: nostalgia. So, while trams are having a comeback elsewhere, in the relatively young city of Kolkata that loves being old, they're being given the boot in the form of a farewell. Let the soulful boo-hoo begin.

# PUBLIC INTEREST Action to recognise, avoid, overcome perils of MIT has to be made policy focus Stuck in the Middle Forever?



Rathin Roy

India is a lower-middle-income country with a per-capita income of \$2,700. 'Viksit Bharat' involves transitioning to high-income status — i.e. \$14,000.

Most development trajectories don't smoothly achieve high-income status. Türkiye, Egypt, Brazil and many others languish in the 'middle-income trap' (MIT). MIT, first analysed by World Bank chief economist Indermit Gill, is marked by the persistence of problems that low-income countries confront in significant measure. But rich countries do not like poverty, malnutrition, poor education, poor public infrastructure, slums and substandard healthcare.

Even as other countries fell into MIT, India has managed to avoid it. Despite hiccups, India's economic transformation has been a positive story, whether one looks at growth, poverty reduction, health and education, or infra development. India is not China. But it has had every reason to hope to avoid the fate of Egypt and Brazil. However, since at least 2019, I've been worried that conditions of India's economic development are increasingly signalling the approach of MIT unless urgent policy action is taken.

The India story since 1991 has delivered great prosperity for the top 150 mn of its population. This has reached its limits because we're unable to craft a strategy that extends this to the next 200-300 mn people. As a consequence, there has been a sharp increase in inequality of every kind — income, consumption, geography, wealth, gender and inheritance.

The MIT experience of other countries tells us that our growing richer will be inhibited with three terrible consequences:

● We will, like Egypt, Brazil and Türkiye, never be viksit.

● A quarter of our citizens will enjoy prosperous lives equivalent to those in rich geographies, while the majority and their children will face the same development gaps their forefathers did when India was a poor country.

● Regional ethnic and gender dimensions of this will challenge the unity and integrity of India far worse than Pakistan or China can ever do.

Given my analysis, I was very interested in the World Bank's latest World Development Report (WDR) on MIT in contemporary times, and particularly because Gill is now the Bank's chief economist. WDR doesn't speak to the macro structural drivers of MIT that I highlight focusing, instead, on micro-economic factors.

Some of these are neoliberal doctrine, and current global fashion like 'Capital account liberalisation helps growth accelerations', 'Startups are great', and 'Climate change is a magic bullet for growth'.

However, there are other insights that are consequences of macro structural challenges, which have been ideologically smuggled into the report, taking issues like inequality and political economy on board. For example, 'coun-



Cat on a hot tin roof

tries characterised by higher-income inequality are often those in which a significant portion of economic advantage is transmitted from parents to their children. In many middle-income countries, descendants of political elites [are] involved in and consolidate resources through politics' (pg 144).

'Efficient firms do not expand, and inefficient firms do not exit the market in India, Mexico, and Peru' (pg 47). 'In India, and Türkiye, female labour force participation is well below what would be expected given their levels of income per capita, the rates are much higher in Indonesia and Malaysia' (pg 156).

The stark headline message of WDR is: the typical fate of a middle-income country is to stay there and not achieve high-income status. Only a handful of (mainly) small European countries and petrostates have made this transition since 1990.

WDR then goes on to speak of different types of 'supply-side processes that countries like India need to adopt to accelerate and bulletproof their transition. But within the content, there are important observations about inequality and political economy — such as those encapsulated in the quotes above

— that point to the need to address serious structural deficiencies on the demand side, by ensuring that the smart strategies adopted result in equalising and inclusive increases in prosperity.

If India is not to lose hope of completing its development transformation successfully, a hope I've been fortunate to cherish all my life, then action to recognise, avoid and overcome the danger of MIT needs to be the primary focus of economic policymaking going forward.

The writer is former member, EAC-PM

# Start Easing, Nice & Easy



Kaushik Das

On Sept 18, the US Fed delivered a 50 bps rate cut and signalled a further 200 bps of easing by 2026. This shift sets a precedent for global monetary policy. It has also opened the door for other central banks to consider similar easing measures in the months and quarters ahead.

Fed's projected 250 bps rate cut is likely to impact India's monetary policy. If the Fed follows through with a 200-250 bps reduction, RBI should, in all likelihood, initiate a 75 bps easing cycle. Before the Fed's move, the differential between India's repo rate of 6.5% and the Fed funds rate of 5.5% was 100 bps. As the Fed funds rate potentially falls to 3-3.5% and India's repo rate drops to 5.75%, the differential could widen to 275-225 bps, maintaining a comfortable buffer.

By mid-2025, Fed funds rate could fall to 3.75-4%, while RBI may implement a cumulative rate cut of 75 bps, resulting in a rates differential of 175 bps — still higher than current levels and ensuring a cushion for India's monetary policy.

Despite potential rate cuts by RBI, India's external position remains robust. CAD is projected to be a modest 1-1.2% of GDP, amounting to \$35-40 bn, while BoP is likely to post a surplus of \$50-55 bn. Any rate cuts are unlikely to place significant pressure on the rupee. India's forex, currently at \$689 bn, is forecast to rise to \$750 bn by the end of FY26, providing RBI with ample flexibility to manage currency depreciation.

While the August trade deficit surged to \$30 bn, largely driven by a spike in gold imports following reduced import duties, this is seen as a temporary phenomenon. Should gold imports remain elevated, GoI will likely raise duties once again. However, the more concerning aspect of the external macro landscape is the 9.3% y-o-y decline in exports, reflecting a potential slowdown in global growth.

A 1% reduction in global growth could lower India's growth by 50 bps, emphasising the importance of proactive monetary policy to cushion against these headwinds. Monetary policy operates with long and variable lags, making pre-emptive action essential.

Fed's decision to cut rates was taken despite its forecast of core PCE inflation remaining above target in 2024 and 2025. Similarly,

India's CPI inflation is expected to fall to 4% by Q1 2026, according to RBI. Given this outlook, there should be no inconsistency in RBI beginning its own easing cycle by the end of this year.

A 25 bps cut is expected in December, followed by a 50 bps reduction in H1 of 2025, bringing the total to 75 bps. While some may argue for delaying cuts, given strong domestic growth and above-target inflation, a calibrated, forward-looking approach would mitigate the risk of larger, more abrupt cuts should growth slow unexpectedly.

If RBI's forecast of 4.5% headline CPI inflation in FY25 holds, real rates will remain positive by around 200 bps with the repo rate unchanged at 6.5%. Recent RBI research estimates India's neutral real rate at 1.4-1.9%, up from the post-Covid range of 0.8-1%. If monetary policy is guided by the upper bound of this range, there is limited scope for rate cuts. However, if a 1.4% real rate is deemed sufficient, there is room for a 50-75 bps reduction, especially if inflation trends align with long-term forecasts.

Real rates of 1-1.5% should ensure macroeconomic stability. Historically, RBI has paused for a maximum of 11 months between the end of a rate-hike cycle and start of a rate-cut cycle. With the last rate hike occurring in Feb 2023, a rate cut beginning in Dec 2024 would represent a 21-22-month gap, the longest gestation period in recent history. Any further delay in starting the easing cycle could result in unnecessary growth sacrifice, making a strong case for timely, measured action.

Fed's rate cut and the prospect of further easing provide an opportunity for RBI to initiate its easing cycle. A cautious, yet forward-looking, approach to cutting rates — amounting to 75 bps over the next 9-12 months — would balance inflation management with the need to support growth. India's strong external position and robust reserves reduce risks typically associated with monetary easing, while proactive action will help ensure that India's economy remains resilient in the face of global uncertainty.

The writer is MD-chief economist, India and South Asia, Deutsche Bank AG

# Thaw Unlikely Before Dec-Jan



Radhika Rao

The US Fed's decision to frontload a more aggressive 50 bps cut in September affirms that the cycle is turning for global central banks. Inflation has been on the downturn in the US, as it has also been in Europe and Britain, as supply shocks recede, service price pressures wane and global energy prices retreat.

With US inflation closing in on the policy target, the focus has switched to potential economic pressure points. The US jobs market is still relatively solid, with net jobs created and people gaining employment each month. However, the pace has slowed.

As the labour supply has picked up, unemployment rate has been up more than 1% in the past 12 months. A more recent cause of concern was revised National Labour Bureau data, which showed that the country produced 70k fewer jobs a month than previously assumed, causing a flutter among policymakers.

Typically, emerging markets track the Fed's rate movements, India included. A slippery dollar index since August provided much-needed relief to regional policy-makers. With domestic inflation on the wane, currencies on a firmer footing — Indonesia's rupiah not only erased year-to-date losses but is up on the year — and markets pricing in a near-certain cut by the Fed in September, led Indonesia and the Philippines' central banks to lower rates ahead of the official US Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC).

For India, the Fed's decision is a necessary but insufficient condition for RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to expeditiously shift to a dovish gear. There are four reasons why policymakers are unlikely to start lowering rates at the October rate review:

● **Favourable base** Moderation in July and August CPI inflation was based on favourable base effects, with stickiness in food inflation offsetting a deeper pullback in the headline print. Receding base effects are expected to push the headline print back

above 4% in September. Nonetheless, soft July-August prints, and the likelihood of a slight uptick in September, suggest that RBI's current quarter's inflation forecast of 4.4% will be undershot by at least 30-40 bps. That said, in the immediate term, RBI's resolve to address food price inflation and prevent an unanchoring in inflationary expectations will likely see MPC members lean towards a pause in October.

● **Term closures** Four-year terms of the three external MPC members will conclude next month, and new members may be announced before the review. Incoming members will prefer to maintain status quo in October, but follow a broader MPC shift later in FY25 as more data become available.

● **Weak rupee** The rupee maintained a weaker bias against the dollar despite the greenback's sharp correction in August. This underperformance was likely intended to correct part of the rupee's overshoot on the real effective exchange rate (REER) basis to a 7-yr high in July. REER jumped to 107.5 in July (one standard deviation above the 10-yr average) and has since moderated in August. Meanwhile, this month's forex buffer is set to surpass the record-high of \$690 bn.

● **Poll ahoy!** Q2 FY25 growth will likely benefit from the passage of election-related disruptions and anticipated let-up in monetary tightening (from the liquidity perspective). Indicators suggest Q2 FY25 (July-September) GDP growth is back above 7% from 6.7% the quarter before, helped by key statistical indicators, including better credit growth and a pick-up in government capex.

Beyond October, inflation will settle into a lower range. Supply-side forces had driven annual inflation to a high of 6% and 6.4% in FY21 and FY23, respectively, in the middle of pandemic supply chain disruptions, high commodity prices, sticky services pressures and elevated core inflation. Headline inflation has since drifted lower, notwithstanding sequential swings around the monsoon months and on weather-related triggers. From 6.4% in FY23, CPI inflation eased to 5.2% in FY24, and will likely settle within 4.2-4.6% this year.

As a baseline, policy easing should start in December, backed by a justification to make 'policy less restrictive' by utilising the real rate buffer rather than lowering rates to respond to economic duress. With Shaktikanta Das' term ending in late 2024, RBI delaying cuts to Q1 2025 can't be ruled out. Separately, macroprudential measures to address excesses in specific segments, including microfinance, retail lending and institutional, are likely to continue.

The writer is executive director-senior economist, DBS Bank



THE SPEAKING TREE

# In Between

HARSH GOENKA

In between 'Waiting for the letter from a friend' and 'Sending a quick message online,' we moved on.

In between 'Racing bikes down the street' and 'Driving cars in city lanes,' we carried on.

In between 'Staying up for the Doordarshan movie on Sunday' and 'Streaming endless OTT shows at midnight,' we changed.

In between 'Hiding in the closet during hide-and-seek' and 'Finding solace in a quiet café,' we evolved.

In between 'Worrying about the next school test' and 'Balancing bills and rent,' we learnt.

In between 'Being afraid to speak up in class' and 'Leading a meeting at work,' we transformed.

In between 'Borrowing a book from the library' and 'Downloading it in seconds on an app,' we adapted.

In between 'Craving for toys and comics' and 'Searching for peace and balance,' we grew wiser.

And as we journeyed on, we realised, How the world kept spinning faster. Very deep inside, we longed for moments lost — A simpler time, where laughter was easy. And we didn't know the weight of silence.

# STEP UP TO THE PLATE

## Wing Hong Kong

Vicky Cheng spent two decades steeped in the world of French fine dining. He never thought of starting a Chinese restaurant. But after he returned to his hometown in Hong Kong, he was irresistibly drawn to the local flavours. At his restaurant, Wing, diners embark on a journey through an expansive 80-dish menu that showcases this narrative.

Wing pays homage to the Eight Great Chinese cuisines, blending tradition with a daring contemporary twist. A sampler for food connoisseurs: try the dry-aged crispy Cantonese chicken, perfected after 80 trials; house-cured century egg elegantly paired with



Japanese oysters; and a pork belly-like slab of braised sea cucumber, artfully wrapped in a puffed spring roll. Wing pushes the boundaries of what Chinese food can be, and what diners will try. Cheng does it in a way that's charming and accessible, while paying respect to this great cuisine.

Experience abalone presented in a captivating duet — one-half fresh, the other aged. The tender sweetness of the fresh abalone pairs beautifully with the umami-packed richness of the aged version, crafting a harmonious journey that transcends mere ingredients. Wing the magic.

# Chat Room

## Let's Port Global Business Home

Apropos 'Getting Into a Porting Spirit' by Swaminathan S Anke-saria Aiyar (Sep 25), sketching the painful, awfully abysmal turnaround time in the then-Bombay port in the late '80s, the writer's ruthless comment 'stupid socialist policies' ruining the once-prominent Indian ports calls for sincere soul-searching. That the policies were inadequate and their implementation haphazard and at the whims of unions cannot be wished away. The nation paid for it in lost years and development. Good that a Chinnabhai saw the loophole in the 'minor-major' classification of ports and seized the opportunity. Sharing data on Chinese ports — now the best globally — the writer calls India to imbibe a 'porting spirit' to make the best of changing geopolitical imperatives and develop our ports to sustain growth. Hope the stakeholders take heed.

JOSE ABRAHAM KATTIPARAMBIL Kottayam



### A thought for today

Be careful of the words you say/Keep them short  
and sweet/You never know, from day to day/  
Which ones you'll have to eat - Anonymous

## Judging The Judges

SC does great service to courts' dignity by calling out objectionable comments made from an HC bench

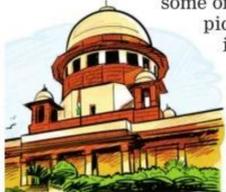
Bringing to a close its suo motu case on two videos in which a Karnataka HC judge is seen making irrelevant, even harmful, remarks, a five-judge CJ-led bench reiterated the basics of what should guide judges' constitutional task. "It is important every judge is aware of his or her own predispositions." CJI Chandrachud did well to take serious note of the two videos. In one, the HC judge called a Bengaluru Muslim-majority area 'Pakistan'. In another, he was mocking a woman lawyer by using offensive language. Justice Srishananda had apologised earlier, though his initial counter was that his words were taken out of context.

It's unfortunate SC had to remind judges of such basics. But rather frequent instances are emerging of judges making either communally charged or openly anti-women rights comments. Have they suddenly turned offensive? No. It is CJI's welcome measure of live-streaming and recording of court proceedings that is capturing some of the reality of courtroom discourse. SC picked up this case, and in doing so it showed it's aware of unsavoury observations some judges make. Observations that no longer escape public attention.

SC observed "that the demands...of the electronic age would elicit appropriate modulation of behaviour, both on the part of the Bar and the bench in the future." Two developments over the last

few years have helped expose preachy self-righteousness of some judges countrywide, where own prejudices and biases weigh heavily upon their conduct in court. One, live-streaming has taken the court to the public. Two, the emergence of dedicated court-reporting websites has captured a plethora of cases, causes and comments that otherwise would be limited to lawyers alone. This is forcing courtrooms to be that much more accountable, in a manner of speaking, to the public they serve.

SC repeatedly emphasises judges should avoid patriarchal and misogynistic stereotypical commentary on women's dress, behaviour, status etc. But judges continue to make loose comments, a misplaced morality damaging to the dignity of court and its proceedings. SC fixed that today - "the heart and soul of judging is the need to be impartial and fair." Here's hoping judges will take note.



## We Were Warned

World is now living with extreme weather & extreme reluctance to take serious action about climate change

Heat almost killed you? Wilting your plants and making life miserable for all creatures great and small? Toxic air, a Delhi regular, burning your eyes, choking your airways? Rain washed your daily routine away? Brought your city to a standstill in, sometimes, chest-deep water? Everywhere in India, in different ways, the last few months have shown us what extreme weather looks like. The cost in lives lost, infra damaged, work hours foregone, and health risks is already large. Now, pundits are warning of extreme cold conditions in some parts of India in the winter. So, whom to blame, really? Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Scientists warned us. The first climate deal was inked over a quarter of a century ago. But, the greenhouse effect was first identified exactly 200 years ago, in 1824. The scientist who identified it wrote: "Establishment and progress of human societies...can notably change...in vast regions...the state of the surface, distribution of water and great movements of the air. Such effects are able to make to vary...the average degree of heat..." By 1896, greenhouse effect was first calculated.

It took another 100 years of development for the world to ink its first climate deal to "save the planet", in the 1996 Kyoto Protocol. But COPs have been a cop out - glitzy episodes of theatric climate negotiations, dramatic emission targets, impressive goals, and shadowy lobbies. In 2023, US Congress and European Parliament members wrote to UN about their "profound concern that current rules...permit private sector polluters to exert undue influence." The Egypt COP had a record 636 delegates who work for fossil fuel companies.

Rivers polluted and dry, oceans warmer and rising, glaciers melting, more 'n more ACs whirring for longer periods - human action alone has unleashed climate change upon us. Rail at the weather, but it needs no criticism. How to mitigate? Even heat action plans are just that. Plans. There's little evidence coverage required to protect, especially outdoor workers, has been achieved - traffic police, airport outdoors crew, street vendors, gig workers are all on their own. As are we. Withered by the weather.

## Tongue-in-check

You can kiss with it, chhee, chhee!  
Or lash with it. But slash it?

Bachi Karkaria



A Shiv Sena MLA recently offered a ₹11L bounty to anyone who 'chopped off Rahul Gandhi's tongue'. After Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to PM asking him to make BJP's Maharashtra allies stop their abuse - in other words, hold their own intact tongues - the unrepentant Sanjay Gaikwad instead threatened to 'bury any Congress dogs' who entered his programmes.

Nit-picking about nonsensical neta natter that's never non-violent is a needless, heedless waste of time. But while Gaikwad's gruesome offer is both unpalatable and tasteless, it merits discussion on grounds of doable-ty.

Bounty is usually 'price on a head', a theoretically accessible body part. But a tongue? While great drama needs 'a willing suspension of disbelief', this farce would require not just proximity, but a sufficient opening of mouth by unwilling, disbelieving target. That too wouldn't suffice.

Imagination boggles at the skill plus strength needed to yank out this notoriously slippery customer. Not worth the *jhamela, bhau*, for a sum which today would be scoffed at by any self-respecting bribee. 'Boss, *khali gyara petti? Bheja satak gaya, kya? Gyara khokha dalo, toich baat chalu!*'

Why did Shri Gaekwad choose this mouth organ to play his brutal RaGa? Was a 'witch'-hunt prompted by the fear that Rahul Gandhi possesses what's idiomatically (and idiotically) called a 'black tongue', *kaali zubaan*, which causes its spiteful utterances to come true? Did he reference Atharva Veda where Kali is portrayed only as a black tongue, one of god Agni's seven. In full, fearsome, goddess form 400 years later, she is shown with protruding tongue - in remorse on realising that the being under her raging foot is her *pati-parmeshwar*, Shiva. Did the enraged MLA think Rahul would shamefully stick his out for some Sainik to slash?

Finally, chew on this. Why call it 'bounty'? Since it's a tongue being talked about, a 'Supari' would be more apt, no?

\*\*\*

Alec Smart said: "Thank you, Bombay HC. Sarkari 'fact-check' only means keeping critical facts in check."

# 'Why Israel Needs To Fight'

A former adviser to two Israeli PMs argues while all parties involved fear the widening of the Lebanon conflict, Tel Aviv doesn't have a choice but to continue till it massively weakens its adversaries

Dan Schueftan



Columnist based in Tel Aviv

The Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon since Monday morning that have killed more than 550 people, including several Hezbollah commanders, must be seen in the broadest context of the multi-front hostilities that West Asia radicals have instigated against the Jewish state since Oct 7 last year. With Hezbollah retaliating by firing hundreds of rockets, including a missile at Tel Aviv, the region is on the brink of an all-out war, even though nobody wants it: Israel expects severe casualties and damage in its population centres, Hezbollah dreads the obliteration of Lebanon, Iran has been arming its proxies for another purpose - to deter Israel from hitting its nuclear project - and US, given its past experience, is wary of being drawn into a costly and pointless conflict in West Asia.

Since last week, Israel has been escalating its offensive against Lebanon. Gaza now only requires coercive maintenance to prevent the resurgence of Hamas, so Israeli forces can pivot to the north. For a year, Hezbollah conducted a war of attrition that forced 60,000 Israelis to evacuate their homes, at a cost this terrorist organisation could easily bear. Israel is now destroying its military infra, killing its commanders and fighters and hunting down its leaders, to diminish its harmful potential and facilitate, with or without an invasion into south Lebanon, the restoration of civilian life in north Israel.

The unique nature of the multi-front confrontation can explain the apparent paradox of a possible escalation into an all-out war that none of the parties seeks. The instigators of this war - Hamas and Islamic Jihad from Gaza, their radical supporters in the West Bank, Hezbollah from Lebanon, the Houthis from Yemen, Shiite militias from Syria and Iraq and the Iranian regional power that arms, finances and inspires them - all proudly seek to bring about the destruction of the Jewish state and its people. Their grievance is not limited to occupation or alleged maltreatment but concerns the very existence of Israel. The role model they educate their children to

glorify is the "Martyr" killer of Jews.

Since Iran and its allies and proxies recognise Israel's military superiority over her regional enemies, they have taken the war out of the traditional battlefield. These proxies wage it from amidst their civilian population, directly against the Israeli civilian population. Positioning their rockets and arsenals in schools, hospitals, mosques and nurseries, they present Israel with a choice between acquiescing in the slaughter of Israel's children, and causing, in the course of disabling their war machine, massive civilian casualties on the Arab side.

They have repeatedly demonstrated that they are willing to sacrifice their own civilians, so that Israel will be embarrassed, criticised, and eventually stopped by its Western allies from effectively responding to the radical Arab aggression. This strategy proved to work to some extent, when an unholy alliance of "progressive" media, international organisations, as well as confused students and an assortment of old and new anti-Semites, chose to blame the targets of genocidal aggression for defending themselves.

Israel's challenge in Lebanon is similar to the one it had in Gaza: to prove that it can levy a cost of war that even a society that does not care about its people can't bear for long. Israel needs to prove again that it can recuperate, continue to offer its people a good and ever improving life, and disregard the "progressive" self-righteous denunciations.

Any decision in this kind of conflict is cumulative: Threatened for more than a century, the Jews proved that they can develop in their ancestral homeland productive

enterprise, even as their enemies stagnate, fail and crumble. Israel confronted a pan-Arab coalition led by Egypt until Sadat realised in 1979 that Egypt could not afford the prohibitive costs of the campaign. The devastating outcome of the "Second Intifada" has deterred Palestinians in the West Bank since 2004 from launching an all-out terror campaign.

Gaza has already proven to be a deterrent. Nasrallah and Iran seek to prevent an all-out war, realising that the widespread destruction and the homelessness of millions could be repeated in Lebanon, particularly in Beirut. The destruction in Gaza was not Israel's war objective; the Palestinian insistence to use civilian structures for military positions, arsenals, tunnel shafts and booby-traps made it inevitable.

Hezbollah realises that a similar disregard for its own civilian population will result in a comparable outcome in south Lebanon, should Israel be forced to push Hezbollah militarily away from the Israeli towns and villages in northern Israel it seeks to destroy.

When this war is over, many will realise how significant it has been for all democracies and pluralistic societies. What looms is the threat of unscrupulous radicals finding a way to undermine and destroy strong and developed democracies, using their scruples and vulnerabilities as the proverbial Achilles' heel. If terrorists can do this with impunity, civilised pluralistic societies stand no chance.

Having one hand tied behind their back may be necessary for such societies to uphold their values even in times of crisis. Now they are being bullied by self-appointed "progressive" moral gatekeepers to suicidally tie the other hand too. Israel did what it had to do in Gaza. It will in Lebanon, Yemen and Syria. If need be, at a very high cost, in Iran. The choice vis-a-vis radical Arabs is between harsh measures and a catastrophic outcome. And not only in West Asia.



## 'Omar's frustration is showing...wait for results, expect big change...poll outcome will make Delhi listen to Kashmir'

Two phases over, elections in J&K are down to the wire as campaigning picks up pace for the third and final phase of voting on Oct 1 to 40 seats. Throughout, the 'X' factor has been Sheikh Abdul Rashid aka *Engineer Rashid*, who defeated Omar Abdullah to win Baramulla LS seat from behind bars in Delhi's Tihar jail. His party Awami Ittehad Party (AIP) has an alliance with the outlawed Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), which is participating in the elections via Independents.

Notwithstanding consistent berating from rivals NC and PDP that he is a BJP 'pawn' whose sole aim is to divide votes, Rashid has remained confident about his candidates' poll prospects, contesting on 34 seats, 33 in Kashmir and 1 in Jammu. On interim bail of 22 days to campaign, Rashid rubbished all allegations in conversation with *Subodh Ghildiyal*, and claimed Oct 8, results day, will see 'big change'.

● **Is an alliance with BJP possible? You're accused of being a 'BJP/Delhi pawn'.**

Why ask me this? They victimised me to the extent that I, despite being a two-time MLA, and MP, was branded a terrorist. So, I don't even want to take their name (BJP). But if there is a possibility tomorrow that we have to discuss the resolution of the Kashmir issue...I am always ready to meet GOI. Nothing beyond that.

I've been behind bars for over five years, the only mainstream politician jailed. Omar Abdullah, Mehbooba Mufti, Sajjad Lone were treated as VVIP guests in five-star hotels, and they're calling me a pawn of Delhi. I don't want to belittle myself by

responding to these allegations. Omar lost in Baramulla and I won by 2L votes from jail. It is his frustration that is speaking. When Kejriwal got bail, Omar had no problem and welcomed it. But when I, his fellow Kashmiri, got bail he felt hurt.

● **You tout your LS victory. But rivals say it was a sympathy vote.**

It was no sympathy vote that won me the seat. If I weren't in jail, I would have won by 4L votes. I won because of my model of governance in my seat as legislator. That helped me.

● **What's the impact of the charge that you're a BJP proxy?**

It will help me, because people know everything. *Yeh jo public hai, sab jaanti hai.* I repeat I'm the one in jail for over five years and traitors, puppets, rubber stamps of New Delhi are accusing me. People know better. I don't want to belittle myself by responding to their accusations.

● **Trend in J&K has been BJP sweeps Jammu region, and a Kashmir party joins hands. How will it unfold this time?**

The future is bright because I know how to bargain for my people. My aim is that the Kashmir issue should move out of the mess. For me, who forms govt etc, these are petty things...Let us wait for Oct 8 results, I'm in no hurry.

● **What'll happen if you win a few seats?**

Why just a few seats? Expect a big change. GOI will have to come and resolve our Kashmir issues, listen to our pain and sufferings, and people of India will know that Kashmir is not about Sheikhs and Muftis, but is beyond that.

● **You have a strategic alliance with the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami.**

You should welcome Jamaat's entry into politics, it wants reconciliation and all those who want peace should welcome it. We should have a political resolution for issues in Kashmir because it's a political problem.

We are not radicals. We want peaceful resolution and we want a violence-free Kashmir. Jamaat has contributed a lot in education and social sector. If GOI can speak to militants in the Northeast, why should anyone raise questions if JeI wants to join politics?

● **Are you a future CM candidate?**

Not at all. For me, these are small things, not big issues.

● **Regular bail can help you attend Parliament. What's happening on that front?**

Of course I want permanent bail. I want to be exonerated in the case. Of course, I cannot discuss the merits of the case. But my question to my fellow parliamentarians and India's intellectual class is this. If a man has won from jail, that too from a sensitive place like Kashmir, why is nobody speaking up for him in Parliament? Are they afraid of me?

I will speak facts in Parliament, let them allow me to speak in Parliament. I'm sure I'll be in Parliament in the near future. But even if I'm not, from jail too I will represent the sentiments of my people. Because, the world knows why I am in jail.

## Calvin & Hobbes



## Sacredspace



I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.

Mark Twain

## Can Your Guru Rescue You From Death?

Narayani Ganesh

Due to uncertainty, people are full of fear. Apart from different kinds of natural and human-made crises, there is the eternal fear of death. Every individual is sure to die, it is just not known when and how it will happen. BK Brij Mohan says, he is often asked whether the Brahma Kumaris can save them from death. A seeker argued, of what use is spirituality to us if it cannot help us escape death?

There is something in us that is eternal, the soul, that is imperishable. Even if you lose everything, says the Gita, you have an identity that is eternal. Once you become aware of this, you will no longer fear death. Krishn, in the Gita, says that once your body dies, your soul goes on to the next life. An earthquake might destroy everything, but not your soul. The

answer BK Brij Mohan gave to the seeker was that the Brahma Kumaris impart knowledge that enables soul-consciousness, thereby removing the fear of body-death. Their teachings can help the seeker overcome his fear of death and look towards the eternal soul that goes through millions of life cycles, remaining immortal, from one life to the next.

It is said that you are born as a human after going through births spanning 84L species, so we need to know that human birth is precious, for only in this form, we have the potential to become fully aware of the limitations of the physical world, the eternal nature of a cyclical existence, and achieve salvation as realised souls. All life forms have souls, in varying degrees; it is only human souls that are more evolved. Once the

individual realises that he is soul, not body, that should help him become fearless.

We are all so-called Kal Yugas living currently in Kali Yug, the negative era, even if some of us are good. All souls suffer; therefore, we need to think positive. Even good actions, if motivated by negative intention, only result in bad karma. The Gita talks of kam, krodh, moh, ahankar - lust, anger, desire and ego - as roots of unhappiness and suffering. Anger is what led to the making and using of the atom bomb, causing destruction that made millions suffer. As The Dalai Lama points out, when you find that you are faced with a problem, and you are unable to find the solution, you become angry. But due to your anger, the problem becomes

worse. It becomes more serious than it was, previously. That is why you should address any problem with a sense of deep responsibility, loving kindness and altruism.

You cannot make an old, ruined building new unless you demolish it and build a new structure in its place. Similarly, when the body ages beyond repair, it gives way for a new life to be born in a new body. But we need to get rid of the five kleshas, negativities, in order to overcome suffering. Doctors specialise in different parts of the body but there is no one who specialises in soul healing. Who can help us heal the soul, remove the five viruses that infect it, but God the great healer, asks BK Brij Mohan. Hence it is more productive to meditate and focus on the eternal, rather than get entangled in temporary objects.

ganeshnarayani@yahoo.com



## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Reaching out to Dhaka

India engaging with key stakeholders

INDIA is steadily coming to terms with the ground reality in Bangladesh after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar discussed bilateral ties with the neighbouring country's Foreign Affairs Adviser Mohd Touhid Hossain on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York on Monday. This meeting made it obvious that Delhi is keen to engage with Dhaka despite the complications triggered by deposed PM Hasina's continued presence in India. No less significant was Sunday's meeting in Dhaka between India's High Commissioner Pranay Verma and Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

The BNP, the principal opposition party in that country, has had an uneasy relationship with India. Delhi was in the comfort zone over the past 15 years due to its good ties with Hasina, whose Awami League was in power for three terms in a row and also won the BNP-boycotted elections in January this year. The upheaval witnessed on August 5, 2024, and the subsequent formation of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus changed the bilateral dynamics. Though the BNP is not part of the interim set-up, it is expected to be a leading contender once the elections are announced — and that explains India's interest in this party.

Alamgir has rightly observed that the 'ice has started melting'. India erred in its Dhaka strategy by putting all its eggs in the Hasina basket but is now striving to make amends. This pragmatic approach is reflected in Jaishankar's assertion that India's relationship with Bangladesh would continue to be positive and constructive. Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said that friends can be changed, but not neighbours. This truism continues to be relevant for Delhi in the neighbourhood.

## Not again, Kangana

Parties must rein in those crossing the line

FACING anti-incumbency after two consecutive terms in Haryana, the Bharatiya Janata Party now has to contend with an unprovoked self-goal. Just days ahead of the October 5 Assembly elections, controversy's favourite child has put the party in a spot. It's a double whammy this time — a very touchy topic and wrong timing. At a religious fair in Himachal Pradesh, Mandi MP Kangana Ranaut said the three farm laws — which were repealed after a year-long farmers' agitation on Delhi's borders — should be brought back. In a bid to limit the damage, the BJP lost no time in making Kangana take back her remarks. The customary spin that this was her personal opinion doesn't hold water. Known for controversial utterances, the actor-parliamentarian can only be expected to rely on her instinctive understanding of issues. Thanks to the patronage she enjoys, Kangana did just that. So, who's at fault?

The Opposition is sure to not let go of this opportunity to portray the BJP as anti-farmer. That's the nature of politics, but there's a lesson here for every party — rein in those crossing the line. As is it, the standard of election debates has been reduced to personal allegations, unreal claims and outlandish promises. Causing controversies further muddies the waters. However, the problem is not Kangana herself — if not her, someone else would be speaking her language. Parties need to reflect on the consequences of giving unhindered space to those who are uninitiated in the nuances of public life.

Agriculture-related issues — such as improving the lot of farmers, increasing productivity and conserving water — dominate the manifestos of all parties. There is also unanimity that the solutions being worked out are inadequate. The solution, then, lies in building consensus, not in confrontations.

## ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1924

## Criminal Law Amendment Act

WITH the passing by the Legislative Assembly of the Bill for the repeal of Part 2 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the nationalist majority in the people's chamber has entered upon a line of activity the importance and urgency of which have again and again been emphasised both in these columns and elsewhere, and in regard to which happily there is no difference of opinion worth the name in political India. What the fate of the Bill in its subsequent stages will be, whether the Council of State will pass it, and even if it does, whether it will receive the Viceroy's assent, we have no means of knowing at the present time. The ground for confidence on either point is, we confess, none. The Council of State has so often even proved itself to be an utterly unrepresentative and thoroughly reactionary body and has only recently given such a miserable account of itself in connection with the Lee recommendations that it will be no matter for surprise if it will fail to carry out the unanimous wishes of the people even in this vital matter. As regards the Viceroy, he must, indeed, be a bold man who could take it upon himself to say, after the Home Member's speech on the second reading of the Bill, that His Excellency would readily accept the popular verdict in this matter. "Our witnesses," he said, "are intimidated and shot. Am I to stand by when our chief Commissioner of Police is being hunted for his life? Am I to stand by and see terrorism in the land and men with revolvers? No, Sir, so long as I am a member of the Government of India, I will not."

## Lessons from the southern surge

Laggard states must focus on economic development rather than political brinkmanship

SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN  
SENIOR FINANCIAL JOURNALIST

IT was in the 1990s that the trend of new industrial projects moving southwards gained ground. Hyundai and Ford set up factories in Tamil Nadu soon after the liberalised regime for foreign direct investment was rolled out. This territory was far away from the large passenger car markets of the National Capital Region. But global car companies were prepared to incur high freight costs rather than set up plants in northern states.

This was followed by the information technology revolution, which centred around the capitals of Karnataka and then undivided Andhra Pradesh. Bengaluru and Hyderabad became the preferred locations for Big Tech to set up huge campuses. Even fledgling Indian IT companies like Infosys and Wipro established their bases in these states. The result was an influx of software professionals to these IT hubs and the creation of what is now considered India's Silicon Valley in Bengaluru.

By now, it is accepted wisdom that southern states are the natural home of hi-tech industries and that overall growth is also better in this region than in the more densely populated northern and eastern states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and West Bengal. The fact that states like UP accounted for a big chunk of the country's GDP in the 1960s has been forgotten over the years. It has taken a working paper by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council on states' relative development to highlight the fact that these regions lost their pre-eminence over the past six decades.



BOOM: Hyderabad has been a big beneficiary of the information technology revolution. PH

The study has focused on the relative performance of states from 1960-61 to 2023-24. It has used two indicators — the share of India's GDP and relative per capita income. This has shown wide variations in development indicators over this period.

For instance, in the northern region, the paper has highlighted the divergent growth paths of Punjab and Haryana. The former's share of the GDP rose to reach 4.3 per cent in the 1960s, apparently due to the Green Revolution. It declined to only 2.4 per cent in 2023-24. Haryana's share now exceeds that of Punjab, and the per capita income has reached 176.8 per cent of the national average in 2023-24 compared to the larger state's 106.7 per cent. The study raises the question of whether the focus on agriculture hindered the transition to industrialisation for Punjab. But the same phenomenon could have occurred in Haryana, which was also part of the Green Revolution. Clearly, aggressive policies to attract investments that led to the creation of the corporate hub in Gurugram have made a difference.

As for the western region, primarily Maharashtra and

## Some states used the 1991 reforms and liberalisation policies as a springboard to attract both domestic &amp; foreign investment.

Gujarat, it saw consistent growth even prior to 1991, according to the paper. One of the historical factors in the case of Maharashtra is the fact that it developed around Mumbai, which was a key colonial outpost and emerged as the country's financial capital. Favourable commercial policies continued after Independence, ensuring that the west coast became an industrial hub with many of the so-called Bombay Club industrial houses located there. The discovery of oil in the Bombay High offshore region in the 1970s fuelled the

establishment of refineries and ancillary industries. Gujarat, too, benefited from being close to offshore gas fields that led to the proliferation of small and medium industries using the fuel as feedstock. State government policies were also consistently industry-friendly, whether it was the Congress or the BJP in power.

In contrast, West Bengal, with similar advantages of being a major commercial hub in colonial times, has exhibited a sharp deterioration in economic performance. The paper finds that it held the third largest share of the national GDP at 10.5 per cent in 1960-61 but now accounts for only 5.6 per cent. The relative per capita income has fallen from 127.5 per cent to 83.7 per cent.

The reasons for the decline have to be found in policies of various state governments over six decades. This includes the Left Front, which was in power for 34 years of the period under review. Though the front has been lauded for carrying out land reforms, it cannot escape blame for the slow pace of growth. The Trinamool Congress took charge in 2011, but it

has not been able to reverse the declining trend.

Regarding Uttar Pradesh, the paper describes it as being the largest economic powerhouse in 1960-61 with a 14.4 per cent share in the country's GDP. The decline began even after Uttar Pradesh was carved out of UP, and the share is now only 8.4 per cent. Similarly, Bihar presents a dismal picture, with the relative per capita income dropping from 70.3 per cent in 1960-61 (when it was undivided) to 33 per cent. For both UP and Bihar, it cannot be denied that the decline in relative economic performance has to be laid at the door of successive governments.

On the other hand, the southern states, which did not show exceptional performance prior to 1990-91, surged ahead later. Governments of these states tailored their incentives for fresh investments to make productive use of liberalised economic policies. As a result, by 2023-24, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu together accounted for about 30 per cent of India's GDP. In addition, the per capita income of all southern states became higher than the national average after 1991.

This data shows that some states used the 1991 reforms and liberalisation policies as a springboard to attract both domestic and foreign investment. Others failed to take advantage of the opening up of the economy. The result has been the creation of vast regional disparities, with western and southern states racing towards affluence while central and eastern states still have large swathes mired in poverty. It is not too late, however, for laggard states to learn lessons in effective governance. The study is a timely reminder for them to recognise that the focus must be on economic development rather than political brinkmanship. "It's the economy, stupid," an American catchphrase, fits perfectly here.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable — and unethical. — Amartya Sen

## Courage in the face of communal mayhem

SANKAR SEN

AUGUST 16, 1946, will remain etched in my memory forever. I was then in school. World War II had ended. Great Britain, though a victor, was badly bruised. Talk of Independence was in the air. Meetings were held and processions taken out by political parties in Calcutta, demanding the lowering of the Union Jack to proclaim the end of colonial rule.

There were dark clouds on the horizon. Hindu-Muslim riots were erupting across the country. There was a strident demand for the creation of Pakistan by a large section of the Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi's fervent call for Hindu-Muslim unity fell on deaf ears. In undivided Bengal, the Muslim League was headed by HS Suhrawardy, who was charismatic but wily and unscrupulous. The League declared August 16 as Direct Action Day for achieving the goal of establishing Pakistan.

We never thought that Direct Action Day would witness a bloodbath. The League had declared the day as a public holiday so that people could take part in protest meetings and processions. Premier Suhrawardy saw to it that the police did not intervene to stop loot and arson. The British Brigadier in charge of law and order in Calcutta ordered his troops to remain confined to the barracks for the day.

On the morning of August 16, reports of attacks on Hindus in Muslim localities and Hindu students staying in the Science College hostel started pouring in. There was outrage and anger in our locality and cries for retaliatory attacks on Muslims.

Right in front of our house, there were bastis inhabited by Muslim rickshaw-pullers and coachmen. My father, a solicitor, feared that communal fire would soon spread to our predominantly Hindu locality, and the Muslims would become victims of mob fury. He summoned some of the local boys, who formed a cordon through which Muslim residents were spirited away to a secure place. Subsequent events proved him right. By the evening, the whole of Calcutta was in flames. Hindus had started to retaliate. Howling mobs gathered before the bastis in front of our house, intending to butcher innocent Muslims, but they could find none. However, there were apprehensions that at night, Muslim ruffians may attack Hindu localities. So, my father asked young men of the area to remain alert.

On August 17, the Army was called in, and the city limped back to normalcy after a couple of days. *The Statesman*, in a powerful editorial, called it the 'Great killing day' and compared it to medieval mayhem. It lambasted the League administration and British Governor, Sir Frederick Burrows, for abdicating their responsibilities and allowing monstrous communal violence.

Even now, after seven decades, when I recollect that blood-soaked day, I visualise my father standing tall and upright, representing the voice of sanity and courage in the midst of chaos and darkness.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Governors shouldn't cross the line

Refer to the editorial 'No, Governor'; it seems like Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi is ignorant about the notion of secularism, which is central to the identity of India. It is the concept of secularism enshrined in the Constitution that allows every citizen to practise a religion of his or her choice. A Governor must be mindful of the constraints of his office. He must not overstep the bounds of his position. It is unfortunate that face-offs between state governments and Governors have become increasingly common. This sets a dangerous precedent, as it will cause the masses to view Governors as a hindrance to the functioning of a state government.

SUDESH KUMAR SHARMA, KAPURTHALA

## Not at the cost of progress

Apropos of 'No, Governor', the editorial rightly calls out TN Governor RN Ravi for undermining the dignity of his office and flouting constitutional principles. His assertion that secularism is a European concept contradicts India's core values and exposes his political bias. It reflects a troubling trend, especially in Opposition-ruled states like Kerala and West Bengal, where Governors have started to act as political agents of the Centre. Eager to please their political bosses to retain their position, these Governors disregard their constitutional oath. All citizens must oppose steps that are inimical to the country's secular fabric. The crucial question is: Is the office of Governor still relevant in India, given its propensity to obstruct rather than facilitate development?

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

## India a country of diversity

TN Governor RN Ravi has once again stoked controversy. His sensational remark that secularism is a European concept is inappropriate. India is a country of diversity. People here have the freedom to practise the religion of their choice — a right enshrined in the Constitution. The editorial is right to note that the politicisation of the gubernatorial office is one Congress inheritance that the saffron party has chosen to indulgently play around with. It has become common for Governors to be at loggerheads with state governments. The Governor must not interfere with the functioning of the government.

GREGORY FERNADES, MUMBAI

## Maharaja-bashing unacceptable

The article 'Clock turns: Mood in J&K as UT votes' (*Spectrum*) makes a good attempt at a regional analysis of the players and influences in the J&K Assembly elections. But the writers did not miss the opportunity to indulge in Maharaja-bashing, describing them as 'wilful and whimsical'. Are they referring to the wilful and whimsical Maharaja who introduced the State Subject Laws in order to protect the land belonging to our people? Or the one who introduced numerous social reforms to integrate the backward castes and communities and had hospitals and colleges built? I find the writers' remark disdainful and offensive; it is part of the bogus narrative on the role of the Dogra Maharajas in the development of J&K.

VIKRAMADITYA SINGH (EX-MLC, J&amp;K), BY MAIL

## Improve quality of education

Punjab's decision to send 72 government primary school teachers to the University of Turku in Finland for a three-week international training programme makes no sense. Any right-thinking person acquainted with the intricacies of teaching would disapprove of the step. It is unfortunate that instead of improving the quality of training and evaluation at the training institutes in the state or filling up the vacant posts of teachers at government schools, the authorities are looking for a miracle from overseas. Children from poor sections of society can only afford education at government schools. The focus must be on improving the quality of education here.

RP CHANI, LUDHIANA

## Tackle porn addiction among kids

Refer to 'Fighting child porn'; the SC ruling on child pornography will help the fight against the sexual exploitation of minors. The apex court has done well to quash the Madras HC's judgment on the same, rightly describing it as an 'egregious error'. It is unfortunate that the consumption of pornographic content has become increasingly common. From teenagers to the elderly, people these days find it hard to resist the lure of watching adult content for self-pleasure. Shielding children from predators is not enough. It is time for steps to rein in porn addiction among minors.

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN, LUDHIANA

# Geopolitical challenges keeping India on its toes



**G PARTHASARATHY**  
CHANCELLOR, JAMMU CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, & FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PAKISTAN

INDIA is recognised as the fastest-growing major economy in the world. The International Monetary Fund's assessment is that India's economy will grow at a rate of 7 per cent this financial year. Even as the country looks to maintain the growth momentum, it must be borne in mind that its position and influence in the world will be determined largely by its economic and technological progress. Given these imperatives, India has little choice but to strengthen its ties with countries in its immediate neighbourhood. This would ensure security and peace in the area extending from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf to its west to the Strait of Malacca to its east. The main challenges India faces beyond its borders arise from the expansionist ambitions and policies of China, even as Pakistan is mired in virtually perpetual bankruptcy. India has also sought for long to develop closer ties with the oil-rich (Persian)

Gulf Region, comprising Iran and the Arab nations, where around six million Indians live. India has built good ties with Saudi Arabia while simultaneously reinforcing its strong relations with the UAE. Delhi also played an important role in restoring a cordial working relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia after interperate comments made by President Joe Biden about the Saudi monarchy were resented by the Saudis. The national security adviser of the UAE, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, also participated in talks between US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman. The talks were reportedly facilitated by India's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval. An agreement for promoting cooperation between the UAE, the US and India was also reportedly finalised and signed shortly thereafter. The stage is now set for India to play an increasingly positive and cooperative role across the shores of the Indian Ocean, together with six Arab Gulf states.

India-US relations have grown significantly amid Washington's expectations that Delhi can balance out the growth of Chinese power across the Indian Ocean. China's policies remain committed to limiting and containing Indian influ-



**COLLABORATION:** India-US relations have grown significantly amid Washington's expectations that Delhi can balance out the growth of Chinese power across the Indian Ocean. AP/PTI

ence. Beijing continues to strengthen Pakistan's missile and nuclear capabilities. It also works in close collaboration with Pakistan along and across India's western border with Afghanistan. New Delhi's recent moves for strengthening ties with Iran, including the construction of the strategic Chabahar Port, give India increasing economic and maritime access to Central Asia and limit the space for Pakistan to hinder India's access to Afghanistan.

While the US had objected to India's growing ties with Iran, it now appears reconciled to Delhi going ahead with the project for a trans-

While the US had objected to India's growing ties with Iran, it now appears reconciled to Delhi going ahead with the project for a transport corridor.

port corridor linking it to Afghanistan and Iran. Pakistan is predictably not pleased with this corridor, as it prevents Rawalpindi from hindering India's access to Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia. This corridor, thereafter, can become a key gateway for India's access to the International North-South Transport Corridor, which, in turn, would eventually link India to Central Asia, Russia and, ultimately, to Europe by sea, rail and road.

One important factor that has cast a shadow on India-US relations is the constant criticism by the US media of alleged violation of human rights in India, evidently with

some encouragement from Washington. India may be among the few countries whose leadership found then President Donald Trump to be friendly — but blunt — during his visit to India. Trump has no illusions or expectations about China and has little inclination to even think about Pakistan. India can be confident that this relationship will grow, irrespective of whether Kamala Harris or Trump wins the upcoming presidential elections.

Nevertheless, relations with the US have grown steadily, with considerable cooperation for strengthening maritime links. This is an important development amid the tensions and piracy in the high seas — across the Indian Ocean — that have been accompanied by the Israeli occupation of Gaza. The US continues to regard India as an important strategic partner in the face of growing Chinese assertiveness across the Indo-Pacific region, extending from the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca to the Persian Gulf. Two aircraft carriers and as many nuclear submarines can be used by India to defend the shores of its Indian Ocean neighbours.

India's problems and tensions on its borders with China and Pakistan are set to continue. Despite being nearly bankrupt, Pakistan appears determined to continue spon-

soring terrorism in India. While the Sharif brothers and their civilian establishment plunged Pakistan into an economic crisis, India is now faced with Pakistan army chief Gen Syed Asim Munir, who wields substantial influence on national security policies. Unlike his mentor and predecessor, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, who understood the economic and diplomatic costs of tensions with India, Gen Munir appears bent on fomenting trouble in India, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. India needs to respond both diplomatically and militarily to this strategy.

While the Sharif brothers control Pakistan's civilian and political establishments, they have little say or influence on their army abetting terrorism in J&K and elsewhere in India. Pakistan now has its hands full dealing with continuing unrest on its border with Afghanistan. Both India and Iran, meanwhile, have a constructive relationship with Kabul, with India primarily focusing on economic cooperation while keeping a 'back channel' open for communication with its maritime neighbours, without allowing Pakistan to make such meetings a target of propaganda. At the same time, India must be prepared to deliver appropriate retribution should Pakistan continue to sponsor terrorism on Indian soil.

# The path to simultaneous elections is dotted with hurdles



**JAGDEEP S CHHOKAR**  
FOUNDER, ASSOCIATION FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS

THE Union Cabinet has accepted the Ram Nath Kovind Committee report on 'one nation, one election' (ONOE). Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who announced the decision, also laid out an action plan, starting with the drafting of a Constitution Amendment Bill that will presumably amend several Articles. This ambitious and complicated Bill has to be drafted and presented in Parliament first. Then, it must be passed in each House by a special majority (more than 50 per cent), with two-thirds of the members present and voting. The Bill, if and when approved by Parliament, will then have to be ratified by the legislatures of half of the states by a simple majority, that is, by a majority of the members of the House present and voting. This is needed because it will seek to amend some critical provisions of the Constitution. If and when all of the above happens, the Bill will need the President's assent.

How long will all this take is anyone's guess. This reminds one of the Women's Reservation Act, called Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which was passed as the 128th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2023, reserving one-third of the seats for women in Lok Sabha and state Assemblies. It received the President's assent on September 29, 2023.

Amid the fanfare, most laypersons believed that the 2024 General Election would see 33 per cent women members in the Lok Sabha. However, when that did not happen, many read the fine print to discover that this law would be implemented only after the next delimitation exercise that first required a census to be held. As the 2021 census has not been held so far, when this Act will be implemented is not known.

The same fate awaits the ONOE proposal. It has been reported that LK Advani mentioned in a blog in May 2010 that there should be simultaneous elections. It was included in the BJP's election manifesto in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. From 2015 to 2018, there was hectic activity about this proposal, but after 2018, the matter seemed to have gone into cold storage. Then, on September 2, 2023, the Kovind Committee was formed. A committee that has such an obvious political intent being headed by a for-



**CHALLENGE:** For the ONOE Bill to become a reality, several Articles of the Constitution will have to be amended. ANI

mer President was a novelty in itself. This committee submitted its report on March 14, 2024. This report was accepted by the Cabinet on September 18.

Three main reasons have been given for recommending ONOE: recurring poll expenses, suspension of development works due to the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and neglect of governance because ministers get involved in campaigning.

The argument that ONOE will result in significant saving of money that can be used for development works is anti-democratic. I have three questions: Are democracy and development mutually exclusive? Can we have either one or the other? Do we want the

Elections are an essential requirement for the operationalisation of democracy. Do we wish to merely go through the motions of holding elections?

most effective democracy or the cheapest possible?

Elections are an essential requirement for the operationalisation of democracy. Do we wish to merely go through the motions of holding elections and provide a formal stamp of people's approval without them necessarily expressing their true opinion? Democracy has a cost and it will be a sad day when India concludes that it cannot afford to pay the cost of democracy and decides to have the least expensive or cheapest democracy.

Anyone who has read the MCC would know that all it says is that the government cannot introduce new schemes which may have the potential to influence

the election result. If there are some new schemes that the government feels must be initiated, the MCC has a provision for that — the government can seek clearance from the Election Commission. The MCC does not prohibit the continuance of ongoing development schemes.

The question of governance suffering because ministers get busy campaigning is baffling. Two issues need to be highlighted in this context. One, political parties, particularly those in power at the Centre and in the states, have a large membership. Therefore, there should be no dearth of effective campaigners. It follows that it should be possible to easily exclude ministers from campaigning during elections.

The second issue is that those who become ministers take an oath of office in which they swear to discharge their responsibilities to the best of their ability. It follows that if they neglect their executive or ministerial responsibilities in favour of campaigning, they are violating their constitutional oath, which should make them liable for prosecution.

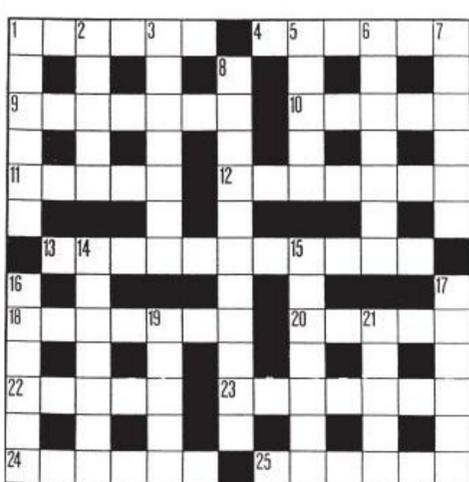
What makes the dream unrealistic is the simple fact of the existence of the Basic Structure Doctrine of the Constitution, laid down by a 13-Judge Bench

of the Supreme Court (SC) in the landmark Kesavananda Bharati judgment pronounced on April 24, 1973. The essence of the doctrine is that while Parliament has the right to amend the Constitution under Article 368(1), it does not have the right to amend what the SC called the Basic Structure.

The elements comprising the Basic Structure have been laid down in the Kesavananda judgment itself and have been added in some subsequent judgments. One constant element in all such judgments is the federal character of the Constitution. The Constitution has separate sections/chapters titled 'The Union' and 'The States'. Each of these two entities, therefore, has separate and independent constitutional existence, which includes electoral dynamics. Force-fitting all these dynamics into one is a clear violation of the federal character of the Constitution, and is therefore a violation of its Basic Structure.

Even if Parliament and the required number of states approve amendment to some Articles of the Constitution — and the President gives assent to that — it can still be challenged by concerned citizens in court for violation of the Basic Structure and will be subjected to a judicial review.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- 1 Intimation (6)
- 4 Prejudiced (6)
- 9 Prevailing trend of opinion (7)
- 10 Reserved and haughty (5)
- 11 Nominal (5)
- 12 The papal government (7)
- 13 Be exactly what is needed (4,3,4)
- 18 Disappoint (3,4)
- 20 Subterranean dwarf of folklore (5)
- 22 Unusually luxurious (5)
- 23 Intensify (7)
- 24 Urge strongly (6)
- 25 Strongly built (6)

### DOWN

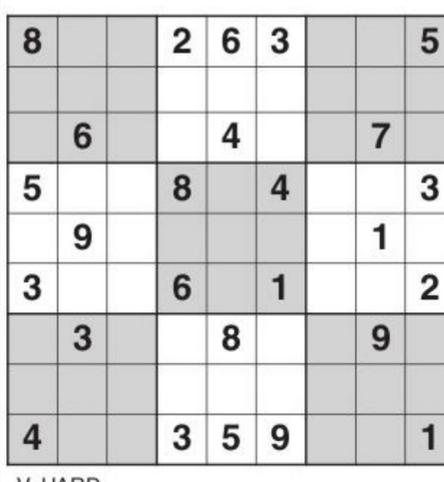
- 1 Subtle distinction (6)
- 2 Consider (5)
- 3 Medium of communication (7)
- 5 Not suitable (5)
- 6 Impassive in adversity (7)
- 7 To champion (6)
- 8 Oppressive (5-6)
- 14 Up to date with news etc. (2,5)
- 15 Important person (3,4)
- 16 Pass by (6)
- 17 Unorthodox doctrine (6)
- 19 Different (5)
- 21 Proprietor (5)

### Yesterday's solution

**Across:** 1 Suspend, 5 Snoop, 8 An eye for an eye, 9 Dogma, 10 Luggage, 11 Dither, 12 Troupe, 15 Refusal, 17 Lodge, 19 By all accounts, 20 Endue, 21 Tottery.

**Down:** 1 Stand, 2 Sleight of hand, 3 Elevate, 4 Doodle, 5 Slang, 6 Overabundance, 7 Precede, 11 Durable, 13 Rule out, 14 Elicit, 16 Salve, 18 Essay.

## SU DO KU



V. HARD

## FORECAST

SUNSET:	THURSDAY	18:34 HRS
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	06:13 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	36	28
New Delhi	34	25
Amritsar	35	27
Bathinda	37	28
Jalandhar	35	27
Ludhiana	34	28
Bhiwani	32	26
Hisar	34	26
Sirsa	38	29
Dharamsala	30	18
Manali	25	13
Shimla	24	15
Srinagar	30	16
Jammu	32	25
Kargil	26	08
Leh	23	05
Dehradun	31	23
Mussoorie	21	15

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION	
4 5 3 9 1 7 6 8 2	1 8 6 3 2 5 9 4 7
2 9 7 8 4 6 1 3 5	5 4 8 1 9 3 7 2 6
7 6 9 4 5 2 3 1 8	3 2 1 6 7 8 4 5 9
6 3 5 7 8 4 2 9 1	9 7 2 5 3 1 8 6 4
8 1 4 2 6 9 5 7 3	

## CALENDAR

- SEPTEMBER 26, 2024, THURSDAY**
- Shaka Samvat 1946
  - Aashwin Shaka 4
  - Aashwin Parvishte 11
  - Hijari 1446
  - Krishna Paksha Tithi 9, up to 12.26 pm
  - Parigha Yoga up to 11.41 pm
  - Punar Nakshatra up to 11.34 pm
  - Moon enters Cancer sign 5.13 pm



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## A new era for Sri Lanka

Dissanayake's presidency signals a departure from dynastic politics and centrist governance in the Island nation

Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the leader of Sri Lanka's left-wing Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), has been sworn in as the new president, marking a significant political shift for the island nation. A prominent leftist figure in Sri Lanka, Dissanayake's rise to power comes at a time when Sri Lanka is grappling with economic instability, post-war reconciliation challenges, and trust deficit with political parties. His presidency represents not only a new chapter for Sri Lanka but also has important regional implications, particularly for its closest neighbor, India. Dissanayake's election is symbolic of a larger political awakening in Sri Lanka. The country has been governed by a mix of family dynasties and centrist coalitions for decades. The Rajapaksa family's long tenure in power left behind a legacy of infrastructure development, but it also plunged Sri Lanka into deep economic turmoil, including a huge debt crisis. Dissanayake's presidency reflects a growing appetite for change among the Sri Lankan populace, particularly the youth, who are seeking accountability, transparency, and a departure from nepotism and corruption.



As a leftist, Dissanayake's ideology is rooted in socialist principles, advocating for wealth redistribution, land reforms, and a stronger welfare policies. His political platform laid emphasis on addressing economic inequalities, curbing corruption, and empowering marginalised communities. For a country with stark economic divisions and ethnic tensions, his approach signals a potential shift in how governance is conducted, focusing more on grassroots development and inclusivity. His presidency could usher in policies that prioritise social welfare over foreign investments. India

has long been a significant player in Sri Lanka's political and economic landscape. From the aftermath of the civil war to the island nation's economic collapse, India has consistently offered support, whether through financial aid, diplomatic backing, or humanitarian assistance. Dissanayake's presidency, however, may bring new challenges to this dynamic. Dissanayake may adopt a more cautious approach toward India. While he recognises the importance of India-Sri Lanka relations, he has also been vocal about maintaining Sri Lanka's sovereignty and avoiding over-reliance on any single foreign power. In his earlier speeches, Dissanayake has hinted at prioritising domestic economic reforms over international partnerships, potentially leading to more protectionist policies. This could mean that Indian investments might face more scrutiny. But it also means distancing from China. Dissanayake's presidency may open doors for deeper cooperation between the two countries, particularly in areas like agriculture, education, and social development. While India has been Sri Lanka's steadfast ally, regional dynamics involving China will also shape Dissanayake's foreign policy approach. Dissanayake has expressed concerns about Chinese debt-trap diplomacy which led to a lot of hardships for the people of Sri Lanka. It remains to be seen how he deals with China.



A Zebra in an enclosure during the 150th anniversary celebration of Allipore Zoological Garden, in Kolkata

## India moves closer to 'one nation one election'

Momentum is building for simultaneous elections, but with constitutional and political challenges ahead, its successful implementation remains uncertain



KALYANI SHANKAR



The 'one-nation-one-poll' idea is moving towards Parliament and public debate, with the Modi government deciding to force the issue last week. The cabinet decided to bring a bill to Parliament in the coming session. The concept has been debated many times in the past, but no political consensus has evolved. The ruling BJP has been pushing to change the electoral system for a long time. Congress rejected the idea when approached by former Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and later BJP leader L K Advani in the past. The timing of the move was excellent, as it was on the day Modi completed 100 days in office in his third term last week. This is one of the critical electoral reforms the BJP has suggested in its manifestoes for about two decades. While the idea seems reasonable and doable, several questions have arisen. Is India ready for such a reform? Does Prime Minister Modi have the required two-thirds majority to get the bill to amend the Constitution passed in Parliament? Is there a political consensus? These are a few questions that need answers. The primary and most important thing is that the bill can only be passed by mobilising two-thirds of the majority in Lok Sabha. In the recent 2024 polls, the BJP was 40 short of a majority in the house

and could form the government only with the help of J.D. (U) and TeluguDesam. The BJP needs the support of the allies and also friendly parties. The BJP is for the reform as it would stop disruptions caused by the frequent changes in the election cycle. It would also help cut down on poll-related expenditures. Most Opposing parties reject the idea of simultaneous polls. They include the Congress, the Left parties, the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. They reject it mainly to settle political scores and apprehension that they may benefit the BJP. Former President Ram Nath Kovind's committee to go into the issue has unanimously endorsed the proposal after eliciting opinions from political parties. Thirty-two parties supported the problem, and 15 rejected it. The panel also indicated that the Centre formed a panel to oversee the implementation of this proposal. Also, there should be a joint electoral roll for all elections so that voters will use the same list for national, state, and local polls. It would reduce errors in voter registration. The panel plans to talk with all the stakeholders. They also suggest having the votes in two parts. The first will be for Lok Sabha and



FORMER PRESIDENT RAM NATH KOVIND'S COMMITTEE HAS UNANIMOUSLY ENDORSED THE PROPOSAL AFTER ELICITING OPINIONS FROM POLITICAL PARTIES. THIRTY-TWO PARTIES SUPPORTED THE PROBLEM, AND 15 REJECTED IT

Assembly votes, and the second for local groups. Historically, from 1952, the first election that was held, to 1967, it was a synchronised poll. But this changed when Indira Gandhi came to power. She began invoking Article 356 to dismiss the Opposition-led governments and thus started the independent election. It is continuing till today. However, the bill faces constitutional, legal, and political challenges. The panel has recommended amending the last five articles of the Constitution to hold simultaneous polls in the country. They are amendments to Articles 83 and 172. The BJP does not have a majority, while constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds majority. Also, the Constitution is silent over whether polls should happen simultaneously. The ultimate test is how Modi would mobilise an adequate number of MPs in Parliament. Second, a political consensus is yet to be made. The BJP has not tried to deal with or persuade the opposition parties to agree. The Opposition is in an aggressive mood and has yet to come on board because they believe simultaneous polls would mean an advantage for the BJP. Significantly bigger parties like Congress oppose it. The Left parties, Trinamool Congress, Nationalist Congress Party and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen have rejected the idea. The 15 opposing parties account for 205 MPs, while Modi requires 362 votes. A legal framework is also needed to meet the necessary changes for simultaneous polls. It could address problems with the state governments collapsing in the middle of the term and toppling games played by the Centre. Since the idea is good and checks the wastage of money and policy paralysis, as well as the occurrence of elections every two years, the Opposition must think twice before rejecting the idea. They should bring that for public debate if they have an alternate plan. On the whole, Modi is bringing this legislation to Parliament with a game plan. Win or lose, Modi gets the benefit. If he wins, it is the fulfilment of the poll promise. He can always claim that he brought the reform with good intentions if the bill is defeated, but the Opposition sabotaged it. While the bill may be delayed, it is still worth debating and finding ways to do so eventually. After all, election expenditure is also taxpayers' money. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

## Reflections from the Northeast: A call for peace amid violence

The deepening communal rivalry in Manipur demands urgent attention, dialogue and reconciliation for the future of this region



RICHARD HAY

As part of my responsibilities as a Member of Parliament, I have had the opportunity to visit Northeast India to expand the community development programmes initiated by the Government of India. Given the evolving turbulence in the region, I find myself reflecting on those visits, struggling to reconcile my previous perceptions with the current unrest. During my visits, I had the pleasure of meeting several tribes across different states in the Northeast. The warmth and hospitality of the people were touching. In many villages, I was welcomed with such affection that it left a lasting impression. The people of this picturesque region are generally peaceful, cultured, talented, and well-educated. Manipur, in particular, has a rich cultural heritage, with its people being tolerant and possessing high aesthetic values. Each tribe follows its traditions with pride and devotion, which I found remarkable. Traveling all the way from Kerala, I felt completely at home. However, it deeply saddens me to witness the current state



of Manipur, which has become a center of violence and atrocities committed by one community against another. This heartbreaking situation stems from a decision on April 20, 2023, when the Manipur High Court directed the state government to "consider the request of the Meitei community to be included in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list." This ruling enraged the Kuki community, who feared that granting the Meiteis ST status would allow them to purchase land in the hilly areas reserved for tribes. Tensions escalated, and the Meitei community became increasingly vulnerable to attacks by the Kukis. I view this crisis as more of a communal rivalry than a political or terrorist conflict.

In light of this, I believe that religious leaders, particularly those from the Church, such as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), as well as influential Cardinals and Archbishops, should step in to initiate a dialogue with the Central Government. Their involvement could help mediate and bring peace to this disturbed region. They could also appeal to Kuki rebel leaders to surrender their weapons and work towards eradicating illegal poppy cultivation, thereby contributing to lasting peace in Manipur. We've seen such successful strategies of surrender and reconciliation in other states like Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh in the past. At the same time, the authorities' seeming apathy towards those responsible for organized crime in Manipur raises concerns about incompetence or vested interests. Many criminals have fled the region, and it is crucial for the authorities to trace them and ensure they face the legal process. Additionally, those who have lost property or land due to the conflict must be compensated by the gov-

ernment. Delaying justice will only embolden the perpetrators and prolong the violence. The citizens of India expect prompt and decisive action to restore peace in Manipur. The region's significant involvement in opium cultivation has allowed certain groups to amass both wealth and power, fueling the cycle of violence. It is disheartening that despite their Christian faith, some are failing to adhere to the teachings of the Church and the laws of the land. Their actions not only perpetuate violence but also set a dangerous precedent for the younger generation, leading to a rise in drug addiction and moral degradation. The people of the Northeast yearn for peace, and the entire country prays for an end to this violence. The insurgency and militancy must cease. At this critical juncture, my heartfelt plea is that the Kukis, find it within themselves to share love, compassion, and respect for other tribes, so they may live together in peace. (The writer is a former Member of Parliament; views are personal)

### MPOX TRIGGERS HEALTH ALERT

Madam — It is with reference to the news "India reports first case of Mpox clade 1 strain" September 24. Recently in India one Mpox case has been diagnosed in Kerala which matches with clade 1b strain infection which has triggered WHO public health emergency alert. While another person was found to have Mpox infection in Delhi earlier this month, it was clade 2 infection. This led to the WHO sending its highest level of alarm and declaring Mpox as a public health emergency of International concern (PHEIC). India has reported at least 32 Mpox cases and one death since 2022 when the infection was first detected in the country. Mpox is highly contagious and can spread through close contact with an infected person or contaminated materials. It can also be transmitted through contact with infected animals. The Health Ministry has to place strong emphasis on early detection, swift containment and preventing any potential outbreaks within the country. Four years ago a 20 years old youth was diagnosed with first Covid 19 infection in Kerala who returned from China. Since 2018, 22 people have died of Nipah virus infection in Kerala and its outbreaks are becoming more frequent. Indian Health Ministry and Kerala Government should enhance surveillance and establish more modern clinical laboratories for early diagnosis of Mpox and other deadly infectious diseases in Kerala. P Vijayaraj | Tirunelveli

### KANGANA'S LOAN ALLEGATION

Madam — Ref: "Himachal Pradesh Government takes loans and gives it to Sonia, alleges BJP MP Kangana Ranaut" (September 23). The recent claims made by BJP MP Kangana Ranaut against the Himachal Pradesh government have stirred a political controversy. During a BJP membership provision drive in the State, she alleged that the current government that the Congress party heads divert the loans given by the State to Sonia

## Historic chess triumph for India



India's chess masters have created history by winning team gold medals in both men's and women's competitions at the 45th International Chess Federation (FIDE) Chess Olympiad in Budapest. In addition to winning the team championships, India also walked away with four individual gold medals as the tournament wrapped up in the Hungarian capital. Wins for Gukesh Dommaraju, Praggnanandhaa and Arjun Erigaisi sealed gold in the men's event, known as the Open event, while Harika Dronavalli, Vaishali

Rameshbabu, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal, and Tania Sachdev won their respective games to secure gold in the women's competition. Gukesh, Erigaisi, Deshmukh and Agrawal bagged individual gold medals on their respective boards. The feat was termed as extraordinary. It feels like a magical time for India. The men's team won 27 of their 44 games, losing just once and drawing six. Their final round of matches was against Slovenia, whom they defeated 3.5-0.5, while the women's team beat Azerbaijan with the same score. Gukesh, who has also qualified for the final of the World Chess Championship in November, said he was delighted that his team got over the line in a dominant fashion after having some close misses in the past. Eighteen-year-old Deshmukh was a standout performer in the women's competition and remained undefeated, winning seven of her 11 games and drawing four. Nikhil CK Subramaniam | Chennai

Gandhi leaving "hollow" the coffers of the State. From the above assertion, it was clear that Ranaut feels that the finances within the State are poor because of the high level of corruption and that the expensive behaviour of the Congress party during elections is not explained. She called upon people not to support the regime that misappropriated the funds meant for disaster relief. These appeals speak not just to the extent of political contestation today but also point toward bigger issues of governance and accountability in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Garima Singh | Kanpur

### LEADERSHIP CHANGE IN SRI LANKA

Madam — Apropos to "Dissanayake sworn in as Lanka's new President" published on September 24, here is my response. Sri Lankans swung to the extreme left by voting Anura Kumara Dissanayake, a leader with spotless image and humble origins. He will have to understand the nuances of this verdict, which means economic revival and leg-up to federalism.

His main fight would be against corruption, nepotism and reckless spending by the political establishment, which led to the 2022 economic fiasco. He will have to address all that but protect people from vulnerable sections of society. For economic revival he will have to take along the IMF, China as well as India. New President is expected to be ideologically closer to China, Sri Lanka's biggest investor and creditor. International spotlight would also be on Sri Lanka because of its geographical location, right in the middle of the Indian Ocean, as they will look at how China plays its cards now. The new President has said that he would not like to be sandwiched between two big powers and this could be a positive sign for India. As far as India is concerned, it is going through a challenging phase as far as its neighbours are concerned, it should make all efforts to build strong ties with the island nation. Bal Govind | Noida



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GRATITUDE

This simple yet profound act of thanking others can deepen our connection with God



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Our natural inclination is to see faults in others. This has to do mostly with our egos; we feel better about ourselves. We could also be feeling insecure or jealous, etc., when we do that. This harms us, if we communicate such feelings either by words or gestures. Others are not pleased about it. Contrarily, if we look for something to appreciate in others or thank them for something, we make friends. It is so logical. Let us not forget that we are small souls, who are intrinsically ignorant, helpless and insecure. But we have been given brains to seek help to get over these shortcomings, especially from God. Let me take up how we can gain by saying thanks to others. We don't become a debtor, if someone has done us some favour, except when it is a loan.

Even then we should be very thankful. Our relationships with others will become sound. Others will feel that this person is naturally grateful – a great quality to endear ourselves to others. We, ourselves, will feel good, having done the right thing. Wouldn't we wish to be thanked if we do some favour? Rather we all expect to be thanked. So shouldn't we thank others whenever an opportunity presents itself? I am very serious about thanking others. Rather I am looking for opportunities to thank. A service is provided, even against payment; still, I thank you, which is well appreciated. Someone has given me time, and does not make me wait, I thank. If a loan is given by a bank, I show my gratitude even if they have oversecured themselves. Someone says encouraging words, I thank them profusely. A gift, no matter what the value is, brings out heartfelt thanks from



me. My help—those who serve me, are thanked whenever they do something extra or better. This attitude has brought me enormous goodwill from those who I deal with. I register in their minds as a good person, who should be helped. This thanking propensity has especially brought me close to my Lord. I routinely pray for guidance. I have realised that my knowledge is extremely limited. Most importantly, I have no idea about what the future will bring; God does. He guides me through intuitions, and mediums like my family members, friends, etc.

God is very forthcoming in this matter because He is not taking away someone else's rights. The next reason for thanking God is the help He provides frequently. Nobody has to tell me that I am very small and mostly helpless. God must help, therefore, I pray whenever my efforts/duties take me only this far. God is very merciful; He helps if what I seek is 'dharma' (according to dharma). I deserve also to remain in God's shelter by doing spiritual practices like 'darshan' (seeing) a photo of my Lord, chanting Krishna and Ohm, doing 'namaskar' (obeisance), and thanking of course. I am slowly becoming positive from a very negative person. I am beginning to see the positive side of others and, of course, life; there is so much good in life.

By habit, we become judgemental, hateful, etc., which hurts the self mainly. Thanking is just one spiritual act; there are so many. The idea is to catch the attention of God somehow. When we do that, God becomes interested in us. He has so much to give, being the owner of everything. He does not need anything from us, and we cannot do any favour to Him. Isn't God the Creator, which He manages by Himself? The conclusion is: to develop a habit of thanking and turning positive.

*(The writer is a spiritual guide; views expressed are personal)*

# Molestation incident in Bhubaneswar sparks fury



SIDHARTH MISHRA

An incident of molestation inside a Bhubaneswar police station has sent shockwaves across the country and caused outrage among the Fauji fraternity



A most despicable and obnoxious incident has taken place in Bhubaneswar, which till the incident occurred was believed to be the safest place for people especially women. The incident involving molestation inside a police station of an Army veteran's daughter and a serving officer's fiancé has caused a turmoil within the community of the uniformed forces, which the government would find difficult to douse. The task has become more difficult with the IT Cell of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its troll soldiers adding fuel to the fire. Social media influencer Rishi Bagree, known outpost of the IT Cell, posted some videos of the incident trying to put the blame on victim for inviting outrage of her modesty by the cops.

While this video may have had thumps up from the IT Cell followers but it has further added to the anger within the Fauji (defence) community. A video released on the Daughter's Day last Sunday by a Fauji daughter and filmmaker Nidhi Sharma, admonished likes of Bagree on micro blog platform X saying, "Those who're outraged by the 'overconfident, arrogant' Army Daughter; who've convinced themselves she deserved to be assaulted, molested and flashed inside a police station because she dared the cops to do their job, and those what are now character assassinating her, need to know this. Fauji kids are no pushovers! And nor is the Fauji Fraternity. We stand together today."



IT'S TIME FOR THE PEOPLE IN THE POSITION OF POWER, WHO MAY BE YET TO REALISE THE ANGST THE INCIDENT HAS CAUSED AMONG PEOPLE IN GENERAL AND THE FAUJIS IN PARTICULAR, TO PUT THEIR EARS TO THE GROUND

The tweet has garnered more than 42K views. More damaging for the establishment is the fact that it has been circulated in the several thousand WhatsApp groups of the Fauji community, where the pain of a Fauji child being first molested and then berated is being severally expressed.

It's time for the people in the position of power, who may be yet to realise the angst the incident has caused among people in general and the Faujis in particular, to put their ears to the ground. The degree of anger is particularly high among the young officers and the armed forces brass has been working overtime to assuage the hurt feelings.

The petition before the Chief Justice of Odisha High Court was filed by the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Madhya Bharat Area, who on learning about the incident travelled from his headquarters in Madhya Pradesh to the Bhubaneswar for the purpose. This shows the enormity of concern which the brass had following the knowledge of the anger seething through the rank and file of armed forces.

In an extra-ordinary move to reach out the rank and file, a message purported to have been

released by the GOC was also circulated through the various WhatsApp groups explaining the course of action and the relief it brought for the harassed officer and his fiancé, including grant of bail by Odisha High Court. The message also gave the information that the police did its best to not let bail be listed for hearing and the High Court judge pulled up the Deputy Registrar for the oversight. This must have reassured the young officers.

However, this outreach initiative of the Army brass to keep the simmering anger under control would be thwarted if the IT Cell of the ruling party is left to its whims and fancies. Remember them calling the agitating farmers anti-nationals and terrorists. What did it end in, BJP being routed not just in Punjab assembly polls but all the farmer dominated seat in north India during the last Lok Sabha polls.

The Bhubaneswar incident came just a few days after the equally despicable incident in Indore. Earlier this month, two Army officers and their women friends were assaulted by six person at a picnic spot near Mhow cantonment. One of the women friends was also gang raped.

Though swift action followed and police arrested the alleged accused, what made the Fauji

angry was the local Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police announcing that a departmental enquiry has been ordered against the officers too. Why should police speak for an internal matter of the Army?

These incidents are adding to the long fermenting anger caused by the unresolved issues of one-rank-one-pension, Ex-service-men Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), Agneepath scheme and pay disparity among others. While the Narendra Modi government has emphasized national security and military prowess in its public messaging, many Indian Army officers feel that their professional concerns, particularly related to pay, promotions, and long-term welfare, have not been adequately addressed.

This has created a growing sense of disillusionment among the officer cadre. The government must realise that this disillusionment could get critical if its social media handles promote trolling of the Fauji families falling victim to civilian callousness. The government has lost faith of the Kisans, it should not lose trust of the Jawans.

*(Sidharth Mishra is author & president Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice; views expressed are personal)*

## Empowering women and nourishing children: Fight against unhealthy snacks

Through innovative interventions, families can be motivated to return to nutritious home-cooked meals

A couple of years ago, when CHETNA, a not-for-profit working on health and nutrition awareness among women, adolescents and children, was conducting a survey, it found a large number of children living in the urban slum of Vasna, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, almost addicted to packaged potato chips and other unhealthy snacks commonly found at grocery stores. They often skipped home cooked meals, preferring to eat such ultra processed food. As a consequence, many of them became undernourished and anaemic. One of the strategies CHETNA adopted to wean children away from packaged food, was to demonstrate how traditional Gujarati snacks and complementary foods like



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

shero, sukhiandi lads could be tasty as well as nutritious. Cooking them in the presence of mothers and caregivers helped them learn new ways of improving the nutrition levels of their children. For five weeks the underweight children of 1 to 5 years were also fed supplementary food which had protein, fat and iron. The CHETNA team visited families thrice a week at a fixed time and followed a

30-minute approach'. This meant ensuring that the child sat down for 30 minutes while caregivers fed them home cooked food. For each child, there were 36 home visits. Within seven to nine months of the intervention, the children were eating only home-cooked meals. To increase their calorie count, recipes from a mix of wheat flour and Bengal gram were also added to their menu. Slowly calories along with the other nutrients the children were consuming increased. At the end of nine months 166 initially underweight children were weighed of which 36% of children were found to be fully nourished. All 35 children who were eating only food packets started eating home-cooked food. To sustain this habit, CHETNA

hit upon the idea of skilling the mothers and other women from economically marginalized communities living in these slums to also be able to gain financially from making such nutritious snacks. In August 2023, they began training women living in these slums to do both-- wean their children away from unhealthy snacks to homemade goodies and become nutri-entrepreneurs at the same time. The first batch of 25 women began with a few lessons on diets, the importance of healthy eating and adding nutrition to snacks. Besides enhancing their nutrition education, they were advised on packaging, marketing and business management. A kitchen was set up in the slum and the women were told



about the importance of being professional and maintaining hygiene. They learnt to make nutritious sweetmeats like date laddoos, traditional khadi made from millets like ragi and beetroot shakarparas as well as savoury puffed millet and nachos. Women began selling their products to neighbours as well as shopkeepers. In the first three months of 2024, the 25 women were able to sell about 60,000 kgs of home-

made snacks. They are now earning Rs 4000 to Rs 5000 a month. For 35-year-old Champaben Makwana, a homemaker and mother of two, becoming a nutri-entrepreneur has made her dream of being financially independence come true. Her monthly income of Rs 5000 has given her the confidence to spread her wings and venture into online business through WhatsApp.

She is not only able to contribute to the family's financial stability but more importantly, also stop her son's recurrent stomach aches by substituting packaged snacks with homemade alternatives. Becoming a nutri-entrepreneur has turned around the life of 18-year-old Bhavna Sargara. After failing in English, Maths and Science in

her 10th Board exam, Sargara lost hope and became directionless.

The entrepreneurial training opened new doors and innovative culinary techniques and recipes have enabled her to earn Rs 5000 a month. This increase in income has given her the freedom to enrol in tuition classes to fulfil her educational aspirations. She is preparing to take her 12th Board exams. Additionally, she is also providing financial help to her family and encouraging her younger siblings to continue their studies. It is well known that ultra processed food such as chips and noodles contain unhealthy levels of fats, salt and sugar. One of the reasons for this is that emulsifiers, additives, preservatives and stabilizers that are not usu-

ally used in home kitchens can be found in these products to prolong their shelf life.

Studies have shown that consumption of these contributes to increasing the risk of developing type-2 diabetes besides other lifestyle-related diseases. The biggest impact of aggressive marketing of unhealthy food products is among communities belonging to the lowest 20% income group who spend 5.5% on packaged foods, according to studies. However, the CHETNA initiative shows that all that is packaged does not have to be unhealthy. It can be nutritious and healthy. All it takes is will and nutrition education.

*(The writer is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are personal)*

<https://t.me/AllNewsPaperPaid>

<https://t.me/AllNewsPaperPaid>

Want to get these Newspapers Daily at earliest

1. AllNewsPaperPaid
2. आकाशवाणी (AUDIO)
3. Contact I'd:- [https://t.me/Sikendra\\_925bot](https://t.me/Sikendra_925bot)

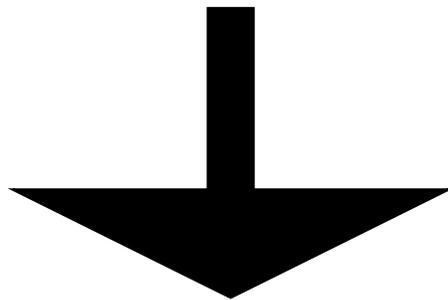
Type in Search box of Telegram

[@AllNewsPaperPaid](https://t.me/AllNewsPaperPaid) And you will find a Channel

Name All News Paper Paid Paper join it and receive

daily editions of these epapers at the earliest

Or you can tap on this link:



<https://t.me/AllNewsPaperPaid>

<https://t.me/AllNewsPaperPaid>

<https://t.me/AllNewsPaperPaid>