Editorial



A distinct right

Right to be free of climate change effects comes amid a conservation dilemma

n recognising the right to be free of the adverse effects of climate change as a distinct fundamental right, the Supreme Court of India has advanced the case for a healthy environment and sustainable development. The apex court had long ago recognised the right to live in a clean environment as part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. However, the Court has now reasoned that the right to be protected from climate change and the right to a wholesome environment are two sides of the same coin; and given the increasing threat from climate change year after year, the time has come to treat the former as a distinct right. It has explained how the vagaries of climate change have an adverse impact on life through factors ranging from rising temperatures, storms and droughts to food shortages due to crop failure and shifts in vector-borne diseases. If environmental degradation and climate change lead to acute shortage of food and water, the right to equality will also be violated, as the poorer, under-served communities will not be able to cope with the adversity. The Court's emphasis on climate change came in a case that pitted the concern over multiple deaths of the Great Indian Bustard due to solar power transmission lines against India's international obligation to meet its emission reduction and increase its energy capacity through non-fossil fuel sources.

The context is a conundrum peculiar to some parts of the country. The Bench was faced with a plea by three Union Ministries - Environment, Power, and New and Renewable Energy – seeking modification of the Court's April 2021 order that sought to protect the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard from being killed in collisions with power transmission lines put up by solar energy companies in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The earlier order had directed that all low-voltage power lines in both 'priority' (where the bird is known to live) and 'potential' (where conservation efforts are going on) areas be laid underground and existing overhead lines converted to underground lines. It had also directed that highvoltage lines in identified areas be shifted below the ground. The modification was sought as conversion to underground lines was technically not possible and too expensive and the renewable energy sector was adversely affected by the order, especially because the area had considerable solar and wind energy potential. The Court has now asked an expert committee to decide on the extent of underground and overground lines and recalled its earlier orders. It is unfortunate that the goal of reducing the country's carbon footprint and the need to protect a critically endangered species are at odds with each other. The sooner a solution is found the better.

Gross mismanagement

India is falling behind in efforts to control tuberculosis

ith less than two years left to achieve the ambitious goal set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018 to "eliminate" TB in India, the pharmacy of the Global South is once again struggling to treat patients with drug-sensitive TB. Shockingly, India is experiencing a TB drug shortage, with increasing frequency. Just seven months ago, there was an acute shortage of critical MDR-TB drugs; disruptions in drug supply, which began with drug-sensitive medicines in 2022 and snowballed to include MDR-TB drugs, lasted for nearly a year. Similarly, in September 2021, India faced a stockout of MDR-TB drug Delamanid. Delay in diagnosis and treatment initiation are already a huge concern in the TB care cascade. Patients who start therapy but fail to achieve treatment success is another gap. However, addressing this gap, which takes drug availability for granted, will become harder if drug stock outs become a recurring issue. A 2010 study found that non-availability of drugs was responsible for 8% of non-adherent patients missing treatment. Making sure that medicines for different categories of TB patients are always available across India is a no-brainer. That 14 years later and close to the target date of 2025, there is still a shortage of drug-sensitive TB medicines, which are manufactured entirely in India by multiple players, only underscores how poorly the national TB programme is being managed.

Renaming the National TB Control Programme as the National TB Elimination Programme in line with Mr. Modi's goal without addressing the fundamentals such as drug availability reeks of incompetence and a lack of seriousness in the war against TB. What makes the situation worse is the Health Ministry's permission to States to procure drugs locally at the last minute, creating huge challenges at the field level. A March 18, 2024 Health Ministry circular to all States mentions that the supply of certain drug-sensitive medicines may get "delayed due to unforeseen and extraneous circumstances". While States have been asked to procure drugs locally for a period of three months, the circular also gives an option for States to reimburse the cost of medicines procured by patients in case the district health facilities fail to provide them free drugs. If the last minute permission to States for local procurement is condemnable, leaving it to the patients to buy medicines themselves, even as a last resort, is abominable, given the poor socioeconomic background of most TB patients. Far from reaching the 2025 goal, India does not seem to have a handle on the most basic elements of TB control.

The climate crisis is not gender neutral

he climate crisis is already here and does not impact everyone equally. Women and girls experience disproportionately high health risks, especially in situations of poverty, and due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a disaster. The Supreme Court of India has just ruled that people have a right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, and the right to a clean environment is already recognised as a fundamental right within the ambit of the right to

Agriculture is the most important livelihood source for women in India, particularly in rural India. Climate-driven crop yield reductions increase food insecurity, adversely impacting poor households that already suffer higher nutritional deficiencies. Within small and marginal landholding households, while men face social stigma due to unpaid loans (leading to migration, emotional distress, and sometimes even suicide), women experience higher domestic work burdens, worse health, and greater intimate partner violence. In fact, when compared to districts without droughts in the past 10 years, National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 data showed that women living in drought-prone districts were more underweight, experienced more intimate partner violence and had a higher prevalence of girl marriages. For women, the increasing food and nutritional insecurity, work burdens and income uncertainties lead not only to poor physical health, but also impact their mental health and emotional well-being.

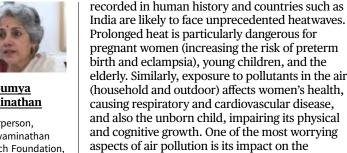
Extreme events and gender-based violence The world is witnessing an increasing frequency of extreme weather events and climate-induced natural hazards. A report from the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) in 2021 found that 75% of Indian districts are vulnerable to hydromet disasters (floods, droughts and cyclones). NFHS 5 data showed that over half of women and children living in these districts were at risk. Studies are increasingly showing a direct correlation between these natural disasters and gender-based violence against women. Also, extreme weather events and subsequent changes in water cycle patterns severely impact access to safe drinking water, which increases the drudgery and reduces time for productive work and health care of women and girls.

The past decade has been the hottest ever



Swaminathan

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and cognitive growth. One of the most worrying aspects of air pollution is its impact on the growing brain. Emerging data from cohort studies in India show that for every 10 micrograms per cubic meter increase in PM2.5, the risk of lung cancer increases by 9%, the risk of cardiovascular deaths on the same day by 3%, and stroke by 8%. For dementia, the risk increased by 4% for 2 micrograms increase in

> Of course, not all women are equally at risk, even within the same geographic or agro-ecological zone. Thus, though climate change has a distinct gender dimension, there is a need for more evidence on the intersectionalities that make certain sub-groups more vulnerable and therefore in need of more protection.

> Why does climate action need women? Climate action requires 100% of the population if we want to achieve the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5° C. At the same time, empowering women means better climate solutions; when provided with the same access to resources as men, women increased their agricultural yields by 20% to 30%. Tribal and rural women, in particular, have been at the forefront of environmental conservation. Giving women and women collectives (Self-help Groups and Farmer Producer Organisations) the knowledge, tools and access to resources would encourage local solutions to emerge. Adaptation measures will necessarily be different in rural and urban areas as exposure to heat, air pollution and access to water and food will vary by context.

On heatwaves and water shortage

While gaps in data (sex disaggregated data for multiple social outcomes) and knowledge need to be filled by more research, there are areas where immediate action is needed. First, we should reduce the impact of prolonged heat on priority groups (outdoor workers, pregnant women, infants and young children and the elderly). Data from many Indian cities show that there are excess deaths during the heat wave days, though they may not be recognised as such. Loss of productivity will impact small and large businesses and our economy. Urban local bodies, municipal corporations and district authorities in all vulnerable districts need to have a plan and provide training and resources to key implementers. Heat wave warnings (based on local temperature plus humidity), change of timings for outdoor work and schools, cooling rooms in health facilities, public drinking water facilities, and immediate treatment of those with heat stroke will minimize deaths. In addition, urban planning to improve tree cover, minimising concrete, increasing green-blue spaces and designing housing that is better able to withstand heat are longer-term actions. The Mahila Housing Trust in Udaipur showed that painting the roofs of low-income houses with reflective white paint reduced indoor temperatures by 3° C to 4° C and improved quality of life.

Water shortage is probably the biggest threat to our very existence and needs concerted societal action. Traditionally, India had one of the most advanced systems for rainwater harvesting and storage with a system of ponds and canals. Work done by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in a few districts of Tamil Nadu showed that using geographic information systems, the panchayat could map key water sources, identify vulnerabilities and climate hazards and develop a local plan to improve water access by directing government schemes and resources.

Working at the village level

Convergence of sectors and services and prioritisation of actions can happen most effectively at the village or panchayat levels. Devolution of powers and finances and investing in building the capacity of panchayat and SHG members can be India's way of demonstrating how to build resilience in a community-led and participatory way.

Finally, a gender lens needs to be applied to all State-action plans on climate change. The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) highlight the impacts on women, yet often default to portraying them as victims, missing deeper gender dynamics. A review of 28 SAPCCs showed a lack of transformative approaches, with only a few recognising women as agents of change. Recommendations for the ongoing revision of SAPCCs lay stress on the need to move beyond stereotypes, recognise the vulnerabilities of all genders, and implement gender-transformative strategies, ensuring a comprehensive and equitable approach to climate adaptation. Instead of being labelled as victims, women can lead the way in climate action.

The corridor of Kolkata's bypass urbanism

rbanisation in India is shaped by three important factors. First, colonialism played a catalytic role in creating urban spaces, which continued even after Independence until the 1960s. Second and third, the Green Revolution and neoliberalisation in the spaces into concrete enclaves. Metropolitan cities such as Chennai, Mumbai, and Kolkata, which are products of colonial urbanism, metamorphosed radically in later years.

These cities have expanded quite substantially and witnessed rapid urbanisation to accommodate more people and their demands. The wealth generated due to the Green Revolution and neoliberal policies has further accelerated urban expansion, albeit in an unequal manner. Newer forms of consumer culture have seeped effortlessly into these urban spaces, thus bringing revolutionary changes in the housing, health, and education sectors.

A city within a city

With reference to Calcutta, in the initial years of Independence, the city was called entangled, congested, and decaying by the then State government. A political decision was initiated to build Salt Lake City, a city within Calcutta city, eventually envisioned as a supposedly clean Tabularasa city. The entanglements in the existing city, notably pertain to its poor infrastructure facilities, such as water, sanitation, and slums, with poverty, traffic, and, with oblivious governance, and minimal accountability for public city spaces.

In the process of expanding the city, the State further developed by building the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass (EM Bypass) in the 1980s, connecting Kolkata's north-east part with its southern part. The construction of the MAA flyover and EM Bypass roads certainly eased or 'bypassed' the congestion, poverty, and, of course, the free flow of traffic. The infrastructural developments around the road yielded enormous benefits by significantly increasing the flow of goods, people, and ideas too. But they also resulted in a host of other problems. The economist, the late Kalyan Sanyal, along with Rajesh Bhattacharya from the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, made the brilliant observation that approaching urbanisation



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Urban

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through the 'bypass route' was to replace the old with a new class of producers and consumers. This replacement also brought up a relevant question: 'whose city is it'?

'Urban outcasts'

en-star hotels, luxury residential apartments clubs, international schools, hospitals, and malls are all situated on this 40-kilometre stretch of bypass. It is evident that the echo system built around (parallel to) the bypass, either with or without the intervention of the state, was meant solely for the consumption of the rich. The clear outcome (of this replacement) is the creation of a socio-spatial hierarchical system that creates neighbourhoods that are stigmatised. Some of the high-rise building complexes have blocks that are demarcated based on income groups: high income group (HIG), middle income group (MIG), and lower income group (LIG). These demarcations point to an urban crisis.

The problems are much worse for the social groups that live outside these ivory towers. They embraced mutely to these uninvited social problems just by living adjacent to these swanky hotels and apartments, only to become urban outcasts – a phrase used by Bourdieuan sociologist Loic Wacquant (2008). The socio-spatial techniques of inquiry make it evident that the inhabitants living in these ghettos may be insiders of the city but are still outsiders a mix of dispossessed and dishonoured people. The small padas have turned into territories of deprivation, subjugation, and inequality, disrupting respectful social life. It is vital to understand the negative effects of the growth of urbanisation to unpack the breadth and depth of these disruptions. The bourgeois capitalist economy and the public policies of the communist regime created a 'servicing class' and labour market pockets to cater to the needs of elites within arm's reach.

The moral right they possess, historically and sociologically, to choose a neighbour was snatched by the remarkable development called real estate that created swanky condominiums that sit right next to shanty houses, more so in the last three decades. The combination of the sociological matrix of caste, class, and religion has come together to produce urban marginality, not to forget the importance of different avatars

of the state. The 'wretched' of the city were deeply exploited in neoliberal globalisation policies, along with colonial and nationalist policies that eventually broke their socio-spatial premises. Kolkata became a place where anti-colonial movements sprang, and which later textbook case to examine the contemporary dynamics of urbanisation. Importantly, the newer dimensions, such as the construction of a single new town, a city within the city, a real estate project, or an ensemble of various independent but related projects, all of them either adjacent to or parallel to the road or bypass, not in a systematic manner but in a sporadically or sparsely manner, can be called 'bypass urbanism', manifestly a slow but strongly emerging concept in urban studies.

Roads and change

Roads are traditionally meant to be a means for the circulation of goods, ideas, and human beings. For historian David Arnold, their functions are much more than that. He interpreted them as "a manifestation of linear modes of power and... as a salient site of social observation, engagement, and friction". They have different nomenclatures, reflects heterogeneity. For instance, a bypass is a road that avoids or 'bypasses' built-up areas to let traffic flow through without any interference or congestion.

They are called truck routes in the United States which are intended to create hassle-free routes for the transportation of goods. In a number of European countries, the Americas, and a few Asian countries, these bypasses are quite popular. In these places, they are referred to as circular roads or orbital roads. Historically speaking, the roads in India, especially since Independence, have brought a significant 'dynamism and assumed a new sociability' that reiterates the past (Arnold, 2013).

Urban infrastructural developments, instead of creating assimilation or integration between different sections, have invariably created estrangements based on their social and class identities. The bypass is not just a road that connects one point to another by avoiding bottlenecks. It also, unintendedly, does socio-economic bypassing in everyday life.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rail link 'in frames'

The people of Jammu and Kashmir have undoubtedly played a catalytic role in India's struggle for freedom from the British yoke. So, it is only natural that the aspirations of the rest of the people of India reverberate with those in the State. With

the opening of the Udhampur-Srinagar -Baramulla railway line/the 359 metre bridge over the Chenab river (Online edition, 'In Frames' - 'The valley is not far', April 8) — The Hindu's photographs were a visual treat — we earnestly hope that there

will be a boost to the economy of the region. While the rail link opens up greater possibilities of responsible tourism, we should also not shut our eyes to the fact that an unbridled opening up of the region can damage a pristine region.

The daily needs to be thanked for highlighting this

vital development in infrastructure in India and

Corrections & Clarifications

The third paragraph of the story titled "Going for broke in Udhampur, the big border constituency in J&K" (April 8, 2024) should be recast to say "Mr. Choudhary had briefly joined the BJP in 2014 and was a Minister in the BJP-People's Democratic Party (PDP) government.'

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bringing it to the attention of its readers across geographies. Francis Kalathunkal,

Alappuzha, Kerala

Letters emailed to

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

THE HINDU

The taste for Test cricket in the T20 era

he Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has unequivocally highlighted its emphasis on prioritising the longer format of the game, which has been furthered by designing an "incentive" mechanism for the players. This innovative initiative aims at elevating the appeal of Test cricket to match the lucrative contracts offered in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Under this scheme, players meeting specific criteria have the potential to earn up to ₹60 lakh per Test match including match fee, signalling a concerted effort to elevate the status and allure of Test cricket in India, mirroring the financial rewards associated with IPL engagements. The coinage of the term "incentive" has been questioned by none other than the Indian coach Rahul Dravid himself, as he prescribed "reward" to be a better alternative. Notwithstanding the same, the significance of domestic cricket by mandating the participation of centrally contracted players in the Ranji Trophy has been recognised. This directive signals a deliberate effort to emphasise the foundational importance of regional cricket tournaments and enhance the overall fabric of Indian cricket. While the BCCI's focus has been made clear, it remains to be seen from the player's perspective if he would choose the toil of tests over the fame and easy money of IPL.

Influence of T20 in Test cricket The influence of T20 cricket on players' strategies in Test matches is unmistakably apparent, particularly exemplified by the England team's adoption of a distinctive "Bazball" style in the classical format of the game. This often criticised style of play places a notable emphasis on employing strategies commonly associated with the shorter format of the game in Test cricket. While England openly acknowledges this as their approach to Test cricket in the T20 era, the euphoria around

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The relentless schedule presents a potential breeding ground for fatigue and injuries

50%

30%

Counting days

Distribution of days taken by Test matches to end

it is over-rated. A closer examination of the data reveals substantial changes in Test cricket dynamics across all the Test-playing nations following the rise of T20 cricket.

For instance, in 2009, the top 20 ICC-ranked batsmen boasted an impressive average Test score of 49.24. The current top 20 ICC-ranked batsmen exhibit an average Test score of 47.5. If a broader spectrum of batsmen is considered, the gap is likely to widen even further. Meanwhile, when it comes to the strike rates of the same group of batsmen, a notable shift is observed. The current average strike rate stands at 59.6, a marked increase compared to the 53.4 average strike rate of the top 20 Test batsmen in 2009. When excluding Virender Sehwag from the list of top 20 batsmen in 2009, given his outlier status with a considerably higher strike rate, the average strike rate of the remaining players diminishes to 51.9. Conversely, the average strike rates of the current top 20 bowlers (26.5 and 52.9 respectively) are noticeably lower than those of the top 20 bowlers in 2009 (30.5 and 60.9 respectively). The impact on the results of Test matches is equally intriguing. Between 2005 and 2009, a substantial 27% of all Test matches played ended in a draw. In contrast, from 2019 to 2023, only 14.8% of the Test matches played concluded with a draw. During the period from 2005 to 2009, a considerable 59.8% of Test

matches managed to extend until

2019 to 2023, only 47.25% of matches achieved the same duration. The evident change in the trends of Test cricket undeniably signifies an influence from its shorter-duration counterpart, T20 cricket.

the fifth day. In contrast, from

A lucrative bait

Another trend that surfaces due to the escalating influence of T20 cricket is the waning interest of players in the traditional, longer format of the game. In the initial stages of the T20 era, it served as a voluntary retirement option for players renowned for their flamboyant playing styles. However, as T20 gained increased popularity and financial allure, even players in the prime of their careers have thrown their support behind the shorter format.

This shift highlights the transformative impact, not only as a retirement avenue but also as a driving force reshaping the preferences of players in the cricketing domain. The contemporary cricket calendar is saturated with a multitude of series, leagues, and tournaments spanning different formats, affording players limited rest intervals. The relentless schedule presents a potential breeding ground for fatigue and injuries. Consequently, players may find themselves inclined to prioritise formats that promise higher financial rewards along with better viewership. Considering this, the BCCI's decision to incentivise Test cricket emerges as a welcome move. While other cricket boards may draw inspiration from the BCCI, it's worth noting that not all cricketing nations might have the financial capacity to offer incentives. Thus, the financial landscape of cricket could have a spillover effect on the long-term sustainability of Test-playing nations. What remains to be seen in this battle of wits between the two BCCIs - The Board of Control for Cricket in India or the Board of Control of Cricketers in India – is who has the final laugh.

Drought stirs political clash in Telangana

The ruling party and the Opposition engage in a blame game over the condition

STATE OF PLAY

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s the mercury crosses 43 degrees C in different parts of Telangana this summer season, the political heat is not left far behind ahead of the May 13 Lok Sabha election.

The withering of crops due to lack of water for irrigation has been exacerbated by the war of words between the Opposition Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and the ruling Congress party over the drought conditions.

Tempers were already fraying between the two parties for the last few weeks, particularly over the defections allegedly encouraged by the ruling party, which has officially admitted three BRS MLAs and given one of them a ticket to contest the election and to the daughter of another MLA.

The Congress has also given tickets to a sitting MP and the wife of an MLC, both of the BRS, adding fuel to the politi-

cal fire. The slug-fest took off on October 22 last, after the sinking of a few piers of Medigadda Barrage of the much talked about Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project on the evening of October 21. Perhaps, the incident sowed the seeds of heightened friction between the two parties especially given that the lifting back of water from the project barrages was necessary to keep drought conditions at bay.

Blame game

The Opposition party is of the view from the beginning that water could have been lifted back with the help of a coffer dam at Medigadda from December first week to avoid

Telangana scarcity when the standing crops were hit hard with lack

of water/moisture to reach harvesting stage with expected yield. Leaders of the ruling party

blamed the previous BRS regime for the current situation, stating that water was not available from the Kaleshwaram project due to problems in Medigadda Barrage and deficit rainfall this water year.

However, the fact remains that rainfall recorded in the south-west monsoon period this water year was normal.

According to the Telangana State Development Planning Society which maintains rainfall data, the rainfall recorded from June 1 to September 30 was 17% higher than normal in the State as the actual rain was 861.1 mm against the normal of 738.6 mm.

But, it has been a lean year for Krishna Basin as flood from the upstream States was minimal with Jurala, Srisailam and Nagarjunasagar getting only 327 tmc ft. flood during the monsoon period of 2023.

At the same time, the flows in Godavari Basin projects were not so pathetic with Singur, Nizamsagar, Sriramsagar, Mid Manair, Lower Manair, Kaddam and Yellampalli getting a flood of 751 tmc ft. during the monsoon period of 2023 against 1,748 tmc ft. during the previous year.

Over 2,822 tmc ft. flood went into the sea from Godavari so far this water year with over 80% contribution from catchment areas till Sammakka Barrage, but in the case of the Krishna Basin, it is only about 63 tmc ft. with most of it generated downstream of Nagarjunasagar.

The slug-fest gained further pace with Leader of the Opposition and former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao taking to field visits to examine the withered crops and console the farmers in distress on March 31 and April 5.

He alleged that the standing crops, mostly paddy, have withered across the State due to the government's inability to give available water for irrigation and demanded ₹25,000 per acre compensation, as demanded by the Congress in the past, to farmers.

'Rebuttal mode'

Functionaries of the government are in rebuttal mode, asking the BRS how many times it had compensated the farmers for crop loss suffered due to untimely rain, hails and gales during its 10-year rule.

On the other hand, the official machinery is yet to complete the enumeration of crop loss due to lack of water for irrigation as well as untimely rain this Rabi/Yasangi season.

The Opposition has described the present crisis in the agriculture sector as manmade calamity due to the inept handling of water management in a lean water year in the Krishna Basin and lack of foresightedness in the Godavari Basin by the Congress government

The ruling party is trying to turn the tables on BRS stating that it was due to the incompetent rule of the previous government that the State has landed in the present situation with no word of consolation and relief yet from the govern-

20 firms bought poll bonds within 3 years, a punishable offence

The law banning firms within three years of incorporation to make political contributions was applicable for electoral bond donations as well

DATA POINT

<u>Vignesh Radhakrishnan</u> Sambavi Parthasarathy

espite companies in existence for less than three years not being allowed to make political contributions even through the electoral bonds route – data shows that at least 20 such newly incorporated firms purchased poll bonds worth about ₹103 crore.

At the time when they purchased their first electoral bonds, five of these firms were in existence for less than a year, seven of them were a year old and the eight others had only completed two years. Notably, many of these firms were started in 2019 when the Indian economy went through recession or during the middle of the pandemic and bought electoral bonds worth crores of rupees just months after incorporation.

The ban on companies making political contributions within three years from incorporation has been in existence for nearly four decades. In 1985, the Parliament amended Section 293A, lifting the ban on political contributions by firms subject to a few conditions. One of the conditions was that the firms should not be owned by the government and should not be less than three years old. This clause was retained under Section 182 of the Companies Act, 2013. When Section 154 of the Finance Act, 2017, amended Section 182, just before the introduction of electoral bonds, this clause was again retained. However, the amendment deleted the first proviso by which the amount donated by a company was capped at 7.5% of its average net profit during its previous three financial years. The prohibition on companies making donations to political parties in their first three years continued. According to Section 182 of the Companies Act 2013, if a firm makes a donation in contravention

to the provisions, "the company shall be punishable with fine which may extend to five times the amount so contributed and every officer of the company who is in default shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months and with fine which may extend to five times the amount so contributed".

12 of these 20 companies were

headquartered in Hyderabad. Together these 12 companies donated ₹37.5 crores, and close to 75% of which was encashed by the BRS, with the rest divided among the TDP, the Congress and the BJP. Two companies in Hyderabad -Tsharks Infra Developers Private Limited and Tsharks Overseas Education Consultancy Private Limited – both incorporated in 2023 - purchased ₹7.5 crore worth of bonds within months of getting incorporated and donated it to the BRS. Among the rest, HH Iron and Steel Private Limited, headquartered in Coimbatore, gave ₹15 crores to the BJP and five crores to the BJD. Their first electoral bond purchase was done just days short of turning three years old. Askus Logistics Private Limited, incorporated in November 2021, bought its first electoral bond within 1.5 years of its incorporation and donated ₹22 crores. This was encashed by the DMK, AITC and the RJD. Besseggen Infotech LLP, incorporated in May 2018, bought bonds worth ₹11.5 crores, with their first purchase done two years and ten months into their existence.

The three-year rule was retained to prevent shell companies from making political contributions. When the first proviso, which prescribed the 7.5% cap, was removed in 2017, the Election Commission of India had warned that this may lead to the use of "black money through shell companies". The RBI had also flagged the possibility of firms misusing bearer bonds for money laundering. (with inputs from Rebecca Rose

Off the

The details about electoral bond purchases were sourced from the data released by the Election Commission of India on March 21. The date of incorporation of these companies were sourced from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs website (MCA)



Table 1: The table shows the names of the 20 firms which purchased electoral bonds (EB), within three years of their incorporation. The date of incorporation of these companies, the date on which they purchased their first electoral bond, the difference between the two dates along with total worth of bonds purchased by these firms are mentioned in the table

Purchaser name	Date of incorporation	Date on which first electoral bond was purchased	Difference in years and months	Total amount of bonds purchased in ₹crore
Tsharks Overseas Education Consultancy	29 May 2023	12 July 2023	0 years, 1 months	4
Vasavi Avenues LLP	06 Apr 2023	12 July 2023	0 years, 3 months	5
Tsharks Infra Developers Private Limited	26 March 2023	12 July 2023	0 years, 3 months	3.5
Bain Global Resources LLP	26 May 2023	9 October 2023	0 years, 4 months	5
Kiriti Ventures Private Limited	21 May 2022	5 April 2023	0 years, 10 months	2
Eficens Software Services Private Limited	10 Nov. 2021	27 January 2023	1 years, 2 months	2
Danika Traders Private Limited	30 March 2021	7 July 2022	1 years, 3 months	2.5
Askus Logistics Private Limited	25 Nov. 2021	12 April 2023	1 years, 4 months	22
Vamsirams Jyothi Lorven	28 October 2021	11 April 2023	1 years, 5 months	1
SLRV Homes LLP	26 Nov. 2021	12 July 2023	1 years, 7 months	2
Happytat Villas Private Limited	20 Dec. 2021	15 November 2023	1 years, 10 months	1
Bluestone Commodities LLP	26 Oct. 2021	12 October 2023	1 years, 11 months	2
MTC Ispat Private Limited	5 April 2021	10 April 2023	2 years, 0 months	2.5
Descent Buildwell LLP	14 March 2019	09 April 2021	2 years, 0 months	2.5
Rajapushpa Asset Management LLP	31 August 2019	6 April 2022	2 years, 7 months	5
Piramal Pharma Limited	04 March 2020	14 November 2022	2 years, 8 months	3
Akshat Greentech Private Limited	15 Dec. 2020	11 October 2023	2 years, 9 months	5
Srivay Industries Limited	07 Sept. 2020	12 July 2023	2 years, 10 months	1.5
Besseggen Infotech LLP	14 May 2018	09 April 2021	2 years, 10 months	11.5
HH Iron And Steel Private Limited	06 April 2018	03 April 2021	2 years, 11 months	20

Table 2: The table shows the city-wise split of the 20 companies

City	Companies
Hyderabad	12
Bengaluru	1
Coimbatore	1
Faridabad	1
Kamrup	1
Kanpur	1
Kolkata	1
Mumbai	1
	_

Table 3: The table shows the party-wise split of the encashments of the EBs purchased by the 20 companies

Party	EB encashed in ₹ crores
Bharat Rashtra Samithi	31.5
Bharatiya Janata Party	26.0
All India Trinamool Congress	9.5
Rashtriya Janata Dal	9.0
Congress	8.0
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	7.0
Telugu Desam Party	6.0
Biju Janata Dal	5.0
Aam Aadmi Party	1.0

The list of 20 firms is not exhaustive as it does not include the firms which were newly incorporated after mergers and amalgamations. The list also does not include firms that are not in the MCA



FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 10,1974

India, Pak., Bangla sign historic Accord

New Delhi, April 9: The Foreign Ministers of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan tonight signed the first-ever tripartite agreement, at the end of five days of arduous negotiations, thus bringing to a successful fruition the talks which at one stage looked like ending in stalemate. India and Pakistan also concluded a separate bilateral agreement for initiating the immediate resumption of postal and telecommunication links and travel facilities. While details of the tripartite agreement will be released simultaneously tomorrow evening in the capitals of the three countries, it is by now clear that the 195 POWS charged with war crimes and awaiting trial in Bangladesh, will be freed.

Any indication to this effect was given by Mr. Aziz Ahmed. Pakistan's Foreign Minister said much of the success of the conference was due to the "farsightedness' of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. In a brief speech after signing the agreement, Mr. Ahmed said that the tripartite talks would not have succeeded but for the statesmanship shown by the three Prime Ministers, "the biggest contribution was made by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh." A common point that was stressed by all three leaders was that peace in the sub-continent was vital for the progress of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and they were confident that the agreement marked a significant step in that direction. Mr. Swaran Singh said this was the first-ever agreement signed by India, Bangladesh and Pakistan and as such it was a historic document. He was confident that an era of peace would commence and the tribulations and difficulties they encountered earlier would be a thing of the past.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 10, 1924

New Bill in Commons.

London, April 9: In the Commons today an Eviction Bill was introduced by Mr. Wedgwood Benn prohibiting the eviction of distressed tenants and providing reimbursement of the claims by local authorities. The tenant would be provided with a certificate of immunity from eviction by local authorities who would investigate the applicant's resources and, if necessary supplement them sufficiently to enable him to retain his home. The Bill passed the first reading.

Varghese)

Text&Context

THEMAHINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

People charged in the Panama Papers money laundering case

Those on trial include the owners of the Mossack-Fonseca law firm that was at the heart of the 2016 document leak. The Panama Papers illustrate how some of the world's richest people hide their money. AP

Number of visas issued by Pakistan to Sikh pilgrims

issued visas to Sikh pilgrims from India to facilitate their participation in the Baisakhi celebrations. PTI

Candidates to contest in phase two of Lok Sabha elections

Candidates from will contest in phase two of Lok Sabha polls to be held on April 26, the Election Commission informed. PTI

Chemical plants in the U.S. required to reduce emissions

More than 200 chemical plants in the U.S. will be required to reduce toxic emissions that are likely to cause cancer under a new rule issued by the Environmental Protection Agency. AP

The number of migrants who died in a shipwreck off Djibouti

The International Organization for Migration said 22 have been rescued. Djibouti is the main transit country for migrants trying to reach Gulf nations. AF COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The 'import restrictions' on solar PV cells

What is the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules? Why was it re-implemented after being 'kept in abeyance' for two years? How did China become a dominant player in the import of solar PV modules?

EXPLAINER

Kunal Shankar Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

ecent government orders on attempts to increase local sourcing of solar modules to support India's renewables manufacturing ecosystem has been widely reported in the media as 'import restrictions'. This follows the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's (MNRE), March 29 order to re-implement its 2021 notification of an 'Approved List of Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic [PV] Modules', also called the ALMM list.

What is the ALMM list? Why is it being re-implemented?

This list consists of manufacturers who "are eligible for use in Government Projects/Government assisted projects/ projects under Government schemes & programmes.... including projects set up for sale of electricity to the Central and State Governments." However, this notification was "kept in abeyance" two years after it was issued, for the past financial year. While the government did not give an explicit reason for this, it has been reported that it stems from concerns and demands of renewable power producers who had secured sale contracts with the government before these rules were issued, when solar modules and cells were overwhelmingly imported from China at highly competitive rates. India's domestic renewables sector, at the time, was unlikely to meet the spike in demand for solar power production equipment at rates offered by Chinese manufacturers.

The government's re-introduction of this rule has been premised on the estimation that following measures, such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, India's domestic sector has boosted its production capacities and bettered price competitiveness to meet local demand. This is an import



Towards the sun: Solar panels in Pavagada Solar Park in Kyataganacharulu, Karnataka. GETTY IMAGES

substitution effort, and not an attempt to

Does India rely on solar PV imports? India is overwhelmingly import dependent to meet its demand for cells and modules - with China and Vietnam being the country's major suppliers. According to a reply by the Minister for New and Renewable Energy in Parliament in February last year, India imported about \$11.17 billion worth solar cells and modules in the past five years. This is worth 0.4% of India's total exports in the same period. And until January of 2023-24, data from the Ministry of Commerce's Import-Export showed that China accounted for 53% of India's solar cell imports, and 63% of solar PV modules. Ratings agency ICRA estimates that China commands more than 80% share of the manufacturing capacity across polysilicon, wafer, cell and

modules. "In comparison, the manufacturing capacity in India is relatively low and is largely restricted to the last manufacturing stage," ICRA stated in its November 2023 report, adding that the PLI scheme is expected to change this, with integrated module units expected to come up in India over the next 2-3 years.

How have our policies responded? To address this over dependence, India made three significant efforts over the past five years. It began with the notification of the ALMM order in January 2019. But the issue attained centre stage in the wake of severe global supply chain disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed the ₹19,500 crore PLI scheme in the Union Budget of 2022-23. This was to scale domestic manufacturing of the entire solar supply

chain – from polysilicon to solar modules. The government also introduced a steep 40% customs duty on PV modules and 25% on PV cells. These duties were halved as solar capacity additions slowed and as Reuters had reported, developers had quoted "aggressively low tariffs" to win power purchase contracts based on imports of Chinese equipment that put cost pressure on about 30 GW capacity worth projects.

Why is China a leading exporter?

In a July 2022 report, the International Energy Agency (IEA) noted that China was the most cost-competitive location to manufacture all components of the solar PV supply chains. This is mainly because of the lower cost of power supplied to the industry, the agency observed, as electricity accounts for more than 40% of production costs for polysilicon and almost 20% for ingots and wafers. The IEA also observed that 'Chinese government policies prioritised solar PV as a strategic sector, and growing domestic demand enabled economies of scale and supported continuous innovation throughout the supply chain."

What is the scope for solar in India? The government's ambitious target of 500 GW of installed capacity from non-fossil fuels by 2030 is the main driver to scale solar power in India. India also accounts for the fastest rate of growth for demand of electricity through 2026 among major economies, according to the IEA. This is because of strong economic activity and expanding consumption of products to mitigate extreme weather. Solar power accounted for about one-third of all energy generated from renewables between April last year and February this year. "The country has an estimated solar power potential of 748.99 GW. Hence, the potential of solar energy is not fully tapped, so far. The government is making efforts to harness the available potential through various schemes & programs," MNRE Minister R.K. Singh said in Parliament last year.

THE GIST

India is overwhelmingly import dependent to meet its demand for solar cells and modules with China and Vietnam being the country's major suppliers.

Following measures, such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, India's domestic sector has boosted its production capacities and bettered price competitiveness

to meet local demand.

The government's ambitious target of 500 GW of installed capacity from non-fossil fuels by 2030 is the main driver to scale solar power in India. India also accounts for the fastest rate of growth for demand of electricity through 2026 among major economies, according to

Can the judiciary be truly independent in Pakistan?

What did judges of the Islamabad High Court write with respect to intervention by intelligence agencies?

to intelligence agencies' intervention and

D. Suba Chandran

The story so far:

n March, six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) wrote to Pakistan's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), complaining about intelligence agencies' intervention to influence the outcomes of certain specific cases. To address the contents of the six judges' letter, the government announced the formation of an inquiry commission to be led by a former Chief Justice of Pakistan. However, following the refusal of Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jillani, who was nominated by the government to lead the inquiry commission, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has announced a suo motu notice of the case.

What is the complaint?

The letter by the six judges of the (IHC) is important, as it came immediately after the Supreme Court verdict setting aside Judge Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui's dismissal by the IHC in 2018 on a similar issue relating

coercion. The content of their letter includes the following - first, it seeks the SJC's guidance "to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with the discharge of his/ her official functions and qualify as intimidation." Second, the letter demands an inquiry to determine whether there is a "continuing policy" of the "executive branch of the state, implemented by intelligence operatives" to "intimidate judges, under threat of coercion or blackmail, to engineer judicial outcomes in politically consequential matters." Third, the letter sees a larger institutional debate on the issue, leading towards an SJC code of conduct if there are issues "that are tantamount to intimidation and interfere with judicial independence."

What has been the response? The response from the senior judiciary has been swift. On March 28, the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) met the Prime Minister and according to a press release from the Supreme Court, "the CJP clearly stated that interference by the executive in the affairs and judicial workings of Judges will not be tolerated and under no circumstances can the independence of the judiciary be allowed to be compromised." Following the discussion with the CJP, the Prime Minister decided to constitute an inquiry commission and nominated Justice Jillani, a former Chief Justice of Pakistan. Following the latter's refusal, the Court decided to take suo motu notice on the case. Both civil society and the legal community seem to be backing the case of the six judges.

Will the judiciary succeed?

This is not the first time there has been a debate over the intervention of intelligence agencies in the judiciary. In July 2018, Justice Siddiqui, then a senior judge of the IHC, accused the Inter-Services Intelligence of manipulating judicial proceedings. The

SJC that looked into the case was of the unanimous opinion that Justice Siddiqui "had displayed conduct unbecoming of a judge" and was therefore, "liable to be removed from his office." However, just one week before the letter from the IHC judges, his petition was taken up and his dismissal was set aside.

While the Establishment's (the military) reach has expanded to all the organs of the state and civil society, during recent years, there has been a pushback. The failed Imran Khan experiment was the first big blow to the Establishment's hold over politics. Despite engineering a new coalition with the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party, the 2024 election results have been the second big blow for the Establishment. The highly contested verdict shows that a substantial section, including those in Punjab, are with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and do not agree with the Establishment.

The judiciary has also made efforts to curb the Establishment's activities. However, these efforts have not been fruitful so far. The primary reason is simple – the separation of powers and the balance of power in Pakistan remain skewed. For the judiciary to succeed, the legislature and executive also need to be independent, and the balance of power vis-à-vis the Establishment must be restored. The judiciary also needs to pursue internal reforms and ensure it protects itself from external intervention. The writer is professor at NIAS, Bengaluru.

THE GIST

In March 2024, six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) wrote to Pakistan's Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), complaining about intelligence agencies' intervention to influence the outcomes of certain specific cases.

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THE HINDU

ABSTRACT



A scene from Moneyball. REUTERS

The legacy of 'Moneyball': objective metrics and statistical analyses

The foundational research of Kahneman and Tversky demonstrated how the human mind consistently made mistakes when it was required to make decisions in unpredictable circumstances. Their research gave rise to the subject of behavioural economics

Atanu Biswas

ground-breaking 2003 book Moneyball, which was later adapted into a Brad Pitt-starrer movie in Hollywood, is one of the significant publications that defined the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Billy Beane, the book's primary protagonist and manager of the Oakland Athletics (Oakland A's) in U.S.'s wealthy Major League Baseball (MLB), was a former MLB player who went into the personnel side of the business and had remarkable success there in spite of a tight budget. For recruiting players, he utilised better "metrics," such as "on-base percentage," which gauges how often a batter reaches base and is now regarded as being superior to more conventional metrics, such as batting average, to assess offensive skill. He did this by using historical data and analytics. Under Billy Beane, Oakland A's discovered value in players who had been passed over or ignored, and folly in much of what passed for baseball wisdom. Furthermore, the influential 2003 book Moneyball caused its perceived significance to soar.

And ever since, it has also started to propel civilisation forward.

The lapse in analysing data

From a wider angle, the book sets up the rationale behind the (seemingly irrational) craziness around data in today's world. Well, if a novel analytical method had produced new insights in baseball, could it not produce similar results in any other area of human endeavour? To make judgements in every area of their lives, people today strive to churn massive amounts of data. "Moneyballisation" is everywhere, in various areas of government, business, education, sports, farming, election campaign, banking, the

investigation of criminal activity, and so

However, in August 2003, a review of the book appeared in The New Republic, written by Richard Thaler, an economist, and Cass Sunstein, a law professor, then both at the University of Chicago. They thought it was intriguing that a poor team like the Oakland A's could beat most teams by taking advantage of the inefficiencies in any market for professional sports. They continued, however, by claiming that the author of Moneyball appeared to be unaware of the deeper cause of the inadequacies in the baseball player market, which originated from the fundamental principles of human nature. Israeli psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky had long ago detailed the ways in which certain baseball specialists might misunderstand baseball players - that is, the ways in which any expert's judgements might be distorted by their own thoughts. Therefore, the book Moneyball was only an example of concepts that had been discussed for many years. "It didn't take me long to figure out that, in a not so roundabout way, Kahneman and Tversky had made my baseball story possible," Lewis subsequently wrote in Vanity Fair.

"Why do professional baseball executives, many of whom have spent their lives in the game, make so many colossal mistakes?" wrote Thaler and Sunstein in their review. Lewis's book simply made the observation that when baseball experts evaluated players, their judgement could be clouded by their prejudices and preconceptions. However,

Why our minds act unpredictably Actually, Kahneman and Tversky had written a number of oddball papers between 1971 and 1984 exploring the ways

in which human judgement could be distorted when we are making decisions in the face of uncertainty. In a 1982 study titled "Judgement under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," they found that when evaluating the likelihood of a particular outcome, people frequently depend on readily recalled information rather than actual data – a concept known as the "availability heuristic."

Subsequently, in a 2004 paper published in the Michigan Law Review, Thaler and Sunstein argued that Lewis's clues can be explained by several studies in cognitive psychology. "Yet reliable statistical evidence will outperform the availability heuristic every time. In using data rather than professional intuitions, Beane confirmed this point." As it happens, Beane's preference for performance scouting over prototype-based scouting aligns well with a 1999 work by Kahneman and S. Frederick on the representativeness heuristic, which highlighted the applicability of dual-process theories of cognition. The cognitive operations are divided into two families. System I operates quickly, automatically, and with ease; it's intuitive. System II is reflective, slower, self-aware, calculative, and deductive in comparison. According to Kahneman and Frederick, System I provides rapid solutions to problems of judgement, whereas System II acts as a monitor, validating or overriding those judgements. Traditional scouts employ System I and emphasise the "mind's eye." Based on data analytics, Beane insisted on a System II override.

'A cognitive minefield'

Overall, the foundational research of Kahneman and Tversky demonstrated how the human mind consistently made mistakes when it was required to make decisions in unpredictable circumstances.

Their research transformed even Big Data studies and gave rise to the subject of behavioural economics, which is the synthesis of psychology and economics. Beane's endeavour just constituted an early exercise in this regard.

"Recognise the signs that you are a cognitive minefield." This is how Kahneman described his research for lay audiences in his 2011 book Thinking, Fast and Slow. Kahneman was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002, which many feel Tversky would have shared if he hadn't died in 1996. Nassim Taleb, the author of *The Black Swan*, reportedly remarked that Kahneman might be the only Nobel laureate in economics whose results can be replicated!

"No area of baseball is more susceptible to bias than scouting, in which organisations aggregate information from disparate sources: statistical models, subjective evaluations, characterisations of mental makeup and more," Joe Lemire wrote in a 2021 article for The New York Times. "Kahneman emphasised the importance of maintaining independence of judgments to decorrelate errors – that is, to separate inputs so that one doesn't influence another," Lemire added. Kahneman's theory may very well be applicable in similar situations, such as recruiting players for the lucrative Indian Premier League.

Daniel Kahneman, the economics unicorn who altered the field forever. died on March 27 at the age of 90. The intriguing partnership between Tversky and Kahneman was discussed in detail by Michael Lewis in his 2016 book The Undoing Project - A Friendship That Changed Our Minds. It's possible that these two avant-garde psychologists altered humanity's perception of its own mind in the process.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

Please send in your answers to



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Horrendous (B. Joseph, Kurnool)" "Horrendous means 'dreadful', 'frightful'. It is a colloquial word.

It was a horrendous sight. 'Horrible' is the word that is generally used to mean 'frightful.'

It was a horrible sight. 'Horrible' is also used to mean 'very unpleasant'.

The food was horrible. 'Horrid' means 'horrible,' but is a stronger word.

I cannot stir out in this horrid weather. 'Horrific' means 'causing horror.' It was a horrific murder.

Once 'horrific' was a bookish term. Now it is used in informal contexts." "Cock and bull story (N. Rajasekhar, Fertilizer City)"

"A 'cock and bull story' is 'an absurd, improbable story, especially one used as an excuse or an explanation'.

Don't tell me these cock and bull stories. I know why you did not turn up yesterday. Cocks, bulls, foxes, crows and other creatures converse in old fables. Their conversation is amusing, but everyone

knows that it is imaginary, not real. From the fables, we get the expression 'cock and bull story." "Bill as verb (K. K. Sanyal, Calcutta)" " 'Bill' is used as a verb also. It means

'to send a bill'. He has billed me for the books I bought last week. 'To bill as' means 'to advertise in

printed notices.' It is used generally in the She is billed to appear as Sakuntala in

the play." 'Absquatulate (V V Srinivasan

Madras)"

" 'Absquatulate' means 'to squat,' 'to decamp.' It is a jocular expression used in America and is a combination of

'abscond' and 'squat." "Co-operate or cooperate? (V. Raghunathan, Madras)"

"Both spellings are acceptable. The tendency these days is to write the word without the hyphen. The main entry in the latest edition of COD is 'cooperate'. It says within brackets 'also co-operate.' The same is true of cooperation, cooperative. But it is always 'co-opt' and never 'coopt'."

"Nit-picking (S. C. Bannerjee, Jodhpur)"

'Nit-picking' means 'finding fault in a petty way.' A nit is 'the egg or young form of a house insect or other parasitic insect especially of human head lice or body lice.' It is a laborious task removing nits from the head or body of an infected person. You have to remove them one by one. From this we get the expression which means 'to find fault in a petty way.' He is a nit-picker. Don't worry about his

Published in The Hindu on August 27,

Word of the day

walking with a slow dragging motion without

Usage: From his shambling, I assumed he was

Pronunciation: bit.ly/shamblepro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /ˈʃæmbl/

lifting your feet; walk by dragging one's feet

Synonyms: shuffle, scuffle

Shamble:

very old.

for the first time on April 10 in 1925. A quiz on the literary masterpiece

THE DAILY QUIZ

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1 The book is set in a specific period in America, named after a music genre. What is this age called? What is the time period of

this age? **QUESTION 2**

The novel depicts first-person narrator Nick Carraway's interactions with mysterious millionaire Jay Gatsby and Gatsby's obsession to reunite with his former lover. What is her name? Which person in Fitzgerald's life inspired this character?

QUESTION 3

What is the term associated with

the novels Moby-Dick, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Great Gatsby, and Gone with the Wind?

QUESTION 4

The Great Gatsby provides a critical social history of Prohibition-era America. What was prohibited in the U.S. during this time?

QUESTION 5

Numerous stage and film adaptations have followed in the subsequent decades, after the publication of the novel. Most recently, the film co-written and directed by Baz Luhrmann, with an ensemble cast was produced. Which actor essayed the role of Jay Gatsby?



'The Great Gatsby' written by American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald was published

Visual question:

This dust jacket art greatly impressed Fitzgerald, and he incorporated its imagery into the novel. What is this painting called? Name the artist.

Ouestions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The meaning of 'seii taishōgun'. Ans: Barbarian-quelling generalissimo

2. The four social classes in Japan during the Tokugawa Shogunate. Ans: Warrior, farmer, artisan, and merchant

3. The significance of the Battle of Dan-no-ura in the history of the Shogunate. Ans: It led to the dominance of the Minamoto clan and the

establishment of the Kamakura Shogunate 4. The shogun credited with unifying Japan after the Sengoku period. Ans: Toyotomi

5. The policy of isolationism, restricting foreign influences and trade with other countries during the Tokugawa Shogunate. Ans: Sakoku 6. The capital under the Ashikaga clan and of levasu Tokugawa. Ans: Kvoto and Edo Visual: Name this leader. Ans: Minamoto no

Early Birds: Jagrati Shukla| Sadhan Kumar

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

thehindubusinessline.

Media needs reforms

Content, ownership issues call for policy response

he Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) consultation paper on the National Broadcasting Policy arrives at a critical juncture coinciding with the emergence of new content delivery platforms, technologies and business models. The growing convergence between broadcasting and digital media has brought into focus a fragmented regulatory framework, posing challenges in maintaining a level playing field for service providers.



Traditional broadcasting services are subject to the provisions of TRAI and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), while digital media platforms are primarily governed by self-regulatory mechanisms as outlined in the IT Rules 2021. The disparate regulatory regimes necessitate an evolutionary approach, ensuring fair competition among stakeholders. The paper sheds light on the low TV adoption rate in India. With over 100 million households still devoid of television access, there exists untapped potential in expanding the reach of broadcasting services. Addressing barriers such as high ownership costs and escalating subscription fees is crucial to unlocking this latent demand.

Content regulation emerges as a critical area necessitating regulatory intervention. While the proposed Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023 grants extensive powers to the Centre to censor content, it is disappointing that the TRAI consultation paper remains silent on this aspect. Balancing freedom of expression with the need for responsible content dissemination requires a nuanced approach that safeguards creative freedom while upholding ethical standards. Any ambiguity in policy formulation risks stifling innovation and impeding India's aspirations of becoming a global content hub. Another critical missing piece is the issue of cross-media ownership. While the paper rightly emphasizes revamping audience measurement systems, it overlooks the need to assess the extent of media consolidation. TRAI itself has previously highlighted the significant cross-ownership between print and broadcast media. There are companies that own content, distribution and broadcast channels. Media pluralism, or diverse ownership, is essential for a strong, healthy democracy. In the marketplace of ideas, the readers, viewers, and listeners seek to read, view and listen to diverse opinions. TRAI itself had earlier called for necessary safeguards to be put in place. A robust policy is needed to ensure healthy competition within the sector.

The need for a consolidated 'National Broadcasting Policy' is undeniable. TRAI's consultation paper offers a valuable starting point for discussion. Policymakers must prioritise the harmonisation of regulatory frameworks, promote accessibility and affordability, uphold freedom of expression, and address issues such as content regulation and cross-media ownership. As India strives to assert its position as a global leader in media and entertainment, a progressive policy framework will serve as the cornerstone of an inclusive broadcasting ecosystem.

FROM THE VIEWSROOM.

EPL's title race just got hotter

B Baskar

he title race for the English Premier League could not possibly get any tighter than this. The top three teams — Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester City are separated by a mere with Arsenal and Liverpool tied at the top spot with City a point behind. Arsenal are table toppers for now due to goal difference.

With just seven more matches to go the football season in England is poised for an exciting finish. Arsenal have been particularly impressive with their clinical performances. Last year too they were title contenders but the wheels started coming off their campaign in April when they drew against West Ham United and Liverpool and lost heavily to Manchester City at the Etihad

But this time around Arsenal have been ruthlessly efficient in their performance and their defence is probably the best in the league. The defining moment in

last week's match against Brighton and Hove Albion was when Arsenal defender Gabriel Magalhaes celebrated a defensive block with team mates David Raya (goalkeeper) and defender William Saliba in the Arsenal penalty box in the dying moments of the game when the Gunners had all but sewed up the game at 3-0. It really was a reflection of the tenacity and steely resolve that the Gunners have mustered under coach Mikel Arteta this season.

Liverpool will also be ruing the fact that they dropped points in its match against Manchester United last Sunday, a frenetic match that defied all footballing logic. Liverpool missed a bucketful of chances only to be punished by two superb goals by Manchester United much against the run of the play. According to the Guardian columnist Jonathan Wilson, Liverpool have had 87 shots at the Manchester United goal, across three games without winning even of them.

The fun and excitement of the EPL is what makes it the best loved football league in the world.

Age of monetary conservatism

Central banks don't want to repeat mistakes made during GFC by loosening policy prematurely, creating asset price bubbles



BARENDRA KUMAR BHOI

ost of the world's leading central banks like the Federal Reserve (Fed), European Central Bank (ECB), Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Bank of England (BoE) have opted to maintain the status quo regarding policy rate/stance of monetary policy. Inflationary pressures have softened but recovery of growth is hesitant and/or

The IMF/World Bank however interpret global growth as resilient despite high policy rates. Stakeholders expect central banks to reduce policy rates at the earliest. Why do central banks hesitate to change their stance and cut the policy rate? Is it premature

During the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) many central banks not only reduced policy rates but reached the zero lower bound quickly. Moreover, quantitative easing was pursued by many central banks through innovative instruments. The burden of reviving the economy disproportionately fell on central banks.

As commodity prices were benign, ultra-accommodative monetary policy continued for a longer period. The revival of asset prices was rather quick as a fallout of pumping excess liquidity into the economy. The unintended consequences of excess liquidity were underpricing of risk, build-up of financial bubbles in the asset market, and sustaining stakeholders' expectations of a perpetual low-interest rate regime.

COVID LIQUIDITY

Before the complete normalisation of the monetary policy, Covid-19 struck the world. The size of liquidity injection by central banks during the Covid-19 pandemic was unprecedented — each country pumping several multiples of liquidity injected during the GFC.

As soon as the pandemic was over, growth witnessed a 'V'-shaped recovery, but liquidity conditions remained in surplus mode notwithstanding quantitative tightening pursued by major central banks.

The demand-supply mismatch of global liquidity persists leading to asset prices reaching historic highs in many countries. Asset price boom preceded







(in %)



	GDP Est. 2023	GDP growth 2024 (P)	Inflation, Feb 24	Current policy rate	Real policy rate (Policy rate-inflation)
USA	2.5	2.1	3.2	5.25-5.50	2.05-2.30
UK	0.5	0.6	3.4	5.25	1.85
EU	0.5	0.9	2.8	4.5	1.7
China	5.2	4.6	0.7	3.45	2.75
India*	7.6	7	5.1	6.5	1.4
Japan	1.9	0.9	2.8	0.1	-2.7
Brazil	3.1	1.7	4.5	10.75	6.25
Russia	3	2.6	7.7	16	8.3
South Africa	0.6	1	5.6	8.25	2.65

Note: 'P' for projection, '*' NSO data for the financial year, Source: World Economic Outlook, IMF, Trading Economics

the high retail inflation before the GFC. Central banks do not want to commit the same mistake once again by loosening the monetary policy prematurely. The possibility of central banks leaning against the asset price boom cannot be ruled out.

After all, monetary policy is forward-looking. Inflation and growth projections matter much more than the current inflation and/or growth. If inflation is moving southward, it may converge to the target sooner or later.

Given the domain knowledge, central banks provide the best projections of inflation and growth and revisit the same frequently depending on evolving macroeconomic conditions, both domestic and global. Why do they want to secure inflation at the target on an enduring basis when inflation expectations have been mostly anchored?

Central banks do not like to lower the guard quickly for multiple reasons. First, geopolitical tensions — Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Palestine conflict, and disruption of cargo movement in the Red Sea — persist, which prevent normalization of supply chains.

Second, there are global uncertainties

about the prices of primary commodities — both food and fuel which weigh on the last-mile deceleration of retail inflation to the $desired\ level.\ Third, global\ growth\ is$ slowly looking up despite high policy rates with clear signs of a soft landing. Fourth, the unemployment rate is below 5 per cent in many systemically important developed countries.

CASE FOR CUT

Delays in taking rate cut decisions may harm the economy. To be on the safe side, it is better to look at the real policy rate of a sample country (Table 1). Conventional wisdom suggests that the real policy rate should be lower than the real GDP growth. The ideal real policy rate for the developed country is difficult to prescribe, but it would be somewhere between 0.5 and 1 per cent. Unfortunately, among the developed

Central banks are not lowering their guard due to the ongoing geopolitical tensions and uncertainties over food and fuel prices

countries, the real policy rates in the US, UK, and EU have been higher than the real growth rates. They cannot afford to delay the rate cut any longer as that may harm growth. These central banks may start the rate-cutting cycle in the second half of 2024

However, the rate-cutting cycle this time is expected to be short and limited to 50 to 100 bps. Japan is an outlier as the real policy rate is negative. Japan has abandoned the negative policy rate due to rising inflation.

Among the emerging market economies, the real policy rate is well above the real GDP growth in Brazil, Russia and South Africa. The central banks of both Brazil and South Africa have the scope to cut the policy rate at the earliest to support growth while Russia may do so subject to the lifting of American sanctions due to war with

As the retail inflation is low, China has already reduced its policy rate by 10 bps recently. China's policy rate is one of the lowest among the peer group. Hence, further rate cut in China is limited, although desirable to prevent a growth slowdown.

India's real policy rate at 1.4 per cent is the lowest in the sample barring China. As the economy is growing close to its potential, the real interest rate of around 1.5 per cent may be treated as an equilibrium real interest rate. India's growth momentum is sustained with robust macroeconomic fundamentals.

However, headline inflation remains above the target despite a fall in the core inflation. Amidst global uncertainties, India's retail inflation is expected to soften to 4.5 per cent by March 2025 and 4 per cent by March 2026.

Hence, the RBI has valid reason to maintain the status quo for the time being.

The writer is currently RBI Chair Professor at Utkal University and former Head of the Monetary Policy Department, RBI. Views expressed are personal.

Balancing employers' interests, apprenticeship laws

Companies can find a way to comply with laws that is not burdensome, and also fill the skills gap

Pooja Ramchandani Suryansh Gupta

he Apprentices Act, 1961 (Act) has evolved over the last 63 years since it was enacted, introducing several amendments to pave the way for compliance with the law.

Prior to 2014, the Act did not include provisions for optional trades. As a result, it was commonly believed that only industries with designated trades were obligated to engage apprentices.

The 2014 amendment emphasised the promotion of apprenticeships in service-related trades in addition to the traditional focus on manufacturing trades. The introduction of 'optional trades' allowed industries to customize courses according to their sector-specific requirements and

preferences. Several pivotal elements within the revamped legal framework governing apprenticeships as it stands today are as

* Enrolment on the apprenticeship portal is obligatory once the Act becomes applicable to an establishment. Establishments operating in four or more States have the option to get central registration. Employers have the choice to register either with NATS (for



APPRENTICESHIP. Bridging the skills gapısтоск

graduate apprentices and designated trades) or NAPS (for undergraduate student apprentices and optional

*Establishments that engage 30 or more workers, including contractual staff, are mandated to engage apprentices, constituting between 2.5 and 15 per cent of the total workforce, encompassing contractual staff, within a financial year.

* Apprentices can be engaged in designated or optional trades. Designated trades are specified by the Central government. Where the activities undertaken at the establishment are not covered in any of the designated trades, the apprentices

can be engaged in an optional trade by the employer. Therefore, an employer will need to examine if its activities fall within the ambit of any of the entries provided in the list of 'designated trades'. If not, the company can engage apprentices in optional trade, as per the

* Establishments can tie-up with third-party aggregators which have the capability to aid in: (a) choosing and recruiting apprentices through the apprenticeship portal; (b) creating a curriculum for the apprenticeship program; and (c) completing all required filings and documentation as per the

*Training must align with the designated/optional trade course curriculum for apprenticeship training as determined by the employer. The employer is responsible for ensuring the availability of adequate infrastructure and qualified trainers to deliver apprenticeship training in accordance with the adopted course curriculum. On-the-job training can be conducted remotely and outsourced to a TPA or external service provider.

Despite reforms to the apprenticeship framework, there remains a misconception that the Act is applicable to only manufacturing industries or organisations falling under the

designated trades.

The intricacy of the apprenticeship system, shortage of qualified teachers and trainers, inadequate infrastructure amongst other factors contribute to the less than optimal compliance with the

This has necessitated regulatory authorities to issue notices seeking adherence to the Act's requirements. That being said, authorities are primarily focused on ensuring the engagement of apprentices while giving industries the flexibility to decide their manner of compliance.

Now, industries have the power to not only decide the number of apprentices required (subject to minimum threshold requirements) but also determine the duration, curriculum, assessment, and certification processes.

Companies can choose to effectively comply with the Act in a manner that (a) is not burdensome, and (b) help them bridge the skill gaps within the organisation. These efforts will unite apprentices, the government, and employers and advance the objectives of 'Skill India' in a business friendly environment.

Ramchandani, Partner & Head of Employment, Labour & Benefits; and Gupta, Senior Associate and Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co

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

market dominated by e-commerce

Promises galore

This refers to the Edit "Troubling promises" (April 9). The Congress party's manifesto has a long list of welfare measures and freebies without spelling out its steps to enhance economic growth and revenues to fund these proposals. Politically it claims to repeal many of the NDA government's bold decisions - Article 370, triple talaq

The Congress has been attacking the Prime Minister's foreign policy, but how much it will roll back is not

YG Chouksey

Mudra's progress

This refers to "Record surge: Mudra loans topped ₹5 -lakh-cr. Mark in FY 24" (April 9). The quantum jumps under small business loan segment by PSBs with significant proportion of women beneficiaries is

noteworthy. Mudra scheme extends financial support to individuals and small businesses

Due to lack of skills and expertise, there were heavy cash burns by these entities resulting in maximum bank loan defaults. Even, where knowledge base of the entrepreneur is high, small businesses are unable to sustain in a besides complex return filing and tax compliances process. With the innovative digital monitoring and frequent customer interactions, the loan defaults under PMMY can be reduced.

Sitaram Popuri

Market peaks

Indian Market cap touched a new high at ₹400 trillion on Monday. The Buffet Indicator that measures m-cap to GDP ratio, currently stands at 1.3 (133 per cent) against the 10-year average of 0.93, a significant deviation from the trend.

In a rare one-off, it had touched 1.46 in 2007. The 2008 market collapse that followed had other causes. Though elevated ratios indicate overvaluation of stocks, they must also be seen as red flags to investors. Elections in India and later in the US, the geopolitical tensions, climbing price of crude, to cite some, will be major factors. Rising gold prices is also a factor

R Narayanan

Olympics and India

With reference to the article 'Why the 2036 Olympics bid is too ambitious', there is no harm in being ambitious and wishing to host the Olympics in India in 2036, but we must do the cost benefit analysis

The costs of hosting the Olympics have skyrocketed with uncertain economic benefits to host cities. 2020 Olympic host city Tokyo has faced multibillion dollar debtSome cities have withdrawn their bids fearing the financial impact. Yes, there are intangible benefits like global visibility and national pride but they are not significant enough. So it would be better if we strive to become a sporting powerhouse first.

Bal Govind

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Data poisoning problem

Involves feeding inaccurate info during AI training

Saai Sudharsan Sathiyamoorthy

rtificial intelligence has become an essential part of our daily lives, impacting everything from our shopping habits to our healthcare. However, the increased dependence on AI systems has also opened up new avenues for cyber threats, including 'data poisoning' attacks. These malicious acts involve inputting inaccurate information into AI systems during their training, leading them to acquire distorted patterns and make biased or inaccurate judgments. Data poisoning poses a significant risk to AI in general, but generative large language models (LLMs) are particularly vulnerable as they are trained using massive datasets often from the public internet that enable them to recognise, translate, predict, or generate text or other content.

There are two primary forms of data poisoning attacks. Targeted attacks seek to manipulate the AI's behaviour for specific inputs. As an example, a malicious individual could manipulate a facial recognition system to incorrectly identify a specific individual. Unfocused or untargeted attacks, on the other hand, seek to diminish the overall performance of the AI by injecting irrelevant data to significantly impact the system's accuracy across different inputs. These are similar to poisoning a well, and the consequences can be as wide-ranging.

ERRORS IN AI SYSTEMS

AI models that are not impartial can contribute to the continuation of social disparities in various domains, including loan approvals, hiring practices, and the criminal justice system. Errors in AI systems involved in $self\text{-}driving\ cars\ can\ result\ in$ accidents. The potential for disruption is extensive, affecting a wide range of areas, including financial markets and national

While some companies have made efforts to improve their data collection practices, incorporate diverse and reliable datasets for training AI models, and mitigate the risk of manipulation, it may be necessary to introduce a legislation to address concerns related to data poisoning. This is especially so as data poisoning may not always be malicious or criminal in nature as it may also act as a tool for artists to defend their artwork from copyright infringement. For example, it may

thehindu businessline.

India up 2 slots in auto rankings

April 10, 2004

governed globally by TRIPS.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

India has jumped two places ahead to the 13th position in the latest

top 15 which has shown a growth of nearly 30 per cent.

IA market share in passenger traffic slips

the year compared to the previous year.

Drug companies warn of rocky IPR road ahead

could surface in the legal framework that is being laid out for the

automobile production ranking of the International Organisation of Motor

Vehicle Manufacturers, OICA, overtaking Belgium and Mexico. OICA, in its

latest rankings for 2003 indicates that India is among the few countries in the

Domestic drug companies have sounded a note of caution on the hassles that

product-patent regime, come January 2005. The pharma industry will soon be

Indian Airlines' market share of domestic passenger traffic slipped to 41.8 per

cent in 2002-03 from 47 per cent during the corresponding previous period.

The drop in share comes despite the airline having posted a rise in the number

of flights operated daily and the number of passengers carried each day during



DATA THREAT. Al worries/istockphoto

help altering the pixels of an image and when an AI model is trained on these poisoned samples, the hidden characteristics of these images slowly deteriorate the output of the model.

The recent introduction of the Artificial Intelligence Act by the European Parliament is the first set of comprehensive regulations to govern AI and represent a significant step forward. It acknowledges the potential danger of data and requires specific precautions for AI systems deemed "high-risk". These systems, such as facial recognition or those used in critical infrastructure, need to be designed with a strong encryption against data poisoning attacks. Article 15 of the Act requires the implementation of "technical solutions to address AI specific vulnerabilities including, where appropriate, measures to prevent and control for attacks trying to manipulate the training dataset ('data poisoning'), inputs designed to cause the model to make a mistake ('adversarial examples'), or model flaws". It also argues for limiting control by restricting access to training data sets and for ensuring that only authorised personnel have the ability to modify the data is crucial in order to minimise the

With a strong emphasis on data integrity and cybersecurity, Article 15 aims to foster the creation of reliable AI systems. Ensuring fairness and avoiding discrimination is crucial, as it helps build public confidence in AI technology. Nevertheless, there are still some obstacles to overcome. The development of enforcement mechanisms for Article 15 is ongoing. In addition, establishing international collaboration on data security in AI development continues to be a challenge. In spite of these difficulties, the EU's approach provides valuable insights for other countries.

risk of tampering.

The writer is Advocate, Madras High Court

Bad news on crude price front

With tensions in the Middle East showing no signs of abating, easing Russia sanctions is the way out. But that seems unlikely

THE WIDER ANGLE.



PARAN BALAKRISHNAN

he timing for US President Joe Biden who's facing a very close election fight couldn't be worse. The Russia-Ukraine war shows no sign of ending. In Israel, it's looking like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants to keep fighting the Gaza war forever. Huge crowds turned out in Tel Aviv Monday calling on Netanyahu to quit. Netanyahu knows an end to his governing coalition and his judicial reckoning will come when the fighting against Hamas stops. Even Israelis now are saying

Netanyahu may want to drag on the war as long as possible to avoid his day in court. Bombing the Iranian embassy in Damascus was a reckless, virtually unprecedented act. The world's holding its breath and waiting for the inevitable Iranian retaliation.

In anticipation, the global benchmark Brent crude price has surged above \$91, up from \$84 before Hamas attacked Israel last October and the below \$80-level where prices stabilised following Russia's Ukraine invasion.

Analysts say it's more than likely crude prices will head toward \$100 for the first time in nearly two years, especially if Iran chooses to launch a major strike-back which would restrict Iran's oil flow and potentially other regional producers. OPEC production cuts, big Mexican crude export curbs and Houthi rebel attacks on tankers in the Red Sea are also pinching supplies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will probably be lucky because his electorate will not be feeling the impact of rising oil prices when they cast their votes. But gasoline prices in the US have been drifting upward this year — they're now \$3.60 per gallon, up from \$3.20 in

For Biden, it will be bad news if oil prices soar to the sensitive touchy \$4-mark or even \$5 a gallon as some analysts forecast may happen with the US summer driving season looming.



OIL SLICK. India continues to be a major buyer of Russian oil. The world must brace up for higher oil prices REUTERS

Voters have a habit of punishing presidents on whose watch gas prices rise. Biden can dip into the US oil stockpile, already at 40-year lows. But that could lead to charges of oil reserve mismanagement.

RUSSIA OIL

Biden has one solution that might immediately send oil prices southward. India's faced criticism for buying Russian oil but it's always been clear that if India stopped buying, it would result in an instant negative shock to global supplies and prices. Easing up on sanctions and allowing Russian oil exports to flow more freely would have a rapid positive supply impact.

But the US has been doing the exact

For Biden, it will be bad news if oil prices soar to the sensitive touchy \$4-mark or even \$5 a

gallon as some analysts forecast may happen

opposite in the last few months. It's been tightening the screws. The US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is squeezing Russia's 'Dark Fleet' that's been ferrying oil to different corners of the world.

The result is 40 vessels, or 15 per cent of Russia's shadow fleet is now banned from many ports globally, including India. And in February, OFAC moved against the Russian state-owned shipping giant Sovcomflot. It also added 14 tankers partly owned by Sovcomflot to its banned list. Sovcomflot is thought to form a quarter of Russia's Dark Fleet. The Russians have, according to analyst Craig Kennedy, spent \$8.5 billion to buy $ageing, often \, poorly \, maintained \, ships \, in \,$ the global market.

Nevertheless, despite the sanctions and the fact Russian discounts have fallen steeply, India's still lapping up Russian crude. In 2023, Russia emerged as India's top oil supplier and we purchased \$37 billion worth of Russian crude, up from virtually zilch before the Ukraine conflict.

Buying of Russian crude is "by no means the exclusive behaviour of a

select few. All of India's commercial-scale refineries with access to coastal ports are buying," says Viktor Katona, lead crude analyst, at Kpler, a global trade intelligence consultancy. Reliance got in the game first on a large-scale but IndianOil has now

overtaken it. India is a difficult market for Russia to serve: it requires a larger number of ships to bring crude all the way here. But India now is an even more valued Russian customer than before because due to sanctions other countries like South Korea have stopped buying Russian crude. Only the Chinese continue as the biggest buyer globally. It's "unlikely India will fall below the 1.5 million/mbd pace of Russian purchases over the course of 2024," Katona says.

All in all, though, the world needs to brace for higher oil prices. And say goodbye to rate cut hopes. With the USand Indian - economies growing more vigorously than expected and inflation sticky here and abroad, caution will be the driving force for central bankers amid fears that a sustained oil cost uptick will fuel prices.

EU leaders call for

uropean Union leaders will call next week for a harmonisation of the 27-nation bloc's bankruptcy

Draft conclusions of a summit of EU

leaders scheduled for April 17-18, seen

by Reuters, also showed leaders would

and corporate tax laws to attract more

private capital for the EU shift to

renewable energy and a more digital

harmonised laws

Short take

Reuters

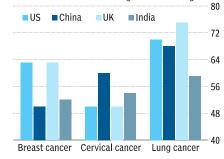
STATISTALK.

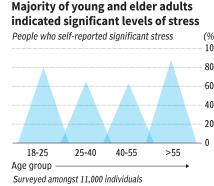
Compiled Madhav Suresh | Graphic Visveswaran V

Trends in NCDs among Indians

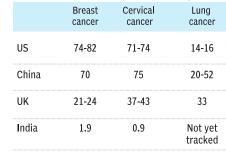
Following the World Health Day, Apollo Hospitals released the fourth edition of the "Health of the Nation" report which analysed Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) trends from their database and other national sources. It emphasized the rising chances of cancer among the younger population and delved into incidences of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity among them. Accompanying charts provide a visual representation of these worrying trends.

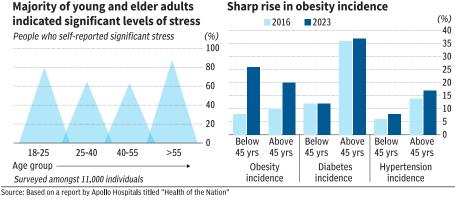
India's median age for cancer diagnosis Cancer screening rates in India is much below other countries Median age for cancer diagnosis





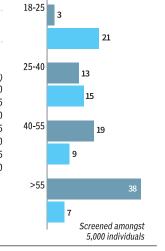
lagging behind global peers Population screening rates (%)





1 in 4 persons were at a high risk of disturbed sleep while I in every IU depression

People with high risk of Sleep Apnoe People with depression Age group



(%)

call for the development of a European securitisation market and for better supervision of cross-border financial market actors. They will urge swift improvement of ways to invest in shares of companies

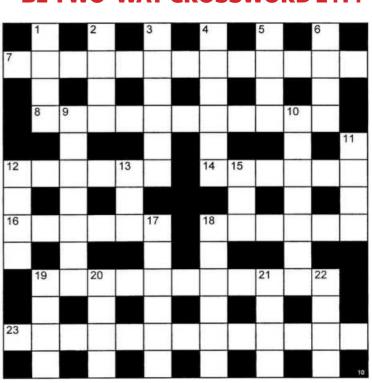
across the EU and the creation of a simple cross-border savings product for retail investors.

The European Commission estimates the EU needs around €650 billion (\$706.5 billion) of private money every year until 2030 to make the transition away from fossil fuels and into renewable energy sources, as well as creating a more digital economy.

Without the measures mentioned in the draft conclusions it will be hard for European countries to attract such amounts of cash because investors find the US market better organised, less complex and more liquid than in Europe.

The EU measures are to create a Capital Markets Union in Europe.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2414



EASY

ACROSS

7. Representative 'slices' (5-8) 8. Upkeep (11)

12. Glowing coals (6) 14. Seasoned (6)

16. Passed as sound (6) 18. Doesn't

sink (6) 19. Castle entrances (11) 23. Smaller entertainment

before main

item (7-6)

DOWN

1. Percussion instrument (4) 2. Italian wine (4)

3. Things being what they are (2,2,2)

4. Teacakes (6) 5. Omen (4)

6. At one time (4)

9. Judge (7)

10. Country dwelling (7)

11. Betting price (4)

12. Desire what another has (4) 13. Grain (3)

15. The lot (3)

17. Wreckage, ruin (6)

18. Establishment for brothers (6) 19. Dope (4)

20. Singer (4) 21. Forbidding (4) 22. Killed (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

7. Angry divisions of platoon considered to be representative (5-8)

8. The upkeep of mother in canteen

12. Remember sometimes having to hold hot coals? (6)

14. Like some crisps, made mine look

attractive (6)

16. Short animal doctor Edward

passed as being sound (6)

18. There's nothing in apartments that bobs on the surface (6)

19. What artist depicting river scenes may do for castle entrances (11)

23. A little work at start of evening for peeper-out-of-window? (7-6)

DOWN

1. Nelson's blood after end of raid takes some beating (4)

2. Wine like sweet vermouth turning up ... (4)

3. ... is to follow its confusion, such being the situation (2,2,2)

4. In a vessel, ice cream sort of cakes (6)

5. Something ominous is given up to heartless gun (4)

6. A hundred are in the unit, not to be repeated (4)

9. He judges the Tiber to be turbulent in half the year (7)

10. Sort of loaf suitable to dwelling in the country? (7)

11. Price one may be offered to do up old, precious finishes? (4)

12. Sent on mission, he loses nothing but desire for what another has (4)

13. Sort of bread and whisky (3)

15. A driver under instruction approaches end of Mall:that's the lot (3)

17. Knight going to bed turns up the wreckage (6) 18. Where brothers cook up a song inside (6)

19. Medical substance one needs get to cover the floor (4)

20. One singing a lot of variations (4) 21. Ghastly sound of a fairy-tale brother (4)

22. To keep one in stitches, about fifty committed murder (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2413

ACROSS 1. Bluebottles 7. Homed in 9. Fair 11. Franc 12. Direct 14. Polytechnic 18. Secure 20. Exact 22. Neat 23. Hissing 24. Attractions DOWN 2. Lumbago 3. Owns 4. Evade 5. Shaft 6. Crate 8. Dockyard 10. Highness 13. Bet 15. Italian 16. Using 17. Stage 19. Craft 21. Chic

NEW DELHI | WEDNESDAY, 10 APRIL 2024

Reforming judiciary

Reserving judgments adding to delays and backlogs

ndia's clogged justice system has acquired global notoriety, which plays no small part in the investment decisions of multinationals. On Monday, Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud sent a wakeup call to the higher judiciary by flagging the proclivity of high-court judges to reserve judgments for a long time after completing the hearing. Seeking information from chief justices on details of cases where judgments had been reserved for three months, he said he had discovered there were cases where judgments had been reserved for as long as 10 months. Worse, he noted, several judges partly heard the matters before releasing them, requiring parties to have the case heard all over again. As the chief justice pointed out, reserving a judgment for 10 months amounts to wasting judicial time since the judge concerned is unlikely to remember the oral arguments. This is not the first time the apex court has urged the high courts to speed up. In 2022, a two-judge Bench hearing a criminal case observed it was advisable for the high court concerned to deliver the judgment at the earliest after the arguments were concluded.

Reserving judgments adds to the legendary backlog of court cases in India, a symptom of the established institutional problems embedded in the judicial system. The government's records show that there are over 40 million cases pending in district and subordinate courts. Of those, more than 100,000 are over 30 years old. A key contributory factor in these delays is the large number of vacancies on the Benches. Though the Supreme Court currently enjoys one of its rare moments of a full quorum, the high courts have 329 vacancies. No surprise, the pendency of cases in the high courts has risen over time. Given that the high courts and subordinate courts constitute the first line of justice in the Indian system, this state of affairs amounts to the denial of justice for the bulk of the Indian citizens. Indeed, the fear of being embroiled in long-pending court cases tends to encourage the culture of graft and corruption.

Increasingly fractious arguments between the executive and judiciary over judicial appointments have not helped matters. But a shortage of judges is part of the story. The entire judicial ecosystem appears to be shambolic, especially at its lowest level. By the government's own admission, the lack of physical infrastructure and support staff in courtrooms and the efficiency and capabilities of investigative agencies and stakeholders (litigants, witnesses) to understand and follow court rules all contribute to the poor picture of the Indian judiciary. Frequent adjournments and appeals have added to the burdens of courts already weighed down by a notable expansion of central and state legislation.

The consequences of this can be seen in the total rejection by India's major economic partners of the model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) document, which requires foreign investors to exhaust all legal remedies within the Indian system before applying for arbitration. The 13 years it took Vodafone to appeal its retrospective tax case in Indian courts stands as a cautionary tale. Justice Chandrachud's observation on high-court judges' practices points to just one element of the problem. But it offers a reminder that judicial reform should be an urgent item on the reform programme for both the Centre and states. India will soon be the third-largest economy in the world. It needs a world-class justice system to maintain sound economic, social, and political order.

Challenges for ECI

Young voters must be encouraged to vote

s the world's largest democracy gears up to vote, starting later this month, the Election Commission of India (ECI) must effectively manage its numerous responsibilities to uphold electoral integrity for ensuring the conduct of free and fair elections. None of the challenges faced by the ECI is novel but they have taken newer forms in recent years. While some amount of bickering is expected in competitive elections, the narrative can quickly take a dangerous turn in response to allegations and counter-allegations of politically motivated fake news. The acrimony in the country can be attributed to the ready mix of a teeming internet population, poor digital literacy, and caste, community, and religious sentiments that threaten to boil over small provocations.

With the emergence of social media bots and deep fakes, the ECI must stay one step ahead of the problem. The new face of misinformation and the availability of digital content in dozens of Indian languages make it harder to monitor and stop bad actors before the damage is done. To combat the misinformation menace, the ECI has done well to launch the "Myth and Reality" project, which entrusts various state authorities with the powers to request the removal of false news under different Sections of the Information Technology (IT) Act. Recently, Google partnered the ECI to offer critical poll-related information on Google search and YouTube. This comes along with Google's verification of political advertisers through ECI-provided certificates and in-ad disclaimers to show who sponsored the advertisement.

Election officials are also trying their best to address the problem of voter apathy by encouraging voting in areas that drag down the overall poll percentage. In this regard, the ECI has identified nine states and two Union Territories that exhibited a voter turnout rate (VTR) lower than the national average of 67.4 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. A total of 266 parliamentary constituencies or PCs (215 rural and 51 urban) with a low VTR have been identified for the preparation of a booth-wise action plan so that people are self-motivated to vote. While it is commonly believed that voter apathy plagues major urban and metropolitan areas (17 of the top 50 PCs with the least turnout in the 2019 elections), it is also increasing in rural areas. Most of the PCs with low turnouts are in rural areas. Interestingly, most states in east, northeast, and south India had above-average VTRs. Additionally, the ECI must also look into better ways of engaging with young and first-time voters. To this end, the ECI is leveraging social media to nudge young voters to come to the polling station to vote through the "Turning 18" campaign.

Unfortunately, India's youngest voters appear hesitant to exercise their electoral rights. Less than 40 per cent of all 18- or 19-year-olds who are eligible to vote have registered for the 2024 elections. Around 18 million new voters in this age bracket have been recorded on the electoral rolls, while the population size of this age group stands at approximately 49 million. Such problems require targeted interventions and an expanded voter outreach, the results of which will be visible only in the first week of June, when the mammoth exercise ends.



A question of spirit

RAISINA HILL

A K BHATTACHARYA

Busy civil servants preparing a five-year plan for the next government raises questions about convention

embers of India's fabled steel frame, or civil servants belonging to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), have been experiencing something quite unusual this summer. Lok Sabha elections have been announced. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has enforced the Model Code of Conduct. Yet, senior civil servants, who usually heave a sigh of relief from their routine work for a few weeks before a general election, are under even greater pressure to work overtime. In the past, most bureaucrats, apart from those entrusted with election duties, would treat this pre-election

period as an occasion for recharging their batteries through some relaxed work and training. But that has not been their experience this time.

How different has 2024 been so far for civil servants? The reality this year is that even those not on election duty have been burning the proverbial midnight oil to prepare an action plan for implementation by the government that would be formed in June 2024. This is no ordinary action plan. It will contain measures and policies that the new government should take and implement during its five-year tenure. Not just that. The

plan should also include a series of steps that the government could take in the first 100 days of its fresh term. Why 100 days? Presumably, the 100-day deadline is meant to induce a sense of the speed and focus with which the newly elected government would be implementing those decisions. Or, perhaps, the idea is to recreate the excitement that the 100-day blitzkrieg of policy action taken by the P V Narasimha Rao government had created more than three decades ago!

Not that civil servants do not work in similar mission mode after general elections are called. In 2009, for instance, the civil servants worked hard on how to rescue information-technology (IT) firm Satyam from financial fraud, to which its owner had confessed in January that year. Civil servants in the finance ministry and the corporate affairs ministry spent many a sleepless night helping an independent committee of professionals to complete the process of finding a buyer for financially beleaguered Satyam and, as many would argue, to save the reputation of India's famed IT industry. Indeed, a new

buyer for Satyam was found in Tech Mahindra through an auction by April, much before the elections were concluded and a new government was in place.

There is, however, no such crisis or scandal that should have driven the Narendra Modi government into overdrive in 2024. The urgency of work among civil servants has arisen from a different set of factors. Mr Modi has already told voters that they should expect a series of new measures to counter corruption in the first few days of the formation of the new government. There are also

reports of the Modi government's decision to put this plan out in the public domain to ensure that everyone is aware of the new government's vision and road map to achieve its goals of making India a developed country by 2047.

Some news reports are talking about a renewed push for infrastructure building, while others are referring to economic policy reforms like notifying the four labour codes that were passed by Parliament a few years ago. It would appear that the finance

ministry has already begun internal preparations for the full Budget for 2024-25 the new government would have to present after the elections. Even the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was gently told by Mr Modi that it should engage in internal deliberations for the next few weeks, because soon after the formation of the new government, a series of steps would have to be taken.

Why do these initiatives appear to be unusual? They do appear unusual because no government in the past initiated the process of policy making for its next tenure even before going in for elections. Not even Mr Modi attempted such an exercise before the general elections of 2019. Clearly, this is an outcome of the ruling party's supreme confidence in its electoral prospects. The formation of a government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in June 2024 is a foregone conclusion that even Opposition parties do not question. So, the government is not losing any time in finalising its 2024-29 action plan during the pre-election days.

But two sets of questions arise over these initiatives. The first set is about the convention a government should follow. It is the same convention that obliges a government to present only five full Budgets in its five-year tenure. That's why last February the finance minister presented only an Interim Budget and not a full Budget despite its belief even then that the BJP would return to power after the elections. Thus, if there is no emergency situation, can a government in the runup to the elections ask the civil servants to prepare an action plan that it wants to implement once it gets re-elected? Should there be a pause in government planning or decision making once elections are called, provided there is no crisis to handle?

The second set of questions pertains to how the ECI should view such policy plans being prepared by the civil servants. The key question here is whether there is a change in the character of the government when the ECI notifies the election schedule. Once the Model Code of Conduct is enforced by the ECI, should the government of the day refrain from taking an active interest in policy making for the next five years and let that be the function of the new government?

There is yet another sensitive issue. It is only natural that if central ministries are asked to prepare their action plans for the next five years, some of those details may come out in the public domain even while elections are being held. Doesn't the ruling party, therefore, enjoy an advantage over the other contesting parties, which can rely only on their election manifestos? Isn't that why the RBI sought in 2014 permission from the ECI before announcing the names of those who would be granted bank licences?

Of course, most of these questions are in the grey area. But they do trigger thoughts about the fine distinction between the letter and spirit of governance and the electoral code of conduct. And a debate over such issues can only strengthen India's democracy and its institutions.

Retail rush: Keeping faith in markets

Retail participation in Indian capital markets has exploded since 2020-21. The number of demat accounts, at over 150 million, is 275 per cent higher than the figure as on April 1, 2020. The proportion of individuals' trading on the stock exchanges in the cash segment is around 40 per cent. The individuals hold about 10 per cent of market cap in listed companies. This translates into wealth of about ₹40 trillion. In addition, the individuals have substantial holdings through mutual funds.

The reasons for this sudden interest in capital markets include unusually low interest rates during 2020-22, resulting in negative real returns on bank deposits,

making people explore other investment opportunities; booming capital markets; the digitisation of processes; ease of going on board using e-KYC; mushrooming digital platforms offering discount brokerage services; successful marketing campaign by mutual funds; and investors' trust in the regulatory framework.

There is every reason to celebrate the increased retail participation in the Indian capital markets — after all, more and more individuals are becom-

ing part of India's growth story. A significant proportion of domestic investors' participation, by individuals and institutions, adds to market resilience and reduces foreign portfolio investors' influence. The people moving to the capital markets have woken up banks, which were hitherto used to taking for granted bank deposits.

The surge in retail participation, combined with increasing market complexity, poses new challenges for the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the market regulator. Protecting investor interests is the primary, statutory responsibility of Sebi. Many of the new participants lack awareness, do not receive proper advice, and are disadvantaged due to information asymmetry. Not much attention is paid to these aspects when the markets are booming and one has only seen the upside. The blame game starts when the tide goes out. Some experts apprehend that a seri-

ous market correction might make newcomers leave the markets for good. This could have disastrous consequences for the evolving capital markets.

So how to sustain the retail participation, harness the investment potential, and address the challenges?

The regulatory framework in India, as in most other jurisdictions, is essentially based on the philosophy of "caveat emptor", which translates into "let the buyer beware". Realising that relying on this principle alone may not be sufficient to protect the interests of individual investors, Sebi has proactively taken a number of meaningful steps to instill their confidence in the market. Two areas need intervention.

The increased proportion of retail investors trading in the futures and options (F&O) segment is worrisome. Sebi has been issuing cautionary public statements from time to time, bringing out the complexity of this market segment and highlighting the possible downside risks. It went to the extent of issuing a report last year, stating that nine of 10 individual traders in the equity F&O segment incurred an average loss of ₹1.1 lakh during FY22. These efforts don't seem

to have had much impact on the investors' behaviour. A few months ago, the media reported that Sebi was planning to link the value of retail investors' F&O trades to their income and net worth, and making stockbrokers responsible for reporting the net worth and income of individual traders to the exchanges. Trading activities could then be limited to a specific threshold relatable to the investors' net worth.

Such a proposal was attempted earlier too. Sebi in 2017 had come up with a discussion paper "Growth and Development of Equity Derivatives Market", bringing out, *inter alia*, the need to introduce a product-suitability framework for investors in India. The idea was abandoned due to brokers expressing difficulty in evaluating their clients' net worth. Also, some viewed the proposal as a bit intrusive and as one that could harm F&O market sentiment. Times have changed

since then. The markets have grown much bigger and retail participation has sky-rocketed. An idea whose time had not perhaps come in 2017 has come now. Brokers need to be brought on board. They could use clients' information disclosed in their tax returns.

Another important matter is to effectively regulate investment advisers. There are about 1,300 Sebi-registered investment advisers at present. It is difficult to estimate the number of unregistered advisers, including finfluencers, in today's digital age and social-media era. Sebi's efforts to rein them in haven't helped much. One of the reasons is the limited outreach of the regulator in a vast and diversified country like India. The right beginning to address this problem would be to have a first-level regulator below Sebi exclusively to regulate investment advisers. This will require an amendment to the Sebi Act. Notably, the concept of first-level regulator exists for stockbrokers, who are regulated by the stock exchanges under the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956.

As for the challenges arising out of the digital age and social media, there should be a standing committee to coordinate among the market regulator, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, and self-regulatory bodies of the media. The government should notify Sebi as one of the agencies under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, to direct the intermediaries to remove objectionable content from their sites under Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. Sebi could exercise such powers in consultation with MeitY.

In conclusion, retail participation in capital markets in India needs to be facilitated, encouraged, and nurtured on a sustainable basis. Much would depend on the extent to which people keep faith in the regulatory architecture.

The writer, formerly in the Indian Administrative Service, was chairman, Securities and Exchange Board of India, and is distinguished fellow, Observer Research Foundation

A destiny in Aligarh



CAUDADU CUADAA

SAURABH SHARMA

par Kot in Aligarh, a city in Uttar Pradesh, is where journalist, writer, and documentary filmmaker Zeyad Masroor Khan spent his childhood. It is a "place where small houses pack into each other to a point of annoyance amid grand mosques that dot its dense neighbourhoods," he notes in this classic memoir *City on Fire: A Royhood in Aligarh*

Boyhood in Aligarh.
In general, one's childhood is a scintilla of emotions, but in the author's case it appears to become a handy guide to survive a riot. That's how City on Fire begins—in the middle of a riot in which

people are escaping to avoid meeting the inevitable. The scene involves the author's elder brother, who is "more excited than afraid" as a bullet misses his "ear by a few inches", his terrified, eightmonth pregnant sister, and his mother determined not to allow her home to be "used for rioting", while his father is away "at his office at the university on the other side of the town." Bricks. Bullets. Blood. They witness it all. Words are inadequate when it comes to encapsulating the immensity and fragility of this situation facing these people and its lifelong impact on their psyche.

As it happens, this was an everyday thing in this Muslim ghetto.

Divided into three parts—Childhood, Boyhood, and Manhood—and 20 chapters, this book elevates Aligarh's association beyond its almost routine linkage with news regarding the imposition of Section 144 and riots that have plagued this beautiful, messy cobweb of a city. The book also offers a playful cautionary note in the beginning: That storytellers from Aligarh exaggerate. There's a lightness to this that goes on to meet the details the author offers about Farsh Manzil, his ancestral home. Its principal storyteller, however, is Badi Ammi, the author's aunt, his father's eldest sister and his "favourite relative".

Not only does she tell him stories like a "witness on a payroll"—notice the metaphor the writer employs —but she also becomes his source of outlining their family history, involving supernatural figures, too. One of them is Sayyed Baba. Aligarh is my hometown as well, but I come from a Hindu family. However, we, too, worship Sayyed Baba—a fact I learnt after my father's death when my grandmother asked me to buy one ladoo for Hanuman and one for Sayyed Baba for the Diwali puja.

In a society where hate is increasingly inspiring purchase, this patchwork of coexistence is lost on its people. Had the author been consumed by it as well, he'd have believed that India was not his country, that Aligarh was an unsafe place for him from where he shouldn't return but leave. "People, traumas and

memories we try to forget, lie in wait like dormant volcanoes ready to erupt, simmering beneath the surface of time," the author writes. "As I carefully placed a decade of my existence in three heartless cartons," he writes, as he finds himself leaving after the riots in northeast Delhi, where I live, "a truth was forever imprinted in my consciousness: The

only thing we should leave behind was the illusion of a belief that we can leave things behind." But is it possible

AJAY TYAGI

But is it possible to leave behind your memories? Try this: As a four-year-old you press a harmless button only to find that it is an alarm,

alerting your neighbourhood to an impending mob attack. Or perhaps place yourself in a school bus surrounded by a Hindu mob, pelting stones at it, baying for Muslim blood, and find yourself identified as Muslim by your neighbour. Or imagine the look in the eye of a neighbour in the capital

city whose admiration for you as a journalist soon transforms into suspicion when you reveal your name.

Hurt doesn't erase itself. It lingers to tell a story. And Zeyad Khan is one of the master storytellers. In this engrossing memoir not only does he recount each incident, rumour, and story poignantly, reminiscent of Joan Didion's who-I-am-

CITY ON FIRE: A
BOYHOOD IN
ALIGARH
Author: Zeyad
Masroor Khan
Publisher:
HarperCollins
Pages: 312
Price: ₹599

and-where-I-was
writing oeuvre —
albeit stylistically
different. But he
also laces them with
dollops of humour.
There's another
remarkable quality
about his use of
language. It's as
innocent as a child's
when he describes

his childhood days. Sample this "oftused joke in Aligarh" that had me in splits: Is this Tala or is it Allah Tala? For a city famous for its locks, it's a layered joke. Then, when his Badi Ammi tells him that it's a sin if one who had remembered the Quran forgets it as his father did, he imagines his "grandparents being removed from the highest place in heaven."

As we're introduced to the author's boyhood, the dramatically changing Indian landscape on the cusp of the millennium when its liberalised economy is interspersed with seminal events such as 9/11 and the attack on the Indian Parliament. The prose here is tense with mixed feelings one experiences with everything new. In this part, Mr Khan graduates from cassettes and comics, and starts getting fascinated by Osama Bin Laden, finds himself attracted to girls, and recognises himself to be an arrogant young adult who tries to negotiate with his identity by being a member of the Tablighi Jamaat, witnesses friendships blossoming and failing, and, most importantly, confronts loss. Meticulous, visceral, and soul-baring, City on Fire is a passageway to understanding how divisive India has become but offers hope despite the worrisome reality facing it.

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{ OUR TAKE }

Law in service of climate battles

The Supreme Court's expansive interpretation of constitutional rights in light of the climate crisis has the making of a new jurisprudence

■ he Supreme Court, in a recent judgment, expanded the scope of Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (life) to include the "right against adverse effects of climate change", underscoring for the first time the urgency needed to formulate policies that address the impending crisis. The judgment noted the lack of legislation on climate and environment, suggesting a framework that looks at allied issues from a constitutional rights framework. This lack of legislation "does not mean people of India do not have the right against adverse effects of climate change", the Court said. It also puts the onus of ensuring a healthy environment on the State, highlighting the intersection between the climate crisis and human rights.

Indian courts, including the National Green Tribunal (India was, in fact, only the third country to set up a statutory body for the environment at the time NGT was institutionalised), have time and again intervened in environmental matters. But most of these verdicts have happened in singular cases. The March 21 judgment takes a holistic view of the environment, with an added focus on the natural world, and links it with the climate crisis. It recognises the need for a transition to renewable energy sources, and the pivotal role solar power plays in this. This transition is not only a strategic goal for the country that is trying to emerge as a world leader on climate but also a fundamental necessity now as its people face innumerable threats from issues such as pollution, vector-borne diseases, rising temperatures and extreme weather events. The judgment also stands out in highlighting the inequality faced by women and indigenous tribes in the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on them.

While remarkable for India, the judgment resonates with the global trend, evident in some recent landmark verdicts from western courts. In a first-ofits-kind trial, a judge in Montana last year ruled in favour of young environmentalists accusing State agencies of violating their constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment by allowing fossil fuel development. The emerging jurisprudence highlights two things: First, the need to address the climate crisis and its aftereffects in the ambit of human rights, and second, the necessity to see the crisis through a wider lens that encompasses not just rising temperatures but also the impact on the natural world. This recognition, even if a small step, is a step that opens doors for citizens to hold their governments to account as the battle to save humanity gets fiercer.

On abortion, Trump pivots to expediency

n abortion rights, a polarising issue in the United States (US), former president and likely Republican presidential candidate in all but name. Donald Trump, has deferred to "the will of the people". Trump rejected the demand for a nationwide ban on abortion after 15 weeks of conception and said he would rather let individual states decide. Only, this splintered situation on not just legality but also the end date for abortion wherever it is legal has more or less been the case since 2022, when the US Supreme Court (SC) overturned its Roe vs Wade judgment, which held that the US Constitution protected abortion rights.

It is, no doubt, a major gamble for Trump despite his lead over Democrat rival and incumbent president Joe Biden in dipstick popularity polls. His latest stance could alienate the party's core voters — conservative and "pro-life". Mike Pence, who served as the Trump presidency's second-in-command, and Lindsey Graham, a Republican senator and key Trump ally, who backs the ban proposal, have already dissented. But clearly, political expediency seems to be driving Trump's backhanded "pro-choice" support. He did say he was "proudly the person responsible" for *Roe vs Wade* getting overturned — his administration nominated three conservative judges to the US SC, which tipped the scales against abortion rights — but he also recognises that access to safe abortion has become an electoral issue not just in the swing states but also in Republican-voting ones (like Kentucky). Meanwhile, the Democrats have made safe and assured access (to abortion) a highlight of their agenda. To that end, whether Trump would continue to straddle the two horses if he wins should be food for thought for American voters.

PMLA has more teeth than needed

There is a need to reassess and recalibrate the balance between the State's powers in enforcing anti-money laundering measures and safeguarding individual liberties

he Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) has been a cornerstone legislation in India's fight against financial crimes. The law has undergone a sea change since its enforcement in July 2005, progressively tightening the noose around money laundering. An array of legislative amendments in 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2019, and 2023 reflect the country's hardening stance against illicit wealth. Nonetheless. PMLA's journey, from its inception to its current form, has raised critical concerns regarding repercussions on individual liberties, privacy rights, and the presumption of innocence.

A recent development saw the Supreme Court (SC) granting bail to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Sanjay Singh, spotlighting the critical need for judicial oversight and accountability in the stringent law's application. The Enforcement Directorate's (ED's) decision not to contest Singh's bail, after his six-month incarceration without evidence of his involvement in money laundering, underscores the necessity of a balancing act between empowering enforcement agencies to combat money laundering and safeguarding

constitutional rights

Over the past couple of years, the SC has increasingly been asked to align PMLA's provisions with constitutional principles, particularly after its 2022 Viiav Madanlal Choudhary judgment. The judgment affirmed ED's vast powers, holding that PMLA provisions were not violative of fundamental rights. The three-judge bench, led by justice AM Khanwilkar (since retired and appointed as the Lokpal chairperson), emphasised the need for stringent measures to tackle money laundering and acknowledged PMLA's role in fulfilling India's obligations under the Financial Action Task Force

(FATF). While the judgment strengthened ED's hands, it attracted criticism from various quarters, including legal experts and human rights advocates who argued that it gave undue leeway to the federal agency, potentially at the expense of personal liberties and procedural safe-guards. Instead of balancing the interest of justice and individual rights, the judgment gave rise to the fears of

Utkarsh

Anand

potential misuse of power by ED.

Merely a month after this judgment, another three-judge bench admitted a clutch of review petitions against it and agreed to reconsider at least two aspects - denying a copy of the **Enforcement Case Information Report** (ECIR) to the accused and shifting the onus of proving innocence from the prosecution to the accused. While the review petition against the 2022 judgment remains pending, the SC has had to interpret PMLA provisions in various other cases, clarifying and sometimes limiting the extent of enforcement powers. Importantly, several subsequent judgments have ensured that enforcement doesn't trample on constitutional liberties. Some of these judgments have even taken a view contrary to the Vijay Madanlal Choudharv verdict.

For instance, in October 2023, a two-judge bench took a divergent view and made it compulsory for ED to provide a copy of the grounds of arrest to the accused in money laundering cases, adding that mere verbal information would be construed as a breach of constitutional right. The 2022 judgment had, however, said that providing an accused person with the

reasons for their arrest constitutes "sufficient compliance" with Article 22(1) of the Constitution, which states that no one arrested shall be held in custody without being informed of the reasons for their arrest or denied the right to counsel of their choosing. Last month, a

request by the Centre and ED to review the 2023 judgment was also shot

Similarly, in the judgment delivered on the medical bail plea of Tamil Nadu minister V Senthil Balaji in August 2023, the SC stressed on cautious exercise of arrest powers under Section 19 of PMLA, demanding substantial evidence before detention. The judgment obligated magistrates to immediately release an arrested person if there are procedural or substantive violations. This approach reinforced the judiciary's role in preventing misuse of power and ensuring that arrests are not punitive without proper cause.

Another judgment in October 2023,



The Sanjay Singh case marks a critical point in PMLA's jurisprudence

on a bail plea moved by former Delhi deputy chief minister (CM) Manish Sisodia, further highlighted the mandate of speedy trial as a fundamental right while clarifying that Section 45 of PMLA — which places a reverse proof of burden on an accused to prima facie show he/she is not guilty of the charges — is not an absolute bar on the grant of bail because "the constitutional mandate is the higher law". It said: "When the trial is not proceeding for reasons not attributable to the accused, the court, unless there are good reasons, may well be guided to exercise the power to grant bail. This would be truer where the trial would take years.'

In a November 2023 ruling in Pavana Dibbur, the top court declared that criminal conspiracy, punishable under Section 120B of the Indian Penal Code, cannot be the only offence for the opening of a money laundering probe and that the conspiracy must relate to a crime enlisted as a scheduled offence under the 2002 Act, Based on this judgment, the SC last month quashed a case lodged against Karnataka deputy CM DK Shivakumar.

The SC order in the Sanjay Singh case is yet another example of the evolving jurisprudence surrounding PMLA, indicating a judicial acknowledgment of the challenges posed by the Act's stringent provisions and the imperative need to prevent the misuse of legal mechanisms for political or personal gain. While this case demonstrates the importance of robust judicial scrutiny, it also serves as a reminder of the need for a comprehensive review of the 2022 judgment by a larger bench to reassess and recali brate the balance between the State's powers in enforcing anti-money laun dering measures and safeguarding individual liberties.

The judiciary's evolving stance, exemplified by rulings on the grounds of arrest and the necessity of a scheduled offence for initiating money laundering probes, illustrates the ongoing efforts to refine the balance between combating financial crimes and protecting individual rights.

The Sanjay Singh case, among others, marks a critical point in PMLA's jurisprudence, reflecting judicial awareness of the law's stringent aspects and the essential balance between State enforcement powers and personal freedoms. It highlights the imperative for a thorough re-evaluation of PMLA's implications on fundamental rights, suggesting a potential reassessment by a larger bench to ensure justice does not compromise the freedoms it aims to safeguard. As PMLA continues to challenge fundamental liberties, the judiciary's vigilant role becomes indispensable in ensuring that enforcement mechanisms do not override the principles of justice

The views expressed are personal

State of democracy is Opposition's battle cry

Rajmohan

Gandhi

his time the Opposition insists that "democracy bachao!" is more than a jumla, that democracy's opposite will become India's reality if voters arm Narendra Modi and his National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with an unalloyed fresh mandate. Jolted by the arrest of Delhi's chief minister (CM), Arvind Kejriwal, the INDIA bloc seems also to have found new vigour. Now there's no hesitation when INDIA's candidates or spokespersons charge that handing oral walkover to the NDA is the so purpose behind the central agencies' election-eve raids of the homes and offices of Opposition leaders, and behind the arrests of some of the bloc's leaders

Jharkhand's former CM Hemant Soren was arrested on January 31 under a corruption allegation. At that time, the INDIA bloc refrained from speaking of a "walkover" that those who run India today allegedly desire in

the voting that's about to start. On March 31, the alliance underlined its new clarity by giving a central place on its Ramlila Ground dais to the wives of both the arrested chief ministers

These arrests have also prompted international expressions of concern, including by officials in the United States and Germany. Our government's scornful dismissal of

such expressions as "interference" in India's internal affairs might please ardent nationalists amongst us. But it is unlikely to allay global worries or the sadness of Indians who cherish democracy.

"BJP's washing machine" is surely one phrase that will figure in future histories of Indian democracy. We know that presentday researchers have come up with a pair of findings. One, for every Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politician that India's enforcement agencies scrutinise for possible illegal acts, at least five or six or more Opposition politicians are investigated. Two, investigations against Opposition politicians tend to come to a halt the moment these politicians cross over to the BJP.

Not wanting a genuine election is only one of the Opposition's charges under the democracy rubric. An intent to change the Constitution is another indictment. Those making this accusation offer a series of



Jolted by Kejriwal's arrest, the INDIA bloc seems to have found new vigour

grounds. One is Narendra Modi's central role, enacted by him in his capacity as the country's Prime Minister, in the inauguration of Ayodhya's grand Ram Mandir. Another is the earlier ceremony when, with the visible blessing of Hindu priests, he formally installed in the Lok Sabha chamber a Hindu symbol of governance — a gold-plated sceptre, fashioned after an ancient Chola

A superior status in the Indian State for without an inferior place for other faiths and their followers, which today's India seems to hail. Doesn't it appear today that the average policeman, newspaper, TV channel, or any other holder of influence has been fitted with special eyes? Even a bulldozer seems able to separate a Muslim encroacher from his Hindu counterpart.

Toni Morrison, the African-American writer who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993 and died in 2019. put it this way: "If you can only be tall because someone else is on their knees, then you have a serious prob lem." In India, that serious problem is also a constitutional problem, and one that corrodes our democracy.

Money power in politics crossing a limit may be seen as the third big

hit taken by Indian democracy. Although cash as the path to power has been discussed since 1952 (when India's first Lok Sabha elections were held), the question received an unprecedented spotlight on February 15 of this year, when our Supreme Court (SC) ruled that the electoral bonds authorised by the Modi government and sold by the State Bank of India are unconstitutional. Their secrecy was the bonds' worst feature, declared the SC.

We can mark that while India's people did not know who was financing politicians, the government could always find out (from SBI, which kept a record) the names of all those who had purchased the zero-interest, taxfree bonds and given them to the political party (or parties) of their choice, which then exchanged the bonds for cash. This authority over information gave the government immense power over all bond buyers, even as bond donors purchased influence with politi-

SBI's procrastination in supplying the list (demanded by the SC) of the bond buyers and the parties enriched by them (among which the BJP was evidently the first by a wide margin) has told its own story. It does not prettify the image of Indian democracy.

As the Opposition sees it, and as independent watchers too might conclude, a fourth major weakness in Indian democracy's current state is the apparent concentration of power in a handful of individuals, plus the unlimited, unceasing projection of a single individual as the source of all wisdom. Ambedkar warned us in 1949 that while bhakti in religion might be a road to salvation, bhakti in politics is injurious to democracy. I'm paraphrasing. The actual remark

> Rajmohan Gandhi's last book was India After 1947: Reflections & Recollections The views expressed are personal

{ JOE BIDEN } US PRESIDENT

Today, too many Americans are saddled with unsustainable debts in exchange for college degrees... Now, thanks to what we're doing, that debt is no longer holding you back

On plans to cancel student loans for 30 million borro

Green hydrogen push needs to be substantive

Somit

ret-zero emissions and green hydrogen are often mentioned together these days. At present, less than 1% of the hydrogen being produced is green, and that too in demonstration projects. Globally, about 70 million tonnes (mt) of hydrogen are being produced primarily through the steam methane reformation (SMR) process—releasing, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), 830 mt of carbon dioxide (CO2) annually. Decarbonising the industrial sector and long-distance road transport, aviation, and shipping would be impossible unless green

hydrogen is available Green hydrogen is difficult to produce because of several factors. First, producing each kilogram needs 50 units of power, with

a 70% efficiency of electrolysers (as per an estimate by TERI). The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimates that to achieve the Paris targets, 30% of the world's electricity use will have to be dedicated to green hydrogen by 2050; electrolyser capacity of 5,000 gigawatts (GW) would be needed. India is targeting to produce five mt of green hydrogen by

2030, and this alone would require 125 GW of renewable power. Further, we need renewable power delivered to the electrolyser through a dedicated line. One can't draw from the grid since this is expensive and has a high carbon intensity. Second, each kilogram of green hydrogen would require about nine litres of water, which could be an issue in water-deficit areas. Third, storage is a problem as hydrogen is inflammable and can escape easily. Ideally, it should be transported through pipelines over long distances (this is very capital-intensive). But, given its properties, hydrogen makes the pipelines brittle over time, leading to cracks. For short distances, transportation through trucks is a viable option. Transport by sea would require port infrastructure for storing and re-gasification. Incidentally, hydrogen can be blended with natural gas to an extent, and transported using natural gas pipelines. Fourth, hydrogen has very low density, hence it requires a large storage capacity unless the gas is converted to liquid form. Converting to liquid form would need temperatures of around 253 C below zero. All of this, again, requires a lot of energy that must be drawn from renewable sources.

Coming to the economics, green hydrogen costs \$4-6/kg today — about three times the cost of grey hydrogen, made from natural gas

via SMR. The two main components of the cost are electrolysers and renewable energy. There are primarily two types of electrolysers, alkaline and polymer electrolyte membrane (PEM) Though alkaline electrolysers are cheaper. PEMs have certain advantages — a smaller carbon footprint, for instance. PEMs can also be ramped up quickly to deliver hydrogen at a higher output pressure. The manufacture of PEM electrolysers, however, needs expensive catalyst materials. The cost of electrolysers can only come down when they are manufactured in bulk which, in turn, will happen only when the price of green hydrogen seems competitive vis-à-vis grey.

The government has earmarked ₹19,750 crore (~\$2.3 billion) for the Green Hydrogen Mission. The lion's share (89%) will incentivise electrolyser manufacturing and production of green ammonia and green hydrogen. Research and development gets a mere 2% and pilot projects 7% Green hydrogen costs \$4-6/kg while Dasgupta grey costs \$2-2.5/kg. The current incentives are unlikely to bridge the

> gap. These incentives should have been devised so as to bring green hydrogen's price to somewhere near grey's. The government probably should also introduce a fiat forcing certain end-users to adopt green hydrogen. But this would lead to an immediate increase in the cost of fertilisers.

> In the case of electrolyser manufacturing, the incentives reduce the cost of electrolysers by barely 10%, which is not enough. Electrolyser manufacturers, after all, will need to have a back-to-back arrangement for sale to claim the incentives. The scheme is designed to support the manufacture of electrolysers totalling only 1.5 GW whereas the requirement is close to 40 GW if the 5 mt target is to be met. Besides, given how the scheme has been drafted — to illustrate, giving more weightage to "increase in indigenisation" while deciding on the winning tender — India will find it difficult to become a global hub for electrolysers. Also, this will promote the manufacture of alkaline electrolysers since PEM electrolysers need rare earth miner-

> als that have to be imported. The short point is the use of green hydrogen will involve considerable effort and pain and will not happen on its own steam.

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OUR VIEW



Can the rupee go global without convertibility?

An e-rupee may hold an edge in pursuit of an ambitious aim set by India's PM, but we need to grapple with how capital controls could be eased to enable the currency's globalization

ast week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to prepare a 10-year strategy to make the Indian rupee a globally "accessible and acceptable" currency. Since the Indian economy is expected to be among the world's three biggest national economies in less than a decade, with only China's and America's larger than ours, it is easy to grasp why such an aim might beckon. It's more than a matter of prestige. A globalized currency confers major advantages. Above all, overseas demand for it—particularly for trade and reserves—would cheapen credit within the country. More rupee bonds being bought will push their yields down, so we'd effectively have foreigners lending us funds at lower rates. The US has long had a clear edge on cost-of-capital, thanks to its dollar being the globe's dominant currency, with even the euro unable to dislodge it. A global rupee would also be convenient for Indian economic agents; who wants foreign exchange risk? For the currency to actually go global, though, our economy would also have to globalize: Not only will we need a surge in demand abroad for what we produce, we would have to turn the rupee fully convertible.

So far, US-style capital account convertibility has been a non-starter of an idea. It gave policy-makers shudders after the Asian currency crisis of 1997, which saw several open economies battered by capital flight and short-sellers like George Soros accused of betting on currencies crashing. Since then, India has stuck with an old ban on anyone limitlessly converting rupees into foreign money, with an annual cap on conversion and special channels for the settlement of commercial trades deemed okay. The rupee is thus partially convertible, with the privilege

of converting large sums restricted to regulated entities. Yet, if we expect our currency to hold liquidity appeal around the world, like the US dollar does, capital controls would have to be dropped entirely. Whether this can be done safely was examined by a panel set up by RBI in 1997, and some of its advice for a prudent switch to a fully convertible rupee remains relevant. For one, our currency must not keep losing its internal value to inflation. This calls for fiscal discipline. For another, we need a banking system that's resilient in the face of shocks and backed by transparency and efficiency across the financial sector. Plus, our external balances need sustainable stability; our trade gap must not get cleaved apart by events beyond our control. To these, add clarity on the external value of the rupee being set by the market, with RBI resolutely playing a non-distortive role.

The list of asks is daunting. Technology, however, could yet lend RBI's e-rupee an edge as a central bank digital currency (CBDC) for global use if it is designed not just for minimal cost, but also utmost privacy. Initial diaspora use for lowcost cross-border transfers could conceivably expand to sundry other purposes, commercial needs included, should it be kept free of geopolitical sanctions (and Swift-type disruptions). As a direct liability of RBI, with no risk of an intermediary failure, the e-rupee might also find international takers if it assures its users an easy way to program it (say, for routine payments), a unique feature of CBDC software. Right now, the e-rupee is only an experiment, with online bank-to-bank UPI transfers being hyped, but it's also RBI's best bet for a global play. Of course, RBI will have to earn itself the reputation of a worthy issuer. And that would call for the macro stability outlined in 1997.

THEIR VIEW

We need urgent global talks on the EU's carbon import charges

The CBAM could unfairly hit industries in countries like India as it ignores differential obligations



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he idea was simple: To meet progressively higher carbon emission-reduction targets in line with its climate-action commitments under the Paris Agreement and the UN Frame work Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the EU needed to impose higher obligations on its own industrial activities in carbon-intensive sectors. As a result, it had to tackle two challenges. One, it had to safeguard the competitiveness of its domestic industry amid cheaper imports from countries where emission reductions or the carbon price for emissions are lower because of differing reduction obligations; and two, it had to prevent carbon leakage through the relocation of its own industrial activity to countries with lower carbon prices or emission targets.

Thus was born the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)—to equalize the carbon price of imported products with its carbon price. From I January 2026, EU importers of products in five categories—iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilizers, electricity and hydrogen—will need to buy CBAM certificates priced at the price difference of embedded emissions between the EU and the exporter country.

The CBAM's thrust is on the quantum of emissions in production processes in each of the five sectors, as well as how these emissions are priced at home. Even if the quantum of emissions is the

same for making a tonne of steel, CBAM charges will apply based on the carbon price gap between the exporting country and the EU. For example, the trading price for a tonne of carbon dioxide emissions is about \$100 in the EU, \$34 in Australia and \$7 in China. So, Australian exporters will pay a CBAM charge of at least \$66 per tonne, while the likely $impact \, on \, Chinese \, imports \, will \, be \, \$93.$ India has no direct system for pricing carbon and there is no methodology yet to derive a carbon price from measures such as energy conservation, mandatory renewable purchase obligations and fossil fuel taxes. It will, therefore, be left to EU-certified auditors to make that assessment based on data provided by individual plants in India on the cost of carbon in the context of a set of fragmented domestic regulations.

National carbon prices reflect a variety of factors, including the level of economic development, per capita income and each country's nationally determined contributions to climate action. The International Monetary Fund, for instance, has recommended differential carbon pricing for countries at different stages of economic development-a 2030 price floor of \$75 a tonne for advanced economies, \$50 for highincome emerging economies such as China, and \$25 for lower-income emerging markets such as India. By aiming for "equalization" with the EU, CBAM charges would run against the reality of differential carbon pricing and emission reduction obligations.

The EU's new mechanism could be valuable if it were to have an impact on emission reduction by forcing imports to decarbonize. But that is unlikely. Both the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have concluded that the CBAM will not have any significant impact on lowering emissions. They also highlight the importance of the sharing and transfer of decarbonization technologies, which is not happening effectively. A report of the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change has underscored inadequate transfers, weak adoption of low-emission technologies and low funding as challenges. Both the UNCTAD and ADB note the adverse impact on EU imports from developing nations. The World Bank's Relative Carbon Exposure Index has also mapped the negative impact on developingcountry exports.

One should also not be complacent about the CBAM's limited initial coverage of five sectors. Given its basic objective to level the playing field for EU producers, its expansion to semi-finished or finished products will be considered in a review planned for 2025. Downstream industries in the EU like automanufacturing would perhaps require the CBAM's scope to widen soon to their own sectors so as to secure their competitiveness, especially those that rely on CBAM-covered inputs like steel.

In its final avatar, the CBAM will have implications for the entire production cycle of all traded products. Its UK replica is expected to be enforced from 2027. In the US, both Republican and Democrat senators have introduced different versions of laws that will impose charges on imports based on their environmental impact in comparison with US-made alternatives. These could render differential climate targets under the UNFCCC meaningless. Further, the tariff reductions and market access promised in free trade agreements that India is negotiating will also likely be nullified by border taxes and carbon charges. Small producers will be hit far more, not only by the burden of paying carbon price differentials, but also because of sheer compliance costs, including of data collection, auditing and certification of emissions.

Substantive talks are needed to craft solutions at the UNFCCC and under World Trade Organization/FTA negotiations. Not doing so in a timely and effectively way will cost industries of

developing countries dearly.

These are the authors' personal views.

10 PEARS AGO



JUST A TEOUCET

Our carbon emissions have to eventually go to zero. We have to. Otherwise we're never going to have a stable climate and that's what our goal is for human civilization to thrive, a stable climate.

KATHARINE HAYHOE

THEIR VIEW

IPL cricket is a fine example of free-market capitalism

MADAN SABNAVIS



is chief economist at Bank of Baroda and author of 'Corporate Quirks: The Darker Side of the Sun'.

he auctions for Indian Premier League (IPL) stars drew a collective exclamation when Mitchell Starc was taken by one of the franchises for ₹24.5 crore, the highest paid for any cricketer. Was this shocking? Yes. Was there something amiss? No. That's because it is the market that decided the price of the player. This is what happens in any market where forces of demand and supply meet. Ten team owners were part of an open and transparent auction that involved a price-discovery process. Welcome to IPL, which epitomizes Adam Smith's theory of free-market capitalism.

The set-up is analogous to how the corporate sector operates. Just like we have shareholders who repose faith in a company, so it is with the people who form audiences in stadiums or watch matches on TV screens and hand-held devices. They do not own teams, but their presence is essential for these tournaments to take place, as this ecosystem exists for them. Sponsors are willing to sponsor as they have a committed home

audience. Audiences get what they want, and as long as they are willing to pay for match tickets (which can go up to ₹20,000 a seat), there can be no counter-argument.

Players are like employees in the capitalist world. All of us get entertainment on a daily basis as we go home and watch IPL matches after office hours. These players play continuously for almost two months and burn out easily, just as employees do at work. Their burn-out is through injury more often than not. But all are paid very well, which is what motivates them to play. The same happens in the corporate world, where employees are made to work endlessly and compensated with bonuses and stock options. There is a lot of travel involved for executives across cities and countries, where they reside in the best hotels. The same holds for cricketers, who need to travel every second day from one city to another. This is the free market place at work, as no one forces anyone to play the game.

At times, bidding for a team player can resemble an initial public offering (IPO). A new entrant to a team (either fresh or from another side) fits the bill. The franchise pays a huge sum (the share premium over the minimum bidding price) to get the player, but the cricketer could still misfire at listing

time (actual match performance). The media will pass snide remarks, while supporters take umbrage, but nothing can be done for the season. Again, it is the market at work. The movement of players from one team to another is more like staff attrition, with better terms making one migrate. Of course, some players are dropped for alternatives.

A free-market economy

Jaw-dropping

for alternatives.

A free-market economy is open to foreign investors pitching their products to consumers. That's how we got McDonald's, Nike, Adidas, Pizza Hut and so on. IPL has the same model. This form of capitalist cricket also gets the best foreign names. Think of Williamson, Warner, Boult, Starc, Cummins, etc. Old brands like Ponting, Sangarakara and Rhodes

have also been with the IPL—first as players and now as coaches or commentators.

A twist is the introduction of an 'impact

A twist is the introduction of an 'impact player,' much like how multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in India customize products to serve domestic preferences. Hence, like the famous McAloo Tikki

burger, an India-centric creation, players get substituted during the match to enhance the team's performance.

Just as analysts and economists pontificate on how one should read markets and the economy, there are experts who analyse every over that is bowled. This is on a sports

bids for players

are driven by

market forces,

just as the mass

enthusiasm for

gaming apps is

and not business channel, though; that's the difference. Newspapers have at least one full page dedicated to what transpired the previous day, with descriptions and analyses, just like we follow articles on GDP growth or inflation. The forward-looking guidance given by experts for a match to be played the next day is similar to the market forecasts we see on

business pages.
Free-market capitalism also gives birth to advertising, which can be extreme at times. As long as the broad rules are followed, like no overt advertising for tobacco or liquor, everything is acceptable in the world of double standards. While we have the Reserve Bank of India and Securities and Exchange Board of India trying their

best to ensure that retail investors are not misinformed, there are no such rules once we cross this boundary. Hence, a former cricketer of the Indian team who also runs a school for children seems to see nothing amiss in doing surrogate ads for a tobaccobased mouth freshener. Such products are also endorsed by two 'great' former Indian team members, as well as a West Indian batsman. Not to mention two Bollywood stars.

As determined by the market, we have also seen the rise of gaming apps, where anyone can create an imaginary team and hope for financial rewards. The law takes a view that this is not gambling, but gaming, as it involves skill! Hence, we see captains of IPL franchises appearing on TV screens every few overs to encourage viewers to participate and win big on another pitch, online. There are cautionary riders for the attentive, but the impact has been tremendous, as millions are hooked on to these games.

Hence, IPL best exemplifies capitalism. The market decides everything. Those who are not in favour can drop out, as there is no compulsion. The stakes are high and much value is created along the way, as food-delivery services, bars, hotels, travel services, garments and other businesses boom.

These are the author's personal views.



THEIR VIEW

China will confront the dreaded middle-income trap this decade

Lofty statements and reform mantras mean little for its troubled economy. What matters are the actual policies it pursues



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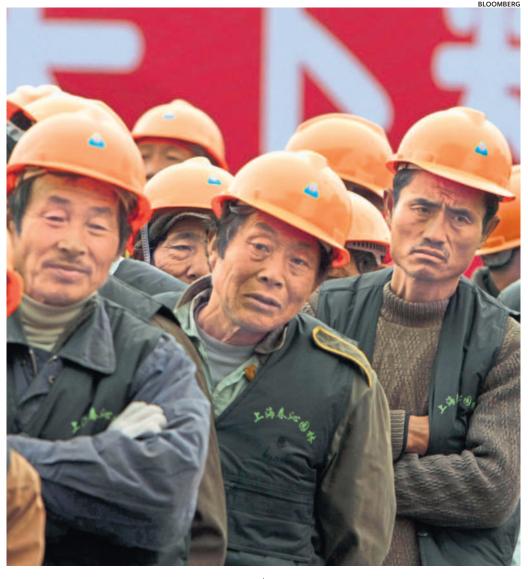
t this year's China Development Forum (the highest-level annual meeting between senior Chinese policymakers and top CEOs, current and former policymakers, and academics like me), the discussion focused squarely on the risk of China falling into the dreaded 'middle-income trap.' After all, few emerging economies have successfully joined the ranks of high-income countries.

Will China be an exception to this pattern? Following 30-plus years in which China achieved annual growth rates close to 10%, its economy has slowed sharply this decade. Even last year, with a strong rebound from the "zero-covid" era, officially measured growth was only 5.2%. Worse, the International Monetary Fund estimates that China's growth will fall to 3.4% per year by 2028, and, given its current policies, many analysts expect its potential growth rate to be only 3% by the end of this decade. If that happens, China will indeed find itself in the middle-income trap.

Moreover, China's problems are structural, rather than cyclical. Among other factors, its slow $down\,is\,due\,to\,rapid\,ageing, a\,burst\,real-estate$ bubble, a massive overhang of private and public debt (now close to 300% of GDP), and a shift from market-oriented reforms back towards state capitalism. Credit-fuelled investment has grown excessive as state-owned banks lend to stateowned enterprises (SOEs) and local governments. Also, Beijing has been bashing China's tech sector and other private enterprises, eroding business confidence and private investment.

In this new period of de-globalization and protectionism, China appears to have hit the limits to export-led growth. The West's geopolitically motivated technology sanctions are constraining the growth of its high-tech sectors and reducing inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI); and the combination of a high domestic household savings rate and low consumption rate (owing to weak social insurance and the low share of household income) is further hampering growth.

The old Chinese growth model is broken. Initially, China's low (and thus internationally competitive) wages meant it could rely on light manufacturing and exports, before pursuing massive investments in infrastructure and real estate. Now. Chinese authorities are advocating high-quality growth based on technologically advanced manufacturing and exports (electric vehicles, solar panels and other green- and hightech products) led by financial incentives to already-bloated SOEs. But without a matching increase in domestic demand-especially private consumption—over-investment in these sectors could lead to over-capacity and the dumping of these products in global markets.



China's excess supply (relative to domestic demand) is already producing deflationary pressures, heightening the risk of secular stagnation. When China was smaller and poorer, a sharp increase in its exports was manageable in global markets. But now that it is the world's secondlargest economy, any dumping of its excess production will be met by more draconian tariffs and protectionism targeting Chinese goods.

China therefore needs a new growth model concentrated on domestic services (rather than goods) and private consumption. Services as a share of GDP are too low by global standards, and though Chinese policymakers continue to talk about boosting domestic demand, they seem unwilling to adopt the fiscal and other policies required to boost private consumption and reduce precautionary household savings. The situation demands larger pension benefits, greater health-care provision, unemployment insurance, permanent urban residency for rural migrant workers who currently lack access to public services, higher real (inflation-adjusted) wages, and measures to redistribute SOE profits to households so that they can spend more.

While China obviously needs to boost privatesector confidence and revive growth with a more sustainable economic model, it is not clear that Chinese leaders fully appreciate the challenges they face. While President Xi Jinping has overseen the move back to state capitalism over the last decade, Premier Li Qiang, a known marketoriented reformer, appears to have been sidelined. Li neither held the customary press conference following the recent National People's Congress, nor met with the full foreign delegation at the latest China Development Forum. Instead, Xi himself hosted a smaller delegation of foreign

The most charitable interpretation of these signals is that Xi now realizes he needs to engage the private sector and international multinational corporations to restore their confidence and boost FDI, private sector-led growth and private consumption. Since Li is still around, perhaps he is pushing quietly for "opening-up and reforms," while keeping a low profile to show deference to Xi.

But many observers have a more pessimistic interpretation. They note that after sidelining market-oriented technocrats such as Li, former Premier Li Keqiang, former People's Bank of China Governor Yi Gang, advisers like Liu He and Wang Qishan, and a variety of financial regulators, Xi has created new party panels on economic and financial affairs that supersede government bodies. He has surrounded himself with advisors like He Lifeng, the vice-premier for the economy, and Zheng Shanjie, the new head of the National Development and Reform Commission, who are sympathetic to the obsolete dogma of state capitalism.

Lofty statements and mantras about reforms and attracting foreign investment mean little. What matters are the actual policies that China pursues over the next year, which will show whether it can circumvent the middleincome trap and return to the path of more robust growth. ©2024/PROJECT SYNDICATE MINT CURATOR

Tesla must launch cheap EVs but Musk's talking of robotaxis

Autonomous cars are still a dream but Tesla's sales slump is real



is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering

he great thing about X, the rebranded Twitter owned by Elon Musk, is its frictionless capacity for escalation. Let's back up to several hours before that post on what was a bizarre Friday even by the standards of Tesla and its chief executive officer. Late that morning, a Reuters story, citing several unnamed sources and internal messages, reported that Tesla has scrapped plans for a cheaper electric vehicle (EV) dubbed 'Model 2.' Tesla's stock dropped by more than 5% in short order. Soon after, Musk replied to a tweet noting the story, accusing the news agency of "lying (again)." The stock made back some lost ground, but still ended the day down 3.6%. Less than an hour after that, Musk tweeted again with an announcement. Tesla's stock jumped in after-hours trading.

I cannot speak to the accuracy of the Reuters piece; Musk's accusation of lying came with no specifics. His reaction as a whole is interesting, though.

Tesla walking away from the low-priced EV model would be a bombshell; hence the immediate drop in the stock. Only on Tesla's last earnings call, in late January, Musk had provided a tentative date for first production in the second half of 2025, saving of the low-cost project that "this is really going to be profound, not just in [the] design of the vehicle itself, but in the design of the manufacturing system."

Moreover, gathering evidence of a slowdown in Tesla's sales, culminating in shockingly weak figures for the first quarter released last week, points to the need for a cheaper model that could expand the company's market meaningfully. Any other company faced with a media report calling into question one of its biggest strategic initiatives might be tempted to issue a detailed rebuttal rather than just a one-line tweet from the boss, but Tesla is

More intriguing was Musk's upping the ante with that later tweet promising a robotaxi reveal in 125 days. For one thing, the Reuters story reported that a big reason for ditching the low-cost EV was to focus resources on developing a Tesla robotaxi. I like to think that if I wanted to demonstrate that a story claiming I had ditched my plans for a cheap EV in order to build a robotaxi was incorrect, I would avoid that same day suddenly announcing the imminent unveiling of a robotaxi.

There is much context to consider. Friday's drama closed out a bad week for Tesla. The big miss on sales, below even the lowest analyst forecast tracked by



Tesla boss Elon Musk hasn't been clear about the EV-maker's game plan

Bloomberg, tees up not just a poor set of first-quarter results but also, potentially, a year where sales either barely grow or actually drop-a big problem for a growth stock. Musk, in his own way, forewarned of the miss by previously announcing a big push on upselling buyers to Tesla's full self-driving (FSD) system; signalling a need to support sagging margins, explain slower sales and, perhaps above all, keep investors focused on the company's touted artificial intelligence chops.

The mooted robotaxi unveiling is in keeping with this. Musk has been claiming that a Tesla robotaxi—meaning a vehicle that can safely drive itself while the user snoozes or tweets or whatever-is around the corner since at least 2016, including a rousing analyst day dedicated to the theme in 2019.

It is 2024 now and full self-driving, despite the name, is decidedly not that; Musk even felt the need to caveat it with a 'supervised" in the recent tweet announcing the big push on sign-ups. However, the idea that Tesla will crack autonomous driving is the key to having its stock trade on a tech-like earnings multiple north of 50 times, rather than closer to a Detroitlike 5 times. That is especially so when Tesla is doing distinctly Detroit-like things, such as offering discounts to clear a swelling backlog of inventory.

I have no doubt that something will be unveiled on 8 August. As with Musk's riposte to the original story on Friday, his after-market announcement lacked details. Perhaps, finally, despite all the false starts and missed deadlines, Tesla will reveal a car that can actually drive itself from Los Angeles to New York and then park itself-a vision Musk touted when Barack Obama was still US president. Perhaps not. Maybe it will be something else. Unveiling the physical design for a robotaxi—pending the actual roll-out of fully autonomous capabilities and regulatory approval, you understand—is also one potential outcome.

For the Tesla faithful, that could be enough. For everyone else, it might be worth remembering that Elon Musk has been known, at a moment of stress on Tesla and himself, to tweet the odd grandiose, less-than-concrete claim. Robotaxis secured?

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

Aadhaar-based age tokens can solve a privacy problem

RAHUL MATTHAN



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mong the more worrisome provisions of India's new Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, is Section 9 that imposes an obligation on all data fiduciaries to obtain a parent's verifiable consent before they process the personal data of a child. What this means is that, before collecting any personal data, businesses will have to ascertain whether the person to whom it relates is a child or not.

This, if you think about it, is an onerous obligation that will likely have far greater consequences than legislators intended. In order to know whether or not the personal data they are processing pertains to a child, data fiduciaries will have to verify the age of every person they interact with. In an entirely online world, there is no way to do this without introducing friction and exposing more personal information than is advisable.

The best way to assure oneself of the age of the person is by validating it using some form of reliable identity documentationideally a document that has been issued by the government. Which seems to suggests that in order to comply with their obligations under the DPDP Act, online services will have to ask everyone who uses their services to first produce identity documents before they can proceed.

This, as you can imagine, will break the internet as we know it. Today, we think nothing of flitting from one website to another by simply clicking on hyperlinks that allow us to navigate wherever our fancy takes us. In the age-verification future that Section 9 describes, each such click will shunt us into an age-verification pit-stop where we will have to confirm our identity before being allowed to view whatever it is that website has to offer.

Yet, as bad as this friction is, that is not what worries me. What I am really concerned about is the fact that in the process of protecting our children from harm, we might have given data businesses something they have sought for a really long time—an excuse to legally collect information on us that can, better than anything else, uniquely target us with their algorithms.

It is probably worth pointing out at this stage that, around the world, concerns over the amount of inappropriate information children are being exposed to has been mounting. Many countries have already begun to enact laws to address this—some of which, like the UK's Children Online Harms Act, have even put in place age-gating obligations similar to those in the DPDP Act. All of which is to say that, as extreme as it | though not intended to serve as canonical sounds, Section 9 is not as

much of an outlier as we might have thought. There is almost universal agreement on the need to protect children online. To do that, we must iden-

tify them as children. But how do we do so in a way that protects not only their personal privacy, but everyone else's as well?

One answer might be to use zero-knowledge proofs (ZKPs), which are cryptographic computational techniques that mathematically confirm a

given fact without disclosing the personal information that would otherwise have been necessary for that purpose. All it will take is for us to generate a digital token that, when processed using a ZKP, will confirm that the person is above the prescribed age without sharing any other personal information. This will allow us to verify the age of internet users while still preserving privacy

Aadhaar is a digital system that offers a unique identity to everyone in India. The system includes an age field that, even

Age-gating

under India's

new privacy law

needn't mean

websites asking

for our personal

documents

proof of age, could be used for age-verification. All we need is for the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to generate a token for each Aadhaarholder that could, when passed through a suitable ZKP system, confirm whether or not the possessor of that token is above the prescribed age.

It should be possible to generate this ZKP token on the UIDAI website in much the same way as we gener-

ate virtual IDs today. Once in possession of such a token, all a user needs to do is present it whenever access is needed to a new website or online service, so that one's age can be proven as appropriate without having to reveal any other identifying information. Where a child is looking to access a service, all the website needs is the token of a parent who is provably above the prescribed age. While the solution I have presented uses Aadhaar, the same functionality can be built using just about any digital identity system that offers proof of age.

Token-based solutions address privacy concerns around age-gating. Set up right, they can also reduce the friction implicit in any age-gating implementation. If ZKP tokens are designed in a way so that they can easily be uploaded to one's internet browser, all a data fiduciary would have to do is run the browser token through the ZKP system to ascertain whether the user is of an appropriate age. This could take place in the background, so that the data fiduciary not only gets to verify the user's age without accessing her personal information, it can do so without affecting the user experience.

While India's digital identity system gives it a relative advantage over other countries, allowing us to implement this sort of a tokenized solution at scale, ZKP tokens can be used to address age-verification problems anywhere in the world. In their search for solutions to fulfil obligations under India's new data protection law, Indian companies could well find answers to a problem that the whole world is eager to solve.

WORDLY WISE

NEPOTISM IS THE LOWEST AND LEAST IMAGINATIVE FORM OF CORRUPTION.

— DANIEL ALARCÓN

The Indian EXPRESS

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽ RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TO BE A DOCTOR

Predicament of Indian medical students in Ukraine highlights gaps and absences in education system at home

N FEBRUARY 2022, 18,000 Indian medical students studying in Ukraine were forced to return home after the country's conflict with Russia escalated into a war. As a onetime exception, India's medical education regulator, the National Medical Commission, allowed 4,000 of these students, who were in their final semesters, to complete their internship at home. With tensions between Russia and Ukraine showing little sign of abating, countries in Central Asia, Eastern and Southeastern Europe have become the preferred destination for a large number of the repatriated students. According to a report in this newspaper, 70 per cent of these MBBS aspirants are now pursuing their dreams in colleges in Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Georgia. These countries are also attracting new batches of Indian students. These developments also point to the deficits in the Indian medical education system.

In July last year, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya told Lok Sabha that India added more than 220 medical colleges in the last five years. The number of medical seats grew more than 60 per cent to 1,07,950. However, medical college seats are still far less than the number of aspirants who leave school with the dream of becoming a doctor. Last year, for instance, more than two million students took the NEET examination for entrance to MBBS courses. In other words, the ratio of medical college seats to aspirants is about 20:1. The need to offer more opportunities to students who seek a medical career cannot be more pressing. A 2019 study by researchers commissioned by the National Institute of Educational Planning revealed that a large section of students who migrate for medical education come from aspirational middle and lower middle classes, including those from rural areas. NEET figures attest to the increase in the aspirational quotient of the medical profession — the number of students taking the test has increased almost three times in the past 10 years. But the examination remains extremely brutal — only the top 0.25 per cent make it to the elite colleges. Government institutions are more affordable than those run by private bodies, but they account for only about half of the seats on offer.

Experts have suggested a variety of ways out of the problem. In 2020, the Niti Aayog proposed linking private colleges to district hospitals to serve underserved areas. Another school of thought advocates enhancing the skills of paramedics and nurses to cater to nonspecialist demands of the medical sector. In other words, tweaks in medical pedagogy could significantly increase the numbers of the professionals, equivalents of the general practitioners today. Several European countries have deployed this strategy with great success. Moreover, MBBS graduates from foreign institutes have to undergo another rigorous test to practice in India. In several parts of Europe, in contrast, the transfer of credits ensures a relatively easier transition to hospital internship for migrants. In recent years, the government has initiated conversations to reform the educational landscape. It should conduct similar exercises to address the absences and shortfalls in medical education.

A HIGH POINT

Sensex crosses 75,000 mark as investor confidence sustains. But there are concerns over valuations

N TUESDAY, THE BSE Sensex went past the 75,000 mark, hitting a high of 75,124. While markets fell thereafter, ending the day down 0.08 per cent, the surge in the recent past has been staggering — the Sensex has risen almost 25 per cent over the past year. On Monday, the combined market capitalisation of the BSE listed firms crossed Rs 400 lakh crore. This rally is not limited to the larger companies — the BSE Midcap index is up almost 67 per cent over the past year, while the Smallcap index is also up 65 per cent.

There are several possible triggers for this rally. For one, economic growth momentum has been healthy. In the third quarter of 2023-24, the economy grew at 8.4 per cent, surpassing most forecasts. In its second advance estimates of national income, the National Statistical Office raised its expectations of growth for the full year to 7.6 per cent. There are some who argue that even this may well turn out to be an underestimate with stronger growth in the fourth quarter. The momentum is expected to continue holding up in the ongoing financial year as well, with the RBI projecting the economy to grow at 7 per cent. There are also expectations of strong corporate earnings in the fourth quarter (January-March) of 2023-24 — the earnings season will now commence — especially in sectors like banks and auto manufacturers. There are hopes that central banks in developed countries will begin to ease policy rates. For instance, the US Federal Reserve is expected to begin cutting rates in its June meeting. The minutes of the Federal Open Market committee (FOMC) meeting, which will be released on Wednesday, will provide clues. There is also the possibility of monetary policy easing in India with food prices likely to ease. Food inflation has so far been a source of concern — the consumer food price index stood at 8.66 per cent in February. However, the likelihood of La Nina, the chance of healthy output, raises the odds of food inflation declining. Considering that core inflation has eased to 3.4 per cent, falling food inflation would create space for the RBI's monetary policy committee to cut rates.

With general elections around the corner, investors may also be factoring in prospects of policy continuity. Markets have in the past seen strong pre-election rallies. There are, however, concerns over valuations. The Sensex is currently trading at a price-to-earnings ratio of 25.54 — this is higher than the average between 2014-15 and 2023-24.

WEALTH, GUARANTEED

The simplest — and oldest — get-rich-quick scheme rears its head among the world's youngest billionaires

OING BY THE tech bros, overly-optimistic podcasters and even the odd selfhelp book, there are many ways to become independently wealthy, a "job creator" even, and in some cases, just stinking rich. They will tell you to "innovate" and "disrupt the market", to "hustle" and "grind", to be a tech genius

and street smart, all at once. But, as it turns out, there's an easier way to acquire wealth. It is simple, old-fashioned and has been around as long as there have been haves and have-

nots. And it's something of an open secret, but one that no wealth guru will talk about. Here it is, then, a sure-fire way to make money: Inherit it. Forbes magazine has revealed that all billionaires under 30 — there are 15 of them in the world today — have done the hard work of having the right last names. The list includes Firoz (27) and Zahan Mistry (25), who inherited Cyrus Mistry's share in the Tata group, reportedly worth \$4.6 billion. The youngest billionaire, Livia Voigt, owes her \$1.1 billion fortune to WEG Industries, the Brazilian electrical equipment giant founded by her grandfather. The number of young billionaires is set to grow. A generation of wealthy moguls, aged 70 and above, are set to

pass on over \$5 trillion to their descendants over the next 20-30 years. There's nothing wrong with generational wealth, a corpus so large that it can preclude the need to work. And more than likely, anger at the uber-rich stems at least in part from jealousy. After all, envy is the most natural of emotions for the vast majority that works massively hard to make ends meet and afford the smallest luxury. The once and future oligarchs, of course, are plain lucky — and good luck, like misfortune, is an accident of fate. Just one request to the finance gurus and tech bros imparting wisdom, as they write their wills — spare the working man and woman the lectures about how to get rich.

The troubled campus



When expectations are realistic, viable alternatives are valued, unhappiness in institutions like IITs will fade

Anindya Chatterjee

SEVERAL RECENT STUDENT suicides in premier institutes have pointed to an underlying problem that requires attention. Each such student suicide is a tragedy. A recent report in The Indian Express covered steps being taken in IIT Delhi to help students who may be "academically adrift."

Institutes try to help in various ways student volunteers who watch out for troubled students; counsellors and psychiatrists to help these students; extensions granted to students for their degree completion; tutoring for troubled students; sometimes allowing close relatives to stay on campus; and lowering graduation requirements (for example, from a GPA of 5 to 4). But these steps address the symptom, not the cause.

Let me offer an analogy. Suppose heart disease becomes common in a country. We must surely open new cardiology units in more hospitals. But we can also act more broadly: What lifestyle issues, dietary habits, environmental pollutants, stressful circumstances, exercise profiles, etc., cause the heart disease?

Behind the small percentage of suicides, which are terrible, there is a broader range of less extreme unhappiness. The entire system is troubled.

In the public consciousness, IITs are famous for jobs, not for education. The press reports astronomical starting salaries, not excellent teaching. Parents of potential students seem blind to the hard statistical truth: Only a tiny percentage of JEE candidates will get in, and only a tiny fraction of those will earn the astronomical salaries. A direct consequence of this apparent blindness is the extreme competition to get in.

The competition takes a toll. Many students enter coaching centres at a tender age. Away from their families, they are insulated from some aspects of family life. Away from general society, they are insulated from some aspects of social life. They are surrounded by competitors rather than friends. They are taught only one measure of worth, namely success on the entrance exam. Their coaching years, spanning their early teens, keep human relations, and even from the idea that there may be other ways of measuring human value. Do a thought experiment. Suppose, hypothetically, that the IEE decides to reward candidates with a social conscience. That social conscience is to be demonstrated through something selfless, namely donat-

them isolated from social and moral aspects

of cause and effect, from the give and take of

previous year will receive five extra marks on the JEE. I think our blood banks will be full. Why do parents put their children through this brutalisation that masquerades as academics? Because no other stream and college offers such an early guarantee of a reasonable career outcome. That is the real-

ity of our external world.

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ing blood. And so, imagine that any candi-

date who donated one litre of blood in the

Consequently, many of our undergraduate students are unhappy. How could they not be? They spend their early teens being soldiers instead of adolescents, dreaming typically of "computer science at IIT Bombay" followed by "one crore plus". If they end up studying, for example, mechanical engineering at IIT Kanpur (my academic home), they think they have failed. They face subjects developed by giants like Gauss, Newton and Euler, and they realise that their JEE training has taught them very little. They realise that their starting salary is likely to be far below their initial dreams. Moreover, within the IIT system, they become average. Their parents usually understand little beyond comparing starting salaries. And their seniors, with no career experience, tell them to de-emphasise the traditional subjects, to learn coding, and to seek "positions of responsibility" in student festivals. Their placement office ranks potential employers based solely on the starting salary. And finally, news filters back from recent graduates about the jobs being boring, and people in their 40s being laid off.

Now consider our postgraduate students. Those often come from smaller colleges, having been even less successful in the JEE race; and are often at a disadvantage when they take tough courses alongside our undergraduates. Their placement prospects are poorer too. So, they too are unhappy. Our incoming PhD students often have poor research preparation; they think the PhD is a "course," and face their own set of troubles within our imperfect system.

All in all, the unhappiness in our premier institutes is largely a consequence of known circumstances, some of which can be fixed. We must help parents, students, and the world in general understand what an IITian's realistic prospects are, and what a career can be.

We must engage with the press to describe actual careers and cut the hype. We must engage with parents to help them understand more. We must have career offices, not placement offices. We must have smaller classrooms, where teachers know individual students again. We must have kind and wise adults on campus whom the students can chat with: Such adults are rarer now because faculty members are under increasing pressure to get grants, guide PhDs, and publish research. We must find tutors for troubled undergraduate students not from other undergraduates, but from senior PhD students who tutor students in small groups. We might (dare I say it?) restrict student festivals to a smaller number of music concerts per year, and instead have more locations and time slots for general technical discussions with tutors where, perhaps, light snacks and soft drinks are provided.

The institute is a place of learning, not a placement agency. When expectations are realistic, when viable alternatives are recognised and valued, and when our stakeholders have more faith in education itself, perhaps the unhappiness in our campuses can begin to fade.

> The writer is a professor of mechanical engineering, IIT Kanpur, and author of Build and sustain a career in engineering. Views are personal



Don't Blame The Elites

They ask questions that political leaders have no answers to

DILIP D'SOUZA

THERE'S A CERTAIN irony, I've always felt, in finger-wagging that's directed at some supposed "elite" by someone who belongs to the same elite. I felt that very sense of irony while reading Aditya Puri's recent article, 'Listen to the people' (IE, April 4).

Consider: He muses about a certain "intellectualism", wondering if it is "disconnected from reality". He suggests that the "correct question" to ask is whether "the intellectuals are listening to the people". He observes that there's a "backlash against elites" around the world, and "we need to ask why". And with that foundation, he weaves an apparently persuasive argument about the politics that surrounds us these days. The friend who pointed me to Puri's effort did so with these words: "Here's a reasonable article from an eminent man."

Yet, it seems to me that this reasonable article could do with a closer examination, maybe teasing out its own connection

with reality. Start by asking about these "governing elites" who Puri claims have embraced a "politics which is only about economics and ignores equitable and sustainable growth and cultural and religious issues". Now pretty much every single government that India has had has talked up such themes as growth for all, the fight against poverty, the right to education and more. Most of them have also talked up such cultural and religious issues as caste, a temple, personal laws, and more. They have had varying degrees of success plenty of outright failures too — in these pur-

INDIAN EXPRESS

It's true, there has been a backlash against elites. In our country certainly, but in others too, large swathes of people feel they have missed these buses named 'development' and 'progress'. As they see it, jobs are hard to find, prices rise, education and healthcare are poor, justice is out of reach, and through it all, the rich get steadily richer. The frustration of these

suits. But that they practised their politics using these themes is incontestable. In other words, politics in India has never been "only about economics". That Puri claims the opposite makes me wonder what country he has really been living in.

But it's true, there has been a backlash against elites. In our country certainly, but in others too, large swathes of people feel they have missed these buses named "development" and "progress". As they see it, jobs are hard to find, prices rise, education and healthcare are poor, justice is out of reach, and through it all, the rich get steadily richer. The frustration of these swathes builds.

Who is to blame for all this? The "intellectual elites"? But it's exactly these issues that they have been raising for decades now. It's what the intellectual elites in any society do, because they have the voice and resources to do so.

Inevitably, along come populist leaders who are acutely aware of two things. First, that many of their predecessors have lacked the political will to really address these issues, not just talk about them; and second, they have no particular ideas themselves about how to address these issues. So they direct blame for such failures back at the elites. Of course elites must be "out of touch", of course they are not "listening to the people". Naturally, the large swathes mentioned earlier must aim their wrath at these folks who are so "out of touch". And right on cue, enough of the elite will

themselves regurgitate this rhetoric. Having done so, they turn to a "vision"

for the country that, for them, this PM has articulated. Well, what I see in this "vision" is a collage of something like this: A temple consecrated by the PM, critics punished, minorities made to feel like inferior citizens, corruption charges forgotten by the simple act of joining his party — I could go on. This may not be what Puri discerns. It may also be that there are enough people who admire this vision anyway. My point here is that

there are a lot of us who don't. Still, for Puri, the flip side of what he thinks the PM is envisioning is that the Opposition has not similarly articulated its own vision for India. Yet, I think it has, and these are some parts of that collage: A hearing for every voice, attention to the needs of the poor, respect for every faith, justice for all Indians, I could go on again. And again, this may not be what Puri discerns. But there are a lot of us who believe in this vision, in an India that will sincerely address these themes. And we think India will be a better country for doing so.

In the end, that is the question that faces us today, whether we are intellectuals or ordinary people: What will make us a better country?

If trying to answer that question means I belong to some elite that Puri disparages, I don't particularly care. But he should never think that I will stop trying to answer it.

> D'Souza is the author, most recently, of Roadwalker: A Few Miles on the Bharat Jodo Yatra

APRIL 10, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO Liberation Organisation under the leader-

BHATINDA BLAST

swathes builds.

THREE PERSONS WERE killed and two seriously injured in the last 24 hours as terrorist activity continued unabated in Punjab. Jawan Chander Bhushan Pandey was killed and watchman Bhagat Bahadur was seriously injured when a high-powered bomb was lobbed into a place of worship at Bhatinda. The watchman was admitted to the hospital where he was said to be out of danger.

INDIA BACKS PLO

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of India and the Advocate-General of Andhra

EENADU EDITOR FREE

THE CONSTITUTION BENCH of the Supreme

Court issued notice to the Attorney-General

ship of Yasser Arafat. Mrs Gandhi told the PLO regarding the discussion on the abolition of chief that it was most important at this time the Upper House. for the Arab nations to maintain their unity and to achieve greater cohesion in PLO ranks.

BORDER TENSION

WHILE TENSION IS mounting on the India-Bangladesh border following the proposal for the barbed-wire fencing, Bangladesh rejected Indian High Commissioner I P Khosla's claim that a large number of Bangladeshis were crossing over to India. He said "it is a well-established fact that there has not been any migration from Bangladesh into India since the independence of Bangladesh" in 1971.

the House for a report published in the paper

THE PRIME MINISTER, Mrs Indira Gandhi, reiterated India's full support to the Palestine

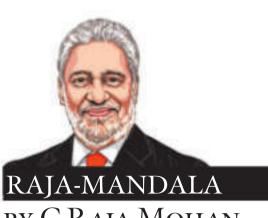
Pradesh on the writ petition filed by the Eenadu editor, Ramoji Rao. Meanwhile, the order of the Supreme Court not to arrest Rao will continue. The legislative council last month had found him guilty of breach of privilege of

- DAWN. PAKISTAN

THE IDEAS PAGE

An elusive grand bargain

Imperatives for the US and China to engage are real. So are the contradictions between Washington and Beijing



BY C RAJA MOHAN

WHEN THE JOE Biden administration described its China strategy as "responsible competition", many analysts in India and beyond dismissed it as mission impossible. The administration insisted that it would cooperate with China where possible and challenge it where it must. President Biden also affirmed that he would do the utmost to prevent the vigorous competition with China from becoming a dangerous conflict. This, in turn, has involved an element of sustained high-level engagement.

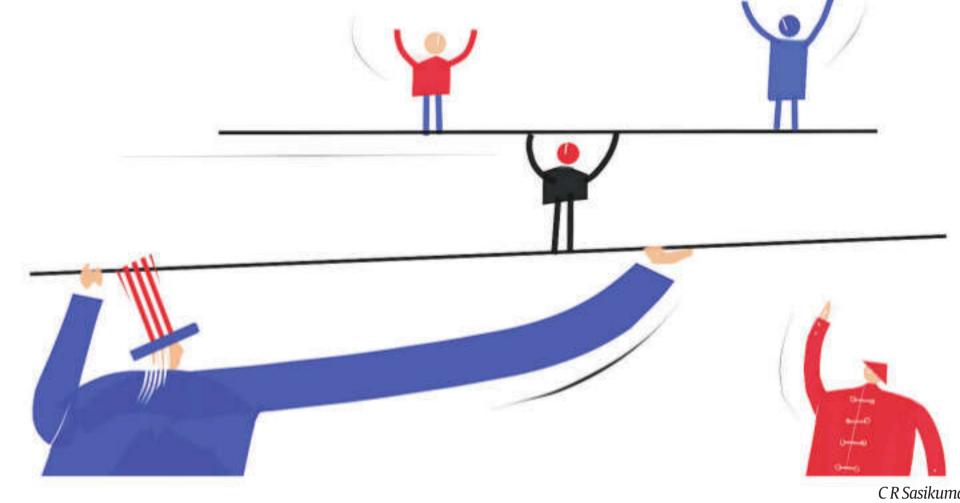
For many in the Indian strategic community, maintaining a balance between competition and cooperation is unsustainable. They worry that the engagement track will prevail at the expense of America's friends and partners and in favour of Beijing. To be sure, as a power far away from Asia and facing no direct threats from China, there will always be reasons for the US to find an accommodation with China. As the world's largest economies with massive interdependence and as leading military powers, their imperatives to engage are real. So are the contradictions between Washington and Beijing.

The growing sense of economic threat from China and the prospect that Beijing is trying to nudge America out of Asia has brought Washington together on the idea of pushing back. This is one of the few things that Democrats and Republicans agree on — the difference is on how hard to push back. Sections of the Republican Party scoff at the idea of engagement and insist on rolling back Chinese influence and ousting the Chinese Communist Party from power. While uncertainty about how Trump might deal with China is real, for now, the story is about Biden's "responsible competition" with China. Several current developments involving the US and China give us a sense of this strategy.

Let's first turn to the dynamic of engagement. Last week, we saw a long telephone call between Biden and the Chinese leader Xi Jinping. This is part of the high-level communication between the two sides that began in Bali at the end of 2022 on the margins of the G20 summit. President Xi visited the US to attend the San Francisco summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum last November when the two sides announced the intent to stabilise the bilateral relationship, open up military contacts and initiate talks on regulating artificial intelligence and counter-narcotics.

This week, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is on an extended tour of China. Considered a strong supporter of free trade and positive economic engagement with China, Yellen is trying to convey a twin message to Beijing: That the US is interested in a mutually beneficial economic relationship with China, but will not countenance Beijing's attempt to dominate emerging technology sectors such as solar panels and electricity vehicles. She is also suggesting if China continues to build excess capacity in these sectors, the US will be compelled to impose new tariffs.

Let us now turn to the other side — competition. This week President Biden is hosting the Japanese Prime Minister on a state visit to the White House. Fumio Kishida is



C R Sasikumar

the third leader of the Quad to receive this special welcome under the Biden presidency. The two other state visits were from South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and French President Emmanuel Macron. The short list of state visits indicates the continuing strategic importance Biden attaches to the Indo-Pacific, despite the war in the heart of Europe.

Biden's summit with Kishida will unveil a range of measures to deepen the militarytechnological partnership between the US and Japan. This would involve greater integration of the military structures of the two nations, more intensive defence-industrial collaboration, and wider advanced technology cooperation.

Under Kishida, Japan has emerged as the lynchpin of Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy and has promised to significantly raise its defence budget and develop new capabilities to deter China, North Korea, and Russia. The new and assertive security role of Asia's secondlargest economy marks Tokyo's pivot away from entrenched post-war pacifism and an important structural change in post-war Asian geopolitics.

Beyond strengthening the bilateral security partnership with Japan, the US wants Tokyo to become a part of the AUKUS initiative — the planned advanced technology partnership between Australia, the UK and the US — unveiled in 2021. The first pillar of the AUKUS arrangement involves the transfer of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines from Washington and London to Canberra. Japan, with its strong anti-nuclear orientation, will not be part of it.

But Tokyo is likely to emerge as a valuable addition to the second pillar of AUKUS, which is looking to jointly develop advanced military technologies. These include hypersonic, underwater, cyber, AI, and quantum computing technologies. Japan is expected to bring its excellent scientific and technical skills and manufacturing prowess to develop and retain the lead over China.

Drawing Japan into AUKUS is part of the Biden administration's strategy to look beyond bilateral alliances and draw its friends and partners into a range of overlapping minilateral institutions. India is familiar with the Quad arrangement that brings India into regional collaboration with Australia, Japan, and the United States. Minilateralism is now becoming part of the Asian security landscape amidst the inability of the regional multilateral mechanisms led by the ASEAN to cope with the changing regional geopolitical dynamic.

Japanese and South Korean leaders to encourage stronger trilateral strategic collaboration and encourage Seoul and Tokyo to set aside their nationalist disputes over history and territory. The Biden administration has also set up the so-called "Chip Four" alliance that brings the world's major producers of semiconductors — Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and the United States. Following the bilateral summit with

Last year, Biden hosted a summit with

Kishida, Biden is hosting a trilateral summit with the President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Biden and Kishida are expected to offer strong support to Marcos, who is standing up to China in the disputed South China Sea. The US is also reinforcing these coalitions by encouraging its Asian friends to develop partnerships with each other with or without direct US participation.

The new approach is about building a web of Asian security networks that pool the region's military resources, enhance deterrence and ensure peace. The US, for example, is asking Japan to expand its security assistance to countries in the Indo-Pacific including the Philippines. It has nudged South Korea to expand advanced technology cooperation with India. The recent visits of External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar to Seoul, Tokyo, Singapore, Manila and Kuala Lumpur have seen India stepping up its own bilateral engagement in East Asia.

The US strategy in the Indo-Pacific is about strengthening its allies, building new partnerships, constructing minilaterals, and promoting independent cooperation between its Asian partners. China's focus instead is on reviving bilateral ties with the US and getting Washington's endorsement of Beijing's primacy in Asia.

While Washington actively courts China's large neighbours, Beijing has yet to make nice to them on political or territorial issues. America's vigorous competition with China delivers greater agency for Beijing's neighbours, including Delhi. Beijing's quest for a grand bargain with Washington for a Chinese sphere of influence in Asia is leaving its neighbours out in the cold. For now, at least, there is little evidence that the Chinese leadership is rethinking its Asian strategy.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and visiting professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

When you share a meal

"If Israel is allowed to continue its provocative behaviour, then the 'next big one'

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

might be closer than we think."

Food, especially during festivals, can unite cultures. There is beauty in the act of breaking bread with strangers



Sadaf Hussain

THE ADAGE "YOU are what you eat" reveals the intimate connection between our diet and identity. The act of sharing meals transcends the idea of food as survival, fostering a sense of security and camaraderie. Yet, the growing trend of dining out, associated with status and sophistication, has eclipsed the intimate act of sharing meals. This transformation is not merely a change in dining preferences but signifies a deeper cultural shift.

Food remains a potent symbol of identity, creating distinctions between "us" and "them". Different kinds of regional foods and food markets are today on the rise, such as Odia food, Naga food, etc. Many chefs (including me) are turning to evocative culinary experiences to revive the flavours and experiences that speak of personal histories and collective memories. But there is also beauty in the act of breaking bread with strangers. And so, many of the iftar heritage walks that I lead through Old Delhi during Ramzan are meant to blur the lines by both creating familiar experiences and sharing them with others.

Festivals in India offer a lens to view the "other". Ramzan is a prime example. It is a time of abstinence, discipline and community. It is a festival that invites people from across religions to partake in a communal dining experience and opens up space for everyone. If you are in Delhi, walk around Purani Dilli, Jamia or Shaheen Bagh for the experience and the food — with a big heart and a big appetite. But to understand food, it is necessary to explore what is consumed, the methods of preparation and the manner of consumption.

The narrative of food as an identity

marker is rife with complexity and conflict. There have been incidents of violence and lynching, such as the 2017 case of Pehlu Khan and the 2015 case of Mohammed Akhlaq. A Zomato order being cancelled because the delivery person happens to be Muslim underscores the grim reality of how dietary choices can become a cause for conflict. The politicisation of food, manifested in the banning of certain meats or the imposition of dietary codes, reveals a troubling inclination towards majoritarianism, often at the expense of minority rights and freedom. When I was younger, it was normal to grill seekh and boti kebabs at home. But these have now been replaced by shammi or chicken tikka kebabs that can be cooked on pans, without creating too much smoke, ensuring that vegetarian neighbours are not alarmed.

Last month, a chef said to me that it was fascinating how Muslims made the best gorma and biryani. I was taken aback because, in my experience, the best gor-

mas have been cooked by non-Muslims from Uttarakhand or Punjab. Similarly, last year during my research on bread, I was surprised to find that most bakers in Afghan bread shops in Delhi are from Bihar. The Kashmiri food joints in Old Delhi are also run by people from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, irrespective of caste. Yet we have strong stereotypes of people from certain communities with regard to their food and culture. If that is not a myopic worldview, what is?

Today, there are sections which emphasise vegetarianism as a key aspect of Hindu identity, undermining the rich diversity and complexity of India's social fabric. Vegetarianism is projected as a virtue, synonymous with cleanliness and higher moral standing, while meat-eating is stigmatised, ignoring the reality that a majority of the Indian population, including various Hindu castes and other minority groups, also partake in meat consumption.

In the past, the judiciary has held that dietary choices are personal. In 2018, while hearing a PIL seeking to ban meat exports, the Supreme Court clarified that it would not dictate dietary choices. But political agendas continue to infringe on personal freedoms, with promises of regulating food choices to garner electoral support.

That variations exist in food habits and customs even within a religious community can be seen in an anecdote recounted by Siobhan Lambert-Hurley in her book Three Centuries of Travel Writing by Muslim Women. Lambert-Hurley, a professor of Global History at the University of Sheffield, wrote about how South Asian Muslims on Haj sometimes tended to differentiate themselves from "other" Muslims — by sneering at the Mecca Sharif's "stinking ghee" for example. A woman from one such group that travelled to Mecca in the early 20th century, Rahil Begum Sherwani (1894 - 1982). founder of the All India Women's Muslim League, exemplified that difference while making a key observation about food identity, and difference. When the other women stood firm on their idea about the ghee, Rahil Begum asked, "Why? Aren't the residents of Mecca human too?" Their answer was definitive: "Human or not everyone has their own habits and tastes.'

Food serves as a powerful bridge between cultures, but only if one is willing to embrace new culinary experiences. During a recent culinary heritage walk to celebrate Ramzan, I encouraged strangers to share their food stories while weaving in details about the fasting practices of Muslims, their rituals, and dietary preferences. It was enlightening to observe the gaps in understanding among participants about each other's cultures. Sharing meals is a crucial step towards appreciating culinary diversity that may also protect food and culinary practices from being politicised. My cuisine may differ from yours, as it may from those in Pakistan, London, or Uganda. But it is in the differences that you can find its universal appeal.

Hussain is a chef and writer

Laws for a better climate

in East Asia.

The new approach is about

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cooperation with India. The

Subrahmanyam Jaishankar

to Seoul, Tokyo, Singapore,

Manila and Kuala Lumpur

have seen India stepping up

its own bilateral engagement

South Korea to expand

recent visits of External

advanced technology

Affairs Minister

Pacific including the

building a web of Asian

the region's military

SC ruling isn't enough. Legislation needs a more holistic vision

Prathiksha Ullal and Sneha Priya Yanappa

IN WHAT CAN be termed as one of the most significant rulings on climate change, the Supreme Court has recognised that there is no single legislation in India that relates to climate change and allied concerns. Although the Court goes to the extent of discussing the right against adverse effects of climate change, it is imperative to understand why there is no legislation or any explicit legislative entry in the Constitution that indicates a decentralised set-up to tackle issues relating to the environment or climate change. This is despite various policies of the government and a plethora of decisions discussing the adverse effects of climate change. Against this backdrop, it is important to discuss whether the Indian Constitution explicitly recognises the importance of the environment and climate change.

On June 15, 1949, the Constituent Assembly discussed the present-day Article 297 of the Constitution. This article vests the control of "things of value" within the territorial waters with the Union. The debate that originally pertained to the ownership of resources went on to encompass discussions around the ownership of water itself. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar remarked, "We must have the waters, the right to water itself, ownership of the water itself and also the fish and other things". This statement seems to stem from a colonial hangover.

The British in India largely possessed an anthropocentric worldview of the environment — they saw it as a conglomeration of resources for unlimited human extraction. This limited view, as reflected in the Constitution, does not view the environment as greater than the sum of its parts. For example, Entry 17 of the State List outlines the legislative power of states regarding "water". But, the understanding of "water" is limited to water supplies, irrigation, water storage, etc. The environment is not viewed in a holistic sense.

The explicit power to protect the environment holistically is not conferred in Indian law. Parliament has the residuary power to legislate on subjects not explicitly listed in the legislative lists. It can legislate on matters related to the environment under Article 253 of the Constitution, which accords it the power to frame laws to implement any international treaty, agreement or convention.

For example, the Environmental Protection Act, 1986 (EPA) was passed under Article 253 to give effect to the decisions taken at the Stockholm Conference, 1972.

This Act gives sweeping powers to the Centre "to take all such measures as it deems necessary" to protect and improve the quality of the environment and to prevent and control environmental pollution.

There are laws on what we call the fragmented understanding of the environment — water, air and forests. The Constitution seems to view the environment as a sum of air, water, and soil. This limited view has led to fragmented legislative power where different entries deal with the components of the environment but none reflect a source of power to protect the environment or deter the impact of climate change.

The present constitutional position in relation to the environment indicates a need to introduce "environment" as an entry in the Concurrent List. This move aligns with decentralisation and enhanced cooperative federalism. Both the Centre and the states would legislate on matters relating to the environment — states take the primary role and the centre will have a specific role in case of climate emergencies.

India's states differ vastly in their vulnerability to environmental emergencies, and decision making at the local level will help reduce damage. In the era of climate change,

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a centre-heavy devolution of legislative power is not tenable.

Climate change is characterised by its differential localised impact, between states and even within districts. This was witnessed in Karnataka recently when Bijapur faced a dry spell, while floods took place in neighbouring Belgaum. Recent developments indicate that states are prioritising climate policy, with the advent of climate action plans and increased capacity.

However, these action plans have faced bottlenecks in implementation, owing to a lack of financial support from the Centre. The fact that most financial decisions are taken by the central government, despite state governments being better equipped to respond to environmental emergencies, indicates a glaring gap.

Given this situation and the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change on society, the need of the hour is to re-imagine Indian federalism. This is also in consonance with the principle of subsidiarity, which ought to be the essence of the emerging new Bharat.

Prathiksha Ullal is a research fellow and Sneha Priya Yanappa is senior resident fellow at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SC STEPS IN

action' (IE, April 9). Climate change is the most challenging crisis facing mankind. Supreme Court has given a path-breaking judgment saying it is the fundamental right of every citizen to breathe fresh air, drink clean water and live a healthy life. The very existence of humankind is at stake given the adverse impact of climate change. SC has rightly emphasised the rigorous implementation of measures to mitigate the effect of global warming. India is one of the most vulnerable countries and so, the SC's intervention is urgent and necessary.

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A call to

Atul Thakre Nagpur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A call to action' (IE, April 9). The Supreme Court order expanding the scope of Article 14 and Article 21 to include "the right against the adverse effects of climate change" is significant. Those at the bottom of the social pyramid are the worst affected by climate change. The rich have options available to lessen the impact or even avoid it; the poor have few options. Access to a clean and healthy environment is a right of every individual but capitalism does not recognise restrictions on the use of resources, including energy, jeopardising the very existence of human beings. The government must take appropriate steps to ensure that the order helps the masses who bear the brunt of climate change.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

SUPPORT STUDENTS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Reaching

out' (IE, April 9). Teachers need to recognise the specific needs of the students, and support them accordingly. For instance, our teachers made groups of six students to consult with and work together. Regular tutorials were conducted by teachers to ensure that students were constantly learning and improving. The initiative of IIT Delhi to support academically struggling students is necessary and should be followed by most educational institutions. All students are not geniuses, some may require intermittent motivation to achieve better results.

FOR GREATER GOOD

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Law in its own time' (IE, April 9). The writers argued that the decisions of the legislature and judiciary must pass the test of public opinion. To prove their point, they cited the retrospective tax law from 2012 and the Electoral Bond scheme (2018). However, that analysis suffers from the following fallacies. First, these laws are not comparable. Second, the tax law targeted individuals while the EB scheme concerns political parties as well. Thirdly, when two rights of equal force collide (privacy vs right to information), the one that is for the greater good must be upheld. Lastly, judicial arbitration can't be based on public opinion.

LR Murmu, New Delhi

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New 3-D map of the universe hints at nature of dark energy

AMITABH SINHA NEW DELHI, APRIL 9

THAT THE universe is expanding has been known for close to a century, thanks to the observations by the American astronomer Edwin Hubble in 1929. More recently, in the late 1990s, scientists found that this expansion was happening at an accelerated rate that is, not only was the universe

expanding, it was expanding at an increasingly faster pace.

This discovery, honoured with the Nobel Prize in Physics (for Saul Perlmutter, Brian P

scientists to hypothesise 'dark' energy. The reasoning was this: If the rate of expansion did not increase, it could be explained as a continuing after-effect of the expansion caused by the Big Bang. That would keep open the possibility of gravity prevailing at some point to either pull things back or to keep the universe in a stable state. But the accelerated rate of expansion meant some other ingredient — an invisible energy — was at work too. Since sci-

Schmidt, and Adam G Riess) in 2011, forced

entists did not have any clue about what this could be, they called it "dark energy".

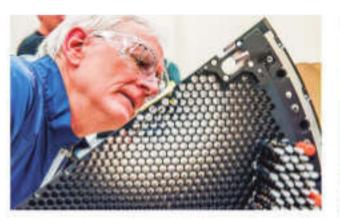
Since then, scientists have not got any closer to shedding new light on the hypothesis — even though dark energy must be accounting for nearly 70% of the universe if its observed behaviour is to be explained. The results from an ongoing experiment involving more than 900 researchers around the world have now offered the first glimmer of hope.

The DESI experiment

The results, announced on April 4, have come from observations of the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument

(DESI), a unique equipment with 5,000 robotic 'eyes', each one of which can separately capture and process light coming from a galaxy. This gives DESI, mounted on the Nicholas W Mayall 4-meter Telescope at the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona, US, the ability to observe 5,000 galaxies at the same time.

DESI has been operating for three years, and is scheduled to continue for at least another two years. Data from the first year of DESI observations — during which light from



(Left) The Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI) has 5,000 robotic 'eyes' to observe galaxies. The Mayall 4-meter Telescope hosts DESI in Arizona, US. DESI

6 million galaxies, some of which existed as far back as 11 billion years ago, was captured have now been used to create the most comprehensive three-dimensional evolutionary map of the universe till date.

"We say it is a three-dimensional map because we have been able to measure the distances between these galaxies to a very high level of precision. Some of these galaxies existed billions of years ago at great distances from us. Lights originating from those galaxies are reaching us only now. These 6 million galaxies together produce a very good evolutionary picture of the universe," Shadab Alam of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai, who is part of the DESI collaboration, said.

The precise distances to these galaxies that scientists have been able to calculate has led to the mapping of the distribution and movement of these galaxies over time, by comparing the data with similar data for some of the galaxies obtained through other experiments.

CHART 1

Food Price Index

95.2

85.42

■ Vegetable Oils

240

210

180

150

120

90

FAO FOOD PRICE INDICES

Cereals

(2014-16=100)

118.3

130.6

110.8

This has, in turn, allowed scientists to

work out the expansion rate of the universe through different times in history. Using the first year's observational data, the DESI collaboration has calculated that the speed of expansion of the universe is increasing at the rate of 68.5 km per second after every 3.26 million light years of expansion.

Through these precise measurements, the scientists have found that some of the calculated values are not consistent with current well-established theoretical models, which otherwise describe the universe very well.

Dark energy intensity

These theoretical models suggest that the energy density of dark energy, or the amount of dark energy contained in any volume of space, remains constant even under expansion. So, while the space itself expands, the energy density in the expanded space does not go down. In these models, a change in energy density would make the universe unstable.

The results of DESI, however, suggest that there are changes in energy density. "In fact, the whole purpose of the DESI collaboration is to look for possible changes in the energy density of dark energy," Alam said.

"In the first year's data, there is just this slight hint that energy density may not be constant. Energy density of dark energy is seen to increase as well as decrease. But we are being extremely cautious as of now. The confidence level is around two and a half sigma, translates to about 95% confidence — not enough for a scientific discovery of this magnitude and implication. We need to have a six sigma confidence level, a near certainty," he said.

But the initial hints have excited the scientific community. If change in energy density is confirmed, it could lead to a complete unravelling of our current understanding of the universe. It would be the first glimpse into the nature of dark energy, and could lead to entirely new physics.

"Right now, we know nothing about the nature of dark energy. Some scientists have speculated that it might be a new invisible field, like... a magnetic, or a gravitational field. There is also speculation about dark energy being a new particle. All these people must be looking at the data from DESI very keenly," Alam said.

The DESI collaboration has announced that it will begin analysing data from subsequent years of observations almost immediately.

IMPORT OF VEGETABLE OILS

CHART 3

In billion dollars

3.17

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

EXPLAINED

SCIENCE

GOVT DEADLOCKED, SKOREA GOES TO LEGISLATIVE POLLS: WHY THEY MATTER

SOUTH KOREA will hold legislative elections on Wednesday to decide the makeup of its 300-member strong National Assembly. Most polls suggest an outcome that will do little to break the deadlock that has gripped the divided government.

Why the polls matter

The election comes nearly two years after conservative candidate Yoon Suk Yeol won the 2022 presidential election defeating Lee Jae-myung of the Democratic Party by 0.73% — the slimmest margin in South Korean history.

South Korea has a powerful presidential system, which is checked and balanced by the assembly that can pass or stop bills.

Yoon is not up for election this time, but the vote is seen as a referendum on the President and his bitter rival Lee. Yoon has suffered from low approval ratings for months. The Korean parliament is currently dominated by the DP, which holds 142 out of 297 seats.

According to a recent poll conducted by KBS and Hankook Research, four in 10 respondents said they would vote for the DP, while 33% said they would back PPP. The two major parties have said dozens of regions are too close to call.

If the opposition wins 200 seats or more, there is a risk Yoon could face impeachment and some PPP members have made this point to appeal to voters.

How polling works

South Korea has a partly proportional representation system for legislative elections, which means voters will cast one ballot for district representatives, who have 254 seats in parliament. They will also vote for a political party which will decide the share of the 46 proportional representation seats.

The rise of third parties in recent polls has come as a surprise in the fourth-largest economy in Asia where politics is often dominated by the two major parties.



President Yoon Suk Yeol casts his vote early in Busan. Yonhap via Reuters

Key issues in the election

In recent polls, the cost of living and high food inflation have emerged as key issues among voters. Another issue is the prolonged walkout by trainee doctors and some senior doctors.

Political parties have also vowed to tackle the fertility crisis with measures such as public housing and tax breaks. South Korea has the world's lowest fertility rate, or the average number of children born to a woman, and data show it is likely to fall to 0.68 in 2024, past the figure of 0.78 in 2022, which was already a record low.

Analysts expect the government's corporate reform push to continue regardless of the election result as both parties support the plan to boost the stock market.

Corruption remains a major issue. The ambassador to Australia resigned last month amid controversy over his appointment while being under a corruption investigation. Main opposition leader Lee is facing trials over charges including bribery.

REUTERS



Forecast for food inflation

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

There are two reasons why food inflation may soften: easing global prices that make imports feasible, and a likely La Niña. This should allow RBI to cut interest rates in the coming months

CHART 2

In billion dollars

IMPORT OF PULSES

90



Harish Damodaran

THE RESERVE Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) noted on Friday that food price pressures "have been interrupting the ongoing disinflation process, posing challenges for the final descent of inflation to the target [of 4%]".

At 8.7% in February, retail food inflation was above the overall year-on-year consumer price increase of 5.1%, while ruling similarly higher for eight consecutive months since July 2023.

But there's some hope for food inflation softening in the months ahead, providing leeway for the MPC to consider cutting the benchmark interest rates. There are primarily two drivers for this.

International prices

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's food price index averaged 118.3 points in March 2024. That's a 7.7% decline from a year ago, and 26.2% lower than the all-time-high of 160.3 points reached in March 2022, immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The index — a weighted average of the world prices of a basket of food commodities over a base period value (taken at 100 for 2014-16) — had fallen for seven months in a row from July 2023 to February 2024, before edging up in March.

The rise was because the index for vegetable oils rose from 120.9 points to 130.6 points. But this was still far below the peak of 251.8 points scaled in March 2022. The cereal price index, on the other hand, has continued its declining trajectory. At 110.8 points, the March index was 20% down from its yearago level, and 36.1% down from its record of 173.5 points in May 2022 (*Chart 1*).

Easing global food prices — a result of bumper harvests in key producing countries and restoration of supply lines after the pandemic- and Ukraine War-induced disruptions — make imports more feasible.

Take wheat, where the estimated stocks of about 7.6 million tonnes (mt) on April 1 were at a 16-year-low, and precariously close to the

minimum buffer norm of 7.46 mt for this date. As for the new crop, the harvesting of which has started, trade sources reckon its size to be lower by 3-4% in Rajasthan, 7-8% in Madhya Pradesh, 15-20% in Gujarat, and 25% Maharashtra. The primary reason for this is the delayed onset of winter: above-normal temperatures in November-December is said to have caused premature initiation of flowering, and cut short the crop's vegetative growth phase in many parts of central India.

Mar-21 Sep-21 Mar-22

Source: Department of Commerce

Fortunately though, the wheat that is about to be harvested in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar looks in good condition. The country's overall production may not, therefore, be impacted greatly. Equally fortunate, perhaps, is that the export price quotes of Russian and European wheat are now at \$200-215 per tonne free-on-board (i.e. from the ports of origin), as against their March-May 2022 highs of \$400-450. Even after adding freight and other charges of \$40-50, the landed cost of imported wheat would work out to around \$260 per tonne or Rs 2,170/quintal — less than the government's minimum support price of Rs 2,275/quintal for the domestic crop.

A decision on imports, which entails slashing the current customs duty of 40%, is more likely after elections. By then, Indian farmers would have also marketed their

wheat, while the new crop from Russia and Ukraine is ready for harvesting in July-

2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17 2017-18 2019-20 2020-21 2021-22 2021-22 2022-23

Possible La Niña

The second driver is a possible La Niña. India's pulses imports were valued at \$3.17 billion during April-February 2023-24, up 80% from the \$1.76 billion for the corresponding 11 months of 2022-23. The fiscal year ended March 2024 may see total imports of almost \$3.5 billion, the highest since the \$3.9 billion and \$4.2 billion in 2015-16 and 2016-17 respectively (Chart 2).

The surge in imports were attributable to El Niño — the abnormal warming of central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean waters towards Ecuador and Peru — which is generally associated with reduced rainfall in India. The southwest monsoon (June-September) rainfall was patchy last year, as were the northeast (October-December) monsoon and winter (January-February) rain.

The brunt of the dry weather was borne by Karnataka and Maharashtra, which are also major pulses-growing states. The Union Agriculture Ministry has estimated pulses output to have fallen to 23.4 mt in 2023-24 from 26.1 mt and 27.3 mt in the preceding

Imports — especially of red lentil (ma-

soor), arhar (pigeon pea), and yellow/ white peas (*matar*) — have kept a lid on prices. Retail inflation in pulses is, however, still too high for comfort (18.9% in February). This is unlike with vegetable oils (minus 14%), where the disinflation has come largely on the back of a global price crash and three years of record imports (*Chart* 3).

2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17 2017-18 2019-20 2020-21 2021-22 2022-23 2022-23

*April-February 2023-24

The good news is that El Niño is weakening. The latest three-month-running Oceanic Niño Index (ONI) — which measures the average sea surface temperature deviation in the east-central equatorial Pacific region — for January-March 2024 was 1.5 degree Celsius.

While that is three times the El Niño threshold of 0.5 degrees, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has predicted an 83% probability of the ONI transitioning to a neutral range (less than 0.5 degrees) by April-June 2024. Further there is a 62% chance of a La Niña (i.e. an ONI below -0.5 degree Celsius or an abnormal cooling of the east-central equatorial Pacific water) developing during June-August 2024. That probability is even higher at 75% for July-September, and 82% for August-October 2024

Given the past association of La Niña with surplus rainfall in India — and these conditions expected to set in by the second half of the southwest monsoon season — it raises hopes of a bountiful agricultural year 2024-25.

Kill elephants, save them: why Botswana wants to gift 20,000 to Germany

epaper.indianexpress.com

ALIND CHAUHAN NEW DELHI, APRIL 9

BOTSWANA HAS literally an elephantine problem — it has too many elephants. And President Mokgweetsi Masisi has now said he would like to send 20,000 of the animals to Germany, where there is a proposal to make it tougher to import trophies from hunting animals.

Botswana is home to the world's largest elephant population of 1.3 lakh animals. Hunting has helped keep their numbers in check, and brought revenues from trophyhunting licences issued to rich westerners. Germany is said to be the largest European importer of African elephant trophies.

Why are there so many elephants in Botswana?

Unlike its south-central African neigh-

bours, Botswana has been a safe haven for elephants due to its stable government and small human population. Following conflictspurred mass poaching in Namibia and Angola, elephants in Botswana stopped crossing the Chobe river, a tributary of the Zambezi that marks Botswana's border with Namibia.

Botswana also implemented strict conservation policies, giving shoot-to-kill orders against suspected poachers in 2013. The following year, the country banned licensed trophy hunting — however, it lifted the ban in 2019.

And why was hunting allowed again?

Successful conservation resulted in a steady increase in Botswana's elephant population over the years. In the early 1960s, the country had fewer than 10,000 elephants; by the mid-1990s, the population had reached 80,000, according to the independent newsroom Conservation Frontlines.



Today, elephants inhabit about 40% of Botswana's land, which has led to increased human-animal conflict. Herds often damage homes in rural communities, drink water from pipes, feed on or destroy crops, and trample people and cattle to death.

"We are forced to collect our livestock early as we are afraid of the elephants... In the

cattle posts, people have deserted... By 4 pm, we have rounded off the animals...so by the time the elephants come, they do not find anyone. We wake up...to find their tracks. There are too many elephants," a resident of Gobojango town told Voice of America. A large population of elephants also

threatens other species and **EXPLAINED** leads to biodiversity loss and habitat degradation — ele-**WILDLIFE** phants tear down trees for fodder and consume large amounts of water, which can cause a decline in non-elephant wildlife.

How does elephant hunting help?

Botswana has been donating its elephants — it gave around 8.000 to Angola last year, and 500 to Mozambique in 2022 – but this has not made much of a difference.

Lifting the ban on trophy hunting helps in two ways — it lowers the population, and

helps the economy as hunters cough up as much as \$50,000 for each animal they kill. A report in *Morning Brew* said trophy-

hunting brought \$5 million to local communities in Botswana in 2021, according to government figures. Also, "trophy hunters injected \$250 million into South Africa's

economy yearly and supported 17,000 jobs, according to one estimate in 2018," the

report said. It has also been argued that regulated trophy-hunting ultimately helps the species as governments pump the money into conservation and share profits

habitat loss. So what's the problem, then?

Western countries and animal rights advocates deem hunting to be cruel and unethical, and responsible for quickening popula-

hunters prefer to kill the largest, strongest animals, whose loss causes population declines," conservation group Humane Society International (HSI) says on its website. According to HSI, the gains to the econ-

tion decline in imperilled species. "Trophy

omy may be overstated. "In eight key African countries, trophy hunters contribute at most 0.03 per cent of GDP and at most 0.76 per cent of overall tourism jobs," it says. It is also alleged that corruption prevents local communities from benefiting from trophy hunting.

Nonetheless, many experts argue that outright banning is not necessary. Conservation researcher Enrico Di Minin of with local communities, which can prevent the University of Helsinki told NPR: "If countries want to ban trophy hunting, they need to have an alternative source of revenue worth hundreds of millions of dollars every year... Just banning things without knowing the consequences is actually creating more problems for the species."



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2024



INDIA'S RISING GROWTH

Union minister for petroleum Hardeep S Puri

Within the next five years...we will be amongst the three largest economies in the world

A needless debate

The new Wipro CEO's game plan will be closely watched but the home-grown versus expat theory is irrelevant

HIERRY DELAPORTE'S EXIT from Wipro's corner office a year before his term was supposed to end wasn't a surprise, in view of the IT major's indifferent performance under his watch. In the third quarter, for instance, the company reported a 12% yearon-year profit decline. With a 6% profit growth in the same period, HCL Technologies displaced Wipro from its position of the third largest IT services provider in India. The acquisitions Delaporte made turned out to be expensive and the weakness in consulting business added to the overall disappointment. On top of that, Wipro saw at least 10 senior-level exits last year alone due to the perceived dissatisfaction over the "outsider" Frenchman's attempts to restructure the organisation.

Wipro is no stranger to CEO changes — four of its six CEOs in the last 16 years stepped down before completing a full term. In any case, historically, any newly appointed outsider CEO, who has tried to change the status quo in the short term, has had to pay a high price when the situation failed to pan out as planned. But Delaporte's exit has rekindled the unfortunate debate over whether it is yet another example of an expat CEO biting the dust in India. A back-of-the-envelope analysis of India's top 20 business houses showed that of roughly 180 CXO-level expats recruited over five years, at least 50-60% resigned prematurely, many within two years. A Harvard Business Review article a few years ago pointed out that India's share of expat CEO exports stood at 30% and imports at 3%. This is in sharp contrast to many countries. The number hasn't changed very significantly since then.

Partly, this could be an Asian problem where promoter-driven businesses rule the roost. Asia's relationship-driven business environment with a premium on loyalty is a hostile setting for expat CEOs to bloom. It is often about culture. Caught between Indian employees and multicultural clients, expats end up being close to neither, which impacts business. India Inc has also played its part in the aversion of expats to take up roles in the country. The Vishal Sikka saga in Infosys is a prime example of that. Sikka had to quit abruptly after some of his decisions that did not conform to the culture of Infosys were questioned publicly. Wipro's former vice-chairman Vivek Paul, an India-born American national, quit after what was believed to be a clash of ideas with the promoters. Later, Paul said Indian managers loved to be in a cocoon.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella hit the nail on the head when he said that countries which are not expat-friendly would likely miss out on the global technical boom. Nadella, of course, took care to mention that he remained hopeful about the land of his birth. But the point wasn't lost on anybody. It is unfair to deprive India Inc from making use of the best talent available globally, more so when the world is being increasingly perceived to be one large market without boundaries. ACEO is supposed to be a professional from any part of the world working under the supervision of a board of directors, and their nationality should hardly be a concern. Delaporte's successor, Srinivas Pallia, may well succeed in opening up new frontiers for Wipro going by his stellar record in the company so far, but that should have nothing to do with whether he is "home-grown" or an expat.

MANUFACTURING GROWTH

A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY IS NEEDED TO PROPEL INDIA'S MANUFACTURING CAPABILITIES

Beyond PLI targets

JANAK RAJ

(CSEP), New Delhi. Views are personal

NDIA'S MANUFACTURING SEC-**TOR**, with a share of 2.8% of global output in 2022, lags significantly behind giants like China (30.5%), the US (15.6%), and Germany and Japan (around 5-6% each). Despite numerous initiatives by the government, the share of manufacturing, on an average, has hovered around 16% of gross value added (GVA) in the last decade. Alongside initiatives such as National Manufacturing Policy (2011), Make in India (2014), Startup India (2016), and Atmanirbhar Bharat (2020), a major initiative of the central government to boost manufacturing output in India was the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme.

Introduced in March 2020, the PLI scheme covers 14 sectors aimed at bolstering India's manufacturing capabilities and generating employment. The scheme envisaged a provision of ₹1.97 trillion as incentives/subsidies ranging from 4-6% on incremental sales for a period of 5-6 years over the base year. The scheme was meant to offset some of the disadvantages faced by the Indian manufacturing sector such as high logistics costs due to inadequate infrastructure, high cost of capital, stringent labour laws, inadequate access to power, and skill gaps.

The budgeted allocation under the PLI scheme for all sectors aggregated ₹25,453 crore up to 2024-25; actual disbursements were ₹10,206 crore (up to 2023-24). The latest data released by the government suggests that the scheme witnessed over ₹1.03 trillion of investment till November 2023, resulting in production/sales of ₹8.61 trillion and employment generation (direct and indirect) of over 6.78 lakh. The PLI scheme is reported to have promoted exports surpassing ₹3.2 trillion. The targets set under the scheme over the five-year period were ₹2.7 trillion worth of investments, ₹32 trillion for sales, and 59 lakh jobs. It will, therefore, be a tall order to achieve these targets in the remaining years.

Senior fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress

It is, however, not clear whether the reported investments, production, employment, and exports numbers are really exceptional, as these would have grown in any case in the business-asusual scenario. Therefore, the contribution of the PLI scheme would need to be assessed over and above normal cir-

cumstances. In addition, data in some targeted sec-Low productivity is tors under the scheme reflected in indices would also need to be adjusted to avoid double such as the World counting. Some compa-Competitiveness nies covered under the Index, where India's scheme may grow at the ranking slipped by expense of micro, small three spots to 40th and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Therefore, some in 2023 additional investments/ employment/sales/

exports under the scheme could be at the expense of MSMEs. Likewise, exports would need to be adjusted for imports used as inputs. Since granular data is not readily available, the analysis of the effectiveness of the scheme can be made only at a macro level.

The share of manufacturing in domestic GVA declined to 14.1% in 2023-24 from 14.7% in 2019-20. India's share in global manufacturing output also declined to 2.8% in 2022 from 3% in 2017, as against China, whose share increased from 26.1% in 2017 to 30.5% in 2022. According to the periodic labour force survey, the propor-

tion of workers employed in the manufacturing sector increased from 10.9% in 2020-21 to 11.4% in 2022-23.

The PLI scheme may help overcome some of the disadvantages facing Indian manufacturing, but there is no escape from the longer-term challenges facing the sector in India at a systemic level. The experiences of successful countries such as China, the US, Germany, and Japan suggests

that manufacturing is determined by a host of factors, particularly, quality of labour force, infrastructure, regulatory environment, and trade policies.

It is encouraging that India has made rapid progress in recent years in some of the key factors that determine manufacturing. India improved

its position to 40th rank among 132 economies in the Global Innovation Index 2023 from 81st in 2015. The Logistics Performance Index 2023 by the World Bank placed India 38th out of 139 countries, a sharp improvement from 54th in 2014. Despite these developments, we have a long way to go to make India's manufacturing globally competitive. Latest estimates (2024) by the International Labour Organization suggest that the output per worker in India was at \$20,108 based on 2017 constant gross domestic prices (GDP) in purchasing power parity terms, which was very low

as compared with many other major manufacturing countries such as China (\$37,548), Japan (\$80,185), the UK (\$94,772), Germany (\$107,131) and the US (\$134,766). Low productivity is also reflected in indices such as the World Competitiveness Index (International Institute for Management Development) where India's ranking slipped by three spots to 40th in 2023. India's R&D expenditure is low at 0.64% of GDP in 2020-21. This pales in comparison with R&D expenditures (as a percentage of GDP in 2019-20) in China (2.4%), Germany (3.1%), and Japan (3.3%), underscoring a critical gap that India needs to bridge to improve its manufacturing competitiveness on the global stage. Since the quality of the labour force is one of the crucial factors impacting manufacturing capabilities, it is important to invest in vital sectors such as education and healthcare, the public spending on which has remained extremely low; expenditure on education has stagnated at around 2.9% of GDP for nearly a decade, and that on healthcare at 1% of GDP in the last three decades. India's position at 134th in the Human Development Index for 2022 was behind even neighbouring countries such as Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. No doubt, India has a huge domestic market; however, if it has to achieve manufacturing on a global scale and integrate into the global value chain effectively, it needs access to other markets for which there is a need to explore free trade agreements.

Overall, a comprehensive strategy is needed aiming not just for physical infrastructure development but also human capital for propelling India's manufacturing capabilities and establishing it as a manufacturing hub.

> Co-authored with Aashi Gupta, research associate, CSEP

Big tech's trapped in a glass house on AI data snatching

A FEW WEEKS ago, the chief technology officer of OpenAI was asked if her company had used YouTube videos to train its AI systems. First, she gave a blank stare. Then there was a grimace. Finally, Mira Murati gave an answer that avoided the messy and furtive world she and other tech companies were operating in: "Actually, I'm not sure about that."

According to a New York Times report, OpenAI in fact had trained its AI on "more than one million hours of YouTube videos", using a speech recognition tool called Whisper. All the conversational text from the transcriptions was used to train GPT-4, the flagship large language model that underpins ChatGPT.

Large tech players racing to build more capable AI models have reached a point where they have fewer and fewer places to look for data on the public web, and taking text from the transcripts of YouTube videos suggests OpenAI has been digging between the proverbial couch cushions, even at the risk of breaking someone's rules. There's a decent chance it did. You Tube chief executive officer Neal Mohan told *Bloomberg News* last week that if OpenAI had used YouTube $videos\,to\,refine\,its\,AI, that\,would\,be\,a\'{}clear\,violation\"{}of\,YouTube\'{}s\,terms\,of\,use.$ When asked about the possibility that OpenAI had violated those rules, a spokeswoman for the AI company said it used "publicly available information that is freely and openly available on the Internet".

Still, it's hard to see the tension ratcheting up between OpenAI and Google over this. Google, for one, can hardly complain about a data violation when its entire business has been built on collecting the private data of billions of consumers, often at a startling and surprising scale. Google has also scraped transcription data

from some YouTube videos to train its AI models, Mohan



OLSON

Bloomberg

firms like Google and Meta Platforms Inc. that the ethics of using people's creative work without consent or compensation seems to have become an elephant in the room that simply isn't discussed. When a lawyer at Meta recently pointed out the ethical concerns of scraping artists' intellectual property, they were met with silence according to the Times, which added that Meta executives considered buying a book publisher like Simon & Schuster to get access to more high-quality data, but decided that securing licences would take too long.

In the end, a Meta executive pointed out that "the only thing that's holding us back from being as good as ChatGPT is literally just data volume", the Times reported. Since OpenAI appeared to be taking copyrighted material, Meta could simply follow this "market precedent", he added.

Of course, Meta itself established the precedent well before OpenAI did, by harvesting vast amounts of personal data from consumers and sharing it with a byzantine network of third parties. That's why Mark Zuckerberg himself recently talked up the mountain of Facebook and Instagram data he's sitting on as an advantage in the AI race. "The next key part of our playbook is learning from unique data," he told investors in February. "On Facebook and Instagram, there are hundreds of billions of publicly shared images and tens of billions of public videos."

A spokesman for Meta said it was "transparent about the ways we collect and use people's information to build products and features". Google didn't respond to a request for comment.

Has Google tried grabbing some of Meta's data in the same way OpenAI scraped YouTube? Has Meta tried scraping any of Google's user data to add to its AI training mountain? We may never know, but it's plausible that the snatch-andgrab style of data gathering happening in the AI business right now goes beyond OpenAI and YouTube. Mining data is, after all, how these firms became multitrillion-dollar businesses.

That's also why it's hard to see Google or Meta making much of a public fuss about their user data becoming a target for exploitation. That would not only be the ultimate example of throwing stones in glass houses, it would also remind people of how much their personal lives — and now their creative work — are being turned into someone else's product.

Deepfakes: A deep threat to society

Experts feel that

competing to

a race to the bottom

and that a single

solution could be

inefficient to deal

with the issue



TV RAMACHANDRAN

Honorary fellow, IET (London) and president Broadband India Forum. Views are personal

Combating deepfakes requires a multi-pronged approach regulations and innovative solutions by companies, and userawareness/fact-checking initiatives by civil society outfits

TECHNOLOGY IS SHOWING us today what ancient texts and scientists proposed long ago. Vedic philosophy and even Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* point to the illusory nature of the world and the limitations of human perception in discerning the true essence of the universe. Albert Einstein famously said, "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."Taking the form of a persistent, evergrowing illusion today are deepfakes. Deepfakes are merely the combination

of powerful deep learning algorithms and rapid advances in computing power leading to the emergence of a new generation of hyper-realistic synthetic media, including all forms of digital content — video, text, images, or audio — that have been either manipulated or fabricated using sophisticated algorithms to mislead, deceive, influence audiences or reinforce behavioural patterns and stereotypes.

Deepfakes are often used to replace a person's likeness or voice. For instance, there have been cases in which eminent politicians, celebrities, and other leading personalities were impersonated to propagate some misleading views that they had never been involved with. Many have emerged from artificial intelligence (AI) platforms that have the potential to convert any text to a speech or a video in a few seconds, thereby creating a saga of deceit.

Impact on democracy

In November 2023, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi said in a speech: "A new crisis is emerging due to deepfakes produced through artificial intelligence."He also said that the misuse of AI to create deepfakes was problematic and that it would turn into a formidable problem.

The 2024 general elections in India, one among 40 polls globally, could see a massive explosion of deepfakes, posing a threat to the electoral integrity of the democratic process. Deepfakes featuring the voices and actions

of politicians, along with fabricated speeches, will lead to misinformation, creating confusion among voters, and impacting their decision-making. A report by Al Jazeera said that nearly 40 campaign managers are looking for AI experts to create deepfakes and influence voters WhatsApp through

groups. The growing phenomenon of deepfakes is a significant leap from earlier versions of media manipulation that were time-consuming and demanded expertise in creating fake content. Today, deepfakes are growing exponentially owing to four primary reasons:

1. The consistency and volume of media-generated deepfakes are unmatched because of sophisticated AI techniques that make it impossible to decipher synthetic and original content.

For instance, fraudulent loan applications use AI tools to generate misleading celebrity endorsements/advertisements.

2. Deepfakes can fabricate digital

content to create and circulate new material that did not exist before. 3. The ready availability and user-

friendliness of deepfake tools is concerning. According to a news report, there has been a ten-fold increase in the number of complaints relating to morphed/doc-

tored images and videos

4. The anonymity of users coupled with the combat deepfakes is easy availability of distribution channels, particularly on social media, enables faster propagation of deepfake content.

In India, any content can go viral due to low latency, and ease of access to millions of smartphones and social media accounts can poten-

tially cause irreparable damage to the dignity or image of any personality. Regulators are hugely concerned and experts are increasingly advising the deployment of a 'zero trust architecture'.

Way forward: A multistakeholder approach

Given the magnitude of the problem, combating deepfakes would require a multi-stakeholder approach — a mix of

regulations, innovative solutions by companies, and user-awareness/fact-checking initiatives by civil society organisations. While India does not have a specific law on deepfakes, the government has indicated that existing regulations, including provisions of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, and IT Rules, 2021, deal with this issue with adequate relief provided through punitive actions, penalties for offences, content moderation, strict content takedown timelines, etc. A more principle-based approach to combat the harms of AI is expected in the upcoming Digital India Act. Moreover, 20 companies (including Meta, Google, OpenAI, and Microsoft) are finalising a pledge, also known as the Munich accord, to fight back against the deceptive use of AI in the 2024 elections. Simultaneously, several bigtech companies are developing software solutions that help in the watermarking and labelling of deepfake content.

Experts feel that competing to combat deepfakes is a race to the bottom and that a single solution could be inefficient to deal with the issue. With more collaboration among players, regulatory guidance, detection tools, and user awareness, we can attempt to ensure that reality remains grounded in truth and well distinguished from illusion.

> With research Inputs by Mira Swaminathan, BIF

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rethinking FDI

Apropos of 'Targeting\$100 bn FDI', the government has done almost everything to attract the maximum foreign direct investment (FDI). Most investments happen as brownfield investments instead of greenfield ones that could ensure more employment and newer technologies. Such unplanned opening of doors for FDIs and foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have proved to be more of a

burden than a benefit. The basic character of capital is to rush for profit. Therefore, showcasing swells in FDIs or FIIs, which tend to fly off with the click of a button seeking more profit, cannot benefit our country in the long run. If FDIs are inevitable, they may be invited with certain conditions like new operation from initial stages instead of simple takeovers, bringing new technologies, assured employment, guaranteed export of the product, and a licence for

domestic players to use technologies after a short protective period. —AG Raimohan, Anantapur

Scorching summer

None of the manifestos of the political parties has promised to do anything about the adverse effects of climate change. Indications that it is going to be a scorching summer are already here. A shortage of drinking water will add to the misery. Despite all this, we keep on merrily chopping

New Delhi

trees for various projects. With the right use of modern technology, trees could be grown even in soils and climate conditions that are not favourable to their growth. We need to do more about the heat waves threatening people in India. Ignoring the factors responsible for climate change is going to hit us sooner and harder than we can imagine. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

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— Ramnath Goenka

COURSE CORRECTION NEEDED TO REVERSE SLUMP IN FDI INFLOW

LUGGISH growth in foreign direct investment is the latest concern for the Indian economy. Despite being the fastestgrowing large economy in the world, India's FDI has been falling, suggesting a change in the global investment outlook. While several emerging Asian economies continue to attract foreign investment, some in the developed world particularly the US—have also seen their FDIs grow. But things have played out differently for India despite the common thought that investors' China + 1 strategy would mostly benefit us. Instead, ASEAN countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand have been attracting large amounts of foreign investment in greenfield projects. Meanwhile, India continues to suffer from policy uncertainties that discourage foreign investors.

The FDI slump has been playing out over a few years. In 2022-23, FDI equity inflows declined 22 percent to \$46 billion. In 2023-24, till December 2023, FDI equity inflows fell 13 percent year-on-year to \$32 billion. The number looks slightly better when reinvested earnings and other forms of capital are added to the FDI equity inflow; in 2022-23, total FDI declined 16 percent to \$71 billion, compared to a 3 percent increase to \$85 billion in the previous year. Even as the finance ministry has blamed the trend on a global investment slowdown in recent times, India's case seems more long-term in nature—setting in since 2016-17. In the 10-year period to 2022-23, India's FDI grew at a compounded rate of 6.6 percent, compared to 27 percent in the previous decade. Total FDI as a percentage of the country's nominal GDP was 2.1 percent in 2022-23, compared to 2.7 percent in 2021-22; the highest of this measure that India ever achieved was 3.5 percent in 2008-09.

So, instead of blaming our FDI contraction to a global slowdown, the government must look elsewhere for answers. Foreign investors continue to be wary of India's bureaucratic hurdles, uncertain tax policies and difficulties in enforcing contracts. The government has announced many incentives for investment in the manufacturing sector, but it is also true that disbursal of those incentives is often marred by delays and at times even refused because of seemingly minor reasons. The competition for attracting foreign investment is getting tougher with many smaller developing economies playing their cards better. India needs to run faster if it wants to board the investment bus again.

INDIA'S DOPING SHAME A WORRY IN OLYMPIC YEAR

NDIA may not figure at the top of the world in Olympic sports. However, when it comes to doping, the country remains on top. This is another ignominy for the country after the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Operation Carousel found discrepancies in the testing system of the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), especially on the whereabouts of athletes. According to the latest WADA report, India topped the world in the percentage of doping positives against the number of samples tested. In 2022, NADA returned 125 positives, which was about 3.2 percent of the total number of samples collected. South Africa, among the nations that had collected more than 2,000 samples for the year, followed India with 2.09 percent samples testing positive. India was on top in 2021, too—with 2.3 percent samples testing positive.

This is doubly embarrassing in an Olympic year. It is disconcerting that Indian athletes continue to dope and the numbers suggest the practice is quite rampant. Before the Olympics, the authorities need to tread a cautious line because one doping failure is enough to tarnish the country's reputation. NADA, too, needs to be more vigilant. The number of tests needs to increase. Through the total number of samples tested increased from 1,794 in 2021 to 3,865 in 2022, it is nowhere near China's testing figure of 19,222 samples, which returned 23 positive cases. The US Anti-Doping Agency, too, had a high number of positives at 84 from 6,782 samples. In 2019, before the pandemic, NADA had tested 4,008 samples and the positives stood at 225 or 5.6 percent. In 2022, there were some high-profile cases as well, which indicates that NADA had been targeting top athletes.

If Operation Carousel was not enough to sully the image of the country's anti-doping system, in another disturbing WADA report, India figured among the top three nations for doping among junior athletes. The 10-year study showed India was second after Russia to have the largest number of minors testing positive and getting sanctioned. This is disturbing especially because of the fact that the juniors' overall development, both physical and mental, is at stake. All stakeholders, including NADA, the national sports federations, the Sports Authority of India and other related NGOs must come together to stop this menace.

QUICK TAKE

NO N-CLOUD, PLEASE

UNDAY'S drone strikes on the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine is a worry for the world. It's down the Dnieper, on which the Chernobyl plant was located. When the Chernobyl blast happened in 1986, though contamination was concentrated over a 150,000 sq km area in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, the radioactive fallout was scattered by wind over much of the northern hemisphere. In the dangerous brinkmanship between Russia and Ukraine, one is blaming the other for the strikes. The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency bluntly said, "This cannot happen." Whoever is to blame, all countries should work to avoid another radioactive fallout.

S you read this today, we are in the midst of preparations going around—spearheaded by the Election Commission of India—to host the world's biggest election ever. The Lok Sabha polls begin on April 19

and conclude on June 1. It is a routine that runs for weeks, culminating with the results day on June 4. So now, India is charged with election fever.

As this unduly hot summer of 2024 scorches on, politicians of each and every party are out there in the sun, campaigning their way into the hearts and hearths of the voter. There are helicopters in the air, flags of every party colour out there, and there is the din and noise of the election on television, print and every other media there is to consume.

All of a sudden, the great Indian voter is feeling very special and in control. This is one season where the voter is boss and everyone else is nothing much. This season comes once every five years. One might as well enjoy its fleeting moments.

Coincidentally, as many as 64 countries go to the polls in 2024, but none of their efforts even match what's happening in India. 96.8 crore eligible voters are being wooed in India this election. This is four times larger than the US election (24.4 crore eligible voters). Add 10.5 lakh polling stations, 1.5 crore officials on duty and 1.82 crore first-time voters, and the numbers game is in the face. This is bigger than ever before.

Election fever has many dimensions. At one end, it is a fever that grips every candidate, every political party and every party worker who sweats it out in the field. At another end is the intermediary media. These are the months when television news news literally every half hour. Newspapers are filled with constituency-level analyses put together by pundits of every kind. Controversy is matched by a counter-controversy.

The school of scandal is really in full flow. Bad-mouthing one another seems the norm. Negating the word of one with the word of another is a well-honed science.

Rumour and conspiracy theory are friends and enemies that float in our midst every moment. Each one of us is so used to it that no one is really surprised. While a small set of us discount it all as part of the great election game

Every election is an opportunity to say yes or no. Your vote is a right as well as a duty. By voting, you say, "I belong." Do you?

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

THE WEIGHT OF EVERY VOTE IN THIS ELECTION





viewership peaks. There is breaking at play, many really swallow the bait. sentiment, the INDIA configuration onto an EVM. The result is but a propaganda and brand building are the positive forces in full flow. The negative forces of rumour, the planted lie and the planted conspiracy are all tools used by many. Every breaking event is watched keenly at the constituency level by political parties in the fray and fed back to their election war rooms to act and counteract.

> Therefore, the overall environment is quite charged. The yen to win is with every candidate and every political party. As of today, the BJP and NDA seems to be totally charged with the "Ab ki baar 400 paar"

Advertising, event management, PR, of parties seems to be hoping to reap collective set of these voices expressed a tumult that is quiet, indiscernible for now, but decisive.

The battle has clearly demarcated lines of the incumbent Goliath being battled by not one David, but possibly many fragmented ones. The INDIA alliance is hoping for an upset, just as the ruling NDA with the BJP in the forefront is hoping for a decisive victory, and a third-time return of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the helm of affairs. While the National Democratic Alliance is depending on the stellar performance of PM Modi and his governance (as overt-

ly defined by public sentiment seen and expressed), the INDIA team is hoping for an upset on the basis of the silent majority and its unexpressed sentiment, which are secrets not revealed till the counting day comes.

The beauty of the election ahead of us is this secret ballot that is protected and respected. A ballot that has had the ability to tell the biggest of the big to walk. A ballot that has humbled the mightiest in the past. A sacred ballot even.

As we near the polling dates, it is very important for all of us as Indian citizens to understand the value of the vote and respect it for what it is. This is a voluntary vote, not a compulsory one.

This vote, however, represents our right and, importantly, our duty. While we can abdicate our right, how can we abdicate our duty? Perform it we must.

A data point important to remember is that the 2019 election to the 17th Lok Sabha had 67 percent of the eligible voter list of 91.2 crore people casting their ballot. Some 33 percent decided not to vote.

Why vote then?

Many reasons. Those of us who do vote, participate. Those who don't, outsource. Those of us who vote walk-thetalk, even as others talk-the-talk. Every election is a mandate-seeking event. If you and I don't vote, this mandate has the ability to get hijacked. A mandate is meant to be a majority mandate. Do you want it to be hijacked by a minority that turns up to vote?

Every election brings with it consequences, social, economic, political and religious. Do you want to hold control on these consequences at all? If you do, you need to turn up and vote.

Every vote is really a voice tapped in every nook and corner of the country by real people like you and I. Would you like to give up your voice by not turning up? By voting, you say, "I belong." Do you?

Every election is an opportunity to say yes or no. You vote for the status quo or you vote for change. Both important items that come up for review once in five years. Why miss the bus? Let's board the bus on your or my polling date. A date to remember. A date to keep.

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

HOLDING LEGAL VALIDITY UP BY A STRONG PIGTAIL

HE story goes that Baron Münchhausen, a fantastical 18th century German nobleman-prevaricator, landed in the midst of a bog while on a trip on horseback to his friend's estate. It is said the baron, even though he was dulled with fatigue, responded to the emergency by pulling himself and his horse straight out of the bog by his own pigtail.

Hans Albert, in his Treatise on Critical Reason, coined the term 'Münchhausen trilemma' as a thought experiment to demonstrate that, without appealing to assumptions, it is theoretically impossible to prove any truth or its validity, especially within the realms of logic and mathematics. According to Albert, no knowledge can be definitively proven as any argument or proof presented to support a proposition can be challenged by asking additional questions that raise doubts about each proof.

Ultimately, we find ourselves in a position where each proof necessitates another, or in a logical circularity in which the proof of a proposition relies on the truth of the same proposition or on accepted precepts that are asserted rather than supported. If the trilemma is valid, then no statement, knowledge or truth can be validly proven. Each of the three options, as is evident, frustrates the possibility of establishing any definite foundation, leaving us mired down in uncertainty and, much like the baron, having to pull ourselves out of the bog with our own pigtails.

In law, legal validity is determined by whether or not a law was made in the proper manner by an authorised organ of the state. But what criteria must be met for an organ to be deemed authorised? And what defines a manner as being proper? Without appealing to assumptions, an enquiry into this would inevitably result in an endless chain of justifications. In order to disrupt this chain, we are faced with an una-

voidable Münchhausen trilemma. Countries, by resorting to a variant of one of the three options or a mix of them, not only seek to justify their own authority and their legal systems but also the validity of the laws they make. For instance, the community law of European legal systems traces its roots to ancient Roman laws (collated in Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis*) and cannon law of the Catholic church. Nevertheless, it is important to note these do not provide an unending sequence of justifications, as the sequence only extends until the time of the Roman republic.



Many countries have sought to justify the validity of their legal systems on an accepted truth or precept. Countries such as India, Bangladesh and Uganda have justified their systems on the basis of certain foundational principles of their constitutions they accept as axioms or grundnorm, which Hans Kelson claimed as being the

highest-ranking presupposed norm.



Baron Münchhausen, a fantastical 18th century German noblemanprevaricator, is said to have pulled himself and his horse out of a bog by his own pigtail. The story leads to an interesting thought experiment on what makes a country's laws valid

For example, Indian law is valid because it derives its validity from the Indian Constitution. But as to the question from where a constitution derives its validity, there is no answer, the same as a grundnorm. This is, however, not to say our Constitution incorporates an underlying semantic assumption about the nature of legal norms. Rather, the understanding is the Constitution provides certain fundamental rules that cannot be trampled on.

Curiously, in Pakistan, the *grundnorm* is considered to be Islam, meaning the validity of its Constitution is derived from Sharia. The UK and Singapore, on the other hand, partly rely on the Diceyan formulation of parliamentary sovereignty and the Hartian rule of recognition, which is a so-

Advocate, Madras High Court cial rule that differentiates between those

norms that have the authority of law and

those that do not. That apart, legal sociolo-

gists have sought to contend the validity of

law is due to ability to maintain itself,

thereby resorting to logical circularity. The Basic Structure doctrine, developed by our Supreme Court in a series of cases in the 1960s and 1970s, is a legal doctrine that the constitution of a sovereign state has certain characteristics that cannot be erased by its legislature. In the famous Kesavananda Bharati case, the SC propounded the doctrine, holding that certain fundamental features of the Constitution—such as democracy, secularism, federalism and the rule of law—could not be amended. Over the years, the court has confined the doctrine to encompass only those standards that are cognates of the grundnorm,

that is, the Indian Constitution. In M Nagaraj vs Union of India, the court, while refusing to accord principles relating to service law the status of constitutional norm, observed the "source of these concepts is in service jurisprudence. These concepts cannot be elevated to the status of an axiom like secularism and sovereignty". In other words, there's a judicially accepted conception that the Constitution possesses an intrinsic quality providing resistance to change beyond specific boundaries. The doctrine broadly advocates that there exists underlying moral principles that are independent and intended to be

represented by the Constitution's text. Since its introduction, the Basic Structure doctrine has often been criticised as illegitimate. One of the primary criticisms asserts that it lacks justification within the constitutional text. These critics claim the Constitution itself can be changed to suit the times. The judges, according to them, openly adopted a political stance and there is nothing inherent in the Constitution that resists change. However, having been constructed in the context of the broader constitutional mandate, the doctrine has stood the test of time, proving it is stronger than the Baron's pigtail.

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Dignified campaigning

Ref: Poll roasting welcome but respect model code red line (Apr 8). It is regrettable that the festival of democracy has many fireworks erupting from the mouths of leaders. It is time for intellectuals to appeal to political leaders to be dignified in campaigning. Jayaprakash Reddy, Nalgonda

Democratic decency

Poll campaigns of the party in power have to be undertaken only with the objective of highlighting its strengths. The opposition parties should predicate their campaigns on their poll promises, the ruling party's shortcomings, etc. But no party is entitled to an extenuating ground for violating the canons of decency by using intemperate language, polarising tropes and intimidating innuendoes. S Balu, Madurai

Losing battle

Ref: Persistence of the prime minister's detractors (Apr 8). PM Narendra Modi, who seems all set for a third term in office, has a legion of admirers across the country. But he has no dearth of detractors either. They seem to be fighting a losing battle as the PM has shown enough dexterity to deflect all the accusations flung in his direction. C V Aravind, Chennai

Aloof saint

Ref: The value of solitude and concentration (Apr 8). I may add that King Yadu happened to watch a wandering ascetic who never reacted to any situation. The king humbly queried how the saint was so aloof. The ascetic answered to have learnt 24 precious lessons from 24 gurus. A virgin girl was among them whose bangleclanking taught him that if there is more than one person, there is scope for quarrel. Hullasa Behera, Bhubaneswar

Exaggerated promises The Congress in its manifesto has made

attractive promises, like an annual grant of one lakh to poor women through the Mahalakshmi scheme, minimum prices for farmers and 30 lakh jobs to young Indians. Like all parties, it has not uttered one word on raising resources for these schemes. The electorate should beware of empty promises on either side. S V Venkatakrishnan, Bengaluru

Communal amity

BJP's Kerala *prabhari* Prakash Javadekar's claim that the BJP will win at least five seats in the state in the general election is an exaggerated statement. Kerala is a land well known for its communal amity. The people in the state, by and large, are averse to the divisive politics of the BJP. Sudhakar Cherukunnu, Kannur

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How to See Green As Greenbacks

A more central role for climate finance

RBI has flagged risks in monetary policy on account of climate change in its study, 'Draft Disclosure Framework on Climate-Related Financial Risks 2024', in February. In this, the central bank is leading from the front after floating a discussion paper on mitigating climaterisk by banks. RBI has a key role in shaping the governance structure around green finance, and it is now in step with similar actions by other central banks. For itself, the central bank is proposing an explicit modelling of climate event risks into its policy framework for interest-rate movements and monetary transmission. For the rest of the banking system, it has a longer list of actionable items such as governance, risk management and disclosure. Both processes will have to be completed for the markets to efficiently price the differential between regular and green bonds.

Climate finance will acquire a more central role over the coming decades as economies re-



direct financial flows to address the causes and consequences of global warming. The world is calculating the cost of what it will take to limit climate change to 1.5° C, protect 30% of land and sea, and reach neutrality over land degradation. Countries are

haggling over who picks up how much of the tab, but agree on the need for a financing arrangement that draws in producers and households. It is falling increasingly on financial markets to assess climate risks and communicate it to the real economy through price signals.

RBI is joining the conversation at a juncture when India's contribution to climate change and its proposed correctives become a key element of global action. It is in need of financing in the range of \$2.5 tn over 2015-30 to fund self-imposed climate-mitigation targets. This cannot be accomplished through taxes alone, and requires participation by the private sector drawn in through a dedicated finance channel. Indian households will have to be convinced of the need to fight the good fight through attractive interest on their green deposits.

Let's Know What We Eat, Drink

Consumers have a right to know what they are eating and drinking — putting into their bodies. It is not enough that the regulator ensures that food and drink producers adhere to norms and provide info to consumers. Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) needs to keep an eagle eye to ensure that companies and sellers aren't making unsupported claims. This is the rationale for FSSAI asking websites and apps that sell food products to not represent premixes, malt-, dairy- and cereal-based drinks as health or energy drinks.

A watchful regulator is essential, especially as people are increasingly making purchasing decisions with health impacts in mind. Producers are increasingly required to provide infoingredients, nutrient details, calories con-



sumed - on labels. That whole jumble of information in small print matters little if the seller or producer 'shelves' the product in a manner that implicitly makes an exaggerated or wrongful claim. FSSAI has no definition or standard for 'energy' drinks or 'super' foods. As things stand,

selling any thing as, say, a 'health' drink would be a violation. Yet, for years on end, malt-based drinks like Horlicks have been treated by consumers as health/energy drinks. Well, wisen up.

The food regulator is on its toes. But it needs to be proactive to set the norms that ensure safety and keep up with changing consumer taste and demands. These are no longer to be seen as 'first world' problems. Producers and sellers will advertise and classify their products catering to demand. The regulator has to be the referee ensuring that consumers know what they are getting. FSSAI must be proactive in setting the norms, as definitions of healthy, organic, vegan and low-fat are becoming more, well, serious.



America's Old Tryst With Kinich Ahau

On Monday, the good people of America observed a ritual that goes back centuries. Invoking Kinich Ahau, the Mayan sun god - without actually invoking him, since most Americans are unaware of the deity's existence - millions observed the Great American Eclipse, or GEA, in parts of Mexico, 15 US states and eastern Canada. Unlike what we, in Asia, consider to be GAE—the decline of the US as a global power — Monday's phenomenon was the celestial spectacle of a total solar eclipse.

The path of totality, where the moon fully obscured the sun, was over 161 km wide beginning on Mexico's Pacific coast, moving northeast through Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, upwards towards New York, New Hampshire and Maine, before stepping off the gas in Canada. Six minutes after the stroke of the midnight hour here in India, when most of us slept, Texans made a tryst with destiny in the form of Ixchel, the Mayan moon goddess, blocked out Kinich Ahau, creating minutes of darkness, barthe latter's glowing halo, or corona. The religious fervour was evident as millions observed the ritual of taking out their mobile phones to click pictures of the Dark Ring in the Sky and muttering the holy words of ancient awe, 'Awesome!' The rest of us witnessed a custom of a continent that, for all its trysts with modernity, goes back in time, and space.

SWAMISPEAK Congress needs to drop its fondness for old pension scheme and stick to NPS

OPS... They Did It Again!



Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

ne of the worst ideas of Congress has been abolition of the National Pension System (NPS) and return to the old pension scheme (OPS) in the three states of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh, where it came to power. Its newer state government in Karnataka is considering the same step, but has yet to take it. Is better sense prevailing?

The new Congress election manifesto makes no mention of OPS. Answering questions, P Chidambaram said OPS was very much on the party's mind, but it was waiting to react to the report of an official committee on the issue. Does that suggest second thoughts?

In Jharkhand, the coalition government of which Congress is a part has gone back to OPS. Seeing the populist trend, even some BJP leaders in other states have said OPS needs reconsideration. Sorry, it doesn't.

A recent RBI study found

that a shift to OPS from

2023 onward would provide a small, temporary relief to state governments. But the additional pension burden would soon mount and eventually cost a spectacular 450% of the NPS burden. There The new Congress election cannot be a stronger indictment of manifesto makes no mention such a short-sightof OPS. Answering questions, ed policy. P Chidambaram said OPS was

Reversion of Congress to OPS was denounced in 2022 by none other than Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the party's former de-

ChatGPT

SHAIRI

OF THE DAY

On Eid, love and biryani

joyly combine,

In a partnership

cinematically divine.

With spices and rice,

And hearts without spite,

Forget manifesto-baiting

for a while.



Why the tension, over pension?

puty chairman of Planning Commission. He declared, 'Bringing back the old pension scheme is one of the biggest 'revdis' (populist giveaways) that

are now being invented.' Manmohan Singh, Congress PM from 2004 to 2014, had also castigated OPS as a fiscal millstone. During his term, he had ushered in NPS, and boasted about it as a major fiscal reform whose wisdom would be recognised by future generations.

So, two of the greatest economists ever to grace Congress had denounced OPS and hailed NPS as a great reform. Did any economic study persuade Rahul and Sonia Gandhi otherwise? No, their

> move to reinstate OPS was a desperate search for new freebies to win votes and seem different from BJP.

Under OPS, central and state government employees got a fixed pension of 50% of last-drawn basic pay, indexed to inflation. Globally, such a 'defined pension' turned out to be a fiscal burden that pre-empt-

More than 3,600 people are dying daily globally due to hepatitis B and C

infections. Viral hepatitis is the second leading infectious cause of death globally

with 1.3 million deaths per year, the same as tuberculosis, a top infectious killer,

according to a WHO report. New data from 187 countries show that the estimated

number of deaths from viral hepatitis increased from 1.1 million in 2019 to 1.3

million in 2022. Of these, 82% were caused by hepatitis B, and 18% by hepatitis

Prevalence of hepatitis B and C virus infection by WHO region, 2022

Deaths

272,000

20,000

218,000

32,000

41,000

518,000

1,101,000

98,305

453,490

Total infection

7.80 m

5.30 m

9.10 m

8.60 m

11.70 m

7.10 m

49.60 m

5.51 m

4.01 m

Deaths

35,000

38,000

42,000

21,000

65,000

43,000

244,000

26,206

19,983

C. Updated WHO estimates indicate that 254 million people were living with

Hepatitis B

Total infections

64.70 m

5.00 m

61.40 m

10.60 m

15.10 m

96.80 m

253.60 m

29.75 m

79.74m

Hepatitis Alarm

hepatitis B and 50 million with hepatitis C in 2022...

African Region

Region of the Americas

South-East Asia Region

E Mediterranean Region

Western Pacific Region

European Region

WORLD

India

China

Source: 2024 Global Hepatitis Report

ed a rising share of government revenues at the expense of other urgent needs. So, countries' abandonment of economic sense across the globe shifted to a pension based on 'defined contributions'.

NPS aimed to do the same. It applied to those joining government service from the start of 2004. Their defined contribution was 10% of basic salary and dearness allowance (DA), with a matching government contribution (later raised to 14%). By investing part of this contribution in stock markets, NPS aimed to ensure a good pension for retiring employees, even while reducing the budgetary burden.

But government employees always resented the deduction of 10% of salary towards NPS. They wanted a return to OPS under which they made no contribution at all. They sought to benefit at the cost of posterity. Their attitude was that of Groucho Marx who famously said, 'Why should I worry about posterity? What did posterity ever do for me?"

In 1990-91, the Centre's pension bill was ₹3,272 cr, and the states' bill was ₹3,131 cr. By 2020-21, the Centre's bill had jumped 58 times to ₹1,90,886 cr, and the states' bill 125 times to ₹3,86,001 cr. NPS aimed to end this march towards fiscal suicide.



victory for Congress in the Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh polls in December 2023? No. The party was thrashed in both states

In technical parlance, OPS was unfunded. No corpus of funds was created to ensure a stream of income that would suffice to pay future pensions. OPS was a 'pay as you go' system where current taxpayers would continually finance the pensions of retirees.

This system was sustainable as long as there were plenty of youngsters to replace retiring pensioners. But the world over, fertility rates have fallen below replacement rate. And, so, future generations will be fewer in number than those retiring. In such circumstances, defined pensions will place an intolerable burden on young taxpavers. In some cases, the pension bill will exceed the government's entire salary bill.

So, countries across the globe have been shifting from a defined pension to a defined pension contribution into a fund. This fund is invested in government bonds and equities to generate a stream of income that finances future pensions. That is the aim of NPS. It ensures that rising pensions will not create intolerable fiscal burdens in the long run.

Alas, Rahul Gandhi jumped on to the bandwagon of government employees to gain votes. This was short-term opportunism and absence of serious thinking.

Did the return to OPS, effectively a freebie to government employees, ensure victory for Congress in the state elections in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in December 2023? No. The party was thrashed in both states. It was one more demonstration of the electoral lesson that while competition in freebies may be part of electoral politics, they are no substitutes for innovative ideas and performance. Congress needs to absorb that lesson.

Bell Curves

THE SPEAKING TREE

Study, Know

HANSAJI YOGENDRA

Yourself

While yog philosophy contains numerous nuggets of wisdom to elevate our lived realities, the concept of Svadhyaya becomes increasingly pertinent in a world that constantly seeks external gratification and validation.

Derived from Sanskrit words, 'sva' means self and 'adhyaya' means study, education. Svadhyaya encapsulates the practice of self-study, introspection and the exploration of one's inner being. It is a transformative process of personal exploration.

Maharishi Patanjali, in his Yog Sutras, presents Svadhyaya as one of the Niyamas, ethical observances, in his Ashtanga Yog path. Svadhyaya encompasses various dimensions of self-exploration and learning. It involves studying texts and philosophical treatises, but more important is its focus on knowing our own thoughts and emotions; cultivating an awareness of the Self. According to Svadhyaya, this is the more potent means to self-realisation. The idea: all knowledge is futile till there is a thorough knowledge of the Self. Svadhyaya is not dissimilar to the philosophical maxim espoused by ancient Greek theologians or Immanuel Kant

during the Age of Enlightenment. In Sutra 2.44, Maharishi Patanjali delineates Svadhyaya as 'svadhyayat ishta-devata-samprayogah'. Here, Patanjali suggests that through study of our own self, we establish a connection with our ishta-devta, loved deity. That is, when we begin to know ourselves, we also begin to know Divinity.

Chat Room

Pasting Its Name in Congress Spaces

Apropos 'BJP Hand in Congress Glove' by Pranab Dhal Samanta (Apr 9), it is true that BJP has outsmarted and browbeaten Congress in their own game of past glory, achievements and legacy. Congress has been surviving on the euphoria of Independence, Bangladesh war, liberalisation, etc. BJP had formed a circumspect narrative to seize the legacy over time. The difference: BJP is focused on development, better governance and corruptionfree administration to attract votes. BJP has been equally agg ressive about dethroning Congress. With Congress losing its sheen, BJP has to expand its narrative for a bigger footprint.

Balancing China,

World Growth

This refers to the Edit, 'Yellen

Speaks Softly, But Firmly, in Beij-

ing' (Apr 9). The US was China's

partner in massive industriali-

RAJARAO KUMAR Bengaluru

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

very much on the party's

mind, but it was waiting to

react to the report of an

official committee on the

issue. Does that suggest

second thoughts?

Naval-Gazing Our Way



Seema Sirohi

There's a definite buzz around Indian Navy's recent exploits. Over the last three months, the navy has thwarted Somali pirates, rescued hijacked ships and responded to multiple drone/missile attacks by the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea.

As the Israel-Hamas war raged, the navy showed up in strength to protect crucial sea lanes as a first responder, security provider and resident power in the Indian Ocean region. It deployed 21 ships, made 19 inter-

ventions and rescued more than 100 crew and others, sometimes from the burning deck. And it assured protection to 450 merchant ships carrying essential supplies. 'These are not run-of-the-mill opera-

tions. They are sophisticated ops involving commando forces,' a US official commented. Add to the list, the commissioning of INS Jatayu, a new base at Minicoy and the induction of USmade MH-60R Seahawk helicopters for maritime surveillance and antisubmarine warfare heft.

Finally, consider the simultaneous deployment of 11 submarines and 35 warships — 10 for counter piracy, drones and missile attacks on the western flank, and rest in the Bay of Bengal and southern Indian Ocean. Since the many milestones occurred in a relatively 'compressed time frame, they generated a lot of buzz and attention', the US official said. India's naval renaissance has meant an active presence in the conflict zone, which means some welcome relief for the US Navy.

India's chief of naval staff Admiral

R Hari Kumar calls it the 'new and

secure'. There's no time limit on deployment because of the need for 'sustained' operations. Indian Navy's bolder avatar is winning praise all around, especially on social media, thanks to officials who decided to highlight key operations

with videos. There's a lesson here: information sharing can be beneficial because: It sends a signal to rivals. Creates greater awareness among friends. Washington, where the 'know-

ledge deficit' about India can be severe in certain quarters, a constant information feed is helpful. Showcasing Indian operations drives home the absence of China in the arena. The People's Liberation Army

Navy (PLAN) is now the world's largest in terms of the number of ships. Yet, China did not send a single vessel to help deter attacks, word salads about underlying geopolitical reasons notwithstanding. China's standard (non)-operating procedure is to freeride while single-mindedly expanding its strategic perimeter — be it in the Indian Ocean or South China Sea. The modus operandi is well

known. Under the guise of 'oceanographic surveys', China's fleet of 64 'research' vessels collects data, which is then shared with the military. In 2019, Indian Navy expelled a Chinese vessel named Shiyan 1 found snooping around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. China is relentlessly aggressive and always probing. Last month, two Chinese 'research'

In periscope vision

ships were detected in the Indian Ocean, possibly on a mission to monitor

confident Indian Navy' ready to take India's missile-testing site and the submarine base. One had docked in 'positive, proactive and affirmative action to ensure the region is safe and the Maldives. China has made inroads into each

> of India's neighbours, most interestingly in Bangladesh. A recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a prominent DC think tank, details how China is not only responsible for more than two-thirds of Bangladesh's arms imports, it's also building a naval base. Although incomplete, the base already docks the two refurbished Chinese submarines Dhaka bought in 2016 for a low price. Once completed, the 'Sheikh Hasina Naval Base' will be 'capable of docking six submarines and eight warships simultaneously'. In sum, Bangladesh could become 'an increasingly receptive partner' for China in the future, the report says.

Indian Navy is gearing up for all eventualities. One of its top priorities is to acquire sophisticated underwater sonar (sound navigation and ranging) technology from the US to better detect unfriendly submarines. Talks have gone on for two years, but progress is slow and conversations difficult. The US view is that India should first create an integrated

architecture with trained operators, and the right tactics to collect, collate and analyse the data from sonars. Underwater detection and analysis are complex, and some experts believe it would be better for India to partner with friendly

> But India wants its own capability because of the history of denials and

sanctions. Will Washington understand, given the frequency and scope of China's watery incursions?

PUDCASI

We grant this boon as a

collective gesture. Do not

seek us out individually.

Apollo, and Lunar Mortals

It's been decades—nearly 55 years, actually - since Apollo 11 landed on the moon's surface and Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin explored Tranquility Base. Yet, the first landing continues to fascinate us for what it was: first humans on the moon.

In a riveting 1 hr 15 min episode of The Rest is History podcast, "Tom Hanks On The Moon Landings & What He Learnt Working With Astronauts', hosts Dominic Sandbrook and Tom Holland embark on an exciting

exploration of one of the most momentous events in human history: Apollo missions. In this captivating discussion and banter, they are joined by Oscar-winning

actor, and Apollo mission aficionado, Tom Hanks.

Together, they unravel the epic saga of mankind's quest to conquer the moon and return safely to Earth. From the heart-wrenching tragedies of Apollo 1 and the gripping suspense of Apollo 13 to the aweinspiring moments of triumph and discovery, including Aldrin's poignant reflection after the Eagle's lunar touchdown, the lunar rover adventures, and intense debates over who would take the first steps on the lunar surface. Hanks, Sandbrook and Holland play perfect 'lunatics' in an episode pockmarked and cratered with epic information worthy of its own

Chandrayaan.

sation without due stress on increasing purchasing power and consumption for the highly populated economy. China should be

ancing existing growth with further development of healthcare, tourism and soft skillsbased services, and also consu-

better off bal-

mer and light engineering fields. One key realisation that has now dawned is that the world economy could be better built on comparative advantages of a country's resources. The strategy should be specialisation and trading with minimum tariffs.

KUMADA Mumbai

Aggressors Can't Be Choosers

The failure of the Hamas-Tel

Aviv peace talks at Cairo was not unanticipated. What is frustrating is the Gazan spokesmen saying that 'there is no progress yet'. Coming from an underdog, it is belligerence, if not arrogance. They do not have the luxury of choosing their words at this juncture when the plight of people in Gaza, especially the children and the mothers who are struggling to keep the infants surviving, is heart-breaking. Hamas cannot win the war with mere sympathy from the international community and food from the world central kitchen. Hamas regretting its actions will open a new peace frontier in West Asia.

T SARVESWARA RAO

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CONTRAPUNTO

The difference between playing the stock market and the horses is that one of the horses must win -JOEY ADAMS

Reserved & Wrong

CJI rightly calls out HC judges who waste judicial time by delaying judgments. Will it have an impact?

t's not the first time a CJI has attempted to fix a major reason that contributes to case pendency. The practice of reserving judgments I for months beyond stipulated periods, where judges put off announcing their decisions, long after hearings are over. This delay is entirely on the judge.

Passing the buck | Yet, Chandrachud's initiative, of seeking details from all HCs of cases awaiting verdicts for over 3 months, had an unforeseen fallout. CJI said several judges had hurriedly released cases for 'fresh hearings'. This meant the entire process must start from scratch - a massive setback, and not just financially - for those who move court. Judges are burdening litigants, to simply avoid their inefficiency getting marked. CJI called it a "waste of judicial time, damaging for principles of judicial efficacy and speedy justice". As if the egregious practice of inordinate delays wasn't bad enough, judges, trying to dodge CJI's initiative, were

being deceitful at the workplace. Not for nothing are questions raised on judicial probity.

Timeframes encoded | CrPC says judgments must be given either "immediately after termination of trial" or "at some subsequent time" for criminal cases. SC, in 2001, interpreted CrPC's "at some subsequent time" as a maximum of six weeks and no more, no matter the case. Detailed guidelines were issued, including maintaining a register of dates of when a judgment was reserved, and when a verdict was finally pronounced. SC

sought HC chief justices should review monthly lists of such cases, and nudge benches involved. Rules also exist to send cases to a fresh bench in the event of inordinate delay – a rule judges exploit. India's new criminal code BNSS that replaces CrPC later this year, provides a timeline for judges to pronounce verdicts - "...shall give its verdict within a period of thirty days (extendable up to 45 days)..."

Are HCs listening? Arriving at a judgment is an intense exercise. Far too many are so shoddily written that they are but a garble of words. CJI repeatedly urges judges to write simply. Too often even the reasoning for decisions is missing from verdicts. At the very least litigants should understand weightage a judge gave arguments, how and why he/she arrived at decisions. But when verdicts are so delayed, as Chandrachud said, "quality of judgments is sacrificed... oral arguments no longer remain fresh in the judicial mind." Yes, CJIs earlier too have called out delays, but rarely has one pointed out how judges were bending the rules. Will it have any impact?

Don't Just Carrie On

How a 50-year-old horror novel is helping us grapple with school bullying today

The horror genre is about our fear of the unknown. But many times, a switch gets flipped, and we see in it a profound mirror to reality. Stephen King's *Carrie* belongs very much in this latter category. This debut novel of the 'king of horror' has just turned 50. Within two years of publication, its iconic status was sealed by Brian De Palma's fantastic filmic adaptation. Sissy Spacek played its scary telekinetic monster. But a switch has indeed been flipped. It is not young Carrie or her climactic, explosive rage that today's literary tributes are finding truly monstrous.

Instead, the ultimate horror is the continual cruelty that drives Carrie to explode. In particular, it is the bloody sadism of



her high school peers that makes the novel feel more relevant than ever today. Because from east to west, poshest schools to poor ones, bullying has become an increasingly serious issue. Of course, it existed back when Carrie was written. King himself went to school with someone who was relentlessly mocked as Dodo or Doodoo. He remembers seeing her smile fade, the light in her eyes first dim and

then go out. Even the gentle worlds of RK Narayan and Ruskin Bondare not without their bullies. But as the educational ecosystem has grown more stressful, vicious bullying has grown more common. Plus in a cyber-psyched world, the bullies follow the child home from the school hallways.

In the novel, Carrie's explosion builds "with all the steadiness of a chain reaction approaching critical mass". In the psychological exploration of the novel, this is the one practical takeaway. Schools have to properly intervene when children bully each other. Not look the other way. Not just pay lip service. Not be 'neutral'. But step in deep, and help.

Choppy waters

It's not always plain sailing for a ship at sea or for the ship of state

Jug Suraiya

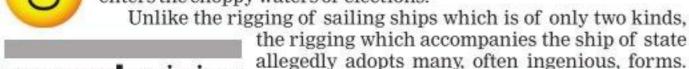


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The legislative and administrative apparatus of a country is often referred to as the ship of state, which navigates the nation through calm or storm.

The maritime metaphor is apt. As in a marine vessel, the ship of state has a captain, the head of government, a crew as represented by legislative colleagues, and fare-paying passengers in the form of the electorate and citizenry as a whole. Ships which make use of sails and masts in particular, share a common term with the ship of state.

The system of ropes, cables and chains by which the movement of the vessel is controlled, is called rigging. There are two types of rigging, a standing rigging, which keeps the masts upright, and running rigging, which adjusts the way the sails are set.



Rigging is an essential component of sailing ships. Rigging of a different sort is also said to play a part in the ship of state when it enters the choppy waters of elections.

the rigging which accompanies the ship of state allegedly adopts many, often ingenious, forms. **second**opinion Indeed, rigging is said to have become a fullfledged competitive sport, involving participants

from across the political spectrum. As in the case of naval rigging, the other kind of rigging has evolved and become more elaborate over time. The rough-and-tumble of what was known as booth capturing has given way to allegations about EVM, as befits an age of

digital devices. Another form of what might be called rigmanship is indirect. Mobility of the competition is impaired when courts put some leaders of competing parties behind bars, basis cases filed by law enforcement agencies. This is supposedly

for the good of the body politic, if not for the body of those individuals. However rigging, whether of the naval or ship-of-state variety, can go awry. If it does so on the high seas it can lead to a mutiny. In the case of the ship of state it can lead to a mutiny by another name, called the anti-incumbency factor.

It's All In The (Bigger) Family

Thanks to BJP's clever campaign pitch, Rajasthan appears to have bought into 'Modi Ka Parivar'. This slogan also taps into most voters' view that politicians must provide and care for them

Anastasia Piliavsky



At his state election launch rally in Kotputli in northern Rajasthan, where voters will go to polls on April 19, Modi addressed the crowd as his parivar. "You are my family," he said. "India is

my family. For BJP the country is our family, but for Congress, it's their own family that matters more than the country." "Rajasthan has always stood against dynastic politics," he added, "In 2014 it ousted Congress from all 25 of the state's Lok Sabha seats. And it will always act as a shield against the forces of parivarvadi."

Parivar vs parivarvadi | In this attack on Congress, which had stood up fairly well to BJP in Rajasthan, winning 99 seats (versus BJP's 73) in the 2018 assembly elections, Modi's parivarvadi meant more than dynasty, or inherited rule. He was referring to political familism, or the placement of one's own people above all else.

Modi has been slating parivarvadi for a couple of years now. In a speech he gave in Hyderabad in May 2022, he denounced Telangana's "parivarvadi parties" as the biggest enemies of democracy,

country and youth. He picked up the theme a month ago, again in Telangana: "I condemn *parivarvadi* because it's plenty to think about. The idea central to this campaign a threat to democracy, it does not let talent grow and will be that of family as a political principle. Both hinders the growth of both the country and individuals."

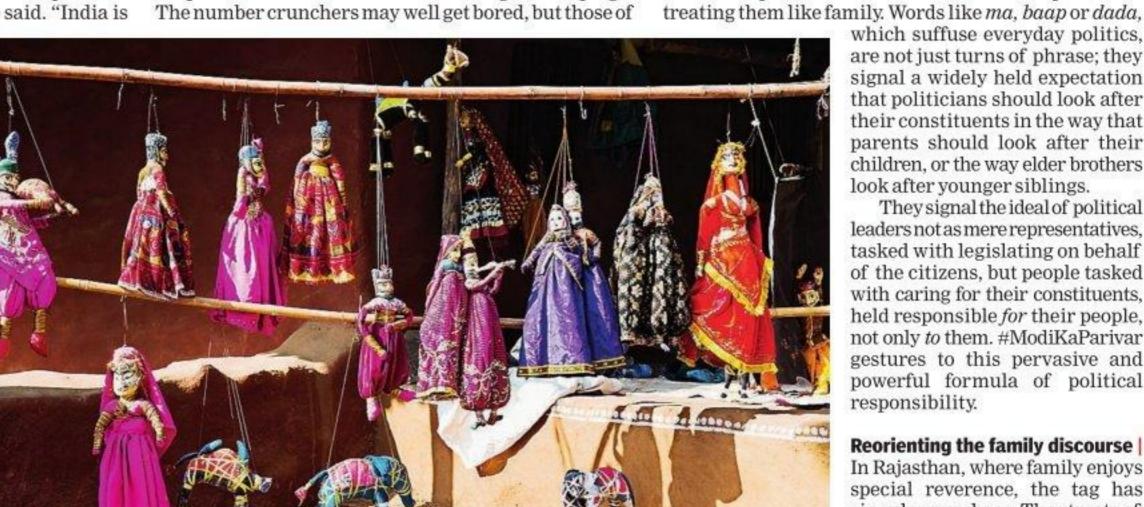
accused Modi of being insufficiently family-bound: "Arre bhai, tell us why are there no children in your family? Modi tells people who have lots of children that they are only doing things for their family. But Modi, you have no family of your own."

As response, Lalu Yadav, a Congress ally in Bihar,

Special Series on Elections BJP's advantage | Modi was quick to turn this slight to his advantage. He declared India's 140 crore citizens to be his family, and the party leadership hooked #ModiKaParivar onto their social media handles. While Rajasthan's legislative assembly has been changing hands between Congress and BJP, the 25 parliamentary seats have passed solidly to BJP a

decade ago, and this year there will be few surprises with only a few seats to be contested in earnest.

The Rajasthan duel | This means that the campaign will be less about political representation and more about the political ideas to be rehearsed during the campaign.



us with an interest in India's political thought will have parties have been toying with it in their rhetoric, but this summer it will play out at high volume in their skirmish over Rajasthan.

Family, indispensable part of politics | The family, in both practice and principle, has long been at the heart of Indian political life. Prior to and following India's Independence, dynastic or

family rule has been shaping the country's politics; on the political right as much as the left it is still common practice for family members to inherit political jurisdictions and posts. Nor have India's citizens, by and large, thought of this as a bad thing. For one, politics is widely perceived as a professional craft - like medical or legal practice

which is best cultivated in families, making leaders from "political families" appear better trained and connected, and easier to trust.

Leaders must provide | More importantly, family is a moral metaphor. India's citizens often insist on politicians

> which suffuse everyday politics, are not just turns of phrase; they signal a widely held expectation that politicians should look after their constituents in the way that parents should look after their children, or the way elder brothers look after younger siblings.

They signal the ideal of political leaders not as mere representatives, tasked with legislating on behalf of the citizens, but people tasked with caring for their constituents, held responsible for their people, not only to them. #ModiKaParivar gestures to this pervasive and powerful formula of political responsibility.

Reorienting the family discourse In Rajasthan, where family enjoys special reverence, the tag has singular purchase. The streets of Jaipur are now full of signs emblazoned with the words "I am Modi's family" and bumper stickers that read: "This car is carrying Modi's family."

This is more than a clever inversion of an opponent's jibe. Modi is in effect reinventing the discourse on family, in which he is setting up parivar, or family as a caring community whose responsible leaders deliver development, as the virtuous opposite of parivarvadi, or family as dynasticism, nepotism, cronvism and corruption. For all his talk of decolonisation, Modi's attacks on *parivarvadi*, insofar as they have vernacular purchase, are aligning India's political thinking with Western political theory, which has long held state and family politics apart.

With Ram Mandir euphoria now sweeping Rajasthan, one cannot, however, help but wonder how inclusive and caring Modi's "family" will prove to be, and whether BJP will manage without dynastic politics. The writer is an anthropologist

Rajasthan votes on April 19 in the first (12 seats) of its two-phase elections

75k to 100k: Ride Won't Be All Smooth

The future of Sensex, which hit 75,000 yesterday, will depend critically on whether equity MFs continue to get money and whether consumption boom gets broadbased

Sanjiv.Shankaran@timesgroup.com



BSE Sensex breaching the 75,000 barrier was a foregone conclusion. What makes it noteworthy is the dizzying speed of ascent. It's taken less than four months to jump from the 70,000 mark it crossed in mid-Dec.

Go farther back to April 2020 when we were in the middle of the first nationwide lockdown because of the Covid outbreak. Sensex had then dropped to about 27,591. The rise in the index value since then has been around 271%.

What's driving the Sensex? | Common to all analyses is the powerful influence of the overall GDP growth trend on the valuation of the companies that make up indices such as Sensex and Nifty. Not only is India the fastest growing major economy, it's also got a four-decade track record of GDP growth that puts it in a small league of economies. Durability of GDP growth is irresistible, particularly when many companies in the Sensex depend mostly on the domestic market.

Adding to the momentum is the surprising upside provided by the global economy. Major central banks tamed inflation in 2023 without triggering a recession. This outcome wasn't expected in 2022. To gauge its significance, think of what the sentiment would have been if some major economies were in deep recession. Counterfactuals provide perspective.

Is India an island of stability? | Many major democracies are headed for elections in 2024. It's often a time of uncertainty. India, however, stands out in an important way. Most analysts are fairly sure of the election outcome. For the market, it translates into stability of policy. Therefore, one of the factors that drags down stock prices in an election year is muted.

What's the next target? | The 75,000 mark was a psychologically important value. But it's nothing compared to

100,000. That's a target which has triggered quite a bit of interest. Emerging markets guru Mark Mobius last year said the 100k mark could be breached within five years. Others feel it could happen sooner. All of them centre around optimism about corporate profits.

How do we break down the journey to 100k? | Sensex's boost comes from investor anticipation of corporate profits. There's optimism about India's nominal GDP



growth, which many think will be upwards of 10% for a while. GDP includes all segments of the economy. including struggling agriculture. Corporate profits reflect returns on the more productive segments of the economy. A reasonable assumption is that corporate profits of companies that make up the Sensex will grow faster than India's nominal GDP. Corporate profit growth rate of 15% year-on-year is an assumption held by some analysts. Any investment

that grows 15% year-on-year will double in value in a little less than five years.

In addition to earnings growth, a lot depends on the value the market assigns to the earnings. That is the Sensex's price/earnings (P/E) ratio, which is now 25.5. But it's fluctuated a lot over time. However, if current assumptions on valuation hold, Sensex could breach 100,000 a lot sooner than the forecast of Mobius.

Isita done deal? Nothing is cast in stone. All forecasts rest on assumptions. Let's start with a potential short-term challenge. On any given day, stock prices are decided by the interaction of demand and supply. That's the bottomline. One critical factor driving demand for Indian equities is the domestic investor who has taken to mutual funds in a big way since the Covid outbreak.

Let's take a narrow measure, equity-oriented mutual funds. In Feb 2024, average assets under management here were ₹22.91 lakh crore, about 51% higher than the previous Feb. As long as money keeps flowing in, rise in stock prices will continue. But there are early signs of a slowdown. RBI's data on flow of funds of Indian households showed that net financial savings slowed down in 2022-23. Other data on bank lending showed sharp growth in unsecured personal loans. It may be a sign that the pace of investment into mutual funds will soon taper.

What's the long-term problem? | Private consumption contributes about 60% to India's GDP. That's been a problem area, growing slower than headline GDP. India's recovery from the pandemic has been spectacular but skewed, particularly on the jobs front. That's the biggest risk to both the GDP growth trajectory and earnings growth of Sensex companies. If there's no improvement, valuations may be marked down, slowing the pace of Sensex's ascent.

For the moment, none of these risks seems to count. Enjoy the ride, but remember markets are a roller coaster.

Calvin & Hobbes

DEAR SANTA,

Last YEAR I asked for 9 LONG-RANGE THERMO-NUCLEAR "SMART" MISSILE and a Launcher



INSTEAD, I Got SOCKS and a SHIRT. Obviously, YOU MIXED UP MY ORDER WITH SOMEONE ELSE'S.





LET'S GET WITH THE



Sacredspace



Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It's only expressing...feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not

leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority.

Henry D Thoreau

Elections Essentials: Vichar, Vivek And Voting

VS Krishnan

nce again, India, the world's most populous country, is going to prove that democracy is the best form of government. Our election machinery is working overtime to ensure maximum participation of the people, in a free and fair atmosphere so that a government of the people, by the people and for the people is established. The election process is a means to achieve the end of a good government. But despite the watchful eyes of Election Commission, there are some cases where unfair means are adopted.

It was Machiavelli, author of *The* Prince, who said that adopting a wrong means is justifiable in order to achieve the right end, in other words, if the goal is high in terms of ethics and morality,

any method to reach it works. But this is not acceptable. However noble the objective is, it cannot be achieved by unfair means, as Gandhiji says, means are as important as the end because means justify the end. In Sabari Hill in Kerala,

there are 18 steps that lead to Bhagwan Ayyappa's shrine. Even though the destination is the divine, devotees reach him only by worshipping all the 18 sacred steps. In no other temple in India, are the steps leading to the

shrine worshipped with as much fervour as the deity inside. This indicates that we have to climb step by step to reach a higher state, and every step we take and every means we adopt should be pure

This theory is applicable to all spheres of human activity. Right from the moment we get up in the morning, we are required to do various acts for our welfare and that of our families. Participating in elections is also an act that determi-

nes the future of the individual and also the nation. If we perform an act, we have to face its consequence, hence, it is essential that we act righteously and objectively. In the Vivekachudamani, THE SPEAKING TREE Adi Shankara says only

humans are blessed with the power of vivek, discrimination; the power to choose right from wrong, real from unreal. As a result of a sense of incompleteness, we identify with the mind and, thereby, lose this power.

the mind. The intellect is not a good guide either, because it always analyses 'what do I gain?' and not 'what is right for me?' Discrimination means going deep within, contemplating, and rising beyond the mind, body, and intellect. Adi Shankara says that the best

course to get the right vision is to do Vichar, Self-enquiry. As we introspect and enquire, we realise that we are not the mind that merely generates thoughts and desires. As we proceed with self-analysis, all thoughts merge in the Source, Consciousness. Even if we perform innumerable acts by the dictates of our minds, or intellect, they will not be equal to the realisation we get from Self-enquiry. When the mind rests continuously upon the Consciousness, higher goals become visible, and our Discrimination is not obtained through actions and results turn out to be good.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Lost chance

Debate continues over whether adequate measures were employed to stave off the Manipur crisis

ddressing the Manipur issue during one of his election rallies, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asserted that "timely intervention" by both the Centre and the State Government played a crucial role in improving the situation. However, the statement begs a thorough assessment as the crisis resulted in the loss of several lives and property and led to the Opposition's criticism of the two Governments being impervious to the situation. Manipur has lived through various socio-political issues, including ethnic tensions, insurgency and demands for greater autonomy. This has led to a long military presence in the State, much to the consternation of the locals. The latest crisis erupted due to communal clashes and the subsequent violence exacerbated the existing challenges. Modi's assertion of timely intervention implies that the Government actions were prompt and effective in addressing the crisis. Indeed, the intervention of security forces and the deployment of additional troops might have helped restore law and order



to some extent. Moreover, the coordination between the Centre and the State Government in deploying resources and initiating dialogue could have contributed to de-escalating tensions. Both the Centre and the State had the BJP Government, so the coordination was swift. However, ground reality suggests a more nuanced but different picture. The recurring nature of crisis in Manipur indicates underlying systemic issues that require comprehensive solutions; merely addressing the symptoms is unlikely to yield lasting peace.

The Prime Minister is right when he says that action was taken swiftly. Indeed, the Army was called in but what it did is a different story. Reports of alleged excess-

es during the crisis and selective action raised concerns about accountability and the protection of civilian lives. The role of political leadership in fostering inclusive dialogue and addressing the concerns of all stakeholders is paramount in resolving conflicts. While the Government's intervention may have focused on restoring order, the efficacy of broader reconciliation efforts and addressing community grievances remains questionable. Furthermore, the assessment of the Government's response should also consider the rehabilitation and compensation measures. The loss of lives and property entails a moral obligation on the part of the Government to provide adequate support and assistance to the affected individuals. Home Minister Amit Shah did visit the State when it was burning and tried to facilitate dialogue between the warring factions, albeit with limited success. The Prime Minister's on-site absence was conspicuous. With his compelling speeches, he might have helped quell the escalating turmoil. Unfortunately, he chose not to. While Modi's assertion might hold some truth in terms of immediate crisis management, a long-term action plan is missing to date. Sustained efforts towards addressing underlying grievances, promoting dialogue, ensuring accountability and fostering inclusive development are imperative for achieving lasting peace and stability in Manipur.



Students perform 'Bhangra' during a folk dance competition at Guru Nanak Dev University, in Amritsar

Iranian 'bogey' in Palestine conflict



Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu aims to broaden the scope of the conflict by involving Iran, leveraging the negative perceptions of Iranians in the West

or decades, US-Israel has consistently blamed Iran for most of the terror attacks, even when actual participants have hailed from countries and organisations inimical to Iran. For example, the nationalities of the 19 hijackers of the 9/11 attack were 15 from Saudi Arabia, 2 from the United Arab Emirates and 1 each from Egypt and Lebanon. All were non-Iranians or even non-Shias — each from a country then known to be staunch allies of the United States of America. Yet within months of the attacks, then US President George Bush had gone on to coin the phrase 'axis of evil' including the troika of Iran, Iraq and North

Historical and irreconcilable antipathy between a Shia extremist Iran and between Sunni supremacist forces like Osama bin Laden's Al Qaida was always conveniently ignored. The fact that most turf wars (earlier and current), be it in the unforgiving swathes of Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria are played out between sectarian and ideological proxies from either of the two distinct sides, has also been ignored.

A creative and often unconvincing conflation of the two historically-at-war forces by somehow linking with specious details of the so-called Iran 'hand' whenever there was a terror attack on assets and personnel of the 'Western' bloc (read, US-Israel-Sheikhdoms), was always insisted. The fact that Iran and its proxy Shia militias led by the likes of General Qasim Soleimani were at the forefront of taking on forces like ISIL, Al Qaida and other Sunni militias, has been successfully obliterated in larger imagi-

However, while Iran and its cosectarian proxies like Hezbollah in Lebanon or Houthis in Yemen were naturally pitted against the rival Arab/Sunni forces (sovereign or otherwise) — the disproportionate demonising of Iran with its supposed role in terrorism, almost instinctively led to blaming Iran tor all problems whilst overlooking the pernicious role the ignorance of Iranian played by the Sheikhdoms in authorities in the planning of breeding violent forces that were the 7th October attack on to go their way or even rogue e.g., Israel — the difference



Perhaps the only predominantly Sunni militia in the Middle East that has retained a modicum of support from the Iranians has been the Palestinian Hamas — they, have overlooked the sectarian angularity in favour of practicality by accepting Iranian support as the Sheikhdoms had virtually abandoned the Palestinian cause (after legitimising, normalising and formalising relations with Israel) and it was left to Tehran to support a virtually forgotten Hamas which was left to fend for itself. But realistically Iran's leverage on Hamas is not expected to be like the sort of substantial leverage it has on forces like Hezbollah, Houthis et al. Many independent experts have commented on



YET, MUCH LIKE THE **INSTINCTIVE** NAME-CALLING OF IRAN AS THE PRINCIPAL ENEMY FOR EVERYTHING THAT GOES WRONG IN THE MIDDLE EAST, ISRAELIS LEFT NO STONE UNTURNED TO BLAME THE **IRANIANS**

SQUARELY

between 'support' and 'leverage' is key in understanding the Iranian control over Hamas. So, Iran does support Hamas, but it is highly unlikely that it was privy to the attack plans in Israel, as so secret was the operation that not only was the famed Israeli intelligence caught by complete surprise, but so were many of Hamas operatives themselves. Yet much like the instinctive name-calling of Iran as the principal enemy for everything that goes wrong in the Middle East, Israelis left no stone unturned to blame the Iranians, squarely.

In recent times, beyond the rhetorical sabre-rattling by Iran's actual proxy i.e., Hezbollah and the odd firing of rockets and gunfire (not exactly the opening of a front), both Hezbollah and Iranians have confined themselves to verbosity as opposed to any major military action. But the Israelis have way gone

beyond pulverising the Gaza Strip killing an unprecedented 30,000 Gazans, attacking NGO-Aid personnel with impunity and now even hitting the Iranian consulate building in Syria's capital, Damascus. Two senior Iranian commanders of the Quas Force along with at least 9 others have been killed. Most likely these Iranian forces would have been involved in overlooking and supporting operations in the Syrian theatre along with forces of Syrian President, Bashir al Assad (a co-sectarian ally) against forces of disparate militias from the same fount that germinated ISIL, Al Qaida etc., But like in the killing of the legendary Iranian General Suleiman Qasimi, even this time the Israelis insisted on the rote like that they had, "been behind many attacks on Israeli and American assets and had plans for additional attacks".

More likely than not, an

increasingly isolated (externally and internally) Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is seeking to expand the conflict contours by drawing in Iran as the Iranians remain the favourite 'bogey' that elicits negative reactions amongst most Jews and Americans, irrespective of their partisan loyalties. Strangely, it legitimises Netanyahu's disproportionate belligerence and missteps by deflecting blame games from himself by taking on the Iranians, who were not exactly the primary participants. It is an age-old invocation of a formula of convenience and half-truths.

(1 ne writer, a military veter an, is a former Lt Governor of Åndaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

Unlocking the strength of homeopathy



On this World Homeopathy Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to promoting wellbeing for all, guided by the principles of homeopathy

hysicians in the early days of the birth of homeopathyy persisted in proving its unorthodox nature as a medical science, disregarding its approach to treatment and the laws of nature. Despite their skepticism, the system managed to attract many converts, including numerous reputable physicians from conventional medicine. Notably, Dr Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, himself practiced allopathic medicine before rejecting its crude methods of healing. The year 1796 marks the discovery of homeopathy by Hahnemann.

This discovery, documented in literature and science, began with his repeated consumption of cinchona (quinine) bark, leading to the development of malaria-like symptoms. Intriguingly, cinchona bark was traditionally used to treat malaria, leading Hahnemann to formulate the principle of 'like cures like, also known as the Law of Similia. Since then, homeopathy has garnered widespread acceptance among like-minded physicians who have propagated this healing system across various regions. World Homeopathy Day, celebrated annually on April

10th, commemorates the birth anniversary of the visionary who introduced this gentle healing system to the world. As we approach the grand symposium scheduled for April 10th and 11th, 2024, at the Yashobhoomi Convention Centre in New Delhi, organised by the Ministry of Ayush through its homeopathy organisations, I am filled with pride to witness the enthusiastic participation and fervour among practitioners. This symposium, dedicated to celebrating the legendary Dr Samuel Hahnemann on his 269th birth anniversary, will feature the esteemed presence of the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Draupadi Murmu,

The principle of "like cures like" has endured over time, offering holistic solutions to diverse health challenges. As the world increasingly embraces traditional and complementary medicine, global initiatives in this realm are gaining momentum. Contemporary scientific

advancements recognise the concept of Precision Medicine, favouring research in personalised medicine tailored to an individual's unique genetic makeup, epigenetics and lifestyle factors. Homeopathy, with its emphasis on individualisation in treatment, rejects the onesize-fits-all approach, acknowledging each person's uniqueness. Through compreĥensive consultation, homeopathy practitioners customise treatments, aiming to restore holistic health and

Research exploring homeopathy's role in epidemics and public health is also a priority. Notably, India has emerged as a leader in Homeopathic research, contributing significantly to the sector's advancement. It is crucial to recognise the

adding prestige to the event. role of homeopathyin health-

care. By integrating homeopathy into mainstream medicine and fostering collaboration among practitioners, researchers and policymakers, we can unleash its full potential and ensure universal accessibility. As renowned healing experts emphasise, there is no division between

"alternative/complementary medicine" and conventional medicine; there is only effective medicine validated by rigorous testing. In the words of John Henry

Clark, a prominent figure in homeopathy, Hahnemann's heirs, much remains for us to accomplish. He has shown us the better way; it is for us to go forward." this

HomeopathyDay, let us reaffirm our commitment to promoting health and wellbeing for all, guided by the timeless principles of homeopathy. Together, let us envision a future where holistic healing is accessible to all, enriching lives and communities alike.

(The writer is Director General, Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy; views are personal)

GUARDIANS OF THE SEA

Madam — Apropos news article, "Navy chief awards INS Sharda for anti-piracy operations", published on April 8, is my response. India's maritime security landscape has reached a critical juncture, characterised by multifaceted challenges and escalating threats. With approximately 95 per cent of Indian trade flowing through the seas, safeguarding maritime routes has become paramount. The Indian Navy has responded decisively to these challenges, deploying its strongest-ever presence in the Gulf of Aden, with 11 warships patrolling at any given time. Over the past 100 days alone, the Navy has deployed over 21 warships, put 5,000 personnel to sea and conducted 900 hours of aerial sur-

veillance to address threats. However, the Navy's tasks are further complicated by the increasing presence of the Chinese military in the Indian Ocean, with a growing number of vessels, including research and surveillance ships, submarines and the potential future deployment of aircraft carriers. To counter these evolving threats, the Indian Navy maintains an unprecedented fleet of 46 warships at sea, including conventional submarines, destroyers and stealth frigates. Through constant monitoring, robust deployments and strategic preparedness, the Indian Navy remains committed to safeguarding India's maritime interests and ensuring stability in the region.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

Madam —Apropos news article, "CAA: Why the hullabaloo?", published on April 7, this is my response. I was bullied on the first day in my new school. It was my first experience with ragging as well as with the game of othering. Fortunately for me, the school administration and teachers did not treat me differently rather they embraced me with affection. I shudder at the thought of what might have happened if my class teacher after calling the roll number asked

me in front of those students to prove that

I was a student of that school. But should

CONTENTIOUS MATTER

THE EDITOR



propos news article, "High on rhetoric, low on originality", published on April 8, this is my response. The Congress manifesto contains a bundle of lies. Economically it is not viable and practically not possible. One lakh per women household, One lakh for the educated unemployed, an increase in the payment of wages to the 100 days job scheme and a waiver of students and farmers loans do involve a

any teacher ask such a question to a student when his roll number had already been recorded in the attendance register? It was the school authorities who had recorded the name of the student in the attendance register. Asking such a question means the authorities do not have faith in

Should a Government ask some voters to prove whether they are citizens of a country or not after being elected by the votes including the votes of those voters? If they were not citizens how could authorities allow them to vote? And how could a Government challenge the way it had been elected while completing its term of five years? Anything that can increase the divide between different communities and create fear psychosis in the minds of the voters of our country should be avoid-

Sujit De | Kolkata

WHO WILL UP VOTE FOR?

Madam — Apropos news article, "In a quandary", published on April 8, this is my response. The most politically significant Uttar Pradesh has a lion's share in the formation of Government at the Centre

huge pay out of state exchequer. Generating funds when the Government is reeling under debt is impractical. Secondly, there is no men-

tion of the most crying problem of jobs and unemployment rising. Thirdly about women folk, it speaks about reservations in jobs and law-making. The Congress ruled the nation for over six decades. It has not done anything for the empowerment of women. How to rely on its promise? Regarding education, it says NEP will be corrected to the wants of time. Skill-based innovation education is the need of the hour. The less said about ending corruption, the better. Its rival BJP is sitting pret-

ty on zero tolerance for corruption and Modi is

likely to hit a hat trick, the Congress manifesto

does not carry promises to face the mighty BJP. N R Ramachandran | Chennai

because out of a total number of Parliamentarians(543), as many as 80 are elected from UP alone even as the state sends 32 Members to Rajya Sabha culminating in the cliched political saying, 'the way to Delhi passes through the very Uttar Pradesh!

On the face of it, the SP is embattled with a strenuous 'horses for courses' exercise given that the party is replacing candidates on an hourly basis while on the contrary, there's palpable indecision in the grand old party over naming the candidates even in its home constituencies like Amethi and Raebareli. Mr Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party happens to be a significant ally in the Congress-led 'INDIA-Bloc notwithstanding, their strategies are different from each other. However, scenes in politics keep changing kaleidoscopically till the last instant and surprises being sprung out of the blue till the end cannot be ruled out either. Hence, let's wait and watch the way this political cookie crumbles this time

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

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FIRST COLUMN

PEACE NECESSITATES MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Universal embrace of tolerance could prevent wars, ethnic and religious conflicts



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

The reason why the world has no peace today is because many nations and most individuals deny the supremacy of a moral order, in their inter-personal, inter-communal and international relationships. The number of such individuals and nations increasing day-byday who think that wickedness, cunningness and vice are better than virtue and violence is better than non-violence. Some whole societies or nations think that man is merely an animal, hankering after material progress and comforts.

They believe that man is satisfied merely by sense gratification and that he is an animal that Lives from sensation to sensation! They refuse to accept the evidence, namely that man has a conscience and that he has higher aspirations, such as the aspiration for peace, calmness and bliss. Even a most degraded person also has an inner aspiration for solace, satisfaction and peace. However, they fail to realise that peace, contentment and bliss are not the qualities of bodily cells; they are the qualities of the conscious self in its state of moral greatness.

Because of their materialistic thinking and attitude, scholars have given to society what is called the materialistic interpretation of history. This view of man and history has been popularised and publicised by historians, economists and social scientists. The result is that the modern man does not believe in the supremacy of the moral law. Man has, therefore, ceased to apply human values to his problems.



for example, the problem of nuclear weapons. There have been many agitations and conferences to bring about disarmament. In the talks for disarmament or in the negotiations for the reduction of nuclear weapons, the only quality brought to bear is the fear of a way and the resulting annihilation. The talks are vitiated and they do not lead to actual disarmament because no moral values are brought to bear on the problem. The lack of a sense of moral responsibility is, in fact, the most sinister aspect of modern civilisation. The whole modern thinking of man is characterised by a lack of moral responsibility. A psychiatrist, today, would explain that a person murdered because he had developed a complex after his father had beaten him with a stick when he was a small boy! So, the responsibility is of the father who had been cruel to his son! In many other forms, the attitude that I am not responsible runs through every aspect of modern life. This has undermined the moral quality of life. So, if we now want world peace, the real effort lies in giving man a sense of moral responsibility. Let man realise that it is his moral responsibility to eliminate these because these cause peacelessness not only to him but to others as well.

Today we see people killing people in the name of Religion, but has any religion ever taught its followers to kill innocent people? The chronicles of mankind or various civilisations or nations bear witness to the truth that property is worth inestimable and incalculable amount and millions of men have been lost in the slaughterhouse of intolerance during the last 2000 years or so because of intolerance that ensued from a hurt ego, an unfulfilled selfish motives or narrow-mindedness that could not stand the existence of different views, different lifestyles, different cultures and different self-interests. Can anyone calculate or imagine how many families lost their peace and harmony and how many cities and civilisations were ruined because of intolerance? If only this virtue, called Tolerance, had been sustained—all or many other virtues also would have survived, for, when tolerance is lost, man loses his patience, selfcontrol, spirit of non-violence, etc. Therefore it is not too late in the day, for, if even now those who are killing innocent people begin to observe this virtue mankind can be saved from the scourge of wars.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist;

views are personal)

Role of education in shaping Viksit Bharat



The significance of ethical education and interdisciplinary approaches in promoting societal change and nation-building cannot be overstated



he lives of students are amidst a major transformation, largely due to rapidly changing value systems across the globe. However, this transformation, driven solely by acquisition, is unlikely to yield positive results. Instead, it risks turn-ing education, a highly revered institution, into a mere business venture where success is measured solely by material possessions. Moral and ethical education stands as the key to success, enabling the new generation to embrace values and approaches that can nurture the creative urges of the student community within an environment marked by rapid change. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the challenges posed by this transitional phase.

Keywords such as knowledge, wisdom, creativity, motivation and encouragement are prerequisites for a successful education system. A competent education system must possess an inner strength capable of deploying myriad strategies to tackle unforeseen challenges. Fostering the latest skills and transmitting new moral codes and cognitive thinking subtly are crucial areas that can lay a robust foundation for the Viksit Bharat 2047 campaign.

Vhile our education system is known for embracing values and approaches that shape the creative urges of students and academicians, it faces increasing challenges during this transitional phase. Efforts must be made to bridge the gap in existing knowledge regarding the contemporary importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies. Higher education institutions in India need to enrich each discipline with diverse content and ideas. Even science students should be exposed to international, national, socio-political and economic issues through multidisciplinary practices, as initiated by NEP 2020. Such policies serve as catalysts for innovation and foster academic collaboration across multiple disciplines and institutions

of higher learning. In recent years, there has been substantial change in the content and nature of various disciplines, with a focused approach to integrating real-life experiments of democracy, the environment, globalisation and governance into the new education system framework. It's crucial to demonstrate how

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS SHOULD PREPARE STUDENTS TO **ENGAGE WITH** SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES ON A GLOBAL SCALE, **FOSTERING** COLLABORATION WITH

> **STAKEHOLDERS** FROM OTHER **INSTITUTIONS**

new higher education approaches can drive change and instil confidence among the masses. The latest research and developments in education globally should be disseminated to upgrade research and teaching accordingly. The strength of the higher education system lies in its internal dynamism, ensuring inclusive growth and contributing significantly to the Viksit Bharat @2047 Campaign.

India's entrepreneurial skills have propelled us forward, overcoming tertiary constraints and fostering innovation. Remarkable initiatives have focused on connectivity and developing new connections, rather than relying solely on the market or cut-throat competition. As Lucy Larcom once said, "If the world seems cold to you, kindle fire to warm it." This sentiment rings true for our forgotten appreciation of traditional values and ethics. The vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 can be achieved by nurturing creativity and responsibility among students, equipping them with moral knowledge and employable skills. This not only broadens ethical horizons and enhances decision-making capabilities but also clarifies what is ethically and morally correct. Practical approaches and workshops can help develop skills through critical thinking and diverse forms of

Ethics transcends clichés, prompting a shift from what is to what ought to be. It's essential to instil a strong sense of responsibility along-side artistic and academic freedom. Despite years of efforts to eliminate major threats, terrorism, caste violence and class conflict persist. Blaming others for these issues is naive; we must acknowledge our role in them. Preservation of identity is important, but efforts to preserve cultural, linguistic, regional or religious identities sometimes damage the socio-political system's fabric. The world also faces the spread of narrow-minded faith, but history shows that such faith seldom survives. A robust education system is needed to cultivate responsibility among the youth, playing a pivotal role in achieving our nation's development goals.

Sensitising students and society through low-cost, intense webinars can be highly effective in this regard, particularly in an era of rapid globalisation. Mass media can play a role in political and social mobilisation, with student participation facilitating mass sensitisation. Improving course content through academic discourse and introducing innovative mechanisms in social sciences can enhance the relevance of education. Academic programmes and services should provide supplemental support to teaching and learning, fostering community development both inside and outside the classroom. Research centres should be established to ensure academic excellence in social sciences.

Intellectual skills should prepare education, promoting social awarestudents to engage with socio-economic and political issues on a global scale, fostering collaboration with stakeholders from other institutions. Community education programmes should encourage lifelong learning. To enhance student standards, self-academic orientation and excellence should be developed, incorporating problemsolving and inquiry-based learning activities in a collaborative environment. A new syllabus should provide insight into the problem of terrorism and its causes, paving the way for a comprehensive strategy to combat it. Understanding the nexus between organised crime and terrorism is crucial. Cultural exchanges among students can promote harmony and creativity, transcending social divisions. It's imperative to focus on empirical and normative understandings to address societal concerns effectively. The Government's inspiring

positioning India at the forefront globally.

In conclusion, the transformative journey of education towards Viksit Bharat@2047 necessitates a holistic approach, emphasising moral and ethical education alongside academic excellence. The challenges posed by rapid global changes require proactive measures to bridge knowledge gaps and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. It is imperative to instil a sense of responsibility and cultivate creativity among students to address contemporary issues effectively. Efforts should focus on integrating real-life experiences into the education system and fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Embracing diversity and inclusivity in education will strengthen the fabric of society and contribute to national development goals. Moreover, initiatives like low-cost webinars and mass media engagement can amplify the impact of ness and civic engagement among

As we navigate through complex socio-political landscapes, it is crucial to uphold traditional values while embracing innovation and progress. By nurturing a generation equipped with moral clarity and practical skills, we can pave the way for a brighter future for India and the world. In essence, the journey towards Viksit Bharat@2047 requires collective efforts from educators, policymakers and society at large. By prioritising ethical education, fostering interdisciplinary learning and embracing diversity, we can build a strong foundation for a prosperous and inclusive future. Together, let us embark on this journey towards excellence, guided by the principles of integrity, empathy and resilience.

tne youtn.

(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav award, is a professor and expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

Election manifestos: Rituals no one is serious about

From the Congress to the BJP and even smaller players, manifestos are released with much fanfare yet often fail to hold substance

t is election time and the season of manifestos. The Indian National Congress which is the world's largest political party; the BJP, an outfit representing the interests of those believing in Sanatan Dharma and even the Kerala Congress (Mani), a single MP party that stands for safeguarding the Roman Catholic Church have all released election manifestos that promise manna from heaven. If the past experiences are any indication, these manifestos do not have the value of the paper on which they are printed. How many among our elite electorate go through the promises made by the parties in their manifestos? Releasing the manifestos has become a kind

The Congress which ruled Interestingly, the party has for the politicians who suc- abolished by the BJP



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

the country from 1947 to 1977 had given a lot of promises to the voters. Provision of roundthe-clock drinking and irrigation water, power supply to all villages, jobs for the millions and subsidised grains to the poor section of the society were some of the promises which figured in all the manifestos released by the GOP since the first General Election

held in 1952.

repeats the same promises in every manifesto without failure. It has kept its promises this time too without failure. For nearly six decades the Congress has kept the country and its people poor, illiterate, unhealthy and unem-The License Permit Raj of the

Congress era was to keep the country perpetually poor. While other countries made giant strides in industrialisation and agriculture operations, independent India remained stagnant and weak. A Congress prime minister went to the extent of asking the people to skip meals a day in a week so that all Indians get at least two square meals a day. If there had been a Nobel Prize

never let down the voters as it ceeded in sustaining poverty, malnutrition and underdevelopment, the Congress leaders would have walked away with the honors. The GOP had some of the best brains who brought in brilliant ideas but the Royal Family that controlled the party had other ideas. They were afraid that if the people came out of poverty and started getting proper education, they would ask for a share in the power.

The difference that stand out in the 2024 election manifesto is the decision by the party to cancel the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution. This means that once the Congress forms a Government at the Centre, it would bring back the special status enjoyed by Jammu & Kashmir which was

Government. The manifestoes what was there to eat. The and that is to vote out the "corof the Congress, CPI(M) and CPI proclaim that they would dump the Agniveer scheme launched by the BJP Government. The truth is that the Communist parties never support any move that would help India to progress and develop economically and socially. The saying in Kerala, is that if the CPI(M) declares that something was detrimental for the country, one can be rest assured that it would be good for the nation and the people.

There is an adage in Malayalam which states that if one doesn't like his wife, he would find fault with whatever good work she does. There is this story about a husband who comes back home after a hard day's job and ask his wife parties have only one mission

poor woman replies that she has prepared tapioca and green

chilly. "Has the tapioca been boiled," asked the husband. The wife replied in the affirmative to which the husband got furious and assaulted her shouting that how dare she do such a thing. Next day when he came home and asked her for food, she said there was tapioca. The man asked her whether tapioca has been boiled and the poor woman, fearing about last evening's thrashings, told him that she has not boiled it. The husband thrashed her many times asking why she did not boil the same! This was a story quite vogue in Kerala in 1950s. This is the attitude of the CPI(M) and the CPI. Both the

rupt and communal" Modi Government. The Congress and Communists have declared that they would dump once and for ever the Agniveer scheme launched by the Defense forces. The agniveer programme is a right measure in the right direction though it has some limitations. Only 25 per cent of those who are recruited would be absorbed in the forces while 75 per cent would be removed after three or four years of ser-

This is in the hope that all those who launch weapons and warfare manufacturing units would employ the Agniveers who would have been benefited by the three year long skill development program. One has to read this

statement together with the findings of various trade and industry bodies like the CII, FICCI etc which pas pointed out time and again that the employability of those passing out of high schools and colleges is poor.

This is not a paean to Narendra Modi or his Government. If the Congress and Communists have to stay in the race to form an alternative to the BJP Government, leaders of these parties should come out with out-of-the-box solutions and promises. Unfortunately, the manifestos of these parties show that they have not moved an inch from the hate-Modi groove they are entrapped in.

(The writer is special correspondent with the pioneer; views are personal)

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Jointness & integration

Expedite bigticket defence reform

HE maiden 'Parivartan Chintan', a pioneering tri-service conference held in New Delhi on Monday, is a major step towards achieving the twin goals of jointness and integration in the armed forces. Addressing the conference, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen Anil Chauhan stressed the need to develop a 'joint culture' for the forces so as to distil and imbibe the best of the three services while respecting the uniqueness of each of them. He talked about large-scale reforms aimed at enhancing the warfighting ability and interoperability of the services.

Jointness and integration are regarded as the pillars on which rests the government's initiative to make the armed forces 'future ready'. It is worrying that the rollout of theatre commands — a joint and integrated operational structure envisaging all three forces working in tandem under a common military commander — has been inordinately delayed. The main stumbling block for this big-ticket defence reform is the apprehension of the smaller-sized Navy and the Air Force about the potential domination of the Army in the proposed commands. A big challenge for the government and the defence top brass is to strike a balance between the formation of joint structures and the preservation of the unique identity and ethos of each service.

It is hoped that the brainstorming done at the conference will help in finalising a roadmap for seamless integration, taking into consideration the turf wars that are holding up the transition. Wedged between two hostile neighbours, India cannot afford to slacken the pace of modernisation, adaptation and collaboration. Warfare in the 21st century is mainly about maximising efficiency and minimising wastage of resources. Expeditiously building consensus on jointness and integration holds the key to early implementation of the theaterisation plan. This is vital for bolstering India's combat preparedness and fortifying its borders against all kinds of military transgressions.

Disaster relief delay

Kamataka, TN cases denote systemic challenge

STATE grappling with the aftermath of natural calamities, having to fight legal battles with the Centre over disaster relief funds underscores broader issues of governance and accountability. The Supreme Court's intervention following pleas from Kamataka and Tamil Nadu sheds light on the urgent need for darity and expediency in disbursing funds earmarked for disaster management.

The grievances voiced by the two states, seeking additional aid from the National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF), are symptomatic of a systemic challenge. Both states cite provisions under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, which mandate timely and adequate assistance in the wake of calamities. However, the process of accessing NDRF funds appears mired in bureaucratic hurdles. Despite requisite assessments and recommendations, both states allege conspicuous inertia on the part of the Centre in releasing funds promptly. It not only undermines the spirit of cooperative federalism but also severely compromises the state governmets' ability to deliver relief to the needy. Tamil Nadu's plea, following Cyclone Michaung and subsequent floods, highlights the pressing need for immediate relief measures to mitigate the suffering of the affected people. Similarly, Karnataka's appeal, prompted by severe drought conditions last September, sums up the precariousness of agricultural livelihoods and the need for urgent intervention.

The legal confrontation reflects the discord between the Centre and Opposition-ruled states, including Punjab. Kerala's recent petition regarding the curtailment of the state's borrowing powers and the disputes over gubernatorial assent to Bills accentuates the strained relations. At stake are the lives and livelihoods of millions of citizens. The release of funds by the NDRF, regarded as a lifeline during a crisis, must not be slowed down by red tape or political wrangling.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 1924

The Vykom Satyagraha

THE Satyagraha Committee has done the right thing in restating the issue on which it is offering Satyagraha at Vykom. The committee, in the course of a recent public statement, says: "It is not the intention of this committee of the Congress to secure the admission of those classes into the temple, either at Vykom or elsewhere. The committee has no kind of mental reservation in the matter and wishes to state categorically that it is not its purpose to take advantage of the right of free passage along the thoroughfare in question for the purpose of forcing the entry of the Ezhavas and Pulayas... The Satyagrahis intend to establish the right of all the subjects of His Highness, the Maharaja, including the depressed classes, to pass along the public roads and pathways, of which the road outside the Vykom temple is one. The committee stands for what are, after all, the strict legal rights of the case, the only obstruction in its way being the order of the magistrate. What the Satyagrahis want is the maintenance of the legal and equitable rights of the depressed classes. The committee wants no more and will be content with no less. It will thus be seen that the Congress committee has no intention of interfering with the existing exclusive right of worship in the Vykom temple, which the Brahmins at present enjoy, but only to establish the undoubted legal and equitable right of Ezhavas and Pulayas to the use of public roads and pathways. It is one thing to insist that a particular temple will be used by only a particular class of people, and quite another to claim that even the public roads around the temple will be closed to particular castes."

Northern comfort elusive for INDIA

The electorally important region presents a picture of chaos and despondency for Oppn bloc



RADHIKA RAMASESHAN SENIOR JOURNALIST

Opposition's INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) bloc has reasons to feel buoyant about its prospects in the southern states in the Lok Sabha polls. In contrast to the promising scenario on the other side of the Vindhyas, where INDIA is well placed in Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and relatively so in Karnataka, the North presents a picture of chaos and despondency for the alliance. The shambolic state of affairs derives in large part from the flaws inherent in every Opposition grouping against a near-hegemonic ruling force (till 1989, it was the Congress, and now it is the BJP), arising largely from ego clashes and a marked reluctance of the self-styled 'stronger' entities to share power equitably with their comrades, and the BJP's smashand-grab approach towards razing a level playing field.

The BJP's predatory tactics have caused major depletions in the critical mass INDIA required to put up a respectable challenge. The Congress — which remains the Opposition's only pan-India party — has suffered the highest casualties. Several high-profile leaders have switched sides, enhancing the impression that an enfeebled Congress' innards have been hollowed out and it is, therefore, in no position to credibly confront the BJP and the NDA.

Jammu and Kashmir contributes only five seats to the Lower House of Parliament, but even in its truncated version as a union territory (the Kashmir valley has three seats and Jammu two), its



Gopal Rai and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav (right) during an INDIA rally. PTI

symbolic significance stands undiminished for the BJP and INDIA. A recent development classically illustrates INDIA's inability to unify the Opposition, which includes the National Conference (NC), led by the Abdullahs, and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), headed by Mehbooba Mufti. Notwithstanding the earlier averments of an alliance, the NC and the PDP decided to fight each other in the Valley and have fielded their own candidates. The Congress failed to cement the grouping. Either the Congress lacked the political and moral authority to broker peace between the Abdullahs and Mehbooba Mufti or the party thought it more 'prudent' to go with the former. However, it is useful to recall that a splintered Opposition could give the BJP the opening it sorely needs in the Valley. Moreover, the NC and the PDP have partnered with the BJP in the past after shedding their supposed aversions to its ideology.

Cut to Uttar Pradesh and its bountiful 80 seats, much of which were netted by the BJP in 2014 and 2019. The Lucknow bazaar buzz has it that there's no jaan (life) left in INDIA after successive routs. The SamajwaThe centrality of Arvind Kejriwal, Hemant Soren and Tejashwi Yadav shows that the Congress is forced to play second fiddle to

regional satraps.

di Party (SP) is the fulcrum of

the alliance by a mile, but the prelude to the elections has been marked by bumps. The SP has fumbled in candidates' selection (it wasn't as though it was spoilt for choice); it has the shell of a party, namely the Congress, for an ally after losing weightier partners such as the Rashtriya Lok Dal and the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party to the BJP, which nimbly put together a seat-sharing arrangement to the apparent satisfaction of the NDA's constituents. The SP chief, Akhilesh Yadav, was discernibly defensive about

last week at Ghaziabad. Muslims have always consti-

tuted a strong vote bank of the SP and the projected outcome of the alliance with the Congress is the consolidation of minority votes. Yadav's unwillingness to affirm a public stand on minority-related issues did not go down well with Muslim opinion-makers, clerics and minority members of the SP. His party's members periodically spoke up against it. The recent death of Mukhtar Ansari, a convicted criminal and politician with a strong base in eastern UP because of his Robin Hood image, drew massive crowds at his funeral, crowds that were undeterred by massive police deployment. The episode prompted Yadav to call on his family, especially since the SP has nominated Mukhtar's brother Afzal from the Ghazipur Lok Sabha constituency in Purvanchal. Afzal Ansari had won the seat in 2004 as well as in 2019.

On the other hand, the BJP has left no stone unturned in its marquee state as it is determined to recompense the NDA for the loss of nine seats—from 71 in 2014 to 62 in 2019 — and perhaps win more. Modi has hit

the ground running with a roadshow in Ghaziabad-Meerut; the BJP's tieups are in place and it has declared over 50 candidates. The Congress, crippled by a weak organisational setup and bereft of charismatic regional leaders, is still expecting the Gandhis to contest from the family boroughs of Amethi and Rae Bareli in Awadh. Should the family back off - especially in view of Rahul Gandhi's Amethi defeat in 2019 — the UP rank and file fears that the Congress might draw a blank.

Where does INDIA's salvation lie in the North? In Haryana, the BJP seems to have willingly forfeited its ally, the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), and the Jat votes it brought to the table. But the Congress doesn't look like the gainer it is notionally projected to be. The break-up only signifies that the JJP would split the votes of a dominant community, depriving the Congress of the cutting edge it might enjoy under Bhupinder Singh Hooda's stewardship.

What about Delhi? Arvind Kejriwal is undeniably INDIA's protagonist after his arrest. The AAP has gone on the front foot, unfazed by the fact that many senior leaders, including the CM himself, are in jail. Its campaign pivots around Kejriwal and his government's flagship programmes, but is that enough of a counter against the BJP's alltoo-powerful leader and a welldefined campaign replete with exaggerated claims about the Centre's 'achievements' and hard work on the ground?

The centrality of Kejriwal, Hemant Soren (also incarcerated) and Tejashwi Yadav shows that willy-nilly, the Congress is forced to play second fiddle to north India's regional satraps. On the other hand, its direct faceoffs with the BJP in states such as MP, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Chhattisgarh will be the ultimate test of its ability to reassert its political leadership.

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

countering the BJP's blatantly

divisive agenda, as revealed in

PM Narendra Modi's speech

The only sure basis of an alliance is for each party to be equally afraid of the other. — Thucydides

"

Portrait of an elephant as a scene-stealer

SHANKAR GOPALKRISHNAN

LEPHANTS are among the most lovable creatures, provided they are not provoked. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu. The elephant at the main temple stole my heart. Unlike other temple elephants, this one was not chained. Imagine an untethered elephant, standing tall and free!

Elephants are like magnets. They capture your attention, so much so that you can scarcely take your eyes away. This one stood on the pathway leading to the main shrine, on a little perch filled with fine sand. What was distinctive about it was the brown hair on its head. A few long, auburn strands hung elegantly from the sides of the head. In its youth, it must have had a full crop of hair, the kind we find in Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book.

There was a white design painted between the eyes. It was not too large to disfigure the face, but just enough to make it look adorable. Elephants' eyes are tiny but expressive. As it greeted each visitor, you could see the mouth crease into a smile with a peculiar glint in the eyes. The ears flapped, the tail waved and the trunk was ever-animated.

Just beside the elephant, a mega dance programme was in progress. Rows upon rows of chairs were filled with people. At the far end was a stage; a troupe of classical dancers regaled the audience. A silhouette of the gopuram, lit with a row of lights, was showcased against the night sky. Music blared from the speakers. The elephant seemed to enjoy the music and was an equal participant in the dance. It crossed one front foot over the other in a steady rhythm, doing its little jig, even as the event reached a crescendo.

Visitors were irresistibly drawn to it. The elephant followed a particular drill to the letter. It picked the rupee note from the visitor's hand, deftly handed it over to the mahout who sat beside it and placed the trunk on the visitor's head in a mark of affection and benediction.

If it was a mother-child duo, the animal was very careful and placed its trunk ever so gently on the kid's head. There were bold children, and there were those who panicked and froze, refusing to get close. The elephant waited patiently till the child overcame his fear and gained an element of composure. All along, its movements were fluid and languid, as it visibly enjoyed the entire setting.

It was 9 pm. The temple was to close for the night. The mahout made a little gesture. On its own, the elephant got down from the sand perch and walked towards the shrine. It swayed from side to side, its majestic gait a sight for sore eyes. Its gigantic frame was strikingly conspicuous as it passed the temple's doorway and towered over everything in its wake.

I learnt that the elephant's name was Mangalam. Apparently, it was the recipient of the best-behaved elephant award.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Agencies must act without bias

With reference to the editorial 'Battleground Bengal'; the recent attack on the NIA team at Bhupatinagar in West Bengal's East Midnapore district shows that the authorities are not dealing with the miscreants with an iron hand. And the lack of action emboldens anti-social elements to attack officials of agencies like the NIA. The state politicians are more concerned about securing their vote banks than the safety of the residents. Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, it is important to ensure that there is no political interference in the functioning of the state police. Further, government agencies like the ED and the NIA must have no bias against any political outfit.

RAJINDER SINGH, PATIALA

Ensure safety of tourists

Refer to the editorial 'Safety protocol lax'; the death of Ritu Chopra, a seasoned paragliding pilot, has once again brought to light the lack of proper safety measures at Bir Billing, a popular destination for paragliding. Since the weather conditions in hilly areas are always unpredictable, there should be comprehensive regulations for the recruitment of pilots and safety guidelines to prevent mishaps. All illegal constructions in the area should be razed. The onus is on the authorities concerned to ensure that the adventures of tourists at Bir Billing do not take a tragic turn.

HARSHITA KALRA, RAJPURA

Bar erring paragliding operators

Apropos of 'Safety protocol lax'; the fact that even an experienced paragliding pilot could not save her life in the mishap is a commentary on the sorry state of affairs in Bir Billing. The difficult topography, coupled with unpredictable weather conditions, makes paragliding a lot more challenging in the terrain. The safety of the paragliders must remain the top priority for the local agencies. A strict enforcement of international standard operating procedures for paragliding should be the way forward. Besides, the authorities concerned should ensure that, in case of violation, the operator or agency is barred.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Hate on campus

Six students from Afghanistan and one from East Africa were recently asked to vacate the Gujarat University's hostel rooms for overstaying, in a move that came weeks after some foreign students were attacked for offering namaz on the premises. The incident could have been averted if tolerance and respect for other religions had been promoted on campus. It is common for Indians to express concern and sympathy for students from our country being discriminated against or targeted abroad. But how are we treating international students here at home? Religious tol-

erance is the need of the hour.

LAJWANT SINGH, BY MAIL

Silence of AAP MPs

Refer to the report 'Five AAP MPs keep mum on Kejri arrest, leaders baffled'; all MPs of a political party are bound to follow its agenda and promote its interests at the national level. The silence of these Rajya Sabha members amid the crisis being faced by the party has baffled AAP leaders and legislators. AAP is struggling to establish itself as a formidable political force at the national level, and the role of its MPs in helping achieve the objective cannot be overstated.

JAGDISH CHANDER, JALANDHAR

Scourge of defections

It has become increasingly common for political leaders to switch parties whenever they see any electoral benefit. It shows that today's politicians are bereft of any ideology. Even big names in the political arena are not above hopping parties, and it proves that they have not worked at the ground level and lack a mass base. Besides, a lot of capable and educated people who are socially aware do not get to contest an election because of the huge sum of money required for a campaign. Even if there is a changing of the guard, power is generally transferred from one political bigwig to another. There is a need to have more people from a humble background in politics, as they would better understand the problems that the common man faces.

RAJESH GOYAL, BY MAIL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.

These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

Systemic changes a must to curb fake encounters



SANKAR SEN EX-DIRECTOR, NATIONAL POLICE ACADEMY

NCOUNTER specialists continue to pose grave problems for the police administration and operations. Recently, a notorious encounter specialist of the Mumbai Police, Pradeep Sharma, was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Bombay High Court in a 2006 case. The court also awarded a life sentence to 12 other cops, who were involved in the same case. This is exemplary punishment for trigger-happy police of ficers indulging in brazen illegalities.

However, the popular impression that fake encounters are the handiwork of errant cops is misleading. The hard fact to be acknowledged is that such encounters are the symptoms of a systemic malaise. At times, these encounters are staged by police officers because of the pressure exerted by their political masters and departmental bosses to show quick results by means fair or foul. The public, by and large, does not mind if cops take the law become executioners in the case of dreaded criminals.

The police dilemma is compounded by the slow-moving criminal justice system. As trials drag on indefinitely in the courts, witnesses are easily gained over or turn hostile. Hence, the police face tremendous pressure to adopt extrajudicial methods and shortcuts. Some civil libertarians presume that extrajudicial killings stem from the 'bloodthirstiness' of the police officials. This is not always the case. The police are encouraged to do the dirty work because the criminal justice system is not functioning properly, and overhauling the system is an arduous and time-consuming job.

But the fact to be constantly bome in mind is that encounters are counterproductive and encourage contempt for the law within the police. Breaking the law in the name of law enforcement is unacceptable in a democratic society governed by the rule of law. It is unacceptable because it is arbitrary as a process and random in effect.

In its report, the National Police Commission strongly condemned false encounters as a remedy. The need of the hour is to strengthen the law and legal processes. Unfortunately, some senior police officers, instead of resisting pressure from their political masters, bend over backwards to please them. As the DIG in charge of the Crime into their own hands and Investigation Department hesitation on the part of the



NOTORIOUS: Pradeep Sharma, an encounter specialist of the Mumbai Police, was recently sentenced to life imprisonment by the Bombay High Court in a 2006 case. PTI

(CID) of the Odisha Police, I was berated by then Chief Minister for not knowing all the tricks of the 'police tradecraft'.

Admittedly, in every police department, there are violence-prone officers who frequently indulge in a disproportionate use of force. In the US, the Christopher Commission, which looked into the misuse of force by the police after the Rodney King incident (1991) in Los Angeles, could pinpoint a few officers who were frequently crossing a red line. There should be no police leaders to discipline and, if necessary, weed out the black sheep.

Thus, for dealing with the menace of fake encounters, systemic changes are called for. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), on receiving complaints of false encounters from the Andhra Pradesh civil liberties committee, held a public hearing in Hyderabad and recorded evidence. The NHRC Chairman, in a letter to the Chief Ministers, asked them to issue directions to all police stations through the where deaths had occurred in encounters with the police. The commission was of the view that the right to private defence should not be manipulated to justify fake encounters. The procedure outlined by

on procedures to be followed

the NHRC laid down that in the case of an encounter in which the police were involved, immediate steps should be taken to investigate the facts and circumstances leading to the incident and ascertain how the offence was committed and by whom. Moreover, if officers belonging to the same police station are members of the encounter party, it would be appropriate that other police agencies, preferably the state CID, should take over the investigation of such cases. Unfortunately, these salutary instructions of the NHRC remain just on paper and are highlighted only in their breach. It is not known if the NHRC has taken firm and tangible measures to ensure that its mandatory instructions are acted upon.

In the Indian police, peer group supervision is also conspicuously missing, though it can be a powerful tool for ensuring accountability and all-round good policing. In Japan, police officers work in pairs with the understanding that one is responsible for the work and conduct of the other. Policemen work in groups in pride, which is the basis of Directors General of Police India also, but the ethos is job satisfaction."

availability of water has drasti-

against the assumption of mutual responsibility. Peer supervision is closer and better informed than supervision by senior officers, but, unfortunately, it has remained a neglected aspect of internal regulation.

Violating the rule of law in the name of law enforcement is not desirable even from the limited point of view of the police. There are instances where criminals have used the police to bump off their rivals in intra-gang warfare. A research study by a former DGP of Maharashtra has shown how the Mumbai Police used to help one group of criminals eliminate their rivals in fake encounters.

There are many in the

police force who mistakenly believe that the end justifies the means. However, the adoption of impermissible means ultimately vitiates the end. Further, violating the rule of law has the effect of 'scapegoating' the police. Police officers, particularly the top brass, have to constantly remember that when the police take recourse to extra-legal methods to make up for the deficiencies of law and legal procedures, they are trying to remedy inadequacies which they did not create. American scholar David Bayley has aptly said: "Illegality in the service of public safety makes policing a furtive and anxious activity and undermines the

Review policies of economic growth for course correction

There are many in

the police force

who mistakenly

believe that the end

justifies the means.



KRISHNA RAJ PROF, INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL & ECONOMIC CHANGE, BENGALURU

NDIA aspires highbecome developed income. (Viksit country Bharat) by 2047. In pursuance of this comprehensive vision plan, the economy needs to wield phenomenal power to ratchet up the GDP growth rate and climb the commanding heights in 23 years from the current nominal GDP of \$3.73 trillion to a whopping \$30 trillion. In practical terms, the world's fifth-largest economy should show an extraordinary incremental growth of \$1.14 trillion every year to reach the pinnacle of \$26.14 trillion in two decades. If the growth rate of 7.6 per cent is taken into consideration, the GDP rose from Rs 38.78 lakh crore to Rs 41.74 lakh crore during the past year (2023-24). The increase is just Rs 2.96 lakh crore, against the Rs 81 lakh crore needed. This is too little to attain the 'developed country' tag by 2047, and it requires more than double the GDP

growth rate at 15 per cent annually. The GDPs of the US, China, Germany, Japan and India are \$26.95 trillion, \$17.78 trillion, \$4.43 trillion, \$4.23 trillion and \$3.73 trillion, respectively. Their per capita GDPs are approximately \$80,410, \$12,540, \$52,820, \$33,950 and \$2,610, respectively. India is currently in the group of lower-income countries. It needs to tread a long road to reach various stages of low income, middle income and high income in 23 years. In order to get the 'high-income country' tag, India's per capita GDP should exceed \$12,055 by 2047.

The key drivers of economic growth are the contributions of the agriculture, industrial and services sectors to the gross GDP. The services sector dominated with a share of 53.34 per cent, while the industrial and agriculture sectors contributed 28.25 per cent and 18.42 per cent, respectively, to the GDP in 2023. However, in the case of top economies of the world, such as US, China, Japan and Germany, the services and industry sectors contribute 95-98 per cent together to their GDP basket, and the dependence on agriculture is hardly 1 per cent, except 6.9 per cent in the case of China. India's GDP contribution from these two sectors is 82 per cent. One of the stumbling blocks to India's growth aspirations is the slow and slug-



INDISPENSABLE: The key drivers of economic growth are the contributions of the industrial, agriculture and services sectors to the gross GDP. REUTERS

gish growth of the agriculture and industrial sectors. Another distinctive feature of a developed economy is that it exports more goods and services than it imports. Despite the fact that India's economy is one of the fastest growing major economies in the world, its high dependence on imports is its main shortcoming. The current account deficit is as high as 2 per cent of the GDP. The US, China, Japan and Germany, on the other hand, have a current account surplus of 5-10 per cent of their GDP. The FDI inflows have fallen drastically in recent years, and the debt has increased to \$625 billion (18.61 per cent of the GDP). These macroe conomic figures clearly show that India's econ-

DOWN

3 Explorer (7)

5 Mountains in

7 Assemble (6)

1 Reaping hand-tool (6)

2 Carrying a weapon (5)

western Russia (5)

8 Obtained directly (2,5,4) 14 US New England state (7)

15 Make a spectacular

flying aircraft (6)

21 Hold high opinion of (5)

profit (5,2)

16 Attack with low

19 Subordinate to (5)

17 Faithful (6)

6 Instrument of oboe family (7)

What India wants is development that is sustainable and has nature & humanity at its core. omy needs to improve its export performance, reduce imports, attract a high inflow of FDI to key sectors and develop the industrial sector to realise its grand dream.

India's economy continues to growwithout the creation of adequate jobs for the youth, and this has aggravated income and wealth inequality. It has produced rapid degradation of natural resources and the environment in recent years. The rate of unemployment among the youth aged 20-24 years and those aged 25-29 years is 44.49 per cent and 14.33 per cent, respectively. The income and wealth share of the top 1 percent of the population rose to 22.6 per cent and 40.1 percent, respectively, in 2022-23. The per capita

SU DO KU

cally fallen to 1,486 cubic metres. Meanwhile, India overtook China to become the world's most populous country, with a population of 1.42 billion. It means 17.5 per cent of the world's population is sharing just 2.4 per cent of the land. These dynamic changes on the socio-economic and environmental fronts have limited India's growth prospects. Further, the structural transformations in terms of economic policies and labour laws have favoured corporations and financial institutions. The poor and the youth lack a level playing field in competitive job markets. India's human and environmental indices and rankings in the world are worsening. The country's agriculture and industrial sectors are globally not competitive in terms of production and productivity.

In furtherance of transforming India into a developed nation, the government has proposed a six-pronged strategy structural transformation, improving competitiveness, financial and social inclusion, reforms in governance, the technology-led Green Revolution 2.0 and labour market reforms. These policies are supposed to improve resource efficiency and sector-wise productivity to accelerate growth, thereby creating jobs and reducing poverty. However, India's goal rais-

tions. Does the policy reflect the aspirations, ethos and values of the people of India? Are the growth of per capita income and GDP the only indicators that will make India a developed country by 2047? Is the high growth rate ecologically sustainable, given the plunder of natural resources? Does the high growth pattern distributes the income rightfully among the people? All these beg the question: development at what cost and whose cost?

Many experts observe that

es many fundamental ques-

India needs to tread a different developmental path rather than desperately following the one pursued by Western economies or by China, given India's diverse demographic, social, economic and environmental conditions. Therefore, the nation needs to realise its inherent macroeconomic strengths and weaknesses to gain the 'developed country' status by 2047. The government immediately needs to review its policies of economic growth for course correction and achieve sustaininclusive and development. The world is desperately struggling amid the increasing incidence of climate change due to myopic and destructive economic policies. What India wants is development that is sustainable and has nature and humanity at its core.

OUICK CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
- 1 Prawns fried in breadcrumbs (6)
- 4 Hypocrisy (6) 9 Be published (4,3)
- 10 A useful quality (5)
- 11 To deposit for
- security (5) 12 Destined to happen (2,5)
- 13 Alternate (5,6) 18 From beginning
- to end of (7)
- 20 Young eel (5)
- 22 Audibly(5) 23 Baffle (7)
- 24 Gain by threats (6) 25 Quick (6)
- YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Disturb, 5 Offer, 8 In the same boat, 9 Twine, 10 Dead set, 11 August, 12 Arrant, 15 Corsage, 17 Flair, 19 After a fashion, 20 Maybe, 21 Relieve.

Down: 1 Drift, 2 Sitting pretty, 3 Useless, 4 Brandy, 5 Opera, 6 Fool's paradise, 7 Rat-a-tat, 11 Acclaim, 13 Refusal, 14 Heifer, 16 Agree, 18 Range.

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 2 5 6 1 3 9 4 7 8 3 4 7 8 6 2 1 9 5 1 9 8 5 7 4 2 6 3 8 2 9 3 5 1 7 4 6 1 7 2 6 5 8 9 5 9 4 8 3 1 2 1 2 6 8 7 9 3 4 8 4 2 1 3 6 5 7 6 7 3 4 9 5 8 2 1 CALENDAR APRIL 10, 2024, WEDNESDAY Shaka Samvat Chaitra Shaka 21 Chaitra Parvishte 28

Shukla Paksha Tithi 2, up to 5.33 pm

Vishkumbha Yoga up to 10.37 am

Bhar ni Nakshatra up to 3,06 pm

Moon in Aries sign

1445

SUNSET:		ESDAY	18:46 HRS
SUNRISE:	THUR	SDAY	06:01 HRS
СПҮ		MAX	MIN
Chandiga	arh	36	18
New Delh	ni	38	19
Amritsar		35	17
Bathinda		35	16
Jalandha	r	35	15
Ludhiana	i	35	16
Bhiwani		36	19
Hisar		37	17
Sirsa		39	21
Dharamsala		26	16
Manali		22	08
Shimla		23	11
Srinagar		22	06
Jammu		32	18
Kargil		14	02
Leh		10	00
Dehradun		35	16
Mussoori	e	23	11