



POPE FRANCIS
Head of Catholic Church

“What’s worse: Make a mistake because I take a certain path, or not make a mistake & stay home? A young person who is afraid of making a mistake, is an old person. Take risks



MALLIKARJUN KHARGE
Congress president

The year 2024 is a watershed year for India’s Democracy. 140 crore Indians gave a verdict which believed in our long-standing institutions, painstakingly built by the makers of our nation



FAROOQ ABDULLAH
Former J&K Chief Minister

They used to say that Article 370 is responsible for terrorism here but today there is no Article 370. Where did this terrorism come from, Today, it is not our govt. Let PM answer this

Challenges galore

The recently concluded conference — Semicon India 2024 — to showcase India’s strategies to emerge as a global hub for chip manufacturing offered an opportunity for an honest reflection on the challenges the country needs to overcome to reach the goal. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who inaugurated the three-day event, presented a rosy picture while inviting leading global semiconductor companies to invest in the country, ground realities suggest that there are many lessons to be learnt from international experiences. Several areas need improvement. Most important among them is that India lacks a robust and integrated supply chain for the semiconductor industry, which involves the availability of raw materials, equipment, components, testing facilities and skilled manpower. The complexity and capital-intensity of semiconductor manufacturing is a major barrier, with a new fab costing over \$1 billion to build. Setting up fabrication plants requires cutting-edge technologies, sophisticated materials and a meticulous production process. India has a shortage of skilled talent and lacks access to high-end technologies, which are licensed from patent holders at a high price. Apart from restrictive bureaucratic procedures, infrastructure limitations, such as power supply, water availability and logistics, can pose significant hurdles for semiconductor manufacturing. Also, India faces stiff competition from established semiconductor manufacturing hubs like China, Taiwan and South Korea. There is also an argument that the Centre’s incentives are not sufficiently attractive compared to what other nations are offering. There are also apprehensions about policy stability in India.

India imports all chips and only a few elements of the semiconductor supply value chain are indigenously available. There is a need to promote research collaborations between academic institutions and industry players to develop cutting-edge chip technologies. While the country boasts a large pool of engineering and technical talent, there is a need for specialised skills in semiconductor manufacturing. Though India traditionally had a strong base for semiconductor design industry, hardware manufacturing has remained elusive. Over the last 15 years, several consortiums made multiple attempts at chip making but without success. The global semiconductor industry is poised for a decade of growth to become a trillion-dollar industry by 2030. India aspires to be one of major drivers of this growth by providing generous fiscal support, creating a conducive manufacturing environment and forging more international collaborations. The Indian semiconductor market, valued at about \$23.2 billion, is projected to reach \$80.3 billion by 2028. India is a key partner in the QUAD Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative and has signed multiple agreements to strengthen global semiconductor co-operation. Initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) offer crucial support through fiscal aid, fostering innovation and building a strong supply chain. The ISM can play a pivotal role in making India a competitive force in the global market, driving economic progress and technological advancements.

To be a global hub for chip manufacturing, India must strengthen its supply chain and address infra limitations



VIVECK VERMA

A balance between the two will ensure long-term success and personal satisfaction

In today’s unrelentingly fast-paced and achievement-oriented world, ambition is largely celebrated as a key driver of success and progress. The relentless pursuit of goals, accolades and professional milestones can indeed propel individuals to extraordinary heights. However, it is not uncommon to note that this single-minded focus on ambition can come at a significant cost to the well-being of individuals. Balancing ambition with well-being is essential for achieving sustainable success and maintaining a fulfilling, healthy life. This balance involves understanding the pitfalls of unchecked ambition, the importance of nurturing relationships and the value of all-inclusive personal development.

Relationship with Ambitions

First of all, it is important to comprehend that well-being is a holistic concept and has emotional, material and cerebral dimensions, which can all be influenced by ambition and the way it plays out in our lives. The ability or inability to accomplish what we aim for can significantly alter what we think of ourselves, impact our degrees of self-care and productivity and determine how we experience life. Therefore, to build a healthy relationship with ourselves, we must create a favourable relationship with our ambitions. Ultimately, we have to strike a fine balance between our aspirations and our sense of the self.

Balancing ambition with well-being involves a well-rounded approach to personal development. Ambition often emphasises external success markers like promotions, awards or financial gains. However, well-being encompasses internal aspects such as emotional intelligence, self-awareness and personal fulfilment. For instance, an ambitious lawyer might focus solely on



climbing the professional ladder, neglecting opportunities for personal growth such as developing empathy, emotional regulation or creative skills. By valuing and integrating these aspects of well-being, individuals can enrich their lives, becoming more complete and fulfilled human beings.

Furthermore, balancing ambition with well-being fosters better relationships, which are essential for personal and professional fulfilment. Ambitious individuals might become so focused on their goals that they neglect their relationships with family, friends and colleagues. For example, a dedicated professional might miss family gatherings or fail to spend quality time with loved ones, leading to feelings of isolation and strained relationships. Strong, supportive relationships are vital for emotional support and stress relief, providing a buffer against the pressures of ambition. By investing time in nurturing these relationships, individuals can create a support system that enhances their emotional resilience and provides a sense of belonging and purpose beyond professional achievements.

Avoiding Burnout

Significantly, ambition with well-being is to avoid burnout, which is characterised by extreme overall exhaustion caused by duress and overworking. For instance, many high-achieving professionals, such as investment bankers or tech entrepreneurs, often face immense pressure to perform. They may work excessively long hours, sacrificing sleep, social connections and even health in pursuit of their goals.

Over time, this relentless drive can lead to burnout, manifesting as fatigue, cynicism, and reduced productivity. By

prioritising well-being through adequate rest, leisure activities and social interactions, individuals can maintain their energy levels and mental clarity, enabling sustained high performance without the adverse effects of burnout.

The practical enactment of balancing ambition with well-being requires a nuanced approach that powerfully integrates self-awareness, sustainable goal-setting and mindful self-care. Ambition fuels our drive to achieve and pushes us toward our highest potential. However, unchecked ambition can lead to burnout, stress and a diminished quality of life. To avoid this, it is essential to cultivate self-awareness, recognising our limits and understanding the deeper motivations behind our goals. Regularly reflecting on what truly matters can help ensure that our ambitions align with our core values, fostering a sense of fulfilment rather than perpetual dissatisfaction.

Goal-setting Sustainable goal-setting is another critical component. Ambitious goals should be broken down into manageable, incremental steps that allow for progress without overwhelming us. This approach not only makes large goals more achievable but also pro-

it is essential to cultivate self-awareness, recognising our limits and understanding the deeper motivations behind our goals

vides frequent opportunities for celebration and reflection, reinforcing a positive feedback loop. Moreover, setting realistic deadlines and prioritising tasks help maintain a balance between striving for excellence and preserving our mental and physical health. By pacing ourselves and allowing for flexibility, we can stay committed to our ambitions without compromising our well-being.

Mindful self-care practices are essential to sustain the energy and resilience needed to pursue ambitious goals. This includes prioritising sleep, maintaining a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity. Equally important is carving out time for relaxation and activities that bring joy and reduce stress, such as hobbies, socialising with loved ones and therapeutic practices. Creating boundaries between work and personal life, and learning to say no when necessary, can prevent the encroachment of professional demands on personal time. By integrating these practices into our daily routines, we can nurture our well-being while still pursuing our ambitions with vigour and enthusiasm.

Finally, it is crucial to understand that we must let neither ambition nor self-preservation become the chief determinant of our identity. If ambition decides who we are, we would be reduced to mere accomplishment or the lack of it, while if self-preservation becomes our priority, we may end up evading life’s most bountiful opportunities. Therefore, we must let a synergy of the two inform who we are, and who we are becoming and choose a bit of preserving ourselves with a bit of stepping into the future.

In conclusion, while ambition can drive remarkable achievements, it is essential to balance this with well-being to ensure long-term success and personal satisfaction. Avoiding burnout, fostering strong relationships and embracing holistic personal development are crucial strategies in this balancing act. By doing so, individuals can not only achieve their professional goals but also lead rich, fulfilling lives that nourish both their ambitions and their well-being.

After all, in the grand scheme of life, the two need not be opposing threads but can instead weave together a pattern of vibrant fulfilment and enduring success. In this delicate equilibrium, ambition serves not as a relentless taskmaster but as a beacon, guiding us towards our highest aspirations while allowing us to savour the richness of each moment along the journey. Thus, we transform the pursuit of greatness into a symphony of sustained passion and overall well-being, crafting a life that is not only accomplished but also profoundly and deeply lived.

(The author is founder & CEO, Upsurge Global, co-founder, Global Carbon Warriors, and Adjunct Professor, ETThames College)

Letters to the Editor

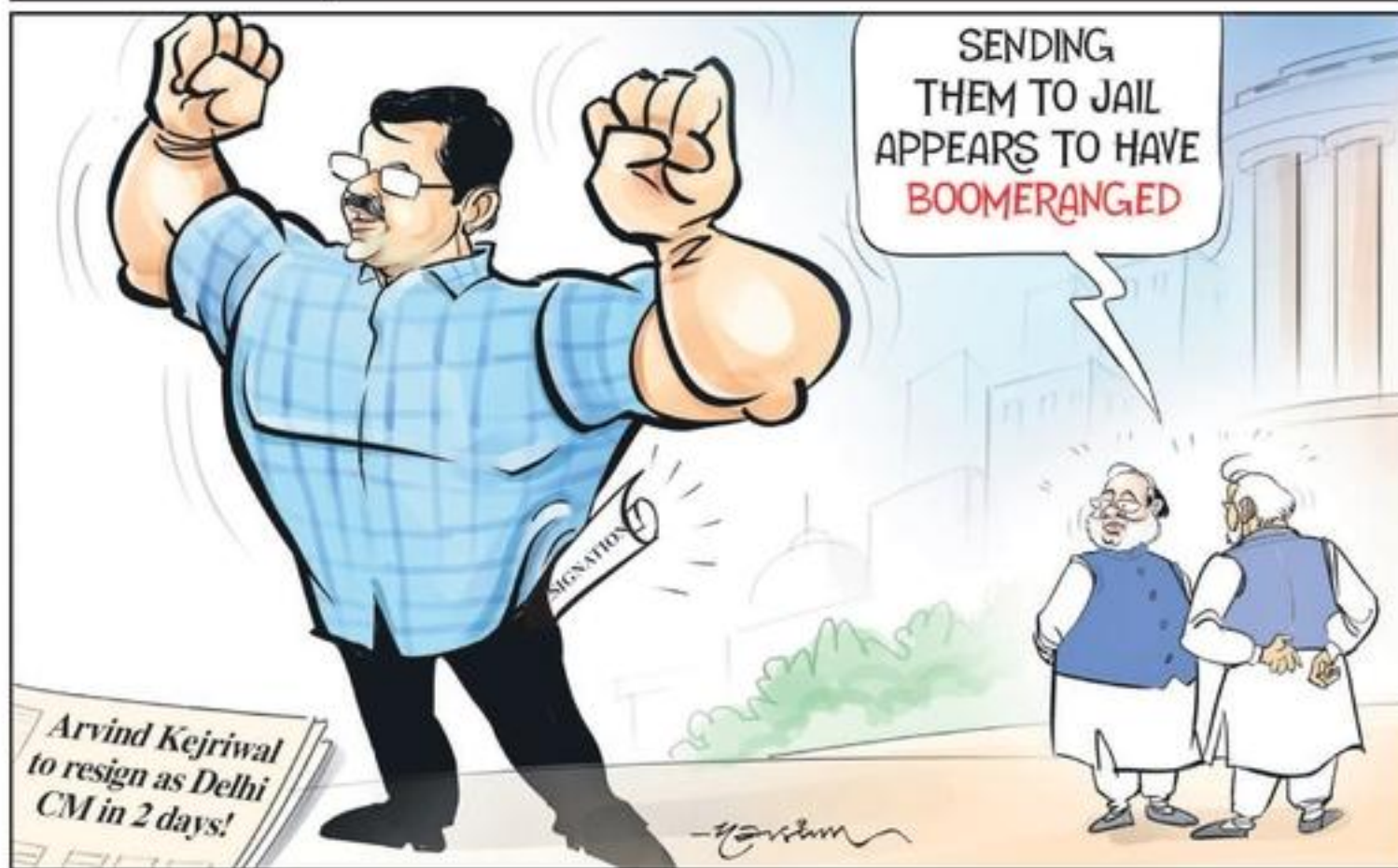
Mere hype

This refers to ‘The Truth of Lie Detection’ (Sept 14). As rightly pointed out, there has been significant hype surrounding the use of lie detection in the criminal justice system, despite its limited probative value for trial purposes. However, the involvement of medical personnel in these procedures raises an important ethical issue. This debate reminds me of the long-standing discussion in the US about whether it is ethical for doctors to participate in administering lethal injections to death row inmates. Since doctors resisted doing so, the governments searched for new

methods like nitrogen hypoxia. The key question here is: Who is responsible for administering lie detection tests? Are medical professionals supervising these tests, and if so, under what guidelines? In my opinion, the involvement of medical professionals in such procedures is unwarranted. The only justifiable role for a medical practitioner would be to remain on standby to provide emergency care if required. The public must be informed about the nature of these procedures, especially since they exist in a grey area between science and pseudoscience. It would be prudent to appoint independent scientific committees with the authority to recommend the appropriate use of such techniques.

K ANANTH RUPESH,
Visakhapatnam

Cartoon Today



India in the hotspot

■ Al Jazeera

Indian poet who scared white S Africa

One hundred years ago, on February 28, 1924, a four-foot-10-inch woman of colour gave a speech at the Wanderers Hall in Johannesburg. Sarojini Naidu poured scorn on the British, writes historian Goolam Vahed.

■ Gulf News

Lynching in the name of vigilantism

The ogre of hate crime in India — that has seen no let up despite BJP returning to power — bared its fangs once again, this time on a school going boy. Aryan Mishra was out late night with friends when he was shot dead.

■ Financial Times

Adani: Prosecutors freeze \$310mn

Swiss prosecutors have frozen \$310mn held at six Swiss banks by a person they suspect to be “a frontman” for Adani, the controversial Indian conglomerate fighting accusations of fraud.

DECCAN Chronicle

16 SEPTEMBER 2024

States in crisis as parties pledge freebies for votes

Give a man a fish and you provide him a meal but teach him how to fish and you give him a livelihood, goes a saying. As another election season is upon us, it only goes to show how far India is removed from the ideal of creating livelihoods through jobs for all its people in the working age group.

In this highly competitive season of laddling out promises of freebies to win votes, each political party tries to outdo rivals by offering to spend freely from taxpayers' money in handing out incentives that may drain the exchequer but may help garner votes for the netas and their parties.

As Jammu & Kashmir prepares to go to the polls in a historic election 10 years after the last one, the competition for wooing the voters with incentives is fierce. With the Congress promising women ₹3,000 a month besides rations and a phenomenal ₹25 lakh health cover, the BJP is inclined to put it all together in a financial package akin to a basic household expenses cover of ₹18,000 a month to be directly transferred to the eldest woman of a household.

Governments that are doling out incentives aimed at empowering women are moving rapidly towards a financial crisis with some states like Himachal Pradesh struggling even to pay government staff their salaries at the beginning of a month.

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Such a prospect of financial bankruptcy of states that are already swimming against the tide with monthly interest payments running into thousands of crores, however, seems to mean nothing to the netas as they bid for the power to run the states, wooing voters by promising the moon.

As a class, politicians seem impervious to the cost-of-living crisis that the middle class downwards face as sticky inflation rises and rules. It has been pointed out that the gross fiscal deficit of the states is somewhere in the region of Rs 9.4

lakh crores now, having risen to that humongous figure from Rs 3.2 lakh crores in the last 10 years.

The delivery of free electricity, with a ceiling of around 200 units that may define a lower middle family's consumption in a month, has left most state electricity boards with gaping deficits. Free bus rides for women besides a basic payment per month to them are aimed at ideals like women's empowerment, but they come with a cost.

Of course, everything adds more burden to the deficit in state finances. Throw in all loss-making state ventures and the debt of every Indian adds up to just under \$2,000 per person in the \$2.8 trillion national debt (Central as well as of states, municipalities, public sector institutions and social security funds) as computed at the end of 2022.

The point is this competitive culture of freebies for votes is a political phenomenon that is intrinsically dishonest. That all parties are guilty of it absolves none in this deceptive practice of cash and incentives for votes. It may be practised around the world, but it seems to be done with a competitive zeal in India regardless of the effect on public finances.

Arguing over delivered and undelivered poll promises will get people nowhere. The courts too periodically comment on the freebie culture, but there is no mechanism to curb the politician from proclaiming a passage to the promised land so he can rule, no matter what effect freebies have on the collective wealth of a state.

World waits for US Fed to act

In a couple of days, economists and central banks across the world will focus on Washington where the governors of the Federal Reserve will be meeting to review the economic situation in the United States. In view of an underperforming labour market, it is expected to slash interest rates by 25 basis points for the first time in four years. As the United States is still a preeminent financial force in the world, this development will force all central banks, including India, to reassess their monetary situation.

A lower Fed rate would widen interest arbitrage and make investors invest in emerging markets. The speculation has already boosted Indian stock markets to an all-time high. If more dollars enter India, it will strengthen the rupee as against the dollar. If the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) wants to keep the rupee lower, one of the options is to buy dollars from the market. However, it would infuse more rupee liquidity into the market, which will increase inflation. A scenario that inflation-wary RBI may not like to adopt.

Another way to deal with the problem of plenty is to maintain the interest rate arbitrage between the rupee and the dollar by reducing the repo rate. In spite of a relatively stable inflation scenario, the RBI resisted the temptation to cut the repo rate.

If it decides to slash interest rates, it will be the first time in four years. The last RBI had slashed repo rate was in May 2020. After increasing the repo rate for seven times between May 2022 to June 2023, the Reserve Bank kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent. However, excess liquidity in the market kept monetary transmission — RBI's ability to influence bank rate — at suboptimal level. Nevertheless, the Fed rate move could finally nudge the Reserve Bank to cut interest rates when it meets in October.

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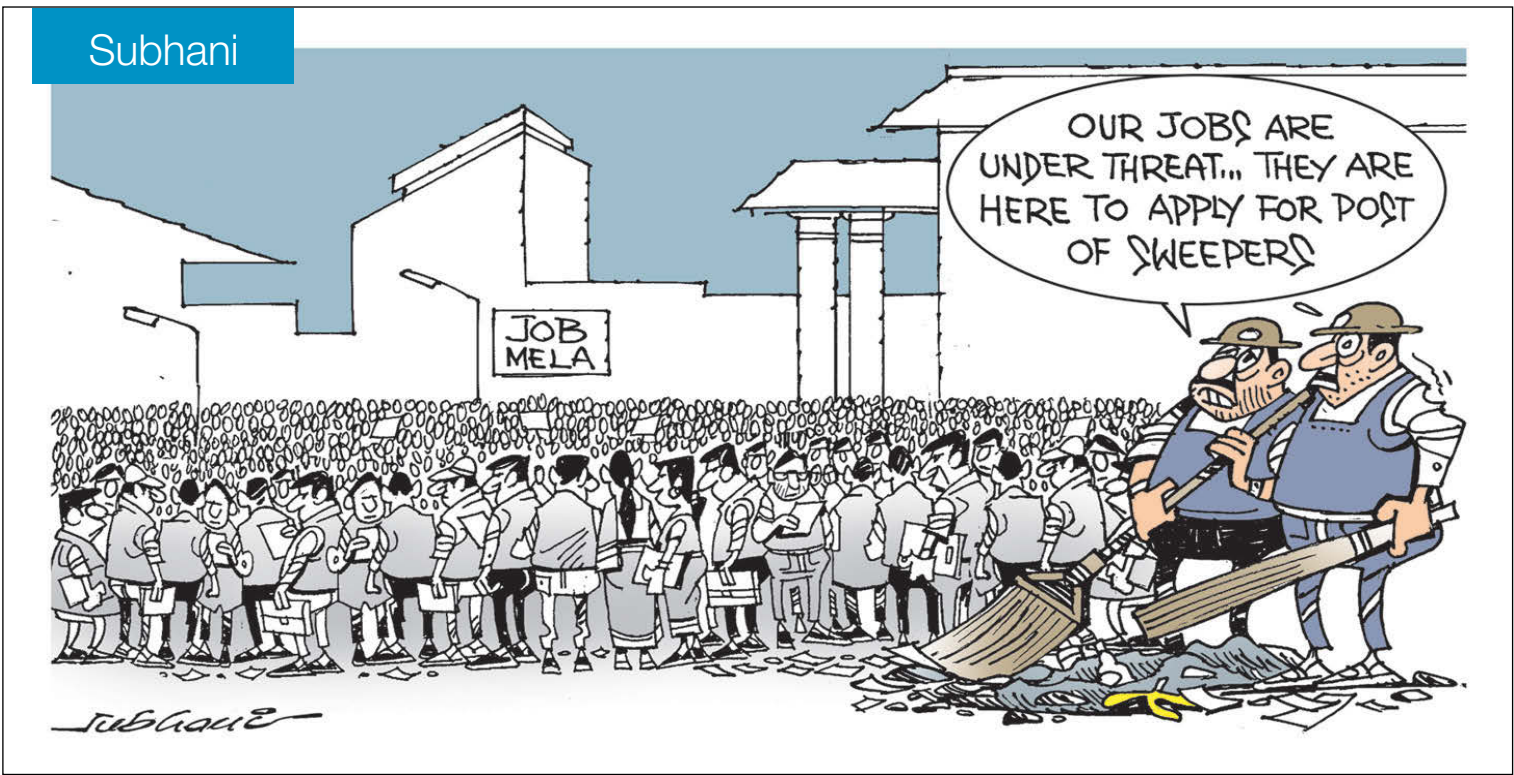
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Subhani



A very Hyderabad boy who became an icon of the Left



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

When he left Hyderabad for New Delhi in 1969, to complete his schooling that was disrupted by the separate Telangana agitation, he was still Y. Sitaram. Just "Sita" for those of us who knew him. He was at All Saints High School and I was at Hyderabad Public School but our friendship was forged at a student debating club that met at Hyderabad YMCA. A Model Lok Sabha brought together students from several schools and we formed a gang of debaters. Sita was always the star — bright, smart, witty and good-looking. He remained that till the very end. In 1966 he won a United Schools Organisation prize that took him to the United States and a breakfast with the President at the White House. The *Junior Statesman*, *JS* magazine, popular in our youth, declared him as a "Future Prime Minister of India".

Sitaram Yechury was the first Hyderabad boy who enrolled at the then newly opened Jawaharlal Nehru University. Many of us had heard of JNU from him and followed in his footsteps. It was on that campus that he emerged as a student leader.

But he was more than that. He was the class topper in the very first batch of M.A. Economics students. Before that he had topped the high school examination and his batch at Delhi's St Stephen's College. At JNU, one of his teachers found his term paper so good that he wished to award more than an "A", and so gave him an "A alpha" grade.

Two things have been said about Sita in all the obituaries of the past few days. That he was a polit-

ical pragmatist and that he was a jolly fellow, always smiling and friendly. Both attributes of a true Hyderabad. Boss, *dil pey mat lo! Chalney do, balkishen*. When he was with friends from Hyderabad, like K.S. Gopal, the "water man" who was his classmate and a close buddy from All Saints, the conversation was always in what we would call "Irani cafe lingo".

If his endearing persona was one reason for the warmth of the eulogies of the past few days, his contribution to contemporary national politics is another. Sitaram represented the true spirit of the "Left and democratic" politics of E.M.S. Nambudiripad, Jyoti Basu and Harkishan Singh Surjeet. This pragmatism was in sharp contrast to the more ideologically and organisationally rigid stance of P. Sundarayya and B.T. Ranadive that Prakash Karat came to represent. The two lines clashed on the issue of the CPI(M)'s support to the Manmohan Singh government in 2008.

As I have recorded in my book on those years, Sitaram devoted considerable energy to protect that alliance between the Left Front and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). It was he who articulated in Parliament the 12 points that became the bottom line for Indian diplomats negotiating the India-United States civil nuclear energy agreement during the tenure of UPA-1. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh instructed his negotiators that whatever the final deal with the United States, it would have to meet all the 12 points raised by Sitaram. Even though the final deal satisfied Sitaram, ideological rigidity within the politburo resulted in the

Sitaram Yechury was the first Hyderabad boy who enrolled at the then newly opened Jawaharlal Nehru University. He was the class topper in the very first batch of M.A. Economics students.

CPI(M)'s withdrawal of support to the alliance.

It was Sitaram who made me a member of the Students Federation of India and subsequently of the CPI(M). My first visit to Moscow, in 1987, was thanks to him. I was taken aback by the extent of anti-communism I encountered in Moscow. The Russian party functionary who was my escort and interpreter was himself critical of the party and repeatedly expressed a desire to visit the United States. On my return, I reported all this to Sitaram. We had many conversations in the late 1980s and early 1990s on the events in Russia and China. On the policy direction the world Communist movement was taking, especially Deng Xiaoping's new line, and the lessons and implications for India. India too was taking a new turn at the time under P.V. Narasimha Rao's leadership.

Sitaram was always an interested interlocutor. He heard me patiently even as we drifted apart ideologically. He remained a believer. I had ceased to be. But, we remained friends. That is what made him a truly great political leader. His ability to make and retain friendships across ideological divides. It would not have been easy, especially given the ideologically hidebound and partisan character of most intellectuals and leaders of the CPI(M). It was the Hyderabad boy in him, the feeling that friendship is what counts in life, that endeared Sita to so many.

When P. Chidambaram was to present the first Budget of the UPA gov-

ernment in July 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked me to check with both Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechury whether the CPI(M) would vote against the Budget. That, under Indian legislative rules, would have led to the collapse of the Manmohan Singh government. I tried to get an assurance on this count from Prakash Karat and Sitaram. Prakash refused to meet me and I was asked to meet Sitaram. Taking his cue from Prakash's refusal, Sitaram was not willing to give me any firm assurance. But he walked me all the way from his room in the CPI(M) office at A.K. Gopalan Bhavan in New Delhi to my vehicle downstairs, with his arm around me. We stood on the roadside in full view of several people gathered there and he bid me farewell, saying: "Give my regards to Dr Singh".

That was the endorsement needed. Sita was like that.

It is this personal disposition and his political conviction and belief that enabled him to become a key architect of the many non-BJP coalition governments of the 1990s and 2000s. He was the true embodiment of the spirit of "Left and Democratic Unity" that EMS and Basu espoused.

Tailpiece: Sometime in the early 1980s Sitaram, Saifuddin Chaudhury (then with the CPI-M) and I were in Khammam to address a student conference. At the end of a long day as we retired to our hotel, Sita suggested we go watch a late night showing of an NTR movie, playing at a nearby cinema. We had to catch an early morning train back to Hyderabad, why go and try to sleep now? Sita loved living life to the full.

What a shame it was cut short so soon.

The writer is an author, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He has recently edited The Importance of Shinzo Abe: India, Japan and

LETTERS

CM'S U.S. TRIP

Chief Minister MK Stalin should be congratulated for his successful tour to the US, bringing huge investments to Tamil Nadu from reputed global companies to the tune of 7618 crores and facilitating jobs for people and skill training for youth. We can be proud of mentioning that few Tamil Nadu CMs have achieved this marvellous target, and Stalin has kept up his promise of fetching foreign investments within a short span of time. The details of the investments have been conveyed then and there through the media, and it appears ridiculous on the part of Edappadi Palaniswamy to ask for the white paper on the investments.

PS Rajagopalan
Chennai

BJP'S APOLOGY DUALISM

Annapoorna hotel owner Mr. Srinivasan apologised to the union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman for having explained the hardships faced by the traders and people on account of anomalies in the GST rate structures in a lighter vein at the meeting convened by her. It must be inferred that he would have been coerced into doing so. It clearly vindicates the sheer intolerance of the minister to digest valid criticism and correct them in the interests of the affected persons. During the first innings of the BJP government under PM Modi, the nation was shocked by ill-conceived demonetisation which devastated almost all sectors of the economy in one stroke, throwing several thousand people out of jobs. Its ill-effects are still haunting the people. Even after 8 years, no BJP leader has so far apologised to the nation for this mistake.

M. Govindaraj
Gudiyatham

Mail your letters to chennai@deccanmail.com

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Kate's new video captivates UK; 'dynamic pricing' for concerts too

It was only a three-minute video but it has captivated the nation. Katharine, the Princess of Wales was the centre piece when it was shown earlier this week. It may have been short but the TV channels could not stop repeating it as often as they could. It showed William and Kate with their children outdoors, frolicking, relaxing, having fun and it conveyed a sense of family closeness. 'The point was that the worst seems to be over for the Princess as far as her cancer treatment is concerned but the way back to "normal" will be long.

The video was shot by an ad film maker — more specifically someone who had shot food commercials for TV. And advertisers know how to tell a story in two minutes and make it look good. Of course, anything royal goes down well but then it also provokes a debate. So 'royal' columnists got into the act debating whether this was "over the top" or "heart-warming" or a "cynical ploy", etc.

There were others who commented too — mostly cancer survivors who were more down-to-earth. But all in all, it was good to see a family — whether royal or not royal — enjoy some carefree moments together after an enormous crisis.

Except, of course, famous stars of the stage and screen often have "rude remarks" to make about royalty. Sir Ian McKellen who has been acting for ages suddenly said that the late Queen was rude. This started a heavy debate. How dare he?

However, this was overshadowed by another debate on the late Queen. A statue was unveiled in Antrim castle in Northern Ireland. 'They already had a previous statue of Prince Philip. Then they added one of Queen Elizabeth II (it is the second anniversary of her passing away) with her favourite corgis playing at her feet. But, unfortunately, no one thinks it looks like her. Rather she looks just about as regal as an ordinary housewife with a scarf around her head going to the super market. And suddenly the insults piled on. The reality is that unless you can get a 3-D reproduced statue by AI (which no doubt is the future) each sculptor will interpret his subject differently — and we should let it be.

And another area to explore through AI or ChatGPT, especially for politicians, can be: How do they maintain their love affair with the public? Within a couple of months of the election, the popularity ratings

of the Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer have gone from positive to negative. Being in government is good for the Party but it immediately invites much closer scrutiny by the Press and the journalists spare no effort at mocking the good and the great. So the Labour Party MPs are learning fast how to keep quiet and behave themselves.

On the other hand, some people do manage to improve on their popularity, but it usually is only after they are dead and gone. Sixty-one paintings of Vincent Van Gogh are now being exhibited at the National Gallery. "Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers" as the exhibition is called is said to be the most extensive display of his works — with many paintings appearing together for the first time. The tragedy of course is that the artist was not the recipient of any of these accolades during his lifetime. Yet, the world fell in love with his work, after him — and it is now being sold all over for many millions and is in the hands of a lucky few. Do catch the exhibition as it is also a chance to gaze upon "Sunflowers" on which the "Just Stop Oil" lobby had poured a can of soup. It is now protected by glass — so hopefully no one will attack it again.

While the best things in life may be — if not free, then at least affordable — as the exhibition at the National Gallery certainly is, you cannot say the same thing about pop concerts. Now tickets for pop concerts are ruled by "dynamic pricing". This is when you think you are going to see your favourite pop star perform live for just £150. But just when you are queuing up, the price goes up. In the old days we called it "black marketing" when people would simply sell tickets for a higher price than announced, because demand outshot supply — but now, hey, it is "dynamic pricing".

Recently this hit hard when the Gallagher brothers (who were great hits when Tony Blair had come to power 25 years back) and then had broken apart, decided to reunite and perform live again. The tickets went up to £325 even as the fans were lining up. So if you want attend any concert in London remember either to be an early bird — or wait till it is shown on OTT.

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author and columnist. She is also the Chair of the Partition Museums in Amritsar and Delhi.

Missile Sanctions

The imposition of US sanctions on Chinese companies for supplying Pakistan’s ballistic missile programme marks another chapter in the complex geopolitical dynamics of South Asia. The decision to target specific Chinese entities underscores Washington’s growing concerns about the proliferation of missile technologies, particularly in regions fraught with security risks. At the same time, it highlights the increasingly strained relationship between the US and China over military technology transfers, further complicating the already fragile balance of power in the region. One of the key issues at hand is the continuing development of Pakistan’s missile capabilities. The sanctions specifically target entities connected to the development of the Shaheen-3 and Ababeel missile systems, which are capable of delivering nuclear payloads over long distances. Pakistan has long sought to modernise its missile arsenal as part of its broader defence strategy, aimed primarily at countering India’s growing military prowess. The Shaheen-3, with its extended range, could potentially reach deep into Indian territory, while the Ababeel system is notable for its ability to carry multiple warheads, enhancing its strategic deterrent. The involvement of Chinese companies in Pakistan’s missile development, while not surprising, raises critical concerns. China has been a longstanding strategic partner of Pakistan, particularly in defence and technology transfers. This partnership, often seen as a counter-balance to India’s alliances with the West, is part of Beijing’s broader efforts to expand its influence in South Asia. The latest sanctions, however, demonstrate the US’s increasing willingness to disrupt these partnerships, especially when they involve sensitive military technologies that could alter regional security dynamics.

From a US perspective, the decision to impose sanctions reflects a broader policy objective of preventing the spread of missile technologies, particularly in regions like South Asia where nuclear rivalries exist. The US has consistently sought to curb missile proliferation through international frameworks, and these sanctions are a clear signal of its intent to act unilaterally when necessary. This action aligns with Washington’s historical stance of addressing any potential threats that could undermine regional stability, particularly when it comes to weapons of mass destruction. China’s response to these sanctions, which emphasises its opposition to unilateral measures and “long-arm jurisdiction,” is also predictable. Beijing has frequently voiced its disapproval of US actions that it perceives as overreaching or not in line with international law. However, China’s role in facilitating Pakistan’s missile programme cannot be ignored, as it reflects a broader strategic alignment that transcends mere economic cooperation. As China continues to assert its global influence, especially in regions of strategic interest like South Asia, it will likely face increasing scrutiny and pushback from the US and its allies. The sanctions underscore the delicate balance of power between nuclear-armed neighbours and the broader implications of military technology transfers in an increasingly multipolar world. As the US, China, and Pakistan navigate these developments, the consequences for regional and global security will be closely watched.

Recalibrating ties

The resignation of two Maldivian ministers who had disparaged Prime Minister Narendra Modi marks an important moment in the fragile Maldives-India relationship. This development, coming just ahead of Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu’s planned visit to New Delhi, signals a potentially strategic shift in the way Maldives might navigate its complex ties with India. Mr Muizzu, known for his “India out” campaign, had been critical of the heavy Indian presence in the Maldives, specifically the stationing of Indian defence personnel. His political rise was marked by a commitment to reversing Maldives’ traditionally close ties with India, pivoting instead toward strengthening relationships with China. His demands to replace Indian military personnel with civilians earlier this year were met by New Delhi, although the move was seen as a strain on what had once been a close partnership. However, the resignations of the two junior ministers ~ who had made inflammatory comments about Mr Modi on social media ~ may indicate a desire to temper the overtly anti-India rhetoric that has characterised Mr Muizzu’s administration. The Maldivian President, despite his pro-China stance, appears to be making efforts to manage relations with India, likely recognising that an outright antagonistic approach could be counterproductive, especially given India’s economic and strategic importance in the region.

Mr Muizzu’s planned visit to New Delhi is a critical diplomatic step. It will be his first official visit to India since taking office, signalling that despite previous tensions, he values maintaining open lines of communication with New Delhi. The Maldives, located strategically in the Indian Ocean, is an important player in the broader regional dynamics, where India and China are vying for influence. India, with its historical and cultural ties to the Maldives, has always played a significant role in the country’s political and economic landscape. Meanwhile, China’s growing presence in the region, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative, has presented a new geopolitical challenge for India. For Mr Muizzu, balancing these competing influences is vital. While his initial actions suggested a clear pivot toward China, the upcoming visit to New Delhi hints at a more pragmatic approach. The resignations of the ministers, who had drawn ire from Indian officials and the public alike, may be seen as an olive branch to smooth over diplomatic friction ahead of the talks. Given the Maldives’ dependence on tourism ~ much of which came from India until tensions flared ~ Mr Muizzu cannot afford to let strained relations hinder the economic benefits of close ties with its larger neighbour. Ultimately, Mr Muizzu’s upcoming visit to India presents an opportunity for recalibration. By engaging with New Delhi while maintaining his ties with Beijing, Mr. Muizzu may be seeking to position the Maldives as a neutral, independent actor in the increasingly polarised Indo-Pacific region. The resignations of the ministers who had publicly insulted Mr Modi are perhaps just the first step in a broader strategy of navigating these complex geopolitical waters.

Waqf Discontent

It is true that the management and administration of Waqf in India is currently afflicted with many ailments and requires urgent corrective measures. Over the years, Waqf properties have been left neglected and mismanaged. Corruption has also crept into the Waqf system. Though Waqf holds the third largest land ownership in the country, the income generated remains abysmally low. A large chunk of Waqf properties have been either encroached on or are under illegal possession with the collusion of the Waqf Board members and other officials. This sorry state of affairs cannot be allowed. However, these issues have hardly been effectively addressed in the proposed amendments in the Waqf Act



The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which is currently being scrutinised by a Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP), has stirred a hornet’s nest. The government claims that the proposed amendments to the original Waqf Act are intended to bring transparency, efficiency, and accountability in the management and administration of over 8.7 lakh Waqf properties spread across India.

It is also being asserted that this Bill intends to address issues of corruption and to ensure the proper utilisation of Waqf properties so that its benefits reach poor Muslims. However, Muslims, opposition parties, and secular-liberal intellectuals consider the proposed changes as a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Much before the Waqf (Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 8 August 2024, a false narrative was already being peddled in the print and electronic media and also through other digital platforms for quite some time.

A false impression is being sought to be created that Waqf Boards have unlimited power and they can lay claims on anyone’s property, especially those of Hindus, and declare them as Waqf property and courts cannot intervene in the matter.

A commentator has even claimed that Waqf has “acted as an enabler to Islamic imperialism, proselytization, and appropriation of other denominational sites.”

Waqf is an important instrument of Islamic philanthropy of dedication of one’s personal property, either moveable or immovable, for religious, pious, or charitable purposes.

Under Islamic law, the dedication of Waqf can take place either through a deed, or even orally. A property can be deemed to be Waqf if it has been used for religious or charitable purposes for a long period of time.

Once a Waqf is created, the proprietary right of the creator (waqif) upon such properties extinguishes and the ownership is permanently transferred to the Almighty God. A Waqf is generally perpetual and irrevocable and can never be alienated, given away as a gift, inherited, or sold.

At present, Auqaf (plural of Waqf) in India is governed through the Waqf Act, 1995. This provided for the establishment of Waqf Boards in each state and Union Territory.

The 1995 Act was amended in 2013, granting more power to the Waqf boards. The precursor to this was the Muslim Waqf Validating Act, 1913, brought out by the colonial government to remove the effect of the Privy Council decision in Abul Fata Mahomed Ishak v. Russomoy Dhur Chowdry (1894), by which the institution of waqf-al-aulad was declared illegal. This was later replaced by the Mussalman Wakf Act, 1923. In 1954, the Waqf Act was passed, which established the Central Waqf Council in 1964.

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, proposes as many as 44 amendments to the existing Waqf Act, 1995. While expressing grave concerns over the proposed changes, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, and other prominent Muslim organisations have rejected the Bill in its entirety, there are a few proposed changes which have annoyed Muslims the most.

The most contentious aspect of the bill is the proposal to include non-Muslim members in the Central Waqf Council and state Waqf Boards and the removal, from the existing Act, of the condition that the chief executive officer of a Waqf Board has to be a Muslim. Critics point out that Waqf is a religious institution, and imposing members of other faiths on its management seems illogical as non-Hindus are not allowed to be part of temple boards.

Section 7 of the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act, 1997 specifically provides that “The Commissioner and every Deputy Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner and every other Officer or servant, appointed to carry out the purposes of this Act by whom-

soever appointed, shall be a person professing Hindu religion, and shall cease to hold office as such when he ceases to profess that religion.”

Another aspect of the bill, that is being vehemently criticised is the addition of a new provision stating that any government property identified as Waqf will cease to be so. Replacing the Waqf Tribunal, the proposed bill has given sweeping power to the District Collector to decide whether a property is Waqf or government land in case of a dispute.

The Bill also seeks to omit Section 40 from the existing Act, which empowers the Waqf Board to decide whether a particular property is a waqf property.

This provision assumes significance in light of the fact that a large number of Waqf properties are under the possession of various departments of the state and the central governments.

This could affect as many as 73,196 disputed properties across 30 states. Many Muslims fear that if the proposed amendment is passed in the present form, the government would usurp Waqf properties that are already in its possession.

The removal of provisions that allowed a property to be considered waqf based on oral declaration and “Waqf by user” is another contentious part of the proposed legislation.

Generally, a Waqf requires an express dedication, but if land has been used for a long time for a religious purpose, then the land is user Waqf.

A large number of mosques and graveyards are Waqf properties by use and may not have valid Waqfnamas.

Under the new law, a property without a valid waqfnama will be treated as suspect or disputed and will remain inactive until a final decision by the District Collector.

The new bill has also added that Waqf-alal-aulad must not result in denial of inheritance rights to the donor’s heir, including women heirs of the Waqf.

This proposal has reopened an old tension between Muslim law of family Waqf and inheritance, which was settled way back in 1913 through the Muslim Waqf Validating Act, 1913. It is often claimed that Waqf-alal-aulad is ‘more about circumventing Quranic inheritance rules and preventing division among heirs than about altruism, charity, and public welfare’.

It is true that the management and administration of Waqf in India is currently afflicted with many ailments and requires urgent corrective measures.

Over the years, Waqf properties have been left neglected and mismanaged. Corruption has also crept into the Waqf system. Though Waqf holds the third largest land ownership in the country, the income generated remains abysmally low.

If efficiently managed, Waqf properties can generate thousands of crores of rupees annually. A large chunk of Waqf properties have been either encroached on or are under illegal possession with the collusion of the Waqf Board members and other officials.

This sorry state of affairs cannot be allowed. However, these issues have hardly been effectively addressed in the proposed amendments in the Waqf Act.

The proposed bill addresses the concerns of ‘others’ more than those needed to bring reforms in the administration of Waqf.

Furthermore, there exists a huge trust deficit between the government and Muslims, who view the proposed legislation with scepticism.

They consider it politically motivated and an undue interference in their religious matters. Many of them see it as a ploy of the government to usurp Waqf land under the guise of protection and transparency.

One cannot shy away from the fact that the desired goal of revamping the Waqf administration cannot be achieved in the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Sustain friendly ties

The summit was significant in that the leaders affirmed the possibility of sustaining “shuttle diplomacy” between Korea and Japan. The bilateral ties of the two countries were tense under former President Moon Jae-in, then Yoon restored them considerably by resolving a historical issue and visiting Japan in March last year for a summit with Kishida, who paid a reciprocal visit to Korea later.

Their diplomatic efforts to normalize relations between the countries led to stronger security and economic cooperation involving the United States. In the summit at the presidential office in Seoul on Friday, Yoon and Kishida signed an agreement to cooperate in evacuating citizens of their countries from conflict zones in third countries during emergency situations. They also agreed to cooperate to mutually introduce a system for advance immigration screening of Korean and Japanese visitors before their flight departures from Japan and Korea.

Just a day before Kishida’s visit to Seoul for the summit, Tokyo handed over a partial list of Koreans who perished aboard a Japanese ship, the Ukishima Maru. A mysterious explosion sank the ship on its way to Korea shortly after Japan’s colonial rule ended in 1945. Thousands of Koreans who were forced into labor in Japan were being repatriated aboard the ship.

The Japanese government had ignored or had no intention to look into the case. It was the first time in 79 years that Japan had provided any sort of list

The Korea Herald

related to the incident, though this one is still incomplete.

The accords on concrete cooperation plans will give momentum to Korea-Japan relations. Particularly, the list of passengers on the ship is meaningful in that it opened the way, albeit belatedly, for bereaved families to confirm their loved one’s deaths and get closer to the heart of the incident. Japan should make similar efforts on other historical issues.

Some Korean politicians inciting anti-Japanese sentiment just for political gain should be criticized, but controversies destabilizing Korea-Japan ties cannot but recur as long as Japan fails to show a sincere and frank attitude toward issues related to its colonial domination of Korea. At the summit with Yoon, Kishida reaffirmed his existing position on the issue of history without any apology.

The Yoon government decided to compensate Koreans forced into labor for Japanese companies during Japan’s colonial rule through a “third party,” such as a government fund, despite domestic backlash on the decision and the Supreme Court ruling that the Japanese companies should compensate the Korean victims directly. Tokyo strongly opposed the ruling, which was issued in the days of former President Moon.

Yoon made the bold decision in a bid to normalize Korea-Japan ties, which underpin the Korea-US alliance. There’s no doubt that cooperation between Korea and Japan in security and economy serves their mutual national interests amid heightened geopolitical tensions.

Cooperation with Japan is important for the security of South Korea in an emergency involving North Korean threats because rear bases of the United Nations Command that can support US forces in South Korea are in Japan.

It is also important in view of Korea’s external economic relations. In a situation where China can disrupt global supply of key materials, the necessity of cooperation with Japan is growing.

Seoul and Tokyo must further their relations restored through a tough path by Yoon’s daring solution to a historical issue. The next leader of Japan should take up where Kishida leaves off to help relations deeply take root.

Next year will mark the 60th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan. The Korea government must make greater efforts to add momentum to its friendly ties with Japan.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Disproportionate

SIR, Bangladesh’s interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has issued a directive mandating Hindu Puja committees to stop using musical instruments and sound systems five minutes before and during the Islamic azaan and namaz as the country prepares for Durga Puja. This move, ostensibly aimed at maintaining religious harmony, has the shades of a ‘Talibani’



order targeting the country’s beleaguered minority Hindu population.

It is a disproportionate imposition on an already vulnerable community. The curbs may not only deepen the divide between the communities in Bangladesh, but they can also strain the country’s relations with India. The timing is particularly sensitive, given the political situation following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina as the PM.

Dhaka’s decision to ban the export of Padma hilsa ~ a beloved fish staple during puja festivities in West Bengal ~ to India could also escalate tensions. This ban is a reversal of the goodwill established by previous governments through ‘hilsa diplomacy’. The symbolic

exchange of fish had become a bilateral gesture of friendship. The religious restrictions, along with the trade ban, could undermine the

historic bond between the two countries. If Bangladesh seeks to maintain peaceful and fruitful relations with India, religious inclusivity

and balanced diplomacy must guide its actions.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 13 September.

LAUDABLE

SIR, When all senior citizens were sore with the Modi government that it had not come out with any welfare measure of worth for them, and were depressed that even the 50 per cent concession they had enjoyed for their train journeys had been withdrawn, the recent announcement of the Union Cabinet that citizens aged 70 and above, irrespective of income will be eligible for free health insurance coverage of Rs 5 lakh on a family basis, under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-Jay) has come as a big boon. Most of the senior citizens and pensioners, including bank retirees, were unable to get health insurance cover due to the prohibitive cost of premia (with an additional 18 per cent GST).

What about when both the husband and wife are senior citizens? In that case, will it be a floater policy as the cover of Rs 5 lakh is said to be on a family basis?

One only hopes that enrolment into the scheme will not be cumbersome. Further, all participating hospitals should be instructed to offer immediate cashless treatment to those who are hospitalised under this scheme, treating the policy under AB PM-Jay at par with health policies of private players. The Modi government definitely deserves appreciation.

Yours, etc., Tharcius S. Fernando Chennai, 13 September.

Health cover expansion comes with challenges

AMAL CHANDRA

The Union Cabinet's decision to expand the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) to citizens aged 70 and above has been celebrated as a move to address India's growing elderly healthcare needs. Offering Rs 5 lakh in annual health insurance to over six crore senior citizens, this initiative promises to reduce the financial burden of healthcare for the elderly. However, a closer look reveals several challenges that could undermine its effectiveness and sustainability.

India's elderly population is projected to reach 319 million by 2050, constituting nearly 20 per cent of the total population. With this demographic shift, there is an increasing need for long-term care, especially for chronic illnesses such as diabetes, arthritis, and heart disease. Unfortunately, India's healthcare infrastructure remains ill-equipped to meet these needs, especially in rural areas where access to care is already limited.

A 2021 report from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare showed that only 0.2 per cent of Indian hospitals have geriatric care units. This disconnect between insurance coverage and the actual availability of age-specific healthcare services raises concerns. Without investments in specialized healthcare infrastructure, the expanded insurance coverage under AB PM-JAY could result in overcrowded hospitals and substandard care for senior citizens.

The extension of AB PM-JAY to all senior citizens, regardless of socio-economic status, signals an effort toward universal health coverage. However, this inclusive approach may dilute the scheme's intended impact on the most vulnerable groups. Wealthier senior

citizens, many of whom already have access to private insurance or employer-provided benefits, will also benefit from this policy.

A 2022 study by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) found that over 12 per cent of the population, primarily in urban areas, has private health insurance. Including wealthier individuals could result in a misallocation of resources, diverting attention and funds from low-income senior citizens who rely on government support. Additionally, beneficiaries of public schemes like the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) and Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) can opt into AB PM-JAY, which introduces redundancy. Instead of covering those who already have insurance, the government should focus on closing gaps in access, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive priority.

Expanding AB PM-JAY to include an additional six crore elderly beneficiaries will place a significant financial strain on India's already overburdened public healthcare system. India spends only 1.28 per cent of its GDP on public healthcare, one of the lowest rates globally, far below the recommended 5 per cent needed for universal coverage.

A 2022 NITI Aayog report revealed that several Indian states, including Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, are already struggling to meet their healthcare obligations. Expanding AB PM-JAY without increasing public healthcare funding could result in states cutting costs, which may lead to poor-quality care, especially in economically weaker regions.

The scheme's sustainability is also contingent on the capacity of state governments to implement it. Wealthier states may manage the expansion, but poorer states could face disparities in healthcare quality

and accessibility, exacerbating regional inequalities.

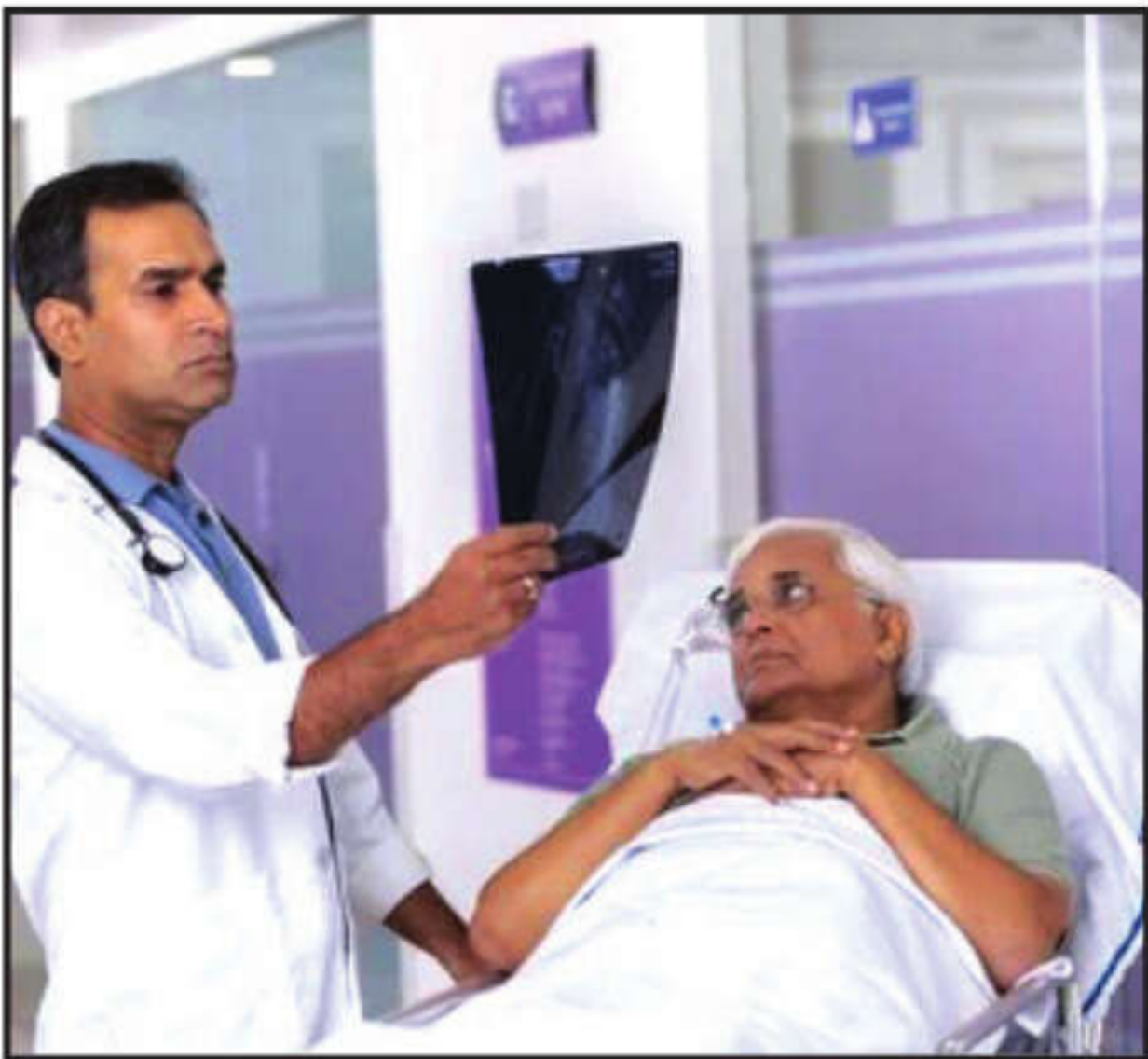
To meet the growing demand for healthcare services, the government is increasingly turning to public-private partnerships (PPPs). While private sector participation can augment healthcare capacity, it also presents risks. Private hospitals may exploit the system by inflating costs, as highlighted by a 2020 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) investigation into AB PM-JAY.

Additionally, private insurers often categorize elderly patients as high-risk due to their chronic conditions, which could lead to denials of coverage or inadequate services. The expansion of AB PM-JAY must be accompanied by stringent regulatory oversight to prevent profiteering and ensure that private sector involvement does not undermine equitable access to care.

Bureaucratic complexities often prevent citizens from fully accessing government welfare schemes, and AB PM-JAY is no exception. A 2021 survey by the National Statistical Office found that only 7 per cent of rural households have internet access, limiting the ability of elderly citizens in rural areas to navigate digital processes for enrollment.

The introduction of a distinct health card for senior citizens aims to simplify access to healthcare, but unless the government addresses structural issues such as digital literacy and geographical barriers, a significant portion of eligible citizens may remain excluded. Offline enrollment centers and mobile services are essential for reaching elderly populations in rural and underserved areas.

India faces a severe shortage of healthcare professionals, a problem that could be exacerbated by the expansion of AB PM-JAY. A 2022 World Bank report indicated that India has only 0.7 physicians per 1,000



people, well below the global average of 1.5. This shortage is especially pronounced in rural areas, where healthcare workers are scarce.

Geriatric care, a key component of elderly healthcare, is still underdeveloped in India. There is a lack of specialized training in geriatric medicine, and medical institutions offering such programmes are few. Without a robust workforce of healthcare professionals trained in elderly care, the expansion of AB PM-JAY could overwhelm an already strained system. Short-term solutions like telemedicine and mobile healthcare units can help, but long-term investment in medical education and workforce development is essential.

The expansion of AB PM-JAY to senior citizens is an important step toward addressing the healthcare

needs of India's aging population. However, its success depends on more than just providing insurance coverage. The government must address financial sustainability, workforce shortages, bureaucratic barriers, and the inefficiencies created by extending coverage to those who may not need it.

By investing in healthcare infrastructure, expanding geriatric services, and improving the efficiency of resource allocation, the government can ensure that AB PM-JAY becomes a transformative policy rather than a symbolic gesture. Only by tackling these challenges head-on can India's elderly truly benefit from universal healthcare.

(The writer is a policy analyst and columnist, and the author of The Essential: On Healthcare.)

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

No easy captive

It started with the mildest tremor in a finger in my left hand," said Cyndi. "It did not bother me much. I am a right-handed person anyway."

I met Cyndi Wollman as the result of a bizarre road accident. A careless driver – it turned out to be an inebriated one – had sideswiped both our cars in a busy street corner in Charlotte. We got out of our vehicles to talk about what we should do. It ended up with us sharing Pad Thai in a restaurant nearby.

Cindi, a patent attorney in a mid-size law firm, was a striking person. She was nearly dainty, but her curly blond hair and piercing eyes would stand her out, even without the Dior suit. She spoke softly but precisely, almost firmly, doubtless a professional habit. The listener would have no doubt what she wanted. That gave a commanding quality to her presence. The next moment, she disarmed you with her friendly demeanor.

When I met her in her office the first time, she seemed so poised and perfect that a slight incongruity drew my attention. There was something awkward in the way she drew her coffee cup closer to her. It was then that she told me how it had started as a barely tremulous digit in her left arm. She waited a few weeks before she went to a specialist. The verdict was shattering. It was Parkinson's.

A cruel disease, Cindi explained to me, Parkinson's affected the nerve

cells in the brain that controlled movement and caused stiffness and shaking in hands, legs and the head. Cindi found it hard to balance or to walk and talk. She had fatigue and depression. Sometimes she had difficulty talking, chewing, and even sleeping. Worse, it was a progressive affliction of which nobody knew the cause or cure. Doctors could only try to relieve the symptoms.

Cindi consulted a second specialist and then started visiting a hospital that specialized in Parkinson's. As her hand movements became more awkward, she started taking an antiviral drug to reduce the gestures and another to lessen their rigidity. These were in addition to the dopamine agonists she was already taking to replace the chemicals her brain was no longer producing.

When I visited her on her birthday, I was aghast at the changes I saw in her. The tremor that had started in her hand had spread to much of her arms. I quickly got up to open the bottle of Pinot Noir I had brought for her as a gift, but I saw how hard it was for her even to manage the platter of cheese she wanted us to savour.

She said she continued to work for her firm but she was no longer the lead attorney. She had ceded the position, for she felt she could no longer cope with the large portfolio she usually handled. She tried to make light of the change, saying she would have more time for other things. I knew the

change must have been painful. She had built up the practice with years of sustained effort.

Though I had prepared my mind when I visited her three years later, I still had a shock. The disease had advanced and taken a bigger toll. She had lost some weight but her elegant, commanding presence still took my breath away. She mentioned she had relinquished her executive role and now served on the firm's board as an adviser. I wondered silently how she would cope with the free hours on her hand. She almost answered that when she said she was thinking about what she would like to do in the coming days. Plainly, she would not cede and go under as an easy captive of Parkinson's.

A surprise waited for me. I called her six months later to check on her and asked airily, "What are you doing these days?"

She shyly responded that she had gotten a little busy these days. "With what?" I asked.

Patent work, she told me, invariably demands in-depth knowledge of different disciplines, and, with new emerging scientific areas, the demand is fast becoming hard to meet. So she had garnered several brilliant science students, along with some trained legal workers, and was training them rigorously in the intricacies of patent prosecution. These are all from modest families, people who could not find their way to becoming scientific



Illustration by : Debabrata Chakrabarty

researchers in chosen universities or well-heeled attorneys in big law firms. Now they could be valued adjuncts to organizations doing complex patent work.

"Will it work?" I asked hesitantly, not sure that such an idea would be quite practical.

I don't well remember what Cindi said in response, but I had a resounding answer this year. A California organization that recognizes the ten best humanitarian efforts of the year identified Cindi's initiative as one.

Cindi will now be assured of adequate financing and informed support.

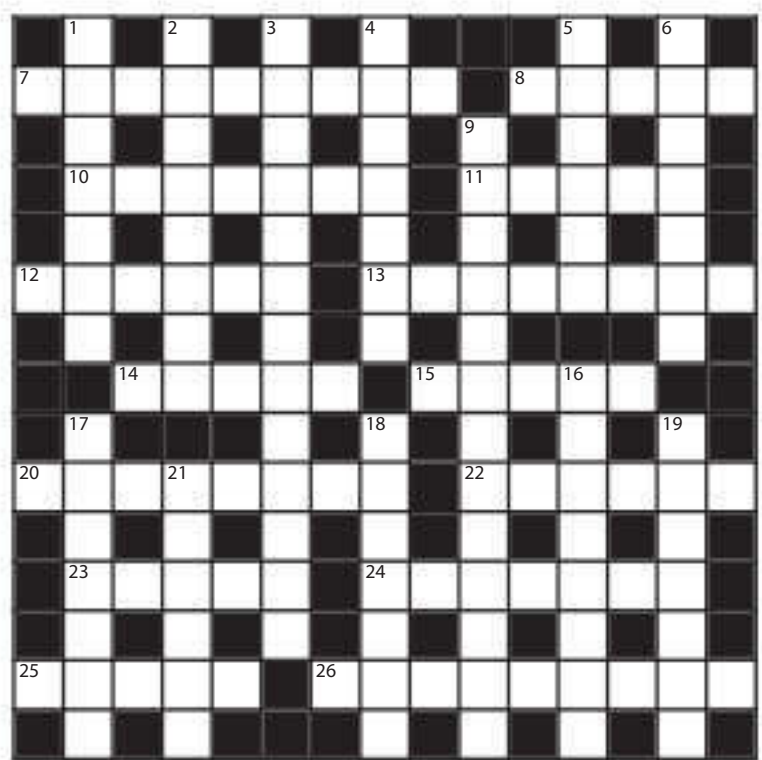
I called Cindi to congratulate her. She took several minutes to pick up the phone – understandably. But her voice was as vibrant as ever, "I'd rather you turned up with a Pinot Noir to celebrate!"

Cindi as ever. My heart swelled.

(The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com)

CROSSWORD

NO-292897



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

DOLLTOP SAMANTHA
EYEMSCORRIOR
TARGET SCORPTION
EITLCHAVAV
ROCKETSIDENTIST
AATPPEYBLUR
TALKTURKEYBLUR
EELSE
SARIPARANORMAL
TEEDGFOFA
PUTIONESFOOTINIT
ISDBHBSU
LEITURED FABIAN
ONREELLOIT
TRAVESTY GLENNYS

ACROSS

- 7 Singer-songwriter, very unwell, finding solace finally in country's capital (9)
8 Girl needing guide through underworld realm of the dead (5)
10 Broadcaster's policy for Horizon (7)
11 Singer Simon sent back Bob's 2016 prize (5)
12 Compete with new article about city in which Bob offered to pose or play (6)

- 13 Heart of Mine: revolutionary's Obviously 5 Believers (actually none) (8)
14 Reported looks of a chronicler of his age (5)
15 Follow something on an album (one with blood on?) (5)
20 One final song from Captain Cook? (8)
22 Depended on lines to express craving (Feeling after One Too Many Mornings) (6)
23 Divine being's returned redeemed (5)

- 24 Piece of music that's short, to a greater extent in audition (7)
25 Mournful song from first of Dylan's Island records with two chords (5)
26 Former quiz show host losing heart with stripped Disney heroine revealing something hairy (9)
DOWN
1 Sarcastic about American movement that's not voluntary (7)

- 2 "Coy mistress" said native of Minnesota once (8)
3 Animals try bid to unsettle other groups of musicians (8,5)
4 Country musician Kooper I rage about (7)
5 Lounger rising late securing cushy job at last (3,3)
6 One who shot his bolt taking lines and acid originally is very revealing (4,3)

- 9 Hopefully this won't get you Knocked Out Loaded before Highway 61 Revisited (3,3,4)
16 Gas about formerly getting openings for Rolling Thunder gigs (8)
17 Form I see creating great work (7)
18 Artist upset after music award mostly for use of language (7)
19 Take pains to get money from Russia after start of tour (7)
21 Wild when bible's assimilated by wise man (6)

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

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

OXFORD can no longer be held up to regretful administration as the home of lost causes. First of all, women were admitted to degrees there, while Cambridge resisted the claim with something like an emeute. More recently the colleges have thrown themselves open in vacation have thrown themselves open in vacation time to people anxious to hold conferences—such as drapers, workers' educational associations, and chocolate makers—whom not so very long ago young Oxford would have comprehensively classified under the genus "cad" and species "low-down." Now, it is announced, Balliol has given permission for the Oxford scenes in "Charley's Aunt" to be filmed in the college, Prima facie the goodwill of the college is more to be commended than the good sense of the filmers. "Charley's Aunt" was not written for the eye, and is likely to seem attenuated without the dialogue. But even Shakespeare is treated in this manner nowadays. "Hamlet" and the "Taming of the Shrew" make their appearance on the screen, while the people in the stalls imagine the words—with what success, who shall say? Truth wonders what Dr. Jowett would have thought of it all. Would he have welcomed it as helping to illustrate his wonderful introductions to the works of Plato and make visible the difference between being and becoming? Drapers and chocolate makers might not have attracted him, for as Master he seldom had dealings except with paupers, peers, and atheists. That, he is reputed to have explained, was because they were the only eccentric and interesting men who over went to the University.

NEWS ITEMS

HINDU-MOSLEM UNITY

PROPOSED REPRESENTATIVE CONFERENCE

AT a largely attended meeting of the Nationalist party, consisting of both Swarajists and Independents and presided over by Pundit Motilal Nehru, the following resolution was unanimously passed:—

"The Nationalist Party stands by the Lucknow compact in regard to separate electorates. This is, of course, subject to any modification that may be made by consent at a national conference of Hindu and Mahomedan leaders on the subject in consultation with other communities. In order to bring about a common understanding and complete unity between the two communities on points in difference between them, Hindu and Mahomedan members of the party will each appoint five persons to form a committee which will be charged with the duty of promoting a national representative conference of Hindu-Mahomedan and other communities at an early date.

EX-MINISTER ARRESTED

MILITARY DISCIPLINE IN SPAIN

THE military situation in Morocco is beginning to have a repercussion in Spain. Reuter's Madrid correspondent wires that Signor Angel Ossorio Gallardo, ex-Minister under the Maura Premiership, has been arrested on a charge of propagating insidious rumours calculated to prejudice military discipline.

MADRAS SEDITION CHARGE

E. V. RAMASWAMI NAICKER, a Congress worker, who was arrested yesterday at Erode on a charge of sedition under section 124A, I.P.C., in respect of a speech delivered, on March 8, last, at Mandavalli was produced to-day before the Chief Presidency Magistrate who admitted him on bail in consideration of his age and posted the case to September 27.

JHARIA MINES

COLLIERY OWNERS AND HOUSING

A RESOLUTION of the Government of Bihar and Orissa regarding the report on the working of the Jharia Mines Board for the year 1923-24 states:— There appears to be a general recognition by colliery owners that good housing does pay and will do so increasingly in the future, and that the Board's present policy and programme is not unreasonable; and Government note with satisfaction that they are doing their best to grapple with this problem. Signs are not wanting too that the miner himself is growing to appreciate the benefit of good accommodation, and has even begun to demand it easily

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

— Ramnath Goenka

SEMICONDUCTOR NATIONALISM WILL TAKE US NOWHERE

T’S raining subsidies in the semiconductor industry. With several countries waking up to the need to create their domestic semiconductor ecosystem, governments across the globe are pouring subsidies into the sector. However, it is already feared that large economies jostling among each other to gain self-sufficiency in semiconductor manufacturing are ignoring basic supply chain constraints, and therefore, creating white elephants. India, which had earlier announced a \$10 billion subsidy scheme, is now planning to announce another \$15 billion subsidy for the chip industry. The minister of IT and technology Ashwini Vaishnaw has hinted that the second phase of the subsidy scheme would be bigger and better from the first one, and that the aim is to create the entire semiconductor ecosystem in the country. In the first phase, Gujarat and Assam got the investments; the second phase will see Uttar Pradesh getting priority. Domestic industry experts believe India needs to have 150 fab units by 2030 to meet the demand for chips. By 2030, the semiconductor industry is expected to invest \$1 trillion in semiconductor fabs.

India’s ambition of becoming a semiconductor manufacturing hub is being matched with similar efforts by bigger economies like the US, European Union, and Japan. The US is doling out \$52 billion and Europe \$43 billion in subsidies to revive their chip-making industry as most of the manufacturing is currently concentrated in China and Southeast Asia. China gave away \$2.5 billion in subsidy in 2023 to five of its top semiconductor manufacturers. While availability of subsidies has become a primary consideration for chip makers to select their investment location, the doles alone may not suffice. Also, the semiconductor programmes cannot solely be driven by national interest.

The semiconductor supply chain is spread across the globe and no country can expect to grow its chips industry in isolation. Each country could face local constraints such as availability of raw material, labour cost, expertise and skilled labour at every step. The effort should be not to disrupt the existing expertise spread across many countries, but to leverage them through meaningful collaboration to expand the supply chain instead of working in silos.

T’GANA PLAY WEAKENS TOP INSTITUTIONS

T HEATRICKS, expletives, face-offs and house arrests, Telangana politics has of late been quite entertaining for the layman. It’s entertaining at first glance, but at the same time, it is concerning for the discerning. It’s a political chess game being played with the ruling Congress on the offensive and the opposition BRS launching its own counter-attack. The root of it lies in defections from the BRS to the Congress camp ever since the elections late last year. Up until now, 10 legislators have crossed over from the pink party, decreasing its strength in the Assembly. Yet, it remains the main opposition being the second largest party after the Congress. The High Court directive to the Legislature Secretary to place before the Speaker pending disqualification pleas against three BRS MLAs for fixing a schedule to dispose of the same within four weeks set in motion an unexpected sequence of events. Hours after the order, a turncoat BRS MLA Arekapudi Gandhi was named chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, a position held by the main opposition by convention. BRS legislator P Kaushik Reddy, known for histrionics, derided the turncoats, offering to send them sarees and bangles in sexist remarks. He further insinuated that the newly-minted PAC chairman was an Andhra settler giving the war of words a regional twist. With Gandhi and Reddy threatening to storm each other’s houses, the police had to intervene and put all important BRS leaders under house arrest. This episode could be dismissed as yet another political slugfest but for the underlying dangers.

First, the BRS appears to have walked into a trap set by the Congress. The BRS during its decade-long stint in power had weaned away many legislators from different parties, mainly the Congress but calls it “merger” instead of defection. It denied the PAC chairman post to the Congress as well. The Congress is paying back in the same coin but in an improvised version by rejecting the official nominees of the BRS and instigating a BRS vs BRS fight as Gandhi is technically still a BRS legislator.

The Congress claims it stuck to the convention as the pink party has no locus standi to lament over the defections. However, we believe this realpolitik isn’t in public interest. PAC keeps an eye on the finances of the State and as such, is important. The weakening of key democratic and constitutional positions for temporary political gains will destroy government accountability. Similarly, attempts to reignite regional sentiments will backfire both for the parties and the state.

QUICK TAKE

TO THE NEXT LEVEL FOR PALESTINE

ISRAEL uncharacteristically owned up to a few grim illegal acts this week. It admitted to having killed three of its own citizens in Gaza; it was similar to a confession they made last December. It also admitted to having killed Aysenur Eygi, a 26-year-old Turkish American rights activist, in the West Bank. For Israel, the admissions were rare shows of ‘due process’ of investigation in a war that has repeatedly crossed lines of legality. The Indian foreign minister recently reiterated the government’s support for a ceasefire. It’s time for the Global South to make renewed, consequential diplomatic interventions in that spirit.

AS the US Presidential election campaigns heat up, ‘Project 2025’ gets frequent mention. A 900-plus page document, its full title is, ‘Mandate for leadership: Project 2025’. Penned by senior officials of the first Trump Administration, it outlines a policy and personnel agenda for his second term (if elected).

The mandate declares the US Congress has abdicated its decision-making responsibilities to unelected bureaucrats, who exercise unchecked policy-making power, even evading the control of the president.

Recognising that much of the chaos of Trump’s presidency—staff turnovers, policy flip-flops, dissents and leaks—was caused by ideologically incompatible personnel in his administration, the project’s coordinators launched a nation-wide search for suitable candidates. Short-listed applicants underwent training on structures and issues of governance. A database of a few thousand candidates will be presented to the presidential team in November for the selection of federal employees.

The mandate’s uncompromising stand against abortion has drawn criticism; its position against immigration is popular. It advocates incentivising preservation of the nuclear family, de-emphasising transgender and LGBTQ issues, and outlawing pornography in speech, print and digital products. DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) policies (affirmative action without quotas) should be reversed; they suppress merit and dilute efficiencies.

The economic agenda comprises pro-growth policies that create jobs, spur investment and increase wages: expanding the manufacturing base through industrial policy, pursuing self-reliance in strategically important sectors, promoting fair and balanced trade, and replacing “environmental extremism” with energy dominance.

Energy dominance is a priority. Exploitation of US hydrocarbon reserves would power economic growth, drive billions of dollars of private investment to communities devastated by globalisation, providing millions of jobs (typically for non-college workers, who are solid Trump supporters). Reinvigoration of manufacturing would ease the pains of decoupling from China. Energy dominance can be leveraged to deal with the Gulf countries on a stronger footing and rebalance energy power away from Russia. Trump’s assertion that his first order as president would be “drill, drill, drill” is, therefore, an economic message, an election pitch and a geopolitical warning.

China is a *leitmotif* throughout. It is asserted to be a totalitarian enemy. The policy of competition and cooperation has

If Donald Trump wins in the 2024 elections, if personnel appointments are sound, and if there is coherence of policy coordination, his agenda could have far-reaching consequences

U.S. PROJECT 2025: POLICIES FOR TRUMP’S PROBABLE NEXT TERM

P S RAGHAVAN

Distinguished Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, and a former diplomat



failed; the US objective should be strategic decoupling and use of all levers to thwart China’s thrust for global dominance.

The menu spans the remit of every department and agency. Expand tariffs on Chinese products. Provide incentives to American companies for onshoring cutting-edge capabilities. Put in place strict controls on technology-sharing. Prohibit Chinese investment in high-technology industries. Reduce and eventually eliminate US dependence on Chinese supply chains. Ban Chinese social media apps. Reduce or eliminate visas for Chinese students or researchers to curb espionage. Every year, over 3,00,000 Chinese students join US universities, laboratories and think tanks.

China should be the top priority for US conventional and nuclear defence plan-

ning. Chinese subordination of Taiwan should be made prohibitively difficult. Allies like Japan and Australia should be drawn into a broader coalition to confront China in a “collective defence model”. This approach accords with Trump’s frequently expressed view that allies and partners should contribute commensurate resources for common security objectives.

While China unifies the conservative movement, the Russia-Ukraine conflict divides it. Some Republicans see Russia as a major threat to US interests and European order. They support US aid and even troop deployment, if needed, to ensure Russia’s defeat. Others believe that Ukraine’s defence should be left to the Europeans, since it is not a principal US national security concern.

JOURNEY OF A YOUNG BOY INTO SAINTHOOD

S INCE many of you wanted more about the Kanchi Mahaswami, let me share some more stories of the many known about him.

Matters moved swiftly when Ginni was taken away at 13 to become the 68th Shankaracharya of the Kamakoti Matha at Kanchipuram. They said it was his daily duty to perform puja to Lord Shiva, worshipped at the Matha as Sri Chandramauleshwara, the Moon-bearer. Ginni was awestruck. “Paramashiva, Mother Kamakshi, they say I am your priest. Help me!” he prayed.

Woken every morning at four, Ginni was set to learn Vedic meters, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and Sanskrit literature, besides Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. He broke off to conduct the daily puja with utmost concentration and increasing felicity. He read English classics in the late afternoon. He was taught yoga at the deepest level to transcend his body’s urges, which took serious practice.

A hard part was fighting food cravings. Ginni had spent a lot of time with his mother while she cooked. He thought of his favourite rava dosais and crisp vadais and sighed. Delicious food was made at the Matha and hundreds of pilgrims and the poor were fed daily. But it was unseemly for a sanyasi to gobble, he was taught. He must not gorge himself, either alone or in public, and learn to resist sweets and fried food.

There were only adults at the Matha and as a sanyasi, he could no longer play cricket with other boys. So lonely Ginni spread grain in a corner to entice the flocks of parrots that swept by. He played with the calves in the cattle shed and made friends with the Matha elephant, Kumbhan.

One day, Kumbhan defied his keeper and refused to leave the pond in which he was enjoying a luxurious bath. The keeper was at his wits’ end, when someone thought of calling the boy sanyasi. When Ginni arrived, he merely said, “Come along,” and Kumbhan clambered out meekly. Several such incidents with animals added to Ginni’s growing mystique.

Ginni tried hard to overcome his craving for treats. One day, a landlord brought the finest mangoes from his orchard for Ginni, who noticed Lambadi gypsies outside the Matha. “Please share the fruit with them. They never get to eat such mangoes,” he told him. Astonished, the landlord did so and was warmly blessed by the tribe. This gave Ginni another idea. Motherly devotees brought him tins of homemade *murukkus*



RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

and laddoos. “There are young boys at the *patashala* who get only plain fare and miss their mothers. Please give them these snacks,” he said. The mothers did so gladly, after their first pang of disappointment that Ginni refused their labours of love.

Ginni began to link the big ideas he was taught to everyday life and was struck by a novel notion. “A typical South Indian meal



A touring Carnatic singer stopped by Mahendramangalam once, and while listening to his glorious rendition of Raga Madhyamavati, Ginni had a revelation. He was no longer ‘Ginni’ in his mind. He was Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, a sadhu and head of a Matha

is served in three courses,” he thought. “There’s rice with sambar, rice with rasam and rice with curds or buttermilk. Sambar is known as *kuzhambu* in Tamil, which also means ‘to get confused’. Don’t these three courses seem to illustrate the three *gunas* or qualities of mankind? The ‘confusion’ of sambar is the darkness of ‘*tamo guna*’, the clear flow of rasam is the activity of ‘*rajo guna*’ and buttermilk is the peace of ‘*sattva guna*’. Our daily meal reminds us of our spiritual path if we eat mindfully. But I’m too young to say these things.”

So many people thronged the Matha to gawk at him that Ginni’s managers took him for further education to the remote hamlet of Mahendramangalam by the Kaveri.

Learned scholars were handpicked to

instruct him. When they asked what else he wished to learn, Ginni chose Marathi and French. A tutor was brought from Maharashtra and stayed for three years. A French teacher came from Pondicherry and a music teacher was engaged, as music was a key spiritual activity.

Mother Kaveri proved a great solace in this isolation. Ginni became a strong swimmer and his teachers often found him in the water. He explored the lush, green countryside on long walks, taking photos of neglected temples with the little camera he was gifted for rapidly mastering Panini’s difficult grammar. His heart never stopped aching for his parents. “I am a sanyasi, I am not allowed to miss my family,” he thought sternly and threw himself into the next activity. One night, when he had an agonising toothache, his instructors made light of it but a teacher’s wife took pity on his huddled form and gave him a clove to keep on the afflicted tooth.

Months later, a touring Carnatic singer stopped by Mahendramangalam with a violinist and a mridangam player. After two glorious hours of singing, he slid into *Raga Madhyamavati*. “*Vinayakuni valeno brovave*,” he sang in Telugu, meaning “Look on me as you look on your son, Vinayaka”. The song was addressed by saint-composer Thyagaraja to Goddess Kamakshi at Kanchipuram. When the singer came to the line “*Anatha rakshaki Sri Kamakshi*” meaning ‘Sri Kamakshi, protector of orphans’, he sang it several times with deep emotion. Ginni suddenly felt alight with the joy of realisation.

“The Universal Mother belongs to each of us,” he exulted. “Mother Kamakshi, you have been patient with me. I have tried my best to grow up, but I still felt like a little boy. I don’t anymore, Mother. I have duties ahead and I know you will help me.”

Ginni sat at ease to hear the rest of the song. He was no longer ‘Ginni’ in his mind. He was Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, a sadhu and head of a Matha. His God-given task was to serve society. With Kamakshi’s blessings, he would do that all his life.

(Views are personal) (shebaba09@gmail.com)

Trump has said nothing, beyond declaring he would end the conflict very quickly. This may not mean forcing Ukraine into a capitulatory settlement. He would not want to do to Ukraine what Biden did to Afghanistan. He may be more amenable to something like the ‘peace plan’, elaborated by former secretary of state Mike Pompeo, and a Republican colleague whose consultancy firm is reported to have links with an advisor of Ukraine’s president and some top US defence manufacturers. It involves ramping up sanctions against Russia to force compromise, a \$500-billion “lend-lease” program, enabling Ukraine to buy US weapons (thus benefiting America’s defence industry), and fast-tracking Ukraine’s admission to the EU, to help modernise its economy. Trump has not commented on this plan, which may need tweaking to be practical.

In the longer term, the mandate’s recommendation reflects Trump’s inclinations: Europe and Russia should bear their fair share for a security architecture. NATO’s European members should field a conventional deterrent against Russia, while the US will provide a nuclear one. This would enable the US to reduce its force posture in Europe to give China fuller attention.

As in Trump’s first term, trade is an important focus area. With adversaries, allies and partners alike, trade policy should be strictly guided by reciprocity: unfair advantages of partners will be countered from tax policy to currency manipulation to domestic standards and subsidies. India has to brace itself for a repeat of 2016-20.

The mandate asserts India’s importance for countering the Chinese threat, securing a free and open Indo-Pacific, and as an emerging economic partner. It declares normal relations cannot be expected with the “perfidious Taliban regime” in Afghanistan and “military-political rule” in Pakistan.

Project 2025 is a useful guide to the likely approach of a future Trump Administration. Its external agenda is neither isolationist nor globalist. The US is seriously challenged by China and overstretched in its global operations. But it also has valuable assets and strong allies; it needs a greater contribution from them to advance its strategic interests. There may be calibrations, as China and Russia push back against US actions. European and Asian partners will need delicate handling.

If Trump wins and stays on message, if personnel appointments are sound, and if there is coherence of policy coordination—all big ifs—his agenda could have far-reaching global consequences.

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MAILBAG

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Work-life balance

Ref: *Why overwork does not help anyone* (Sep 15). Studies show excessive working hours can lead to decreased productivity, increased stress, and health problems like heart disease and stroke. In India, where these issues are already prevalent, increasing the burden on individuals with demanding jobs could worsen the crisis. Policymakers must prioritise employee well-being and promote work-life balance.

Priyanshu Priya, Noida

Sustainable schedules

When workers are allowed a choice of working styles based on varied circumstances, overtime becomes synonymous with hustle culture. For additional working hours to help translate into productivity and improved quality, work schedules must be sustainable in the long term.

Katragadda Sarveswara Rao, Bhubaneswar

Self-hurting behaviour

Ref: *Is Rahul riding the Khalistan tiger?* (Sep 15). It is obvious that with assembly elections in Punjab round the corner, Rahul is making bonhomie with alleged ‘superfans’ without realising the repercussions. By doing so, he is handing over a stick to opposition parties to beat the Congress with.

HP Murali, Bengaluru

India’s torchbearers

Ref: *Dynasty vs J&K youth in assembly polls, says Modi* (Sep 15). At the backdrop of the impending J&K polls, PM Narendra Modi’s appeal to the region’s youth to come forward and work to raise India is laudable as youth are the torchbearers in whose hands lie the destiny of future India.

R Pichumani, Kumbakonam

Dummy CM?

The hanging up of the boots by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is out of the blue. The Supreme Court imposed strict restrictions on him discharging his duties as CM. It remains to be seen who would take over the reins as dummy CM, since Kejriwal will most likely remain the de facto chief minister.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

Name politics

The BJP government’s decision to rename the Mo School Abhiyan to Panchasakha Sikhya Setu in Odisha seems more like a political move than a necessary change for the programme. The emphasis should be on improving the quality of education, enhancing infrastructure, and ensuring the programme’s success, rather than altering its name.

Rupesh Rathore, Dhenkanal

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OPINION

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{ OUR TAKE }

Big churn in the Capital

Kejriwal resigning can reshape Delhi politics, but governance must not become secondary

Arvind Kejriwal’s dramatic announcement on Sunday that he will quit as Delhi’s chief minister in two days, and someone else from the party will be nominated to take over the chair has stoked a fresh churn in the national Capital, barely months before it is scheduled to hold assembly elections. The declaration came two days after the Supreme Court gave Kejriwal bail and ended his months-long incarceration, but barred him from visiting the CM’s office, signing official files or making public statements about his role in the excise case. The backdrop of the development is instructive. Over the last 20-odd months, virtually the entire frontline leadership of the AAP has been behind bars at some point or the other, dealing a severe blow to its ability to mobilise voters. Additionally, the party is battling complaints over crumbling civic infrastructure in Delhi — especially after the death of three civil service aspirants who were marooned inside a flooded basement following heavy rainfall —even as the BJP has attempted to chip away at the party’s core USP, its pledge of clean politics. Kejriwal’s statement that he will seek justice in the “people’s court”, and that he will go to every house to seek public support, indicates that he is aware that the party needs an extensive grassroots campaign to triumph at third consecutive time in Delhi — particularly since governance suffered due to a tussle between the elected government and the lieutenant governor. The recent dysfunction in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi only underscored this chaos, which is a far cry from the AAP’s early push for transforming civic amenities such as schools and health care.

This is a critical moment in the evolution of the AAP, which captured power in Delhi and later swept Punjab, but was unable to expand in other states. The way ahead isn’t clear — after all, early elections may not be possible because the assembly has not been dissolved, and summary revision of electoral rolls takes time. The AAP will also be aware of the unhappy history in the Janata Dal (United) (involving Jitan Ram Manjhi) and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (involving Champai Soren), where temporary CMs picked by party chiefs led to more dissidence.

As important as this moment may be, the political class on both sides of the aisle must remember that the primary responsibility they have towards the Capital’s residents is of governance. For too long, political tussles have hamstrung policymaking in Delhi, hurting its development and even exacting a tragic human toll. Kejriwal’s decision holds the potential to upend the Capital’s politics and reshape the AAP’s future, but it shouldn’t triumph over concerns of governance.

Working on easing pension pains

Faced with the prospect of a drying pension pool, China has raised the retirement age of men from 60 years to 63 and of women from 50 to 55 and 55 to 58 depending on the nature of work. Over the next 15 years, there will be incremental hikes every few months. And, in a few years, individuals will need to have served for a minimum of 20 years to be eligible for pensions, against the current 15. The move recognises three realities: rising longevity, falling fertility levels, and the country’s receding youth bulge. Without the move, funding pensions would have fallen to a smaller pool of young workers, since pensions for retirees rest on the contributions of the currently employed to pension funds and the capital these generate. Also, the share of the government in the pension burden is at risk from the high deficits that certain provinces are saddled with. Delaying pension payouts can therefore provide much-needed relief. The move corrects China’s gap on retirement age with competing Asian economies such as South Korea and Japan. Against the headwinds to the future robustness of social security, China has chosen to act early. But the move is not without its challenges. First, a buy-in from the people who now the need to work longer is needed; though the Chinese context is very different, such moves elsewhere have sparked resistance. And second, enough jobs will need to be created to accommodate the demands of the youngest of the working-age cohort and to extend retention to the oldest. India, which could face similar challenges some decades after, must closely watch the Chinese experience to ensure that it avoids its pitfalls.

This generation gap is actually a valley

The first beneficiaries of the 1991 economic reforms are now retiring. Their kids are clear that they don’t want to repeat their parents’ lives

The age cohort that began work in the decades surrounding 1991 is now in its 50s and 60s. This is the urban mass affluent population slice that saw its boats lift with the giant wave of economic growth and prosperity that the economic reforms of 1991 unleashed. You just had to be in the right place at the right time with the willingness and ability for sustained hard work, and economic growth, job opportunities and competition did the rest. People of this generation had grown up at a time of peak socialism with the state intervention and dysfunction making everyday life difficult. They were afraid of sliding back into genteel middle-class poverty if they did not work hard and build careers and assets. Now 30-40 years later, as this cohort slips into retirement and watches their kids take over the story for the next three decades, it finds itself shaking its collective head over some of the behavioural changes it sees in Gen Next, which has seen a lifestyle unimaginable 30 years ago. They worry about some of the decisions around marriage, kids and work they see in their

younger selves.

There are two major changes that define the chasm between the behaviour of the two cohorts that’s causing the generation gap to turn into a valley.

One, the wariness around marriage and kids. When the same story is repeated across tens of social or work-related interactions, it might stop being an anecdote and might upgrade to a trend. I find that an increasing number of the upper-middle class young are choosing to stay single or in relationships without marriage. From questioning the institution itself to the inability to find a suitable partner since the option of an “arranged” marriage is off the table, more young adults are preferring to “go solo”. The trend is especially sharp in highly educated professional women who just don’t see the point of repeating their mothers’ lives in what could be toxic extended family situations.

While there is hard data to show that the overall age of marriage has gone up in India, the behaviour of the slice of the population at the top 5% is harder to pin down. A ministry of statistics and programme implementation (MoSPI) report titled Youth in India 2022 finds that the percentage of women between the ages of 20-24 years who were married before the age of 18 years has dropped from 47.4% in 2005-06 to 23.3% in 2019-21. Overall, fewer young men and women are getting married. The

same report finds men and women between the ages of 15-29 years who were not married, rising from around 17% in 2011 to almost 25% in 2019. The YouGov-Mint-CPR Millennial Survey found that 40% of those surveyed marked marriage as “not important at all”.

Those that do get married are reluctant to have kids due to a mix of lifestyle, financial and freedom issues. There is also the fear of bringing a baby into a world they believe has gone to hell. Overall, the fertility rate in urban India was down to 1.6 in National Family Health Survey 2019-2021, which is below replacement rate, and it is likely that the rate in the highly educated, well-off segment might be even lower where there is a preference for being dog parents over being parents to a human.

Two, the focus on work-life balance and a desire to retire early. A doctor who runs his own practice talks about how his son, who has begun to work in the father’s clinic, is unwilling to put in the hours it takes to sustain the business. “I am still here at 8pm some nights, but he needs to be with his friends after 6 — I just don’t see how he will finally take over,” he shares. From the point of view of the young cohort who saw their parents slog with little time for leisure or even family, they certainly do not want to repeat their parent’s grind. In fact, the FIRE movement — Financial Independence, Retire Early — movement is a rage with the young



Monika Halan



Fundamental choices as those around marriage, kids, and work have long-term consequences

urban Indians who can’t wait to quit the work grind and travel the world, engage in their hobbies and just chill.

Fundamental choices as those around marriage, kids, and work have long-term consequences. I see two threads that will follow people of this generation when they hand over the baton to the next cohort in 30 years. One, they need to plan for old age care since they might be either single or married with no kids. Despite worries on the climate crisis and other global disasters, this generation will live well into the 90s. Old age care will need a plan, money and a support system.

Two, they need to earn and save aggressively to meet their desires for an early retirement and to have enough to last their entire long retired life. But this comes directly in conflict with the desire for a work-life balance today.

This is a wrinkle they will need to iron out as they choose between their today and their tomorrow.

Just as the Millennials and Gen Z in India don’t understand the uncles jokes around the lady knitting sweaters behind the bank counter, they perhaps don’t get the worry that the first cohort of economic freedom feels when it watches their kids, now young adults, take very different decisions with their lives. The post-Independence cohort went from coal and wood to kerosene to gas cylinders. The post-1991 generation went to piped gas and microwaves. And their kids have gone to Swiggy. And so, the story of the generation gap continues, as it has over the ages!

Monika Halan is the best-selling author of the Let’s Talk series of books on money. The views expressed are personal

Mitigating risks, impact of flooding in the cities

Most Indian states have borne the brunt of excessive rains this monsoon season. Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Assam and Bihar have experienced heavy rainfall and flooding over the last few weeks. In some cases, the increase in rainfall has exceeded more than 20% compared to the normal average in this season. As India sees more and more weather extremes, such heavy rainfall and floods pose a serious threat to lives, livelihoods, and urban infrastructure.

There are two primary reasons for the flooding. Floods are an outcome of heavy rainfall, and these extreme events are increasing due to the climate crisis. In the last decade, compared to the previous 30 years, an analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) has shown that more than 64% of Indian sub-districts or tehsils have witnessed an increase in heavy rainfall days. Not only that, this heavy rainfall often comes in short bursts of intense rain. We found that cities such as Pune, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, and Hyderabad are especially affected. But human activities also accentuate the impact of flooding. Poor regulations related to land-use-and-change policies often disrupt drainages that are natural conduits for water flow. This leads to higher water runoff from dense built-up areas during heavy rainfall or storms. Poor implementation of solid waste management policies end up choking the waterways in our cities and towns even further. Finally, inadequate design of stormwater drains leads to slow outflow, leading to water logging.

It’s high time we rethink how to deal with urban floods and move from reaction to readiness. The solution lies in improving our preparation — pre-monsoon, during monsoon, and post-monsoon. This is where an action plan to manage flood risks can be a useful tool. Such a plan should ideally cover two important bodies.

First, urban local bodies must reassess the intensity-duration-frequency of storm events by looking into the latest rainfall patterns and revising the peak flood flow and volume data. In fact, such assessments are usually not undertaken regularly at the city level, often leading to stormwater drains being designed based on old data and making their

capacity insufficient to handle heavy rain. For instance, CEEW’s assessment shows that Thane in Maharashtra lacks a stormwater drainage system that can manage peak flow generated from one hour of heavy rain, which has been around 64 mm/hr for the city in the last decade. The Thane Municipal Corporation has taken cognisance of these revised estimates and is considering designing new stormwater drains based on them.

Second, authorities should undertake flood risk assessments to identify “hot spots” in a city. This involves identifying risks posed by hazards related to extreme rainfall, exposure of “assets” such as hospitals and schools to extreme rainfall events, and vulnerability, including the adaptability of communities to cope with the adverse impacts of extreme rainfall events.

Finally, it’s important to manage flood risk through specific interventions over the short, medium, and long term — and not just when a city floods. The action that should be taken immediately is the strengthening of the weather monitoring system, as per the World Meteorological Organisation norms. Doppler weather radars, which have been recently installed in various cities, can be crucial in precise rainfall forecasts. Another short-term measure can be designing campaigns to nudge community behaviour to handle solid and other waste better so that it does not clog drains. For instance, the city of Indore was instrumental in successfully sensitising citizens to segregate their waste at source and not to dump garbage in open areas. Similar efforts by the cities of Tirupati and Alleppey offer good examples to learn from.

Finally, urban local bodies must separate stormwater and sewerage systems, which are often one and the same in Indian cities.

In the medium term, establishing an Urban Flood Management Cell to coordinate with different agencies in charge of developing and managing public urban infrastructure is crucial. Moreover, replacing ageing stormwater drainage infrastructure is essential — as Cuttack in Odisha has done. However, the drains must be designed according to the latest rainfall pattern assessments.

In the long term, rejuvenating local wetlands and water bodies, which act as sponges, is key. The 15th Finance Commission allocated ₹2,500 crore for reducing flood risk across seven major cities in India such as Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata. We must explore the potential of nature-based solutions, such as integrating wetlands with the existing grey infrastructure in the city. To scale up such solutions, use a unified framework for mapping and estimating benefits to bring in targeted investments.

Flooding and heavy rainfall are becoming the new normal in India. Our cities must urgently become flood-proof, and not just respond in monsoon months. For cities, risk-informed water planning all year round is the way forward. It saves lives and livelihoods.



Nitin Bassi



Vishwas Chitale

Nitin Bassi and Vishwas Chitale are senior programme leads with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). The views expressed are personal



It’s high time we move from reaction to readiness on urban floods

{ DAVID LAMMY } FOREIGN SECRETARY, THE UK



{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Countries must not put religion in driver’s seat

The newly formed government in Bangladesh faces a tough challenge next month — the Durga Puja. The world will be keenly watching whether that country will now allow its Hindu citizenry to celebrate the festival with traditional elan.

Bangladesh’s home affairs adviser Lt Gen. (ret’d) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has said puja committees have been asked to switch off musical instruments and sound systems during namaz and that they have agreed. The past few weeks have been particularly hard for the Hindus in Bangladesh. They have faced targeted violence since the removal of Sheikh Hasina as prime minister.

According to the Bangladesh National Hindu Guard Alliance, ever since Hasina’s ouster, Hindus have suffered violent attacks and killings in 48 districts of the country. Initially, it was believed to be the handiwork of anti-social elements. It wasn’t.

Media reports suggest that since August 5, about 50 Hindu teachers have been forced to resign. Also, offices across Bangladesh received an order to share a list of Hindu employees as soon as possible, reinforcing the belief that the new government was bent on disenfranchising the minority Hindu population by taking away their right to earn a living. An official clarified that it was only an annual exercise, but panic had spread nationwide by then.

Hindus in Bangladesh claim they feel insecure even in the presence of the police force. They are terrorised by incidents such as the one on September 6 where a 15-year-old Hindu boy was beaten to death in broad daylight at Khulna. He was accused of making a defamatory post against Prophet Mohammed on social media. Such incidents have happened in India, too, but timely action was taken, unlike in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh can learn lessons from the miseries of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Hindu population in Pakistan has declined by 84% over the past seven decades. Hindus constituted 12.9% of Pakistan’s population as per the 1951 census; today they constitute just 2.17%. The situation in Pakistan is such that the selection of a Hindu girl, Manisha Ropta, as a deputy superintendent of police in 2021, became a national headline. Pakistan can feel smug about it, but such things are common in India. We had our first Muslim president, Zakir Hussain, in 1967. The situation

in Afghanistan is worse. With the Taliban back in the saddle in Kabul, the situation of minority Hindus and Sikhs has deteriorated steadily. The Sikhs and Hindus, who number less than a hundred in Afghanistan now, want to run away at the first opportunity.

Bangladesh’s record since its liberation from Pakistan in 1971 is no better. As per its first census in 1974, Hindus constituted 13.5% of its population. Today, the number stands at just 7.96%. For the present Bangladesh regime, it should be a cause for alarm. Insecure minorities would not only dent their international image but the consequent economic and social instability can create Pakistan-like systemic breakdown and anarchy.

In India, the majority Hindu population has witnessed a small percentage decline compared with the Muslim population. But it is still an overwhelming majority and the situation won’t alter significantly for centuries to come.

In our country, those who indulge in fear-mongering citing Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh as examples should be careful. It worsens the situation for minorities in those countries.

They should also not forget there are many Muslim countries where Hindus have created a space for themselves through sheer hard work. They are contributing to those societies and their culture and economy. Orthodox United Arab Emirates boasts of 10% Hindus in their population mix. This year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a ₹700-crore temple in the UAE. Similarly, Kuwait has a 15% Hindu population and Qatar has 10%. In Indonesia, which has the largest population of Muslims worldwide, Hindus form just 2% of the population. However, Hindu rituals are performed at most of their government functions.

Those who spread fear in the name of religion should know that more than 20 Fortune 500 companies have Hindu CEOs. Would the shareholders of these multinational be able to create a global brand had religion been their sole criterion of CEO selection? After living for years in London’s cool climes, is Muhammad Yunus aware of such facts and is he ready to work towards it?

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

India inundated

The unprecedented rains have wreaked havoc across the country, serving as a stark wake-up call for urban planning

India's major cities, including Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, are reeling from the aftermath of unprecedented rainfall, leading to widespread flooding, loss of life, property damage, and severe disruptions to daily life. As heavy monsoon showers continue to batter these urban hubs, residents are grappling with submerged streets, gridlocked traffic, and power outages, exposing critical flaws in the country's urban infrastructure. This year's torrential downpour has been particularly devastating. In Mumbai, water levels have risen to waist height in low-lying areas, while Bengaluru's once-bustling tech corridors resemble rivers. Over 100 lives have been lost in flood-related incidents across the country, with thousands displaced from their homes. Many families have seen their life savings washed away in a matter of hours as homes and vehicles succumb to rising waters. Besides, the northern cities like Meerut, which hardly ever reported water-logging, have been partially submerged. The economic toll is equally staggering. Shops,



offices, and industries have faced forced shutdowns. Public infrastructure has borne the brunt of the floods. Urban centres in India are no strangers to traffic congestion, but the flooding has exacerbated an already dire situation. In Delhi, where rainwater has clogged major arterial roads, commute times has increased manifold.

The inconvenience is compounded for those who rely on daily wages for their livelihood, as the disruptions prevent them from working. The scale and intensity of these floods underscore the urgent need for India to rethink its urban planning. Many problems are rooted in poor drainage systems, encroachment on natural water bodies, and unregulated urban sprawl. In cities like Mumbai and Chennai, where floods have become an annual menace, experts have long warned of the consequences of unchecked development in flood-prone areas. Indeed the rains have been unprecedented but they have exposed the slackness of urban planning which is ill-equipped to deal with heavy downpours in the monsoon season. Drainage are clogged, necessary equipment is either unavailable or non-functional, and poor planning in executing operations only exacerbates the situation. City drainage across the country are either outdated or inadequate to handle the massive volumes of rainwater. Local governments must invest in upgrading this critical infrastructure, ensuring that water can be efficiently channelled away from residential and commercial areas. Besides the builder- bureaucrat nexus has stolen away the water bodies. Many lakes, rivers, and wetlands that once absorbed rainwater have been lost to unplanned illegal development. It goes without saying that urban planning should incorporate green spaces, permeable surfaces, and sustainable construction practices that allow water to seep into the ground rather than accumulate on the surface. This includes promoting rainwater harvesting and stormwater management solutions. Cities must build climate resilience into their long-term plans.



Caparisoned elephants participate in the 'pooram' festival as part of the Onam celebration, in Kochi

PTI

Life's unplanned pathways: A journey through coincidences

Sometimes life unfolds in ways that we cannot foresee, shaped by a mix of choices, opportunities, and coincidences

I joined a premier engineering and science institute after my schooling. I quit two years later as I failed to secure an engineering seat. I joined another engineering college and then the prestigious railway services. My entry into the railways could also be attributed to good fortune as the organization increased the number to be inducted. My inability to join the civil services was a sore point with my parents. I would often tease them that I might have done much better had I continued to pursue science. They would retort that I might have been working as a clerk in some obscure government department. Who knows! I might have worked harder to clear the civil services examinations had I continued to pursue science in the premier institute or had I not been selected for the railways. My father often narrates the story of his friend, a civil engineering graduate from his college, who joined the state services. He was afraid that the



bridge that he had designed might collapse. He followed my father's advice to join academics. He is now an internationally recognized geotechnical engineer in America. My father is an electrical engineer who joined the engineering college a year into postgraduation. He had wanted to pursue his MSc and then enter academics if he could not join the prestigious IAS. My father does not regret his choices. He does have one memory that he regrets whenever he remembers about it. This also is from his college days. A few of them decided to indulge themselves with an evening out. My father went to the friend's room to take him along. This young boy appeared cheerful but refused to accompany

them. He had committed suicide by the time they returned. My father still ruminates, "Maybe, we could have saved him had we stayed back or pushed him to accompany us." I know an engineer who joined a famous engineering college. The branch that he had joined was not considered well-placed. He was offered the branch of choice in another college a year later. He left the overnight without consulting anyone. He is extremely successful in his chosen profession. However, he has pangs of regret that his life would have taken a different trajectory had he not taken the impulsive decision and waited the night out to reconsider. The two of us recently bumped into another well-known engineer at Mumbai airport. This gentleman almost quit the structured and disciplined life of the engineering college which was in stark contrast to the relaxed environs of the science graduate course he had completed. He went to his friend's hostel room with

the admission forms for the postgraduate course, to realise that the studies were as structured and disciplined as his engineering course. He completed his engineering, joined the railway services, and successfully headed a leading metro rail organization in India at the time of his retirement. We were walking to our car after a beautiful laser show in Connaught Place in Delhi a few years back. I was approached by a lady requesting if she could use my mobile phone to contact her husband. They had got separated in the crowd. The husband spoke to me to thank me for the courtesy. It turned out that we were together during training in my first job. Douglas Coupland, Canadian novelist and designer, said, "Every single moment is a coincidence." It is up to us to use this joker in the pack to play this game of life. *(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)*



SANJAY CHANDRA

The art of problem solving

Those in decision-making roles must be equipped with the necessary skills, attitudes, and awareness to meet the demands of their tasks

Problem-solving is more than an art. It is a matter of resources, teamwork, and timing. Behavioral interventions in problem-solving need to keep this in mind. This applies equally to training programs on problem-solving. Many training programs tend to believe that if their techniques are right the results will surely follow. This is a palpably comforting approach but with limited truth in reality. Amongst the foremost requirements of problem-solving is the need for all the people involved in the process to have the necessary skills to handle the job. The job itself has to be neatly reduced to manageable levels of skill clusters, and the persons allotted the responsibility for it must have the necessary attitude, skills, and approaches to handle the job. Unfortunately, not all in key decision-making situations have the competence to embrace this simple truth.

They seem to have arrived in that position either through regular promotion, seniority, hierarchy, or indeed, simply by chance. While the logic that brought them there is understandable, it does not meet the requirements for getting the tasks done. The result is therefore all to see. Not only do accidents take place, but delays and ineptness also become the hallmarks of a situation. It is important to remember this while planning an activity. It is important to build this into training programs, and above all, it is important to remind those who control the resources to be conscious of this requirement. Even when all the skill columns and more are regularly accounted for, it stands to reason that the resources of the supply chain must be intact and in position. As it happens in organizational setups, the supply chain side and the engineering side need effective dialogue, communication, or exchanges with the human resources side, the skill formation side, and control and monitoring methodologies. Thus, it is that ineptness becomes an inevitable part of the scene in organizations not so well linked together on these dimensions. It



is therefore necessary to create a culture of effectiveness and an appreciation of the requirements to deliver. To deliver requires, to the extent possible, objective and manageable resource mobilization, skill availability, sensitive monitoring, and linking up with the results in the time set. If this is not done, effectiveness is impaired, and others who can organize themselves will surge forward, and then the institutional returns of the defaulting group will continue to diminish. It may ultimately reach a point where there may be no surpluses to distribute even for salaries or to administer. This is a point of view to which no exceptions can be made. Considering this in the current and growing crescendo on reservations following and pandering to political rising waves, even though it may not be sustainable in the long run. This is such an obvious warning and caution that it cannot be over-emphasized. The tragedy is, not only that so many people seem to

GRADUALLY, THROUGH POLITICAL COMPULSIONS AND OTHERWISE, THE FOCUS OF RESERVATION-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES WAS EXPANDED TILL THE SUPREME COURT HAD TO STEP IN AND SAY THAT NOT MORE THAN 50% OF POSITIONS COULD BE MADE IN THE RESERVED CATEGORY.

overlook this point. It appears, at times, that many otherwise knowledgeable people do it purposefully to gain political advantage. Little do they realize that what they gain on the swing, they will lose on the round. In this context, two observations need to be made, one concerning the constitution and the other concerning the practices of reservation for social equity in other parts of the world. The constitution in its initial draft was very clear and forthright on the reservation as a policy only for a limited period, even the period for which was indicated. Gradually, through political compulsions and otherwise, the focus of reservation-affected communities was expanded till the Supreme Court had to step in and say that not more than 50% of positions could be made in the reserved category. Pressure has been on for a while, in political terms, to loosen this limit. Should this happen, it could have implications, not just politically but also in terms of perhaps affecting the results of performance. This could jeopardize the total volume of resources, then, available for distribution. To consider the issue of social equity in other communities and countries beyond India may be worthwhile. Limited examples may be found across

the world where the total availability of jobs is parcelled off in reserved blocks. Some nations have a parallel stream for reserved categories and a definite stream where only talent could be a criterion for selection. This amalgam seems to have worked for both productivity and distributive justice. There is a clear case of streaming of jobs in India, being examined from this point of view also. Not to look at this option would be limiting the possibilities of growth with equity. That may be risky and unwise. The logic of preferential treatment has many caveats, and one of them is that preferential treatment could become a matter of habit and expectations, and when not granted, it could be seen as akin to 'rights' being violated. The time has come to seriously ask whether the slogan-mongering of several political groups may not be tantamount to throwing the baby out with the water. Every approach can be considered for and against, but the ultimate solution should preferably incorporate requirements of universal equity, and sustainability amongst various criteria of performance and results. *(The writer is an internationally acclaimed management consultant. The views expressed are personal)*



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BAIL IS THE RULE, NOT EXCEPTION

Madam — It is indeed a welcome move on the part of the SC to quote Article 21 of the Indian Constitution which enables an Indian citizen protection of life and personal liberty and orders bail to the leaders with the often quoted words of SC "bail is a rule and jail is an exception. While one would not disagree with this ruling the SC may be reminded of the pending cases where several political leader's cases have been pending for more than two or three decades. These leaders use the powers they wield and resources in their command and with the aid of the top most lawyers frustrate the system and ensure the trial is delayed for some decades. The pending DA cases of TN ministers and the verdict in the case of Jagdish tytler will vouch for this fact. SC should also lay guide lines for speedy trial in cases such as these while ordering bail.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

PORT BLAIR IS NOW SRI VIJAYA PURAM

Madam — Reference: "Centre renames Port Blair as Sri Vijaya Puram" (the pioneer September, 14). Centre's decision to change the name of Port Blair to Sri Vijaya Puram showcases an indication that they want to acknowledge and celebrate the rich historical and cultural past of India. With reference to the former waterborne empire of Sri Vijaya, this plan is meant to laud the maritime heritage as well as regional pride within India. Nonetheless, such a name change trend would evoke some discussions that are wider in scope regarding modifying names with regard to more contemporary backgrounds. Some people would see it as a bidding to claim back lost histories while others think it disturbs ancestral practices and community memory too much. It is therefore important for the government world to balance them so as to keep themselves including everybody in their stories.

Garima Singh | Kanpur

CAGED PARROTS

Madam — The Supreme Court's scathing

India's booming bioeconomy



In reference to 'Indian bioeconomy hits US \$151 billion, contributes 4.25% to GDP' (14 Sept), the remarkable growth in key sectors like biopharma, bio-fuel, and biotechnology could be further accelerated through enhanced government support in the form of funding, tax incentives, and mandatory policies on ethanol-blended petrol and biofuels in agriculture. Tier-II and Tier-III cities offer significant

comment on the CBI might as well apply to nearly all of the government's institutions (Ref: Supreme Court again compares CBI to caged parrot, p3, Sept. 14). The "caged parrot" remark, now made by Justice Bhuyan, was first made by the Supreme Court way back in 2013, during the investigation of the "Coalgate" scam. A lot of water has flown down the Ganges, but nothing seems to have changed on the ground. The reiteration of this sarcastic and stinging remark affirms that even the highest investigating agency in the country is beholden to the powers that be. The same remark may be extrapolated to other institutions to a greater or lesser degree. Take the police department as just one example. Cases are doctored, expedited, closed, or hushed up, depending on signals that originate from the political leadership in a particular state. The recent RGK hospital crime in Kolkata bears shameful testimony to this. No Investigating Officer dares to rub his political masters the wrong way by insisting upon following the rule book. Justice

opportunities for biofuels in the agricultural sector, reducing costs, creating jobs, and fostering local entrepreneurship through dealership networks. A strategic approach could also be applied to biofuel exports, particularly to neighboring countries. Additionally, there is vast potential for bio-based household products, such as cosmetics, provided there is proper standardization. Universities and research institutions should be encouraged to pursue innovative research in areas like marine biology, space, and vaccines. The growth of the bioeconomy is a result of joint efforts by the corporate sector, industry, research institutions, and the government. This progress also aligns with India's goals for COP 28.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

is given a short shrift because the department in question, in this case the police department, is a "caged parrot", much like the CBI. Sports and Education are no exceptions. The Brij Bhushan Saran Singh saga bears ample testimony to the fact that political bigwigs run their departments much like their fiefdoms. If sportsmen and sportswomen of repute have to resort to "dharmas" in the country's capital for the redressal of their grievances, the lot of the common man seeking justice can well be imagined. There is nobody to red flag the minister for higher education, M.P. when he rubbishes well established historical facts and claims that we had trade relations with America in the eighth century, even before Columbus discovered America in the fifteenth. The saddest part is, even the fourth estate is playing along, instead of questioning our elected representatives on our behalf. Sad and shameful, to say the least.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

SPORTS BOOST MENTAL HEALTH

Engaging in sports strengthens emotional stability and cognitive growth



SAKSHI SETHI

Sports have since long been celebrated for their physical benefits, but their impact on mental health is equally profound. Engaging in sports activities is more than just a means to maintain physical fitness. It is one of the powerful tools to enhance mental well-being. In an age where mental health challenges are increasingly common, the role of sports in fostering a healthier mind is more relevant than ever. One of the most significant mental health benefits of sports is their ability to reduce stress and anxiety. Engaging in various physical activities increases the production of neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which play a crucial role in regulating the mood and emotions of an individual and being consistent in sports routine can lead them to a more stable mood, thereby helping them in reducing symptoms of depression and promoting overall emotional well-being. Furthermore, achieving personal goals in sports, such as running a faster mile or mastering a new skill, provides a sense of accomplishment that boosts not only self-esteem but also confidence to a large extent. Sports such as basketball, soccer or tennis that involve strategy, coordination as well as decision-making require quick thinking and concentration can help improve cognitive skills over time. Studies too have shown that regular physical activity can enhance memory, problem-solving abilities as well as attention span, which are all critical components of mental health. By keeping the brain active and engaged, sports help in maintaining cognitive function and prevent age-related decline. Moreover, they also teach individuals how to handle failures, manage stress and push through adversity- skills that are invaluable in everyday life. Whether it is dealing with a loss, overcoming an injury or working hard to achieve a goal, sports challenge individuals to grow stronger



and mentally. This process of overcoming obstacles builds resilience and equips individuals with the mental fortitude to face life's challenges more effectively. Not only this, engaging in team sports, cycling and aerobic activities are particularly effective in reducing anxiety symptoms caused likely due to the combination of physical exertion and social interaction. When talking about different stages of life, there is no denying the fact that sports play a crucial role in enhancing mental health across various stages of life—whether in school, college or professional settings. Schools can be a stressful environment for children due to academic pressures, social dynamics and extracurricular demands so engaging in sports offers an effective outlet for releasing stress and pent-up energy. Regular participation in the same helps manage stress by releasing endorphins and promoting relaxation, which leads to better focus and productivity in academic pursuits. Sports not only improve physical health but also boost mental activity. This improved cognitive function can translate into higher productivity and better problem-solving abilities at work. Regardless of age or stage, engaging in sports provides a holistic approach to maintaining and enhancing mental health, making it an invaluable tool for personal well-being and development. Thus, the benefits of sports extend beyond physical fitness thereby contributing significantly to emotional well-being, cognitive development and social integration. By fostering resilience, enhancing emotional regulation and encouraging positive social interactions, sports provide a comprehensive approach to mental health care. In a world where mental health challenges are increasingly prevalent, the importance of sports as a tool for mental well-being cannot be overstated. Encouraging participation in sports at all levels, from casual play to competitive athletics, can be a powerful strategy for improving mental health across all age groups. *(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

Nothing undemocratic about PM's visit to CJI's pooja



GOURAV VALLABH

In a nation where governance and justice work in tandem to uphold the Constitution, such an event signifies the harmony necessary for collective effort



The Prime Minister of India attending a Ganesh Pooja at the residence of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) is an act that should be seen as a symbol of respect and unity rather than an event warranting criticism. In the complex structure of Indian governance, where the judiciary and the executive function as distinct but interdependent pillars, such gestures are appropriate and reflective of the harmony essential for the nation's progress. To criticise this act would be to adopt a narrow-minded approach, ignoring the more profound significance of the occasion. The judiciary and the executive are two of the most important pillars of Indian democracy. While they are distinct in their functions, they share a common purpose: the preservation of the Constitution and the welfare of the people. The Prime Minister, as the head of the executive, and the Chief Justice of India, as the head of the judiciary, embody the leadership of two vital branches of government. Their personal or religious event participation reflects mutual respect and understanding of their respective roles in the country's governance. The Ganesh Pooja, a significant religious event in India, represents the invocation of wisdom, prosperity, and the removal of obstacles. By attending such an event together, the two leaders are sending a message that they are united in their goals for the nation, seeking divine blessings for the common good. To view this act as inappropriate would be to overlook the fact that it is not merely a personal gathering but a reflection of shared responsibility in upholding the constitutional fabric of India. Critics of the Prime Minister's participation in the Ganesh Pooja at the Chief Justice of India's residence should remember that performing the Ganapati Pooja is not a crime, but a deeply ingrained part of India's cultural and historical heritage. The significance of Ganesh Pooja, especially when viewed through the lens of its revival by the great freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak, is a reminder of its deeper objectives—unity, nationalism, and collective strength. In this context, the Ganesh Pooja is not just a religious ceremony but a powerful cultural symbol that has historically promoted social



BY COMING TOGETHER AT A RELIGIOUS EVENT, THEY DEMONSTRATE THAT DESPITE THEIR INSTITUTIONAL SEPARATION, THEY WORK TOWARDS THE SAME LARGER AND GREATER GOAL—THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE AND THE STRENGTHENING OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

cohesion, unity, and nationalism. By criticizing such an event, the critics undermine the values that Tilak sought to instil through this festival. In Indian tradition, the term 'Karta' refers to the head or manager of a family, responsible for the well-being of the entire household. Similarly, the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice act as the 'Kartas' of their respective domains: the executive and the judiciary. While their roles are different, their objectives often align, especially concerning matters of national interest, law, and justice. By coming together at a religious event, they demonstrate that despite their institutional separation, they work towards the same larger and greater goal—the welfare of the people and the strengthening of Indian democracy. As the Karta of the executive, the Prime Minister is responsible for running the government, implementing laws, and ensuring the country's development. The Chief Justice, as the Karta of the judiciary, ensures that justice is upheld and that the laws are interpreted and applied in a fair and just manner. These roles complement each other, and public gestures of respect and unity, such as attending a religious event together, only strengthen the understanding and coordination between these two pillars of governance. Only a narrow-minded perspective would find fault in the Prime Minister's attendance at the Ganesh Pooja. Such criticism is often rooted in a limited understanding of the executive and judiciary's roles in the country's broader governance. Criticizing such gestures of goodwill and unity overlooks the significance of collaboration between these branches, which is essential for a well-functioning democracy. By attending the Ganesh Pooja, the Prime Minister and the CJI are reinforcing their commitment to work together for

the nation's greater good. It is well-known that Congress, during its tenure in power, had multiple instances where it was accused of attempting to influence or interfere with the independence of the judiciary. One such example that comes to the mind of every informed citizen is when Chief Justice S.M. Sikri retired on April 25, 1973, the day after the Supreme Court's landmark Kesavananda Bharati judgment, which ruled that Parliament could not alter the "basic structure" of the Constitution. Displeased by this limitation on her plans for constitutional amendments, Indira Gandhi swiftly responded by superseding three senior judges—Justices K.S. Hegde, J.M. Shelat, and A.N. Grover—on April 26. Justice A.N. Ray, who was less critical of the government's stance, was appointed Chief Justice. This supersession sent a clear message, influencing the Supreme Court's subsequent ruling in the ADM Jabalpur case (also known as the Habeas Corpus case). During the Emergency declared on June 25, 1975, which suspended fundamental rights including the right to life and personal liberty, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court heard challenges to the presidential order. Attorney General Niren De argued that no judicial remedy could be sought during the Emergency. Justice Khanna questioned the Attorney General about remedies for severe abuses, like police killings, during the Emergency. The Attorney General admitted there would be no judicial recourse during this period. Despite this troubling admission, the majority ruled that citizens had no right to life or personal liberty during the Emergency. Justice Khanna dissented but was later superseded by Justice M.H. Beg as Chief Justice in January 1977. In November 1976, Congress passed the 42nd

Amendment, aiming to undermine judicial independence and establish a more authoritarian regime. The Prime Minister's participation in Ganesh Pooja at the Chief Justice of India's residence underscores mutual respect and recognition of each other's roles and powers. Unlike Congress, which historically attempted to undermine judicial independence, this gesture reflects a healthy relationship between the executive and judiciary. It demonstrates that both leaders acknowledge and uphold the boundaries of their respective roles, ensuring a collaborative rather than confrontational dynamic in governance and judicial matters. The Prime Minister's attendance at a religious function does not imply interference in the judiciary's functioning or decision-making. There is a significant difference between engaging in respectful cultural or religious participation and attempting to subvert judicial independence for political gains, as seen during the Congress era. To equate the two is to distort history and misrepresent the present. The Prime Minister performing Ganesh Pooja at the Chief Justice's residence is an act that reflects India's values of cultural unity, mutual respect, and inclusiveness. Only those with a narrow-minded view or divisive political motives would criticize such a gesture. This event represents the healthy relationship between the judiciary and executive, reaffirming their shared commitment to upholding the Constitution and promoting the welfare of the nation. Rather than being a cause for criticism, it should be seen as a celebration of the harmony and unity at the heart of India's democratic and cultural ethos. *(The writer is professor at XLRI and a BJP Leader; views are personal)*

The hidden toll of climate change: India's struggle with eco-anxiety and mental health

Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns are not only threatening the nation's economy but also fueling anxiety, depression and trauma

India's diverse landscape is one of its greatest assets, but it also makes the country highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. The consequences are increasingly evident in events like wildfires, violent storms, unseasonal rainfall, melting glaciers, air pollution, and heatwaves. These phenomena not only damage the environment but also have serious implications for public health. Heatwaves, for instance, have led to a 53.7% increase in heat-related deaths among people aged 65 and above between 2000 and 2017. Additionally, the growing heat stress could result in an estimated 34 million job losses, while air pollution is expected to cause 6.6 million premature deaths by 2050.



VARADA MADGE

Climate change poses a significant threat to India's economic stability as well. Implementing adaptation strategies will come at a staggering cost of ₹85.6 lakh crore (approximately \$1,065 trillion). While these economic challenges are daunting, the mental health implications of climate change are often overlooked. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth

Assessment Report, shifts in economic, social, and food systems triggered by climate change will lead to long-term mental health impacts, including rising levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. One of the most alarming consequences of climate change on mental health is the rise of "eco-anxiety." Defined as a persistent worry about the current environmental crisis and the bleak future it suggests, eco-anxiety is affecting millions globally, especially the younger generation. A study by The Lancet across ten countries, including India, surveyed 10,000 young adults aged 16-25 years. The results were sobering: over half of the participants reported feeling 'sad', 'anxious', 'angry', 'powerless', 'helpless', 'insecure', and

'guilty' about climate change. Furthermore, 45% admitted that these emotions disrupted their daily lives, while 75% expressed serious concerns about their future. Most disturbingly, 83% believed that humanity had failed to take adequate steps to protect the planet. The Lancet Countdown report of 2022 further highlighted the mental health consequences for younger people, including increased levels of phobias, drug dependency, sleep disturbances, emotional dysregulation, and cognitive impairment. Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to eco-anxiety, as they are growing up in an era where the effects of climate change are becoming more apparent with each pass-



ing year. India has already witnessed numerous climate-induced disasters that have exacerbated mental health issues. According to the National Institute of Disaster Management, India experienced 1,058 climate-related events, including floods, cyclones, droughts, cold waves, and heatwaves between 1995 and 2020. These disasters often

result in severe psychological consequences. For example, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in flood-affected populations is estimated to be around 50%. Frequent droughts, for instance, have been linked to high suicide rates among farmers. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported over 10,000 farmer suicides in 2019. A study also found that when temperatures rise above 20°C, a 1°C increase in a single day's temperature is linked to approximately 70 additional suicides. Over the past three decades, rising temperatures and droughts have contributed to the suicides of around 59,000 farmers in India, accounting for 6.8% of the overall upward trend in suicides.

The future also appears bleak in terms of water security. A 2018 report by Niti Aayog predicts that 21 Indian cities will run out of water by 2030, affecting 100 million people. By that time, 40% of India's population may lack access to clean drinking water, leaving communities stressed and insecure. The mental health impact of such crises is particularly severe for indigenous communities, whose lives and livelihoods are closely tied to their natural surroundings. Sadly, these communities and their experiences remain underrepresented in mainstream discussions about climate change, calling for more focused research to understand their specific vulnerabilities. Addressing these challenges

will require coordinated efforts across sectors. Communities, climate activists, organizations, policymakers, and mental health professionals must collaborate to develop solutions. Initiatives like planting trees, reforestation, and recycling can empower communities and provide a sense of agency, helping alleviate the psychological burden of eco-anxiety. Policymakers must prioritise the environment by enforcing carbon emission reductions and investing in renewable energy. Mental health surveillance should be integrated into climate policies at every level of governance. *(The writer is Fellow Environment and Health Assessment, TERI; views are personal)*

A big deal

New competition rules for M&A are pragmatic

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has recently notified amendments to the Competition Act, 2002 which includes the introduction of deal value thresholds (DVT). Now, any M&A transaction exceeding ₹2,000 crore in value must receive prior approval from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), irrespective of the size of the company being acquired. This provision, which has already come into effect, marks a strategic shift to deal with M&As that could alter competitive dynamics, particularly in digital markets.



For corporates, this means a re-evaluation of acquisition strategies, especially in industries such as technology and pharmaceuticals, where companies command enormous market valuations despite minimal physical assets. The requirement to secure approval of the CCI for high-value deals introduces a layer of regulatory compliance. The amendment, however, also significantly reduces the review timeline for mergers from 210 days to 150 days. This change is aimed at enhancing India’s attractiveness as a business destination. For businesses, the shortened timeline could mean quicker deal closures and less uncertainty. However, this also places a premium on businesses being better prepared to engage with the CCI — requiring them to be more meticulous in their initial submissions to avoid delays within the tighter review framework. For the CCI, the ability to make thorough yet timely decisions will be critical to prevent bottlenecks, given the expected increase in the volume of transactions to be reviewed under the new thresholds. The exemptions list for the new merger control regime would have to be refined accordingly to exclude transactions that are benign. This revamp of the exemptions would allow the CCI to focus on significant transactions.

The move by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to exempt acquisitions through the stock exchange route from “standstill obligations” is a welcome one. Put simply, standstill obligations implied that no part of the deal can be pursued without the CCI’s prior approval. This rule is arguably restrictive to the extent of threatening the viability of the acquisition. Now, the acquirer must apply for the CCI’s nod within 30 days of the acquisition. Under the erstwhile set-up, a merger deal that ignored “standstill organisations” would be hauled up for ‘gun jumping’ and be required to pay penalties. However, a post-merger approval process should not turn into a mere *fait accompli*. More clarity is needed here in terms of post-merger regulation.

With the introduction of the new thresholds, the CCI needs to augment its capacity. This involves not just increasing the number of staff but also enhancing their skills in complex economic and legal analyses. Revamping India’s merger control regulations is a timely step. However, the CCI, not otherwise known for swift action, must elevate its performance to meet the demands of a constantly evolving landscape – digital or otherwise.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Donald Trump and Loomer Tunes

Donald Trump likes to call his political opponents nuts, as in “crazy Nancy Pelosi,” so then why is he hanging with the 9/11 conspiracist Laura Loomer? Is he trying to lose the election? We can’t believe we have to write this about a presidential candidate, but then Mr. Trump seems to like the company of Ms. Loomer, the 31-year-old online provocateur. She was backstage with the Trump team during this week’s debate with Kamala Harris and was in the spin room with the former President afterward. She then flew on Mr. Trump’s plane to the anniversary memorials of 9/11 in New York City and the site of the Flight 93 crash in Pennsylvania. Her attendance at these events was especially insulting since Ms. Loomer has claimed that 9/11 was “an inside job.” NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 16

The Guardian

NHS: Let’s start with the way it handles our data

Last week’s report by Lord Ara Darzi on the state of the country’s health service made bleak reading. In relentless detail, the distinguished surgeon outlined the steady decline that has taken place in the NHS over the past 15 years, a decrease in effectiveness that now causes an estimated 14,000 unnecessary deaths a year, he argued. As headline writers for the nation’s newspapers made clear: the NHS now faces a simple truth. It must “reform or die”. How this change can be brought about is unclear, however. Our health service needs to be better resourced, although the government has warned little money is likely to be made available for such a monumental transformation. LONDON, SEPTEMBER 15

LINE& LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

The Congress is busy diverting attention from its leader’s various faux pas in the US. It has suggested that the Constitution was in danger because last week the Prime Minister visited the home of the Chief Justice for a private religious function.

This charge once again focused on an age-old problem, namely, what the proper relationship between the executive and the judiciary should be.

There are two aspects to the problem. One is the question of checks on executive power. The other is cooperation between executive and judiciary. Sometimes the former turns into an adversarial relationship and that’s what causes problems.

In the first quarter of the 17th century in England, a theory was propounded that judges should be “lions under the throne”. That is, they could eat everyone except the sovereign.

It’s been a well documented running battle since then. Suffice it to say that the relationship depends almost entirely on the personalities of the heads of the governments and the heads of the judiciaries. When both are insistent on a ‘my way or highway’ approach things get quite rocky.

But how about the relationships within the judiciary? It was best described in a book on the US Supreme Court by a journalist — never underestimate them — called Max Lerner. The book was called *Nine Scorpions in a Bottle*. I read it more than two decades ago. Its applicability is universal.

But in India we don’t do such research. The US, however, is different and its academic excellence is what sustains it as a world power.

JUDGES AND JUDGMENTS

So here I want to describe the findings of a research working paper published by the Boston-based National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). The authors are Alma Cohen of Harvard University and Rajeev H. Dehejia of New York University. The paper is called ‘Judges Judging Judges: Partisanship and Politics in the Federal Circuit Courts of Appeals’ (NBER Working Paper No. 32920).

They have analysed “how politicisation and polarisation influence judicial review within US Federal appellate courts.” They have looked at



Judiciary vs executive: The elusive balance

Judicial inconsistencies aggravate the already fraught relationship between the judiciary and the executive

over 400,000 cases from 1985 to 2020 and found that “judges’ political alignment or misalignment with trial judges increasingly affect their decisions, particularly in the last two decades.” Wow!

They further find that “panels of Democratic judges are 6.9 percentage points more likely to reverse Republican trial judges compared to Democratic ones, whereas Republican panels are 3.6 percentage points less likely to reverse fellow Republican judges.”

While reviewing the literature they also found a study that said that increasingly even in the Supreme Court

The struggle between the executive and the judiciary led to one Indian Prime Minister to ask for a committed judiciary. Committed to her, that is.

there were instances of divisions along party lines when a case was especially divisive. I suppose the latest such thing to happen was the reversal of Roe v Wade that reversed a 1973 decision that protected the right of a woman to have an abortion.

JUDGES V GOVERNMENTS

The struggle between the executive and the judiciary led to one Indian Prime Minister in the mid-1970s to ask for a committed judiciary. Committed to her, that is.

Another Prime Minister in the mid-1950s brought the fourth amendment to the Indian constitution. It limited the power of judicial review in cases relating to compensation to be paid by the government when it acquired private property.

But the government isn’t the only problem before the judiciary. It is quite often at odds with itself as when the Supreme Court overturns its own decisions, thus leaving many important

issues open. Arun Shourie had raised this question in 1996 in his book *Courts and their Judgements*. It’s a masterpiece on judicial inconsistency.

All the three works cited above prove just one point: the judiciary can be its own worst enemy, making life that much easier for the executive and sometimes more difficult for the citizen. It’s of little comfort that this happens everywhere, including the US.

Perhaps the best summing up of this fraught relationship was given by a former chief justice in the late 1960s who observed that while the executive was impatient, the judiciary had to be circumspect because it was its duty to implement the law, not change it.

But strong or ideological judges have often interpreted the law to suit their own preferences, especially when having to choose between the rights of citizens and their abridgement in the public interest. Indian case law is littered with these instances of *ipse dixit* or ‘because I say so’. There’s no one to check this.

E-commerce boom has helped small vendors

E-retailing has really caught on in the country but some lingering issues need to be ironed out

Ashish Kumar Sakshi Abrol

Skipping developmental steps and leapfrogging have been uniquely Indian. We leapfrogged into services from agriculture, skipped the landline stage and moved to smart phones and the same holds true for retail as well. We’ve leapfrogged to online retail while malls remain largely restricted to the metros.

But what does this mean for the retail markets in India? Drawing insights from a pan-India survey of 2,062 online vendors and 2,031 brick-and-mortar vendors conducted by Pahle India Foundation, we take stock of how we adapted to this nimble transition. And in doing so, we shift the needle from a misguided ‘online vs. offline’ debate to a discussion on business performance and productivity of retailers in India.

The study reveals that 60 per cent of vendors reported an uptick in their sales since the time they started selling online and 52 per cent attribute their increase in profits to this digital shift. Vendors have additionally seen an improvement in other aspects of business performance as well. About 60 per cent of vendors stated that they have improved market access after joining e-tail platform, alongside a boost in purchase value per customer, and 58 per cent of them report that they have more customers. Interestingly, a greater

percentage of vendors from tier 3 cities have seen an improvement in market access as compared to the rest.

The maturing Indian retail economy vests on the ability of retailers to adapt new systems and technologies. Fifty-seven per cent of vendors have adopted more technology and close to 97 per cent of them have digitalized at least one retail function (for example, marketing, management, warehousing) since their shift online.

Additionally, by benefiting from the specialised services of suppliers, shippers, packers etc., 56 per cent of online vendors have been able to usher-in efficiency in their sourcing and distribution methods.

With greater customer intelligence, vendors today are better equipped to meet consumer expectations of quick, hassle-free delivery of quality products. Sixty per cent of online vendors believe they have better insights into customer preferences than before, 59 per cent of them have improved their product design and 61 per cent have enhanced product variety.

Much like market access, innovation (in product design, variety and payment methods), efficiency (in sourcing and distribution, customer intel) and technological adoption have been the highest amongst tier 3 city vendors.

TIER III FACTOR

The data show that close to half the tier 3 city online vendors have seen an improvement in these three parameters.



E-COMMERCE. Surging ahead
/ISTOCKPHOTO

Barring costs – that have ‘not decreased’ according to 40 per cent of vendors – and stiffening competition, vendors by and large view their move online positively.

Comparable developments are seen in traditional retail as well.

When offline vendors were asked if their product variety and payment options decreased since the growth of e-commerce, a negative score was obtained. This was also true for consumer insights.

Notably, about 70 per cent of offline vendors have adopted some form of technology, the most prevalent being point-of-sale device for digital payments followed by software for retail operations management and business intelligence.

Some challenges remain, particularly around vendor costs — such as the expense of acquiring new customers, platform charges, and the burden of unsellable inventory or returns. Around

60 per cent of vendors registered a dissatisfaction with platform charges and about 56 per cent vendors expressed concerns around fulfilment costs such as logistics, packaging & handling, and customer acquisition costs such as marketing & sales, respectively.

In light of this, ONDC offers a timely solution. By allowing vendors to access customers across multiple platforms without the hassle of onboarding each one individually, ONDC is creating a more cost-effective and streamlined ecosystem for sellers of all sizes.

Although just 3 per cent of the surveyed vendors are currently selling on ONDC, this number is expected to grow significantly as the platform continues its wider rollout. There is also need for incentivising offline vendors to also adopt online trading by suitable capacity development.

To conclude, vendors across the spectrum are spurring to level it up — jumping on the technology bandwagon, improving product quality, enhancing design, and using consumer data to make smarter decisions. It is thus time we move beyond the traditional - digital dichotomy and see e-commerce as a catalyst for innovation and growth in the retail industry.

However, the lingering issues that continue to nag at the industry’s edges, even as innovation propels it forward, may need attention in the near future.

Kumar, Former DG, MOSPI, is Distinguished Fellow and Abrol is Visiting Fellow with Pahle India Foundation

● BELOW THE LINE



Chetna Sinha of Mann Deshi Mahila Bank BUJOY GHOSH

Thumb impression!

At the 2024 BL Changemaker Awards, Chetna Sinha of Mann Deshi Mahila Bank, who won for Financial Transformation, shared an

interesting story. It all began in 1997 with just 1,335 members, and since then, Mann Deshi has bloomed into a thriving financial institution. But when the digital age rolled in, the bank’s managers hit a snag: “How will our illiterate rural women remember PINs and passwords for digital transactions?” they wondered. Enter the women themselves, with an even bigger concern: “What if someone steals our PIN? It’s not like we’re guarding national secrets here!” Then came the kicker: “Forget PINs—give us digital thumbprints! You can steal passwords, but who’s going to steal our thumbs?” Chetna learned a valuable lesson here:

“Never offer poor solutions to the poor — they’re too smart for that!”

The Solution

After receiving the *BusinessLine* Iconic Changemaker Award, Prof. Ashok Jhunjhunwala was surrounded by eager youth, questioning him about unemployment, overpopulation, and future challenges. Calm and optimistic, he responded, “Yes, there are problems, but there are always solutions. Why focus on the issues when we can work together to solve them?” His words shifted the energy, offering not just answers, but a clear direction.

CBI - Still a caged parrot?

The Supreme Court, while granting bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, made a pointed reference to the Central Bureau of Investigation’s (CBI) controversial reputation as a “caged parrot”. This sobriquet, dating back to the coal scam case of 2013 of UPA era, has been a haunting reminder of the CBI’s perceived susceptibility to political influence. Justice Ujjal Bhuyan’s remarks in the Kejriwal case underscored that the agency must dispel this notion. He cautioned that investigative agencies must maintain the highest standards of integrity and avoid using coercive powers like arrests as instruments of

harassment. The timing of Kejriwal’s arrest, coming nearly two years after the FIR was registered, raised eyebrows, with Justice Bhuyan even characterizing it as an “insurance arrest” aimed at keeping the Chief Minister in jail despite bail in the ED case. The judge urged the CBI to act as an “uncaged parrot”, stressing the need for impartiality in investigations. Now legal experts see Justice Bhuyan’s observations as a stern reminder to the CBI that its actions should reflect independence and fairness rather than succumbing to external pressures! **Our Bureaus**

Underutilised data

GST transactions are a rich mine for policymakers

In the seven years since goods and services tax (GST) was introduced, an enormous number of transactions have been recorded by the GST Network, or GSTN. The question is whether this data can be put to use in multiple spheres. The GSTN has been understandably reluctant to be particularly open with this data because of privacy and security concerns. But, properly anonymised, there is much that could be done with this data to inform not just policymakers but also the markets and the broader public. The GST Council needs to be proactive in directing the GSTN to better inform the public and policymakers.

One possible use for the GST data that has been suggested is by the Union government's statisticians, who report to the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (Mospi). It has been reported that India's official estimates of output could soon incorporate the GST data as their next improvement once statisticians have finalised the mechanism for shifting the base year against which gross domestic product (GDP) is calculated. There have been several criticisms levelled against the current ways of estimating economic activity used for India's national accounts. One major concern has been the use of company balance sheets reported to the Union Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA). Basing private-sector value added on corporate earnings in the MCA database runs the risk of biasing the estimates towards large, formal enterprises. Especially given that, at present, the differential and unequal impacts of policies across large and small enterprises are being widely discussed, such a bias in official statistics is a serious problem.

While GST by its very definition is constructed out of formal-sector payments, it will nevertheless have access to a far wider and more heterogeneous domain of transactions out of which better estimates might be designed. GST data is not only more granular, but also more regular than company reports, which are submitted once a quarter as compared to a monthly tabulation of GST data. There are of course multiple other ways in which individual and aggregated GST data might be used. At the level of the individual taxpayer, for example, it must be examined whether it can be used to inform the planned Unified Lending Interface, which is being incubated by the Reserve Bank of India innovation hub. With the proper security and privacy safeguards of the sort that are common in India's digital public infrastructure, it could vastly improve the quality of information made available to lenders about possible borrowers, increasing welfare all round.

Aggregate data must be properly anonymised and then publicly released. Data on which items and which slabs provide how much revenue is an essential input into discussions of how to reform GST, raise more revenue, while also simplifying procedures. Such data will inform a lot about the functioning of the Indian economy and enable suitable changes in business models. It is imperative to move GST towards fewer slabs, as many entrepreneurs and small business owners have been consistently arguing. But to make this argument effectively to the government, the exact amount raised per slab must be made available, so that calculations ensure any changes are revenue-enhancing or at least revenue-neutral. The GSTN's concerns about privacy and security are important and must be respected, but they are not insurmountable.

Affordable health care

Infrastructure needs improvement

India is making proactive efforts to improve its health care infrastructure and invest in capacity building. Last week, the Union Cabinet cleared the expansion of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) to provide health coverage to all senior citizens aged 70 years and above, irrespective of their income. Currently income-based, the scheme is the world's largest publicly funded health scheme, which provides health cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to the bottom 40 per cent of the population. In this regard, the expansion in coverage must be welcomed as a measure to reduce out-of-pocket health care expenses among the poor and the elderly, for whom a health emergency can be a significant setback, often resulting in impoverishment and indebtedness. So far, the scheme has covered 73.7 million hospital admissions, including a large number of women beneficiaries. The utilisation of scheme services by women accounts for approximately 49 per cent of authorised hospital admissions. Government schemes such as AB PM-JAY and the National Health Mission (NHM) are aimed at ensuring access to health care services that are agnostic of economic status and improving India's health care ecosystem and last-mile access.

However, addressing the problem of affordability is not enough. The government and health regulatory bodies must also ensure that quality standards and minimum patient-safety protocols are enforced, particularly at primary level, which can also help reduce the need for secondary and tertiary care. In this context, the recently released report titled "Health Dynamics of India 2022-23" highlighted the status of infrastructure and human resources in the sector. The report showed that there had been a sharp increase in the number of sub-centres, primary health centres (PHCs), and community health centres (CHCs) between 2005 and 2023. Yet, around 31.4 per cent of sub-centres and 74 per cent of PHCs do not have their own building. Rather, they operate from rented buildings or space provided by gram panchayats. At all-India level, there is a 22 per cent shortfall in the number of sub-centres, the most peripheral and first contact point between the primary health care system and the rural community. According to the report, several PHCs across the country lack basic facilities like beds, toilets, clean drinking water facilities, labour rooms, and electricity.

Although public spending on health has increased in recent years, it continues to remain low compared to other countries. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare received a Budget allocation of ₹90,958.63 crore in the 2024-25 Union Budget, a 12.9 per cent increase from the previous year's Revised Estimates. The allocation for the AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) Ministry also registered a 23.7 per cent increase over the ₹3,000 crore in 2023-24. Additionally, the states' expenditure on health reached 1.58 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023-24. Government (Centre and states combined) expenditure on health has increased at a compound annual growth rate of 15.8 per cent from 2017-18 to reach 1.9 per cent of GDP in 2023-24. Yet it remains below the 2.5 per cent benchmark, as recommended by the National Health Policy in 2017. Clearly, more policy attention is needed to improve the state of health infrastructure to improve outcomes at all levels.

How to get FDI up 10 times

Big gains in FDI are central to the Indian growth process

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



Xi Jinping came to power in China in 2013, and brought a new emphasis on arbitrary state power and nationalism. This disrupted the "China model" for making progress towards greater prosperity and greater freedom. Many economic indicators show how the China model was derailed from 2017 onwards. Net foreign direct investment (FDI) in China was \$291 billion in 2013. In the latest data, for 2023, it was \$43 billion. On September 12, Eleanor Olcott and Wang Xueqiao had an article in the *Financial Times*, in which they described "How China has 'throttled' its private sector". One indicator they show is the pace of venture capital-funded company creation. It went down from the peak of 51,032 in 2018 to 1,202 in 2023. That's a decline of 97.6 per cent. One vibrant field was essentially extinguished.

Under normal circumstances, once China-centric production arrangements are established at a global firm, change can take place only at a glacial pace because no leadership wants to rock the boat of well-bedded production arrangements. Even when Chinese wages rose, relatively little activity moved out of China through this sensible conservatism of firms. Once the Chinese state lurched into arbitrary state power and nationalism, this triggered a rethink. Most global corporations realised that they were under-diversified. A unique moment arose, where many global firms started shifting activities away from China. The phenomenon of global firms redesigning their production arrangements is a megatrend of the 2018-28 period.

Why is FDI important for national development? Firms from advanced economies contain frontiers knowledge. When they operate in India, they bring superior techniques of management and technology and they directly generate productivity growth by improving the utilisation of Indian labour and capital. In each market they operate in, they challenge incumbent firms and improve the tone of flesh of the entire industry. Indian employees gain their knowledge, and then go out to work for other firms, thus diffusing better knowledge into the economy. FDI is the key to firm internationalisation, which powers productivity growth for firms.

Economic policymakers in countries like Vietnam and Thailand are actively playing for the modified global FDI environment. It is sensible for Indian economic-policy leadership to establish an objective of getting net FDI in India up by 10 times, from the present value of \$26 billion in 2023-24 to a level of \$260 billion.

What is the report card for Indian gains in the period where global firms were retreating from producing in China? Let us look at the data for Indian merchandise exports and for FDI in India. Discussion on FDI needs to be careful in distinguishing between FDI in India vs FDI by India and, when it comes to FDI in India, net out the repatriation of capital by global firms, which gives the "net FDI in India". Expressed in nominal dollars, compound growth in the last decade (ended 2023-24) works out to 3.3 per cent for merchandise exports and -1.5 per cent for net FDI in India.

FDI in India comes in two kinds: There are the



SNAKES & LADDERS

AJAY SHAH

Sustaining the cotton revolution

A consistent downtrend in cotton yield over the past decade is a clear indication that the cotton revolution, triggered by the introduction of gene-altered and pest-protected Bt-cotton hybrids in 2002, has withered away. Though this can be attributed to several factors, notably the emergence of new pests and diseases, the prime reason seems to be the government's imprudent policy regarding genetically modified (GM) crops, which has thwarted the much-needed regular flow of new and upgraded seeds to replace the outmoded ones. Most of the initial GM cotton hybrids, containing the pest-killer gene borrowed from the soil-dwelling bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), have outlived their utility, having lost their vitality and ability to withstand the threats from constantly metamorphosing pests and pathogens, and climate change-induced challenges. Their effective, and even better, alternatives are the need of the hour.

Monsanto, the multinational bio-sciences company that had pioneered the development of Bt-cotton hybrids, quit India long ago due to the government's ill-disposed approach towards its business operations. (Monsanto has since ceased to exist, having been bought over by Bayer in 2018.) Most other private-sector seed developers, too, have turned wary of investing in the cost-intensive genetic-modification technology because of the uncertainty of getting approval for commercialising their products. Though some gene-tweaked cotton strains, including the herbicide-tolerant Bt-cotton hybrids, which help reduce the cost of controlling both weeds and pests simultaneously, have become available of late, these are circulating largely through illegal channels, pending

the formal approval from the government. India, thus, is almost five to six generations behind other countries in the use of advanced GM cotton seeds.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the average yield of cotton in India, which had surged markedly from 278 kg per hectare in 2001 to 566 kg in 2013-14, has dwindled to 440-445 kg in recent years. This is far below the global average productivity of nearly 800 kg a hectare. Farmers in countries like Australia, Brazil, and China commonly harvest yields as high as 1,800-2,000 kg.

India ranks below over 30 other cotton-growing countries in terms of average productivity. However, India's annual cotton production is almost on a par with that of China, the acknowledged world leader in cotton output, but that is basically because this crop is planted here in a much larger area. In fact, India's cotton acreage, around 13 million hectares, is the largest in the world, and almost four times that of China. But the average per-hectare yield is less than one-fourth of that in China.

Interestingly, India enjoys the distinction of being the only country to grow all the four species of cotton — *Gossypium arboreum*, *G. herbaceum* (both deemed Asiatic cottons or Desi cotton), *G. barbadense* (Egyptian cotton), and *G. hirsutum* (American cotton). However, almost all the Bt-cotton hybrids, which occupy more than 90 per cent of the country's cotton land, belong to the American cotton species. Desi cotton has managed to retain a market niche, primarily due to its softness and absorbent nature that make it ideally suited for surgical purposes. Also, Desi cotton, being in cultivation for ages, is better acclimatised to local agro-ecological condi-



FARM VIEW

SURINDER SUD

tions, and has greater resilience against pests, diseases, and weather aberrations.

Sustaining the cotton revolution is not just desirable, it is essential for the economic well-being of the textile sector, which accounts for about 5 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), 14 per cent of industrial production, and 11 per cent of export revenue. Apart from about 6 million cotton farmers, millions of others are engaged in the production, processing, and trade of this natural fibre and its products, such as yarn, fabric, garments and other kinds of apparels. The textile industry alone supports the livelihood of about 45 million people. According to trade circles, India's textile market is valued at around \$240 billion, and is anticipated to swell to over \$475 billion by 2033, clocking a compound annual growth rate of 6.8 per cent. This rate can be stepped up substantially with the use of better crop seeds.

Cotton is, indeed, a multi-utility crop that provides food and feed, apart from the key fibre. While the cotton's versatile lint (colloquially called Kaps) is used for producing yarn and different types of fabric, besides various other applications in the medical and household sectors, its seeds yield edible oil for human consumption, and de-oiled cake to serve as nutritious feed for cattle and poultry. Urgent measures are, therefore, imperative to rejuvenate the cotton revolution through inducing new genetically engineered seeds and modern technology. Apart from reviewing the GM seeds policy to facilitate the development of new high-yielding and pest-resistant cotton strains, steps are called for to promote improved agronomic practices to push up crop productivity. This would not only bolster the availability of cotton in the country, but also enhance farmers' income, improve export prospects, and benefit the cotton-based industry.

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Harari pulls back the silicon curtain



BOOK REVIEW

DENNIS DUNCAN

In the summer of 2022, a software engineer named Blake Lemoine was fired by Google after an interview with *The Washington Post* in which he claimed that LaMDA — the chatbot he had been working on — had achieved sentience.

A few months later, in March 2023, an open letter from the Future of Life Institute, signed by hundreds of technology leaders, including Steve Wozniak and Elon Musk, called on AI labs to pause their research. Artificial intelligence (AI), it claimed, posed "profound risks to society and humanity."

The following month, Geoffrey Hinton, the "godfather of AI," quit his post at Google, telling this newspaper that he regretted his life's work. "It is hard to see how you can prevent the bad actors from

using it for bad things," he warned.

Over the last few years we have become accustomed to hare-eyed messengers returning from AI's frontiers with apocalyptic warnings. And yet, real action in the form of hard regulation has been little in evidence. Last year's executive order on AI was, as one commentator put it, "directional and aspirational" — a shrewdly damning piece of faint praise.

Meanwhile, stock prices for the tech sector continue to soar while the industry mutters familiar platitudes: The benefits outweigh the risks; the genie is already out of the bottle; if we don't do it, our enemies will.

Yuval Noah Harari has no time for these excuses. In 2011, he published *Sapiens*, an elegant and sometimes profound history of our species. It was a phenomenon, selling over 25 million copies worldwide. Harari followed it up by turning his gaze forward with *Homo Deus*, in which he considered our future. At this point, Harari, an academic historian, became saddled with a new professional identity and a new circle of influence. AI expert, invited into the rarefied echelons of "scientists, entrepreneurs and world

leaders." *Nexus*, in essence, is Harari's report from this world.

First, it must be said that the subtitle — "A Brief History of Information Networks From the Stone Age to AI" — is misleading. Really, what we have is two separate books, neither brief. The first 200 pages are indeed historical in their way. Unfortunately, this is a dizzying, all-in version of history that swerves unsatisfyingly from Assyrian clay tablets to a 19th-century cholera outbreak to an adaptation of the "Ramayana" on Indian TV to the Peasants' Revolt in medieval England to the Holocaust in Romania, and so on. It doesn't feel controlled, or even particularly expert — and the effect is a little like a flight where the person sitting next to you is well-read, hyper-caffeinated and determined to tell you his Theory of Everything.

In a nutshell, Harari's thesis is that the difference between democracies and dictatorships lies in how they handle information. Dictatorships are more concerned with controlling data than with testing its truth value; democracies, by contrast, are transparent information networks in which

citizens are able to evaluate and, if necessary, correct bad data.

All of this is sort of obvious-interesting, while also being too vague — too open to objection and counterexample — to constitute a useful theory of information.

After a lot of time, we have arrived at a loose proof of what we hopefully felt already: Systems that are self-correcting — because they promote conversation and mutuality — are preferable to those that offer only blind, disenfranchised subservience.

In the end, however, this doesn't really matter, because the second half of the book is where the action is. The meat of *Nexus* is essentially an extended policy brief on AI: What are its risks, and what can be done? (We don't hear much about the potential benefits because, as Harari points out, "the entrepreneurs leading the

AI revolution already bombard the public with enough rosy predictions about them.") It has taken too long to get here, but once we arrive Harari offers a useful, well-informed primer.

The threats AI poses are not the ones that filmmakers visualise: Kubrick's HAL trapping us in the airlock; a fascist RoboCop marching down the sidewalk.

NEXUS: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI

Author: Yuval Noah Harari

Publisher: Random House

Pages: 518

Price: ₹1099

They are more insidious, harder to see coming, but potentially existential. They include the catastrophic polarising of discourse when social media algorithms designed to monopolise our attention feed us extreme, hateful material. Or the outsourcing of human judgment — legal, financial or military decision-making — to an AI whose complexity becomes impenetrable to our own understanding.

Echoing Churchill, Harari warns of a "silicon curtain" descending between us and the algorithms we have created, shutting us out of our own conversations — how we want to act, or interact, or govern ourselves.

None of these scenarios, however, is a given. Harari points to the problem of email spam, which used to clog up our inboxes and waste millions of hours of productivity every day. And then, suddenly, it didn't. In 2015, Google was able to claim that its Gmail algorithm had a 99.9 percent success rate in blocking genuine spam. "When the tech giants set their hearts on designing better algorithms," writes Harari, "they can usually do it."

Even in its second half, not all of "Nexus" feels original. If you pay attention to the news, you will recognise some of the stories Harari tells. But, at its best, his book summarises the current state of affairs with a memorable clarity.

Parts of *Nexus* are wise and bold. They remind us that democratic societies still have the facilities to prevent AI's most dangerous excesses, and that it must not be left to tech companies and their billionaire owners to regulate themselves.

That may just sound like common sense, but it is valuable when said by a global intellectual with Harari's reach. It is only frustrating that he could not have done so more concisely.

The reviewer is the author of *Index, A History of the*
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Fast Trains, in the Time of Crowd-Flights

Test of sustained commercial viability

Six new routes of Vande Bharat trains were flagged off on Sunday, bringing the total number of the VB fleet to 60. Even in this age of 'democratised' air travel, high-speed trains are a climate-smart solution for a densely populated country like India. Cars are the fastest mode of travel over short distances before becoming uncomfortable. But there is an efficiency band within planes and cars where trains deliver the most bang for the buck and comfort. Trains running at more than highway speed limit can move people faster between our cities. And that's just the beginning. The fastest trains in the world are reaching top speeds almost half of the cruising speed of planes. The average flying time between Indian cities works to the advantage of trains. Airports are at a distance to city centres, which makes trains running into central districts an appealing alternative. High-speed intercity trains integrate



better with metro rail networks. Railways need less land to be built upon and, thus, score over highways. Railway dependence on fossil fuel can be reduced quicker through electrification from renewable sources than by creating charging infra for EVs. There are two reasons why high-speed railway networks are relatively scarce. One, governments find it difficult to muster the political will to build them. Two, mismanagement of railways often causes them to become unprofitable. This feeds into the lack of political will. Yet, countries such as China, Japan, France and Germany that are expanding high-speed rail transport are doing so profitably. Investors have come round to the view that every new line will run into losses for some time before traffic grows. Private finance for high-speed railways is not as hard to come by as it used to be. Railways have a more direct impact on employment, which becomes a factor in their funding through public finance.

India needs more high-speed—and high-end—trains to push through railway network upgradation. But the test of Vande Bharat trains will be their sustained commercial viability.

Rx, World Can't Afford a Relapse

The Covid-19 pandemic alerted the world about the need for multilateral and plurilateral networks to tackle the next 'major pandemic'. According to a recent study by disease-forecasting firm Air Affinity, it turns out that post-Covid, diseases that we 'vanquished' like measles, polio, chickenpox, whooping cough, tuberculosis, polio, smallpox are posing a threat. It's not just poor countries with weak healthcare that are seeing these outbreaks, but also the US, Australia, Europe, China and India.

The study states that 13 infectious diseases have surpassed pre-pandemic levels, with 44 countries reporting at least one disease at least 10x than pre-pandemic levels. A decline in immunity due to global lockdowns and isolation is one driver of this surge, particularly chicken pox, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza. Disruption of immunisation and vaccination programmes, and impetus to vaccine hesitancy has led to resurgence of diseases that had been eradicated. Climate change is another contributing factor, particularly for diseases such as dengue, cholera. Exponential rise in post-pandemic travel and resumption of international commercial activities have meant that outbreaks in one country or region are difficult to contain.

This calls for setting up global and collaborative mechanisms to share information on cases and outbreaks of diseases, sharing best practices, ensuring adequate vaccine supplies and rollout, not to mention continued investment in the study of infectious diseases and development of therapeutics and vaccines. Aggressive sanitation programmes to prevent proliferation of water- and insect-borne diseases should also be undertaken. The world can't afford to take past gains over diseases for granted.



JUST IN JEST

Ability to turn off and on rain in the next 5 years? Let's not cloud judgment

Break Indra's Weather Control Monopoly

'We can think of it.' Those five words don't just hold ambition and hope, but also cheek and delusion. GoI gave the nod to Mission Mausam, which, among other things, aspires to end the monopoly on weather control that resides with Indra—the king of gods and of rain, storms, the sky, lightning and thunder—within the next five years. 'We want to go for initial experimental artificial rain suppression and enhancement. Lab simulations will be done in the next 18 months, but we'll definitely go for artificial weather modification in the five-year time scale,' announced earth sciences ministry secretary M Ravichandran last week. Thankfully, Mission Mausam is primarily about improving weather forecast systems, with the 'turn off and on rains at will' aspect as a neon-lit headline-grabber.

Believers in GoI wizardry will point to existing cloud-seeding tech, and that if people once 'dreamt' of going to space, why not weather control. Point. Where there is a will, there may well be a way. Also, five years, thankfully, is a target that, unlike, say, 2047, is very much trackable in terms of success or failure. We suggest while the scientists are at it, they also try enhancing cloud tech—not of the computing kind, but that elaborated by Kalidas in his 4th-5th c poem Meghdoot—to invent WiFi-less cloud messaging and communication through the sky.

Andhra Pradesh is a pioneer of riding technology for prosperity—now it's the energy sector's turn

REap the Energy Harvest



N Chandrababu Naidu

Andhra Pradesh recently witnessed an unprecedented rainfall resulting in flash floods in various parts of the state. Such sweeping changes in climate change are a grim reminder to policymakers that we need to devise climate-resilient and compliant solutions in taking the economy, especially the energy sector, forward. This needs a fundamental transition in the way energy is generated, transmitted, distributed and utilised. In this context, the 4th Global RE-INVEST Renewable Energy Investors Meet & Expo that starts today in Gandhinagar is significant.

India has made giant strides by reaching installed RE capacity of 200 GW. The seeds of this journey were laid in the late 90s, when Andhra Pradesh pioneered unbundling of AP State Electricity Board and created six entities. Independent T&D companies were created with a focus on strengthening governance and cleaning up balance sheets.

An important piece of the reform agenda was the nudge towards RE. Given the nature of cost curve, while it took some time to mainstream the focus on renewables, significant capacity additions were made in 2014-19. Progressive policies resulted in an increase of RE capacity from 1,342 MW in June 2014 to 7,716 MW by FY18-19, an increase of 475%.

AP was among the first few states to develop solar parks, offering land and connectivity to developers through a plug-and-play model.



AP is focused on creating a mines-to-socket ecosystem. Availability of high-grade quartz, silica and other mining resources are ample



More than just a sunrise sector

Such initiatives instilled confidence in the sector. AP remains among the top 5 states in RE adoption.

Today, the state has a potential of over 217 GW of RE, which comprises 58 GW solar, 123 GW wind, 44 GW pumped storage and 2 GW of biomass projects. Only about 4.3% of this capacity has been harnessed. Further growth will depend on its ability to foresee tech trends, including storage and cost-effective decentralised generation. It's also imperative that a level playing field for investors is created that encourages tech adoption and value addition.

Since it took office in June 2024, the new AP government committed to generate 20 lakh jobs in the next five years while maintaining 15% growth rate. A detailed roadmap, 'Swarna Andhra Pradesh@2047,' is being prepared.

RE is a pivot in this endeavour that alone will attract investments of ₹10 lakh cr with 7.5 lakh jobs. The state government has proposed developing an Integrated Clean Energy (ICE) policy. This will enable planning all clean energy sources holistically while providing attractive incentives for investors.

Much can be learnt from countries like Germany, Sweden and Norway that have made a strategic and tactical shift to clean energy for geopoliti-



cal reasons. The best of four Ts—trends, technologies, trade practices, transformation models—can be adopted and evolved into a model policy that aims to deliver local, national and global objectives by blending abundant local resources.

AP is focused on creating an ecosystem model, where it can encourage the entire clean energy ecosystem from mines to the socket. Availability of high-grade quartz, silica and other mining resources is ample. These can be value-added through upcoming manufacturing cities and then installed at RE sites. The state also has the unique advantage of multiple clean energy sources.

The state has always been successful in utilising technology for transformation. Now, it needs to transform its grid using AI and ML models to seamlessly blend these sources and provide appropriate clean energy solutions to citizens. Smart grids that are origin-neutral and can optimise for losses and plan for contingencies while delivering the cheapest and most reliable power, need to be devised.

We must start looking at RE not

just as an energy source, but as an engine of economic growth. AP will be redesigning its economy as a green hydrogen (GH)-based economy by encouraging GH hubs and developing export terminals across its long coastline. A hydrogen grid that will run in sync with the power grid that will make the latter grid adaptive and sustainable is in the pipeline.

Manufacturing of RE-powered specialised steel and other metals are being promoted. This will enable AP-based manufacturers to export to Europe and East Asia by positioning their products as 'green metals' and take advantage of 'green premium'. The state will be moving towards EVs, encouraging EV manufacturing and providing incentives for charging stations across the state.

India's successful telecom model needs to be replicated in power. It must make sustainability and green transition into a people's movement

In all this, one must not lose sight of the immediate aspirations of our people. Skill development remains a key element of the RE strategy. The state has embarked on the world's first-ever 'skill census' to determine current skill levels of our youth. A Clean Energy Knowledge and Skill Development Centre to impart skills is also in the works.

Land acquisition remains a key challenge to develop largescale renewable projects. Under the state's pioneering and unique P4 model—public-private-people partnership—it will create enabling mechanisms for the landowner to benefit from RE projects, thereby creating all-round prosperity.

The state also aims to deliver on a decentralised and democratised model of electricity delivery, driven by its focus on 'speed of doing business'. People need to have the ability to choose their energy source, provider and most-efficient form of supply. India's successful telecom model needs to be replicated in power.

The writer is CM, Andhra Pradesh

Broadcast, It Ain't Just TV Anymore



Punit Goenka

The media and entertainment (M&E) sector is transitioning. Many predicted digital would spell the end of linear broadcasting. Yet, here we are in a converging, multi-platform universe where TV and digital are driving cross-platform growth and delivering on-demand content.

In an industry where the term 'broadcast' has been confined to TV, the earlier draft of the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2024, which was withdrawn by GoI last month, encompassed segments that did not fall under the ambit of 'broadcast' at all. Stakeholders must rethink what 'traditional media' and 'broadcast' mean.

TV and digital mustn't be seen as competitors but as equal allies in crafting the industry's future. Trai has recommended that the national broadcast policy acknowledge the importance of creating a level playing field for all platforms.

The Broadcast Bill is being formulated to replace the 1995 Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act to modernise regulations and reflect the transformation of TV broad-

casting. But when the last draft was presented to stakeholders, it could not holistically cover interests of all players as the ecosystem had expanded and converged.

At the heart of this transformation is convergence of TV and digital platforms. The rise of digital entertainment platforms has been a game-changer. But instead of making TV obsolete, it has catalysed TV's evolution. In this age of 'infinite choices', TV isn't just keeping up with the times, but it's also defining them.

AI and ML tools are being interspersed within the broadcasting ecosystem to shape scripts and characters that reflect changing consumer taste and demand. So, if a Broadcast Bill covers all segments under one umbrella, can the licensing and policy framework not fall under one governing authority too?

It's imperative for policymakers to also consider changing realities of entertainment consumption, delivery and monetisation to boost the sector's long-term growth. It may be easy to dismiss the relevan-

ce of TV with OTT platforms gaining ground. But TV has nurtured a conducive environment for digital to grow in more ways than one. Several global streaming services entered the market with a curated catalogue of content, comprising the best of TV shows. Through TV, digital platforms gained a masterclass in episodic storytelling to craft compelling original content that resonates with the contemporary Indian viewer.

In this scenario, recommendations proposed in the draft Broadcast Bill regarding content regulation, including a multi-tiered governing system, could be counterproductive. The existing self-regulatory framework provides guidelines for responsible content broadcasting across platforms. It would serve

policymakers well in working with industry players to enhance this framework further.

With the number of TV screens expected to reach 202 mn by 2026, up from 182 mn in 2023, and the OTT segment expected to grow to \$6.5 bn by 2026, developing the M&E ecosystem harbours opportunities to turn every viewer into an in-



Not split, but joint screen

In Manipur, Status Quo is a Big No?



Samrat Choudhury

The situation in Manipur, which was dire since the start of violent ethnic conflict in May 2023, is now in danger of deteriorating further. Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya left Imphal for Guwahati last week, a day after his official residence in the Manipur capital was besieged by protesting students. His departure amid escalating protests was vaguely reminiscent of Sheikh Hasina's exit from Dhaka last month.

The key demands of the students are removal of the state's director general of police Rajiv Singh and security advisor Kuldip Singh, and handover of control of the unified command that controls the security apparatus in Manipur to the state government. 'Go back central forces,' has been their slogan.

Both Kuldip and Rajiv Singh were appointed shortly after the outbreak of violent clashes between Kuki and Meitei groups last year. Kuldip, a former CRPF DG, was widely reputed to be the union home minister's pick. As security advisor, he's head of

unified command of state and central security forces including army, police, paramilitary forces and intelligence agencies operating in Manipur.

Manipur CM N Biren Singh of BJP had presented the governor with a memorandum demanding that control of unified command be handed over to him shortly before the outbreak of the student protests. There has lately been renewed pressure on the Centre to remove Singh as CM following the release of audio tapes that implicated him in the ongoing violence. His government has described the audio recordings as 'doctored'.

The current escalation began following what was described as a 'rocket attack' on the residence of Manipur's first CM M Koirang Singh on September 6, and concerns about the earlier use of drones by Kuki militants, allegedly to drop bombs. Former Assam Rifles DG Pradeep



Not just about dismantling Kuki bunkers

Chandran Nair stated that the drones visible in videos were 'small' and the impact on ground was of bigger shells, and there were reasons to believe the latter couldn't have been fired from those small drones. He also described the rockets used as being improvised, of indigenous make, and not of the kind used by modern armies. Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, Manipur, has condemned this statement and warned that they would initiate legal proceedings against Nair.

It is already a year and a half since fighting between the Meitei and Kuki communities began. Since then, it has not been clear what—beyond preserving status quo—GoI's policy in the matter might be. But it is clear that no group in Manipur really wants status quo anymore.

Kuki-Zo groups have been clearly stating for more than a year that there cannot be any going back to the way things were before the outbreak of violence. Meitei groups are unhappy with the unofficial division of the state and fear its Balkanisation. They are also not satisfied with the official administrative status quo and would very much like to see central security forces withdrawn or put under the command of the state government headed by Biren Singh, who happens to be a Meitei.

The other major community of

fluencer and every screen into a stage.

The landscape has moved from an era of weekly ratings to a world where engagement is measured across social media, online search, live voting and real-time feedback, turning TV viewing into a participatory experience. Connected TVs have further invigorated the medium by merging broadcasting with the flexibility and interactivity of digital, expanding the reach and relevance of TV, and unlocking newer revenue streams and opportunities for content creators and advertisers.

This, coupled with improved distribution infra and enhanced transmission technologies, has opened newer avenues to drive loyalty and viewership, making the medium more future-focused. Policymakers must consider these changing realities as they propose a new audience measurement system to be implemented for TV, OTT and radio.

Screens are ubiquitous today. To ensure robust industry growth through both segments, industry and policymakers must arrive at a middle ground to build a future-focused policy framework, in which flexibility at both ends—TV and digital—will be essential. Anyone doubting the power of TV amid the growing potential of digital is simply missing the big picture.

The writer is MD-CEO, ZEE Entertainment Enterprises



THE SPEAKING TREE

Celebrating Onam

SWAMI BHOOMANANDA TIRTHA

Onam marks the annual homecoming of King Mahabali, who once ruled the three worlds. Though he was an asur, but by virtue of his noble deeds and qualities, he became the ruler of heaven and earth. This made the devas, gods of the celestial world, very insecure. According to the Bhagavat Puran, as a result, Aditi, their mother, prayed to Bhagwan Vishnu for help. In response, he manifested as her son, Vaman, a dwarf.

As Mahabali was performing sacrificial rituals and offering gifts, Vaman appeared and asked for some land, only as much as he could measure in three steps. Mahabali agreed. Vamana then began to grow in size and measured the heaven in one step, the earth in another and asked the king where to take his third step. Unperturbed, the generous asur king offered his head for the third step. Pleased by his sense of surrender and sacrifice, Vamana blessed him.

Despite being from the clan of demons, Mahabali was hailed for his noble and generous qualities; a master of the three worlds, he did not consider himself as their possessor...

Ramana Maharshi says, "When you find it difficult to pursue the Jnan Marg, path of knowledge, that involves introspection, contemplation and self-enquiry, just detach yourself, renounce and surrender." This is what we learn from the abject surrender that Mahabali displayed before Vishnu, whom he venerated.



Don't You Want Me The Human League

There are delights. And then, there are secret delights. The Human League's 'Don't You Want Me,' a synth-pop masterpiece, is an example of the latter—a mainstream pop song that has taken on cult, classical greatness.

From the band's 1981 album, Dare, DYWM is a proto-new wave anthem. Its greatness lies in its perfect blend of catchy melodies, hyper-slick (to the point of irony) production, and pulling that one

non-negotiable string of the human condition: rejection, seen from both PoVs of the rejector and rejected.

The juxtaposition of Phil Oakey's deep, robotic baritone with Susan Ann Sulley's bright, almost naive vocals creates an aria of a fractured romance. The 'he said, she said' works like a dark gawwail about a relationship on the brink.

Producer Martin Rushent's genius is palpable in the song's polished, yet edgy sound. The use of synthesizers was groundbreaking at the time, giving the track a futuristic feel that still sounds fresh today.

The words, 'But don't forget/ It's you who put me where I am now/ And you can put me back down too,' radiates vulnerability. This lead-up to the anthemic chorus is downright Faustian, about a contract in the process of being broken.

Chat Room

A Piece of The Solution

Apropos 'Age is No Limit, Car Conditions Are' (Sept 14). The criteria for a car's worthiness must be whether it meets emissions norms and other standards of the day. A well-maintained older vehicle may, in fact, be less polluting than a much newer, but badly maintained one despite its up-to-date emission-controlling technologies. Tackling bad air quality calls for tighter vehicle and emission standards, judicious use of fiscal incentives to encourage cleaner vehicles, a massive improvement in public transport systems and a radical rethink of urban planning.

PRADEEP KUMAR Surat



The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

RESTORING BALANCE

Removal of export curbs on onion and basmati is welcome. Centre must lift restrictions on trade in other farm products

ON FRIDAY, THE Narendra Modi government lifted curbs on onion and basmati rice exports in the form of minimum floor price, of \$550 and \$950 per tonne respectively, below which they cannot be shipped out of the country. The export duty on onions remains, but has been halved to 20 per cent now. Friday also saw the Centre hike the effective import duty, inclusive of special agriculture and social welfare cesses, on crude palm, soyabean and sunflower oil from 5.5 to 27.5 per cent. The duty on refined palm, soyabean and sunflower oils was raised from 13.75 to 35.75 per cent. The political timing of these moves cannot be missed. Haryana, a key basmati paddy growing state, votes on October 5 when the new crop's market arrivals would have also taken off. Onion and soyabean are, likewise, major crops in Maharashtra's Nashik-Ahmednagar-Pune and Marathwada-Vidarbha regions respectively. That state, too, is scheduled to go to the polls later this year.

Electoral compulsions apart — the predominantly Maratha and Jat peasantry of Maharashtra and Haryana wields numerical as well as socio-political influence in their respective states — the Modi government's latest actions seem to have been equally guided by economic factors. Soyabean is trading below its official minimum support price in the wholesale mandis of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh even as harvesting and marketing of the crop will start only from next month. Global vegetable oil prices are also roughly 50 per cent down from their March 2022 peaks scaled immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While onion prices in Maharashtra's Lasalgaon are ruling more than twice their year-ago levels, farmers have planted almost 50 per cent more area under the tuber in the current kharif season. That crop will be ready for harvesting in a month's time. A good monsoon — cumulative rainfall during the season (June-September) has been 7.7 per cent above the normal average so far, while both spatially and temporally well distributed — should translate into bountiful harvests of most kharif crops this time.

The Modi government's farm trade policy in the last two years and more has been excessively pro-consumer, with export and private stockholding restrictions being imposed alongside liberal imports. Ideally, policy should be neutral between consumers and producers, with any deviations being temporary and rules-based as opposed to arbitrary and knee-jerk. The easing of food inflation pressures provides room to dispense with the remaining export curbs on non-basmati rice, sugar, onion and even wheat. There is no justification for stocking limits on pulses and wheat either. Inflation in these can be better addressed by allowing duty-free imports. The government must also build a buffer stock of all essential food items by procuring when prices are low and offloading when they go through the roof.

EVADING QUESTIONS

Disbanding of committee on statistics will further undermine the credibility of country's data collection system

LAST WEEK, THE Centre abruptly disbanded the 14-member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS). The committee, which was first formed in December 2019 and later expanded in July 2023, was tasked with overseeing all statistical surveys by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). A letter by the ministry to the panel members reasoned that the work done by the committee is similar to that of the recently-formed Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys. Yet, the committee members, led by former Chief Statistician Pronab Sen, seem clueless about the government's exact motive. Moreover, as this newspaper reported, the dissolution has happened amid apparent concerns raised by some members over the delay in conducting Census 2021. Two aspects to this development are noteworthy. One is to understand why the delay in the decennial Census is serious. Two, how this dissolution undermines the already worsening credibility of India's statistical framework.

The decennial census provides the foundation for the entire statistical system of the country. For instance, in the absence of the Census, there is no clarity the extent of urbanisation in the country — unofficial estimates vary. Similarly, sample surveys, whether done by the MoSPI or individual departments or private agencies, are judged for how close to mirror they are to the actual reality provided by the Census. In the absence of a new Census, the original picture gets distorted and that distortion then gets amplified through sample surveys. For instance, until the end of 2023, the last sample survey to map the consumption patterns of Indians dated back to 2011-12. The survey results, in turn, provided the base for other critical policy metrics such as inflation rates and poverty levels. Not surprisingly, Sen told this newspaper that while there was no recent discussion, it is true that “all the members had earlier expressed concerns that in the absence of censuses, both economic census and census, household surveys are unreliable”.

Over the past decade, almost every statistic that matters has been questioned, sometimes even by the government itself. For instance, in 2019, the government ran down the results of the first Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) as it showed unemployment had hit a 45-year high in 2017-18. Several commentators, led by one of the government's former Chief Economic Advisors, have argued that India's GDP data is misleading. Last year, a member of the PM's Economic Advisory Council argued that major surveys used by policymakers are based on unsound data collection frameworks. The larger concern that this episode raises is about the credibility of India's statistical framework especially at a time when the eyes of the world are trained towards the Indian economy.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



Mamata, the establishment



PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI

West Bengal's CM, who thrived on her underdog image, is now at sea against protestors who speak a different language

AT FIRST GLANCE, July 21, 1993, is unlikely to attract scrutiny in a documentation of the Left Front's waning fortunes in West Bengal. In a state of protests and *hartals*, it could well appear to be just another piece of statistics. Yet, it is a date that marked a change in Kolkata's dynamics with the Communist government. Led by Mamata Banerjee, then the state Youth Congress head, party workers and protestors had marched to Writers' Building, the seat of the CPM government, demanding that voter identity cards be made the sole requisite for voting. Police intervention to manage the agitating crowd had gone awry that day — Banerjee had been intercepted at a distance from Writers' but 13 party workers died in police firing. Later, the Congress and Trinamool Congress (TMC), the party formed by Banerjee in 1998, would commemorate July 21 as Shaheed Diwas (Martyrs' Day); a committee would find that the police used disproportionate force to disperse the crowd. But much before that, and certainly much before Singur and Nandigram, July 21, 1993 burnished Banerjee's credentials as the state's dissenter-in-chief, the Pied Piper to Bengal's masses.

A few months earlier, in January, she had had another run-in with the establishment during a protest outside then chief minister Jyoti Basu's office, against a cadre's sexual assault on a differently abled woman in Nadia. Banerjee had been arrested and put in detention. In 1990, during an ugly confrontation between Left cadres and Congress workers in south Kolkata's Hazra, she had been hit on the head with an iron rod — an image of Banerjee, her head and arm bandaged, lying on a stretcher had roused public indignation against the strong-arm tactics of Left cadres. She had always been vocal, but by the time 1993 rolled in, with the experience of being one of the youngest MPs in Lok Sabha and frequent run-ins with the government, Banerjee had managed to breach the distance between trouble maker — the ruling party's description of her — and mass leader. She had, so to speak, emerged as Didi who refused to be daunted or diminished by the Left's *sadagiri*. Breaking away from the Congress in 1997, where her voice was getting undermined, and shaping

Why did Banerjee fail to read the signs this time? In the immediate aftermath of the gruesome incident, her government's missteps speak of a tentativeness — a nervous tic even, to maintain status quo unless pushed otherwise — that is an administrator's inheritance. It also signals the complacency of a government and party that has been in power for over a decade, arrogant in its assumption of its own irreplaceability. But most of all, it speaks of an inability to read the disruptive heft of a disappointed people whose ease with the media outdoes the CM's own, who can measure out their lives in reels and live streams, whose legitimate demand for punishment and justice must not only be met but be seen to be met.

TMC into a party of consequence in the state and the Centre bolstered that reputation.

Three decades later, and a few months into her emphatic Lok Sabha election victory, Banerjee finds herself on the other side of the protests, fumbling to keep pace with the changing idiom of negotiations. Spontaneous people's rallies against the rape and murder of a junior doctor at the state-run R G Kar Medical College and Hospital and demands for accountability have brought Kolkata to a standstill. Women — highlighted often as central to Banerjee's administration and vote bank — have reacted to the incident with shock and anger. The striking doctors have refused the government's offers for discussion unless they are live-streamed. Banerjee is the establishment now and the image of her waiting in an empty room for the junior doctors to come to the discussion table marks a turning point in her familiarity with the language of protest.

The CM's apprehensions are understandable. Whether in power or in Opposition, it is in her role as the underdog that Banerjee has been most at ease. Over the past four decades, she has positioned herself again and again as the counterforce to the establishment even when she is the establishment. In a party which runs on the cult of Didi, notwithstanding her autocratic tendencies, it has stood her in good stead, especially outside of the state capital. This even when her administration's grasp on law and order has appeared to be slipping, even when a string of corruption cases — from the Saradha scam to the recruitment scam — have mired her party functionaries, even when complaints of sexual harassment and police inaction have come up in Sandeshkhali. In June, for instance, Banerjee berated her ministers, bureaucrats, police and other functionaries for systemic corruption, giving out the signal that she stood apart from her partymen.

A large part of Banerjee's charisma owes itself to this ability to distinguish herself from others and leverage her working-class background. In the Left Front government's over three-decade rule in Bengal, politics had been the bastion of the *bhadralok*, its leaders belonging to the middle class, a euphemism for socio-economic and cultural capital. Jyoti

Basu, chief minister between 1977 and 2000, was a barrister, an alumni of premier institutions. Buddhadeb Bhattacharya was known for his interest in and knowledge of movies, theatre and literature. In contrast, Banerjee came up from the *trinamool* — the grassroots — and propped herself up as an everywoman fighting her way through life. The second of seven siblings, her education and upbringing were modest. In speech and attire, she has rejected the template of the genteel; her poetry and painting can be called pedestrian at best. But what Banerjee recognised much before her political opponents was the power of a spectacle and the role of the media in amplifying it: She offered her story both as rebellion and alternative. Her emotional outbursts, pushbacks against attempts to hem her in, targeted welfare schemes lent her a folk appeal as a champion of the masses, articulating their aspirations and grievances. By the time the Singur and Nandigram movement took shape in 2007, Banerjee had cemented her base among the state's agrarian population. When she came to power in 2011, she had managed to convert a large section of the urban intelligentsia — the *buddhijibis* — in her favour.

Why did Banerjee fail to read the signs this time? In the immediate aftermath of the gruesome incident, her government's missteps speak of a tentativeness — a nervous tic even, to maintain status quo unless pushed otherwise — that is an administrator's inheritance. It also signals the complacency of a government and party that has been in power for over a decade, arrogant in its assumption of its own irreplaceability. But most of all, it speaks of an inability to read the disruptive heft of a disappointed people whose ease with the media outdoes the CM's own, who can measure out their lives in reels and live streams, whose legitimate demand for punishment and justice must not only be met but be seen to be met.

Banerjee failed in the opening gambit. Her subsequent attempts at breaking the impasse have not succeeded at the time of writing. Can she turn the corner still?

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POWERING AHEAD WITH COMPETITION

Governments should encourage more players in the power sector, not less



ANN JOSEY, SHANTANU DIXIT, ASHWIN GAMBHIR AND ASHOK SREENIVAS

TWO DECADES AGO, India introduced competitive bidding for electricity power procurement, which has yielded significant results in the form of greater competition and increased investments.

Competitive bidding based price discovery leveraged rapid technological advancements to achieve efficient pricing for solar power. Tariffs fell from Rs 15/kWh in the initial bidding rounds of 2010 to Rs 2.80/kWh by 2018. About 27 GW of capacity was added, driven by the private sector. In the wind space, competitive bidding led to tariffs falling from Rs 5.30/kWh to Rs 2.50/kWh in just two years. The benefits of competitive procurement extended to smaller projects as well.

Recently, the renewable energy (RE) sector introduced several innovations to meet the growing demand for reliable power supply. Since 2018, over 9 GW of RE and 15 GWh of storage have been contracted through storage-linked tenders to overcome the challenges of intermittent renewables. The benefits of competition are also evident in battery energy storage procurement where the discovered price has fallen sharply.

The RE sector has lower entry barriers compared to traditional power sources encouraging participation from big as well as smaller players. This is due to several factors — shorter gestation periods, lower investment requirements, absence of fuel-related risks and the modular nature of technologies, especially solar and battery energy storage. The sector demonstrates a continuous learning curve, adapting with each new tender. This

Allocating a majority of the future capacity to a single tender is akin to putting all eggs in one basket. This approach not only excludes smaller players due to the massive investments required but also eliminates potential tariff reductions and innovations that could result from spreading procurement across years — a benefit particularly relevant for solar projects with shorter gestation periods.

evolution is evident in three key areas: Increased capacity, price reduction, and improvements in tender conditions to meet the complex requirements of procurers.

A recent development threatens this positive trend. Some states are inviting bids for capacity from both coal and solar sources using a composite bid structure. These tenders require bidders to supply both energy sources, with selection based on an average tariff. For example, one tender is for 1600 MW of coal-based power and 5000 MW of solar, and another in a different state requires 3200 MW of coal power and 8000 MW of solar. In the former, the entire capacity can be shared by at most two bidders and in the latter the total quantum is to be offered by each bidder. This would mean an investment of about Rs 28,000 crore from one or two parties in the first case and an investment of about Rs 52,000 crore from a single party in the other case. These tenders represent the majority of both coal and solar capacity needs for these states over the next six to 10 years. However, despite the composite bidding, actual power delivery timelines will differ significantly. Coal plants require about six to seven years to become operational, compared to one-and-a-half to two years for solar projects.

Allocating a majority of the future capacity to a single tender is akin to putting all eggs in one basket. This approach not only excludes smaller players due to the massive investments required but also eliminates potential tariff reductions and innovations that could result from spreading procurement across

years — a benefit particularly relevant for solar projects with shorter gestation periods. The requirement for bidders to commit to substantial solar and coal capacity simultaneously has adverse implications. This approach effectively excludes many developers from the bidding process. Some players may struggle to secure the necessary capital for investments at this scale. Developers without expertise in building and operating thermal power plants also find themselves at a disadvantage, though they may be competitive in the solar sector. Thermal as well as solar plants will continue to operate independently, offering no particular advantage due to composite tendering. By concentrating procurement in large, composite tenders, states will be foregoing benefits of a more diverse, competitive, phase-wise and innovative power procurement.

Whether these proposals will translate to procurement and if so, at what price point is yet to be seen. The advancement towards a robust wholesale power price discovery through competitive bidding should not be undermined by such arrangements. Measures are needed to foster competition and innovation. Distribution utilities should consider implementing an annual procurement calendar to acquire capacity, providing investors with greater clarity and certainty. Given the ever-growing demand for reliable and affordable power, it is crucial that we continue to move forward towards fostering competition and market development, and not take a step back.

The writers are with Prayas (Energy Group)

SEPTEMBER 16, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON GOVERNANCE

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi made it clear that she was not changing the present system of government to bring in the presidential system. She pointed out that the debate was not started by the Congress (I). But when asked whether the issue could be discussed, she had thought it would be wrong to say there should be no discussion because not merely intellectuals, but the general public should study these matters.

DOORDARSHAN JUBILEE

THE PRESS CONFERENCE addressed by the

Information and Broadcasting Minister, H K L Bhagat, on the occasion of the silver jubilee of Doordarshan, was marked by some unpleasantness. Bhagat said the charge that the Opposition was not given adequate coverage was false and baseless. The matter would have ended there but for Bhagat's insinuation that the journalist's question was toying the line of opposition parties.

ANDHRA BANDH

THE ANDHRA PRADESH bandh called by the all-party action committee demanding the dismissal of the “minority” Bhaskara Rao ministry and reinstatement of N T Rama Rao as

chief minister was near-total and peaceful. The Director General of Police, M Mahender Reddy, told ENS that the bandh passed off peacefully and that there were no incidents.

ASSAM FLOODS

THE ARMY WAS called out to assist the civil administration in rescue and relief operations in Nalban town and several other areas in Assam, now in the grip of floods. Pratul Sharma, Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup district, told PTI that the Army was expected to move into Nalban town and other affected areas any moment as the situation in the town was reported to be alarming.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Giving farms their due

A new minister, seven new schemes, and focus on rural housing and roads indicate the emphasis Modi 3.0 has placed on agriculture in its first 100 days



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

EVEN BEFORE THE parliamentary elections were held in 2024, the Narendra Modi government had asked all secretaries to prepare a policy agenda to be announced in the first 100 days of Modi 3.0. They were pretty sure that the BJP was coming back with a thumping majority. The actual results of the parliamentary elections were humbling for the party, as it fell way short of its target of 370. Yet, the enthusiasm of the first 100 days has not waned.

The BJP now is running a coalition government, and therefore it will have to accommodate the demands of its major allies, especially N Chandrababu Naidu and Nitish Kumar so that the government can continue to do its job without much difficulty. What has it done differently? While there is an overall thrust to manufacturing, especially high-tech chip making, etc, there are also many changes in other sectors. I cannot cover all that here in this column, nor do I have the expertise to analyse and assess the efficiency of the steps being undertaken in those areas. I would limit myself to agriculture and rural development space which affects the welfare of the masses most.

On the agriculture front, the Modi government (Modi 3.0) started off with a new Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and he was also given the additional charge of rural development. Bringing a minister with ample experience as the longest serving Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, and who transformed agriculture in Madhya Pradesh, signalled a high priority that Agriculture and Rural Development may get under Modi 3.0.

The first major decision that was taken was to distribute Rs 20,000 crore under PM-KISAN, a commitment that it made in 2019 to give Rs 6,000/year to most of the deserving agriculture households. It signalled clearly that direct cash transfers under the PM-KISAN scheme will continue under Modi 3.0. Although I had expected that its nominal value would be adjusted for inflation over the last five years, and the Rs 6,000 amount would be increased to at least Rs 8,000 per household, that hope was belied. In the Union Budget 2024-25 also, we had expected a major increase in agri-R&D allocations to deal with climate change issues. But there too not much real increase in the Budget allocation. It seemed business as usual.

But the major announcements came later, somewhat as a surprise, when the Union government approved seven schemes for agriculture ranging from digitalisation of agriculture (land records, farmers' identity cards, etc) to crop science for food and nutrition security in the backdrop of climate change, to horticulture for nutrition and profitability, livestock health and production for sustainability and profitability, natural resource management for climate resilience and clean environment, agriculture education for skilled human resources and Krishi Vigyan Kendras for better outreach for farmers.



MRINAL PANDE

HOW LONG HAS it been since you spent a few days in the close company of young female athletes and experienced their easy camaraderie? In my generation, at least, that kind of intimacy was strictly limited to male locker rooms.

I come from a generation of women who were brought up "traditionally" and did not "do sports". For me, the high school annual athletics-cum-cultural meets in UP for girls (Uttarakhand was then a part of the state) was the only time I spent time with athletes from our school and other girls' schools. Most of the athletes in our team were tall, muscular Jat girls from the Terai region sent to school in Nainital. A few came from local Thakur families and had shoulders powerful enough to throw javelins and discuses and I applauded when they won trophies and certificates. I was a nerd, a perennial part of the "cultural" team, who competed in music and dance.

In the shared bathing and changing rooms, we nerds were horribly conscious of our adolescent bodies — unlike the athletes, whose acceptance of their physical prowess and fitness I envied. I ensured that all the doors and windows were shut and curtained so snooping male eyes would not see us. We were raised to believe that the most important thing was not knowledge of how a female body functions but rather, how it looks. And no one should look at it in the nude. In our families, sports that made women sweat out fear and weakness and build bodies like their brothers were considered "unfeminine". Women



C R Sasikumar

A sum of roughly Rs 14,000 crore has been allocated for these schemes to be implemented in the next two-to-three years or so. All these are steps in the right direction, and if implemented properly and quickly, they can bring rich returns, economically and politically.

Let me explain with the example of the digitalisation of agriculture. Identification of farmers is the first step. Distinguishing between an owner-operator and a tenant is the next step. Right now, India's official figure of around 17 per cent tenancy is way below what micro-surveys reveal. It could be anywhere between 25 to 30 per cent, if not more. The problem with oral tenancy is that those farmers have very limited access to institutional credit at seven per cent or four per cent, which owner-operators get. Borrowing at interest rates of 24 to 36 per cent, tenant farmers can never make agriculture a profitable business. Tenant farmers don't get even the benefits under PM-KISAN. This problem of proper identification of who is the actual tiller needs to be resolved as soon as possible and giving them access to institutional credit is a must at lower rates of interest.

But digitalisation of agriculture has to go way beyond just identifying farmers. There is a need to know what crops they are growing, whether they are insured or not, how much fertiliser they are using, what is the status of their soils, whether they are receiving food subsidies (free rice and wheat), etc. What is needed is a triangulation of various data sets related to agriculture, which are fragmented today into a common agri-stack. For example, soil health cards are not linked to fertiliser pur-

Digitalisation of agriculture has to go way beyond just identifying farmers. There is a need to know what crops they are growing, whether they are insured or not, how much fertiliser they are using, what is the status of their soils, whether they are receiving food subsidies (free rice and wheat), etc. What is needed is a triangulation of various data sets related to agriculture, which are fragmented today into a common agri-stack. If we can triangulate various data sets and use them to tweak our fertiliser and food subsidies, it can lead to massive savings and higher efficiency in the use of public resources.

chases. And why does a rice grower, for example, need to be given free rice from the Public Distribution System (PDS)? If we can triangulate various data sets and use them to tweak our fertiliser and food subsidies, it can lead to massive savings and higher efficiency in the use of public resources. The marginal rates of returns from digitalisation of agriculture then can be more than 10 times the investment being made to do it. That would be a tremendous boost to this sector, as well as the efficiency of public expenditure. Similar returns can come from investments in other schemes of agriculture, especially those focused on creating climate-resilient agriculture.

On the rural development front, Modi 3.0 announced an additional 20 million houses to be built in rural areas with government support. That would give another boost to the rural economy, creating jobs in rural areas for masons, carpenters, electricians, etc., besides giving much-needed dignity and hygiene to poor people in rural areas. That will be a commendable welfare step for the masses, and may also give political mileage to the government.

Lastly, under the PM-Gram Sadak Yojana, Modi 3.0 has announced its intention to invest Rs 75,000 crore. Our research reveals that investments in rural roads give high returns in terms of agri-GDP and poverty alleviation, as it opens up markets for rural people. All this brings some hope for agriculture and the rural economy.

The writer is Distinguished Professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The domestic protests that followed the killing of six hostages showed no sign of shifting Mr Netanyahu. Kamala Harris has offered a more sympathetic tone than Mr Biden to Palestinians, but no new prescription to alleviate their suffering should she win in November."

— THE GUARDIAN

Failing Sikhs again

Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks about the community deserve condemnation. He should know Congress's role in persecuting Sikhs



HARDEEP S PURI

RAHUL GANDHI'S RECENT remarks during his foreign sojourn about Sikhs in India have left not just the Sikh community but all Indians disappointed and dismayed. As a proud Sikh who has worn a turban for 62 years, I can say with certainty that not a single Sikh wonders "whether a Sikh is going to be allowed to wear his turban or a *kada* in India. Or he, as a Sikh, is going to be able to go to Gurdwara", to quote Rahul Gandhi from his "talk" in Washington DC. His contention is so stunningly bizarre and alien to the lived experience of all Sikhs that it defies comprehension.

I have served India for more than five decades as a diplomat first and now as a member of the Cabinet. Sikhs consider India their homeland, their motherland, and their *karma bhoomi*. Gandhi's malicious and divisive propaganda cannot be allowed to take wing. This mischief must be nipped in the bud. This is not the first time he has spewed such rubbish either. Last year, at Cambridge, he had called Sikhs second-class citizens in India.

The only time Sikhs have felt insecure and faced an existential threat in India was in the early 1980s and Gandhi needs to educate himself on this. His statement leads to the inevitable question on everyone's lips: Will Rahul Gandhi apologise for the atrocities his family and party visited upon the Sikhs when Indira Gandhi executed Operation Blue Star that desecrated the holiest of Sikh shrines with the brazen invasion of the Harmandir Sahib complex and the destruction of the Akal Takht? Will he apologise for the violence that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi when Congress goons killed 3,000 Sikhs in cold blood, mostly in Delhi? Will he condemn his father Rajiv Gandhi who had said after the atrocities that "when a big tree falls, the ground is bound to shake", thus implying that such base violence was somehow justified for a democratic nation undergirded by the rule of law?

I suspect we will be waiting a long time for an apology. The fact that his statements have been endorsed by fringe separatist voices raises uncomfortable questions that Gandhi must answer. He cannot dismiss them away as his closest advisor, Sam Pitroda, had tried to when he said of the violence committed against Sikhs, "hua toh hua" ("what's done is done"). The Narendra Modi-led BJP govern-

ment has sought to heal these wounds. The Prime Minister's reverence for Sikh teachings, especially the philosophy of integral humanism, is evident in most of the government's actions. We respect the integrity, honesty, and hard work that the Sikh community stands for and lives by. Unprecedented measures have been taken in the last 10 years to improve the welfare of the Sikh community and redress long-standing grievances — which, unsurprisingly, were against Congress governments.

It was the Modi government which removed 312 Sikhs from the blacklist or the "Central Adverse List" that Congress had imposed. Sikhs who were living as refugees abroad due to government persecution during the period of turmoil in Punjab were able to come home because of our intervention. It was the Modi government which took steps to bring the perpetrators of 1984 to justice and provided long overdue financial relief of Rs 5 lakh to each victim's family.

It was the Modi government which facilitated the FCRA registration for Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, and made *langar* and *langar* items tax-free. When the Taliban took over in Afghanistan, 230 Sikh families were repatriated expeditiously by the Modi government and five copies of the holy Guru Granth Sahib were brought back safely. The Modi government inaugurated the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor in November 2019. It was the Modi government which celebrated Guru Nanak Dev ji's 550th Prakash Parv as well as the 350th Parkash Utsav of Guru Gobind Singh ji and the 400th Parkash Purab of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur ji with immense fervour across India and the world. It was the Modi government which announced that the nation would observe December 26 as Veer Bal Diwas to honour the "Chhote Sahibzaade". It thus accorded the pride of place to Sikh tradition by righting a historic wrong.

In contrast, what has the Congress done for Sikhs except subject them to humiliation and disrespect? Rahul Gandhi needs to be taught a little about the dark passages of Congress's history. If ever Sikhs have been subjected to identity-based discrimination, it was under Congress's rule and under their explicit instruction. In 1982, police dragged down Sikhs from buses and cars, identifying them by their turban and *kada*, to prevent them from entering Delhi before the 1982 Asian Games because the community was viewed as a "threat" by Congress leaders. That is the legacy Gandhi must contend with.

Rahul Gandhi's disgraceful remarks in the US deserve to be condemned in the strongest terms possible.

The writer is Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas in the Government of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INTERNAL MATTER

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Rahul needs an education' (IE, September 15). The Leader of the Opposition visiting the US is appreciable. But criticising the government in a foreign land does undermine the government. To use Sikhs as a tool to further his propaganda against the BJP is tragic. The only time they faced an existential threat was in 1984, during the anti-Sikh pogrom when Congress was in power. His remarks have also been hijacked by a Khalistani terrorist to justify his anti-India cause. He must carefully calibrate his speeches while outside.

SS Paul, Nadiya

RELIEF FOR AAP

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Calling out the parrot,' (IE, September 14). Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's stay in jail has come to an end weeks before the Haryana elections. He is free to campaign for AAP candidates but cannot make any public comment on the merits of the case. Nor can he discharge his duties as the CM as normal. Despite the restrictions, Kejriwal and his party have every reason to feel relieved. If they have a watertight case against the CM, they should not be bothered about whether he is out on bail or in jail. If not, their credibility will take another hit, buttressing the Opposition's charge of political vendetta.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Calling out the parrot' (IE, September 14). The highlight of the recent bail verdict given by the SC in the Arvind Kejriwal case was Justice Bhuyan's criticism of how CBI operates, calling out the agency for selectively targeting political opponents,

which threatens justice. While many years have passed since the SC judgment, when the caged parrot metaphor was used the first time, the situation remains the same, if not worse. Despite the bail, the bigger issue remains: The working of the CBI and its credibility. Its role in the justice system requires urgent reform.

Amanpreet Singh, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Calling out the Parrot' (IE, September 14). It should be noted that there was a split verdict in the two-member bench of the Supreme Court. While they agreed unanimously that the Chief Minister of Delhi should be released on bail, the two judges disagreed and delivered a split verdict on the question of the validity of the CBI's arrest. The ground for granting bail but with strict conditions likely prolonged delay in concluding the case.

Y G Chouksey, Pune

REFORM NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The UN the world needs,' (IE, September 14). The upcoming UN Summit of the Future is an important moment to tackle global challenges, yet the real issue remains — the relevance of the UN. The organisation struggles to address the complex issues of today, from geopolitical tensions to global security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's participation offers an opportunity for India to push for a more inclusive and responsive UN. The organisation's inability to prevent ongoing conflicts and address global inequalities shows its limitations. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's call for "reform or rupture" underscores this urgency.

Raj Shukla, Mumbai

The writer is former chairperson, Prasar Bharati



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

Why Commons matter, how community is key to their well-being

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

LAST month, Delhi hosted a first-of-its-kind dialogue on the conservation, restoration and governance of common resources such as forests, community lands, and water bodies like lakes or rivers, all usually referred to as “Commons”.

More than 500 people, mostly representing grassroots organisations in different parts of India, attended the three-day event, which was organised to raise awareness about the need to evolve more inclusive and community-led frameworks for the governance of the Commons.

Commons, their governance

Commons refers to resources that are not owned by an individual, group or government, but belong to, and are shared by, the community as a whole. Forests, local ponds, grazing lands, rivers, and sacred sites are all Commons. In urban settings, parks and lakes

are Commons.

Commons could be intangible too. Language, folk art or dance, local customs, and traditional knowledge are shared resources, thus Commons. At the international level, the polar regions, the Arctic and Antarctica, are considered global Commons. No country is allowed to take ownership of these areas, even though everyone can use them for certain kinds of activities. Outer space, the Moon, and planetary bodies are also global Commons.

In the digital age, most Internet and open-source software are Commons. Digital resources with creative commons licences are meant to be used freely by everyone.

Commons provide a variety of ecological and other services that are beneficial for the entire community. But they need to be maintained, preserved, and used sustainably. As these resources are accessible to all, they face a greater threat of over-exploitation and damage. Since no one owns Commons, the responsibility of maintenance and upkeep often becomes a problem. Commons have also come under increased stress due to climate change.

Several kinds of governance mechanisms have evolved to manage Commons. There are international agreements for the use and management of polar regions, outer space, and the high seas. The Paris Agreement on climate change, which seeks to maintain a liveable planet for everyone, is an example. In urban areas, municipalities or other bodies of local governance take care of the Commons.

In rural areas, however, the governance of Commons is often not very well-defined — or is non-existent. Local communities do get involved, but in most cases, they lack the resources or the legal sanction to manage their common spaces. The NGOs gathered in Delhi last month raised their voice mainly over issues related to the governance of these kinds of Commons.

Need for community leadership

In the past, it was believed that Commons such as grazing lands or water bodies at the local level could not escape over-exploita-

tion or destruction, as everyone using them would tend to extract the most for themselves. This was referred to as the Tragedy of the Commons, a term popularised by ecological economist Garrett Hardin in the 1960s. The only viable solution was to either get the government or the market involved in managing and regulating the use of these common resources.

This view was turned on its head by the landmark research of Elinor Ostrom. Her field studies with several local communities across the globe pro-

vided plenty of evidence to show that community-led governance structures resulted in more sustainable management of common spaces. She also found that interventions of the government or the markets were not the only way to deal with the Commons. Ostrom's work, which fetched her the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009, the first for a woman, culminated in a book titled *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*.

Ostrom's ideas now form the backbone of the governance structures of Commons in many parts of the world. These involve the participation of local communities in different ways, depending on local contexts and requirements.

Forest Rights Act, significance

In India, the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA) is considered to be a good template for managing common forest resources. The Act gives individual and community ownership rights to forest-dwellers to live in and carry out their livelihood in the forest areas.

Before the Act, the forest department used to be the sole custodian of forest areas, although practices such as setting up joint forest management committees, with representation from the local villages, had begun acknowledging the role of indigenous peoples in the conservation and restoration of natural resources. The FRA is considered to be a turning point, as it recognised the legal rights of forest dwellers over the land. Jagdeesh Rao, director of Common

Ground, one of the organisers of the Delhi event, said the FRA is a good model for forest land, but similar frameworks need to be developed for other common resources — in particular, areas that are officially classified as wasteland.

Almost one-fourth of India's landmass, about 205 million acres, is estimated to be Commons, comprising community forest pastures, or water bodies. Almost 350 million rural people depend on these Commons for their livelihoods. These Commons are estimated to generate economic value worth about Rs 6.6 lakh crore annually through the provision of goods and ecological services.

Rao said that schemes such as MGN-REGA, compensatory afforestation, and green credits would become much more effective at governing Commons once the rights of the locals are acknowledged. He said the NGOs working in this area wanted the Centre to legislate a model Commons Bill, which could be replicated or adopted by state governments for more effective governance of the Commons.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

STUDY SHOWS HOW AI CAN TRIGGER RETHINK ON CONSPIRACY THEORIES

A CHATBOT with the ability to call out fake news and misinformation was able to persuade participants in a study to have second thoughts about their beliefs — which suggests that artificial intelligence (AI) can be used as a tool to combat conspiracy theories and disinformation.

The chatbot presented participants with comprehensive answers and detailed arguments, following which they found themselves thinking differently — a change that lasted for several weeks. (“Durably reducing conspiracy beliefs through dialogues with AI”: *Science*, September 13, Thomas H Costello and others)

Conspiracy theories are thought to feed off the yearning of individuals for safety and stability in a world full of uncertainties. “What we found in this paper goes against that traditional explanation,” co-author Thomas H Costello, a psychology researcher at American University in Washington DC, told *Nature* news, which published a report on the research.

“One of the potentially cool applications of this research is you could use AI to debunk conspiracy theories in real life,” Costello said.

Relevant and important

The study shows that many people who strongly believe in “seemingly fact-resistant conspiratorial beliefs” can change their minds when presented with compelling evidence, the researchers wrote.

“From a theoretical perspective, this points a surprisingly optimistic picture of human reasoning: Conspiratorial rabbit holes may indeed have an exit. Psychological needs and motivations do not inherently blind conspiracists to evidence — it simply takes the right evidence to reach them,” they said.

Studies have shown that almost half of all Americans believe conspiracy theories — the claim that NASA “faked” the 1969 Moon landing has endured for decades. During the Covid-19 pandemic, some conspiracy theorists said vaccines were used to inject chips into the body to enable mass surveillance; in Germany, such beliefs triggered violent protests.

With social media dramatically ampli-

fy the voices of conspiracy theorists, some of these ideas came to have serious consequences — vaccine uptake was impacted; in 2016, a man who believed a conspiracy theory that top Democratic officials were running a paedophile ring opened fire in a pizza shop in Washington DC; and the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol was fuelled by fake news that the presidential election of 2020 had been “stolen”.

How study was done

The researchers said they sought to “leverage advancements in large language models (LLMs)...to try to directly refute” particular evidence each study participant cited as supporting their conspiratorial beliefs.

“Across two experiments, 2,190 Americans articulated — in their own words — a conspiracy theory in which they believe, along with the evidence they think supports this theory. They then engaged in a three-round conversation with the LLM GPT-4 Turbo (chatbot), which we prompted to respond to this specific evidence while trying to reduce participants' belief in the conspiracy theory,” the study says.

The results were encouraging: across a wide range of conspiracy theories, “the treatment reduced participants' belief in their chosen conspiracy theory by 20% on average”, and the “effect persisted undiminished for at least 2 months”. Also, the study noted, “AI did not reduce belief in true conspiracies”.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE



Supporters of Donald Trump who stormed the Capitol on Jan 6, 2021 were fired by a conspiracy theory about a ‘stolen’ election. *The NYT*



HARISH DAMODARAN

“FOOD VERSUS fuel” is a familiar debate in the context of sugarcane, rice, maize, palm or soyabean oil being diverted for the production of ethanol and biodiesel.

There's also a looming “food versus cars” dilemma, which is linked to phosphoric acid — the key ingredient in di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), India's second most consumed fertiliser after urea — increasingly finding its way into the production of batteries for electric vehicles (EVs).

DAP contains 46% phosphorous (P), a nutrient crops need at the early growth stages of root and shoot development. The ‘P’ comes from phosphoric acid, which is manufactured from rock phosphate ore after grinding and reacting with sulphuric acid.

But phosphoric acid is also the source of ‘P’ in lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) batteries. These supplied more than 40% of the global EV capacity demand in 2023 — up from a modest 6% in 2020 — gaining market share from normal nickel-based NMC and NCA batteries.

While all three are lithium ion batteries, the first type uses iron phosphate as the raw material for the cathode or positive electrode; the others use more expensive nickel, manganese, cobalt and aluminium oxides.

Implications for India

India consumes 10.5-11 million tonnes (mt) of DAP annually — next only to the 35.5-36 mt of urea — more than half of which is supplied through imports from China, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Russia, and other countries.

In addition, India imports phosphoric acid (mainly from Jordan, Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia) and rock phosphate (from Morocco, Togo, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE) for the domestic production of DAP, as well as other P-containing fertilisers.

In 2022-23, India imported 6.7 mt of DAP (valued at \$5,569.51 million), 2.7 mt of phosphoric acid (\$3,622.98 million) and 3.9 mt of rock phosphate (\$891.32 million). These amounted to \$10 billion-plus of imports — excluding imports of other inputs, namely ammonia and sulphur/ sulphuric acid.

But just as bio-fuels have created an alternative market for foodgrains, sugarcane, and vegetable oils, merchant-grade phosphoric acid with 52-54% P used in fertilisers is find-

ing new application as cathode raw material in EV batteries after further purification.

This is already being seen in China, where two-thirds of EVs sold in 2023 had LFP batteries. China is a leading DAP supplier to India (*Table 1*). It was also the world's third largest shipper of DAP (5 mt) and other phosphatic fertilisers (1.7 mt) in 2023, after Morocco and Russia. As more of China's phosphoric acid goes towards LFP batteries, there will be that much less available for manufacturing fertilisers — hence the ‘cars vs food’ dilemma.

The share of LFP batteries in EV sales is still below 10% in the US and Europe. However, even these markets are likely to switch to batteries that are less dependent on critical minerals such as cobalt — whose world reserves are only 11 mt, of which 6 mt are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rock phosphate and iron ore reserves are more abundant, at 74,000 mt and 190,000 mt respectively.

LFP batteries also score in longevity (chargeable more number of times) and safety (less overheating/ fire risk), offsetting their disadvantage of lower energy density (larger size required to store the same amount of energy).

The looming challenge

As the world moves more to LFP batteries, it can potentially reduce the supply of phosphate fertilisers. India's DAP imports of 1.59 mt during April-August 2024 were 51% below the 3.25 mt for the same period of last year. This was largely due to export restrictions imposed by China.

While China is the only country that is mass-producing LFP batteries now, Morocco too has attracted significant investor interest

for establishing LFP cathode materials and EV battery manufacturing facilities. Morocco is the second biggest rock phosphate miner after China, but holds an estimated 50,000 mt or nearly 68% of global reserves (*Table 2*).

With phosphate reserves of hardly 31 mt and an annual production of 1.5 mt, India has to meet the bulk of its nutrient requirement (including as intermediate acid and finished fertiliser) from suppliers such as Morocco's OCP Group, Russia's PhosAgro, and Saudi Arabia's SABIC and Ma'aden.

This also makes India vulnerable to changing global market dynamics — whether on account of war-induced supply shocks, or the diversification of phosphoric acid use beyond fertilisers.

Way forward for India

The effects of low DAP imports may be felt in the ensuing *rabi* (winter-spring) crop season, starting with mustard, potato and *chana* (chickpea) plantings in October and wheat in November-December. Farmers apply this fertiliser, necessary for root establishment and growth, right at the time of sowing.

Sales of DAP fell 20.5% even during the *kharif* (monsoon) season, from 4.83 mt in April-August 2023 to 3.84 mt in April-August 2024. It was partly compensated by a 29.5% jump in complex fertilisers — containing nitrogen (N), P, potassium (K), and sulphur (S) in different combinations — from 4.55 mt to 5.88 mt.

Farmers replaced DAP (which has 46% P plus 18% N) with complexes with less P (like 20:20:0:13, 10:26:26:0 and 12:32:16:0). They may have to do the same in the coming *rabi*.

The decline in DAP imports and sales has

been exacerbated by government policy fixing its MRP at Rs 27,000 per tonne. This is only marginally more than the Rs 24,000-26,000 for 20:20:0:13 (having less than half DAP's P content) and less than the Rs 29,400 for 10:26:26:0 and 12:32:26:0.

Fertiliser companies are being paid a subsidy of Rs 21,676, average rail freight reimbursement of Rs 1,700, and a one-time special incentive of Rs 3,500 on DAP sales. Adding these to the MRP of Rs 27,000 takes their overall realisation to Rs 53,876 per tonne.

As against this, the landed price of imported DAP is around \$620 per tonne. Together with other expenses (5% customs duty, port handling, bagging, freight, interest, insurance, dealer margins, etc), the total cost comes to roughly Rs 61,000 per tonne.

Thus, companies are incurring a loss of more than Rs 7,100 per tonne, making it unviable to import and market DAP. They are, instead, choosing to sell complexes or single super phosphate containing just 16% P and 11% S.

This may not be a bad thing. A country having very little rock phosphate, potash, sulphur, and natural gas reserves cannot afford to consume too much DAP, urea (46% N), and muriate of potash (60% K). The future lies more in fertiliser products incorporating less N, P, K, and S, but having higher nutrient use efficiency.

In the long run, India needs to also secure supplies of raw materials, especially phosphates, through overseas joint ventures and buy-back arrangements. Indian companies already have four plants manufacturing phosphoric acid in Senegal, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. More are probably required.

TABLE 1

IMPORTS OF DI-AMMONIUM PHOSPHATE

(lakh tonnes)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
China	15.91	20.43	11.97	22.87
Saudi Arabia	18.89	19.33	21.28	15.86
Morocco	14.98	12.13	16.79	10.49
Russia	3.03	1.97	9.69	3.41
Jordan	3.04	2.46	1.81	1.74
US	0.45	0	2.86	0.31
Australia	0	0.52	1.51	0
Tunisia	0	0.44	0.85	0
Egypt	0.84	0.68	0	0.30
TOTAL*	58.00	58.60	66.77	55.96
VALUE**	1,948.90	4,007.50	5,569.51	3,109.86

*Includes other countries; **Million US dollars; Source: Department of Commerce

TABLE 2

TOP ROCK PHOSPHATE MINE PRODUCERS

(million tonnes)

	2022	2023	Reserves
China	93.00	90.00	3,800.0
Morocco	39.00	35.00	50,000.0
US	19.80	20.00	1,000.0
Russia	14.00	14.00	2,400.0
Jordan	11.30	12.00	1,000.0
Saudi Arabia	9.00	8.50	1,400.0
Brazil	6.20	5.30	1,600.0
Egypt	5.00	4.80	2,800.0
Peru	4.20	4.20	210.0
Tunisia	3.56	3.60	2,500.0
TOTAL*	228.00	220.00	74,000.0

*Includes other countries; Source: US Geological Survey.

Behind Typhoon Yagi becoming the most powerful storm in Asia this year

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

MILLIONS OF people in Southeast Asia continue to struggle with torrential rain, floods, and landslides triggered by Typhoon Yagi — the strongest tropical cyclone Asia has seen this year and the second most powerful storm in the world so far this year after Hurricane Beryl.

While Typhoon Yagi has severely impacted multiple countries, including the Philippines, China, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, it has hit Vietnam the hardest, where the death toll stands at around 233. The overall toll across these countries has crossed 300 as of last week.

How are tropical cyclones formed?

Tropical cyclones form over warm ocean

waters near the equator. When the warm, moist air from the ocean surface rises upward, a lower air pressure area is formed below. Air from surrounding areas with higher air pressure rushes into this low pressure area, eventually rising, after it also becomes warm and moist.

As warm, moist air rises, it cools down, and the water in the air forms clouds and thunderstorms. This whole system of clouds and winds gains strength and momentum using the ocean's heat, and the water that evaporates

from its surface.

“The weakest tropical cyclones are called tropical depressions. If a depression intensifies such that its maximum sustained winds reach 39 miles per hour [63 kmph], the tropical cyclone becomes a tropical storm,” according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



People help a woman in a flooded area in Thailand on Friday. *Reuters*

(NOAA). Storm systems with wind speeds of 119 kmph and above are classified as hurricanes, typhoons, or tropical cyclones.

The category of a tropical cyclone is de-

termined by its sustained wind speed, as measured by the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. It is classified into five categories — Category 1 to Category 5. While Category 1 tropical cyclones bring winds of 119 to 153 kmph, Category 5 tropical cyclones, which are the strongest, have winds of 252 kmph or higher. Storms that reach Category 3 and higher are considered major tropical cyclones due to their potential to inflict significant damage.

How did Typhoon Yagi become the strongest storm in Asia?

Typhoon Yagi started as a tropical storm in the western Philippine Sea on September 1. It made landfall in the Philippines the next day and began to weaken. However, due to unusually warm waters in the South China Sea, the storm intensified again. By September 4, it strengthened into a typhoon with Category 3 winds.

The next day, it became a Category 5 typhoon with peak maximum sustained winds of 260 kmph. Typhoon Yagi is one of four Category 5 storms recorded in the South China Sea, after Pamela in 1954, Rammasun in 2014, and Rai in 2021.

On September 6, it made landfall in China's Hainan province with winds of 223 kmph. The following day, Typhoon Yagi hit near Haiphong, Quang Ninh province, in northern Vietnam, as one of the strongest storms the country has seen in more than a decade. The storm was later downgraded to a tropical depression but still brought heavy rain in countries such as Thailand last week.

What is the role of climate change?

Scientists are yet to reach an agreement over how exactly climate change is impacting tropical cyclones. That is because there are a lot of factors that determine whether a storm forms, how it develops, its strength,

duration, and overall characteristics.

However, there is consensus that with rising global temperatures, tropical cyclones are becoming more intense. A study published in the journal *Climate and Atmospheric Science* in July showed that tropical cyclones in Southeast Asia are now forming closer to coastlines, intensifying more rapidly, and lingering longer over land.

This is happening primarily because of warmer surface temperatures of the ocean.

Higher sea surface temperatures cause marine heat waves, an extreme weather event, which can also make storms like hurricanes and tropical cyclones more intense. Warmer temperatures escalate the rate of evaporation along with the transfer of heat from the oceans to the air. When storms travel across hot oceans, they gather more water vapour and heat. This results in stronger winds, heavier rainfall and more flooding when storms reach the land.



Political hypocrisy over naming September 17

It's surprising that politicians shy away from calling a spade a spade. Even 74 years after Telangana was liberated from Nizam's rule after a police action, namely 'Operation Polo', the opposition and the ruling parties shiver to use that word. It is history but still for narrow political reasons they shudder to call September 17 a Liberation Day or Integration Day as some including AIMIM suggest.

This hesitation of giving a proper name to September 17 has always been shrouded in controversy whether it was Congress that was in power or TDP during the undivided Andhra Pradesh as well. It had become an issue during the agitation for separate Telangana but the TRS (now BRS) which came to

power in 2014 followed the previous regime and refused to officially celebrate the Liberation Day. The BJP for whatever reason has always been demanding that September 17 be celebrated officially as Liberation Day.

Can anyone deny that India got liberated from the British and became Independent on August 15 1947? It is a fact and all communities happily celebrate it. So is the case with January 26 which is Republic Day. History is history. Why politicians make a mountain out of molehill is what one does not understand.

The politics surrounding this day does not end here. The BJP in a quick political move in 2023 announced that it would officially

celebrate September 17 as Liberation Day and held a public meeting at Parade Grounds which was addressed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. This year the Union Home Ministry issued a notification declaring September 17 as Liberation Day and will be celebrating it officially at Parade Grounds and Amit Shah will address a huge gathering. The Congress party which came to power in December 2023 in Telangana and keeps on bashing BRS also does not seem to be in a mood to call it as Liberation Day. At the same time, it does not want to accept that it believes in policy of appeasement. Hence as a via media, it gave a new name 'Prapajalana Dinotsavam'. 'The praja sarkar' as the Congress calls itself was not formed

on this Day nor were the results announced on this day. It also did not launch praja darbar on this day yet it announced that September 17 as Prapajalana Dinotsavam. The Congress party claims it is a synonym to the Liberation Day.

Interestingly, the BRS which keeps challenging and criticising the government for everything is silent on this issue. What is it if not pseudo secularism? Why can't the Congress and bloc INDIA leaders led by Rahul Gandhi who wave the book on Constitution take a firm stand on this either way? Constitution is against policy of appeasement. Rahul who wants to be the PM in 2029 should take a firm stand on issues like September 17 and try to infuse the flame of

patriotism in the minds of youth, and not maintain silence even when reporter of a national electronic channel was attacked during a video interview with his US mentor Sam Pitroda. The attackers forcefully deleted the interview, but Sam says he does know about it and neither Sam nor Rahul or his cheerleaders or even AICC president condemned the incident. Why? Is this how Congress and Bloc INDIA wants to protect the Constitution? Waving a book won't help Rahul ji! Pick up courage to call a spade a spade. It is high time the grand old party should reinvent itself, develop a strong spine and say history is history and September 17 is Telangana Liberation or Integration (whatever they like) Day.

LETTERS

Need to expedite climate change mitigation

This refers to "Climate change: A clear and Present danger" (Sept 14). Union cabinet approved "Mission Mausam" with the aim of predicting weather with high precision by deploying, high performance computing, artificial intelligence and machine learning etc. India is also promoting "Green Energy" to tackle climate change. Mission Mausam will enable to save lives and reduce damage to infrastructure, but does not mitigate climate change. Green hydrogen is meant for energy transition from fossil fuels to cleaner energy. But green hydrogen has several significant challenges for widespread adoption such as high production costs; the efficiency of splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen is low around 60-80%; production of green hydrogen needs fresh water that is scarce; infrastructure limitations on production, distribution & storage. What is seriously and urgently required is drastically reducing the emissions of carbon dioxide and methane gases, the main culprits, by fully implementing the "Paris Agreement" by all the nations.

Dr O Prasada Rao, Hyderabad

Paradoxical situation of LIC pensioners

It is good and welcome news that a number of nearly one lakh pensioners of pre-2014 retirees are to get benefited by higher pension as members of EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organization). In this connection, it sounds odd that pension payable to the retirees of Life Insurance Corporation of India leaves much to be desired. Their basic pay component in pension amount remains the same, without any corresponding upward revision as and when the pay scales of the corporation's in-service employees are revised. As a consequence, those who retired much earlier in high cadres like even Managing Director, Executive Director, etc., are getting much lesser pension than those who retired later but in lower cadres.

Seshagiri Row Karry, Hyderabad

Yechury's departure an immense loss to nation

The departure of Seetharam Yechury, the CPM general secretary, is an irreparable loss to public life in India. As rightly highlighted by PM Modi, he was a leading light of leftist forces in India and commanded much popularity or acceptance across the political spectrum. Through donation of his dead body for medical research, he proved that such ideal or rare gesture is indeed befitting to role or duty of ideal citizen or leader. For 45 years, he worked for justice, and built coalitions for the country's best interests.

B V K Thampi, Thiruvananthapuram

A clean & green initiative by CM Revanth

Indore won the title of the cleanest city in India for the 17th consecutive time last year. It is heartening to learn Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy wants to transform Greater Hyderabad into Indore-like clean city, and has directed officials to prepare plans in this regard. He called for a study on the systems and procedures adopted there. The government should take inspiration from Indore's cleaning model to achieve cleaner cities in Telangana. Civic bodies must be held accountable for inefficiency, and citizens should be educated on cleaning practices to contribute. A clean city can only be achieved through collaborative efforts and proper regulation.

R Sreestuti, Hyderabad

Sustainability at forefront amid festivities

Amidst the presence of the current immersion season, a few eco warriors have pursued a creative and a sustainable initiative to create incense sticks out of immersion floral waste. This initiative addresses waste management and additionally stresses the need for sustainable development and strikes a chord deeply with cultural and spiritual practices. This is a notable initiative which shows how environmental activism can go hand in hand with the cultural values to bring about a change.

Bindi Mani Dhrishie, Hyderabad

Unravelling cosmic beauty of universe

NASA has unveiled a cosmic masterpiece. Red Spider Nebula photos have left the Internet starstruck. NASA's recent release of stunning high-resolution images of the Red Spider Nebula has reignited a sense of wonder regarding the captivating beauty and mysteries of our universe. These awe-inspiring visuals have sparked global curiosity and highlight the importance of ongoing astronomical exploration and research. The profound impact of these images extends beyond scientific advancement, serving to unite individuals through a shared sense of wonder and inspiration for future generations of explorers.

Ruqqayyah Osman, Hyderabad

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BENGALURU ONLINE

State's proposal for new international airport is ready

BENGALURU: After careful consideration, the state government has selected a site adjacent to the National Highway-75 between Nelamangala-Kunigal to build the proposed second international airport near Bengaluru. The government has taken steps to finalize the proposal to build an ambitious airport in this same place. Keeping in view the development of the capital, the increasing passenger and freight pressure, the state government, which has taken up the process of constructing the second international airport after Delhi and Mumbai, has inspected seven or eight places in different directions of the city for this purpose. Now, based on the Airport Authority of India's technical criteria, the area between Nelamangala-Kunigal has been almost finalized. The 11th round of meeting regarding the development of the second international airport was held on Friday in view of the increasing pressure on the current Nadaprabhu Kempegowda International Airport and the need for the future of Bengalore, which is growing rapidly in the country.

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

Bangladesh — A potential source of grave concern

B V KUMAR

Sheikh Hasina's exit from Bangladesh has led to significant political fallout. The new dispensation and its supporters are targeting journalists seen to have been close to the erstwhile Hasina government. The release of BNP leader Khalida Zia, who was convicted on corruption charges in 2018, and the rehabilitation of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, which was banned by Hasina's government in 2023, is perceived as steps towards creating an inclusive political climate.

However, what should be the concern of the security establishment in India should be the release of Islamist radicals having links with terrorist groups, including Jashimuddin Rahmani, Chief of Ansarullah Bangla Team, an organisation that has links with Al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent. The ban on Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh has also been lifted. These steps now taken by the new dispensation raises concern over the safety of the minorities, intellectuals and politicians and party offices, belonging to the Awami League.

The question is whether the terrorist groups, who were operating in Bangladesh, were a recent phenomenon or they were in existence even in 1971 when Bangladesh was formed. For this, it is necessary to find out which were the terrorist groups, and who were financing them to get the facts right.

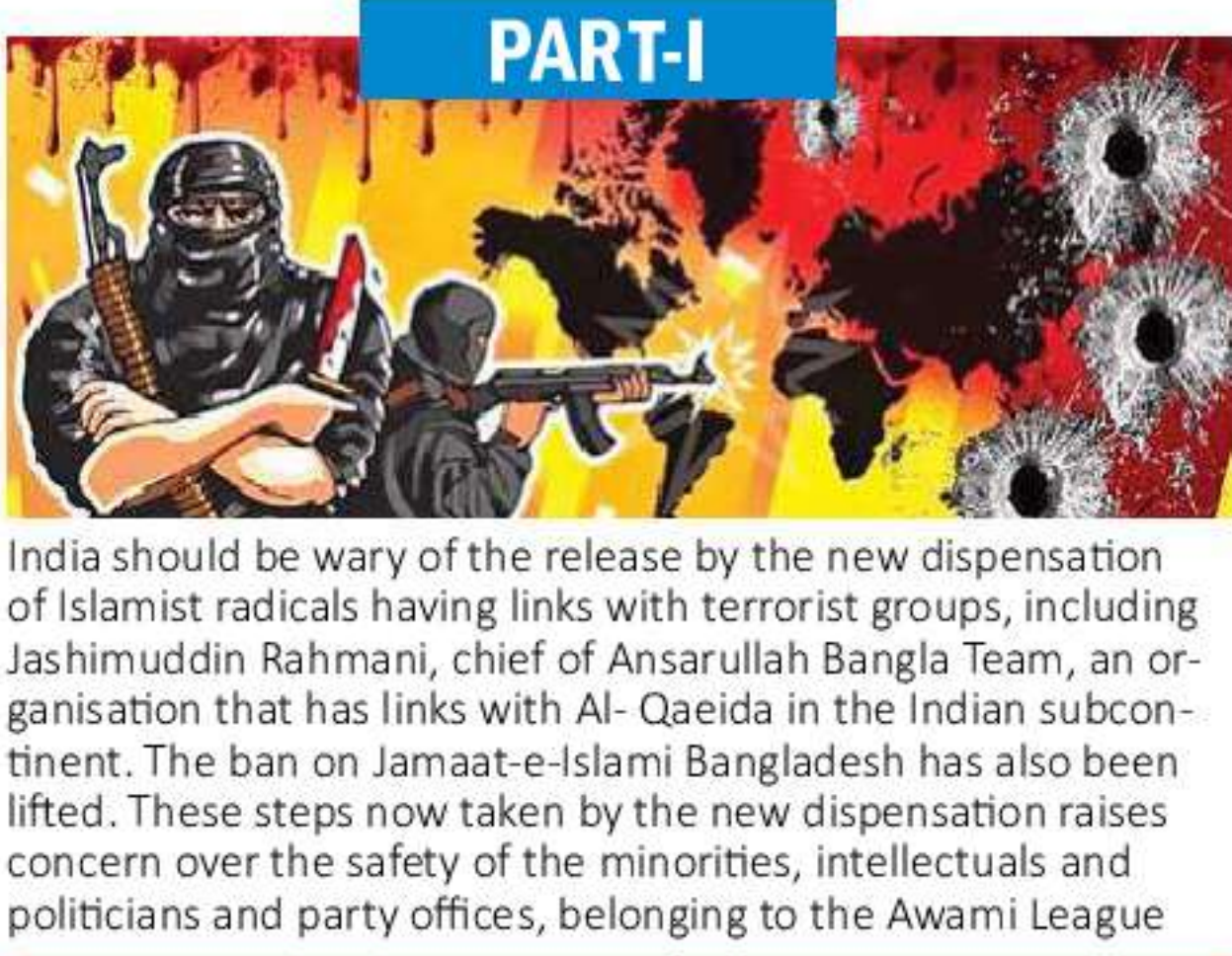
Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh is the Bangladesh branch of the terrorist group Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI). It is banned in Bangladesh and is a banned organisation in the UK HuJI was also responsible for setting up the Indian Mujahideen terrorist group. The group was formed by Maulana Abbas Salam. The other leaders include Shaikhul Hadith Allama and Azizul Haque, who was the Chairman of the political party Islamici Olkayfote. Muhammad Habibur Rahman (alias Bulbuli Huzur) was a leader of the HuJI and initially a leader of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis. The principal of Lalkhan Madrasa in Chittagong, Mufti

Izharul Islam Chowdhury, was also a leader of the HuJI.

Amaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) is a terrorist organisation set up in 1988 by Abdur Rahman and gained public prominence in 2001 when bombs and documents detailing the activities of the organisation were discovered in Parbatipur in Dinajpur district. JMB was operating in Bangladesh and listed as a terrorist organisation in India, Malaysia, UK, and Australia, besides Bangladesh. JMB was banned by the Government of Bangladesh in February 2005 after attacks on NGOs. But it struck back in mid-August when it detonated 500 small bombs at 300 locations throughout Bangladesh. The group reorganised and has committed several public murders in 2016 in northern Bangladesh as part of a wave of attacks on secularists. The JMB was believed to have contained at least 10,000 members, and have an extensive network of organisations, including connections to legal Islamist organisations. Six of the top leaders of JMB were captured by the RAB security forces in 2005. After being tried and convicted in court, on 29.3.2007, four were executed by hanging for the killing of two judges and for the August 2005 bombings.

In 2015, it was discovered that JMB had been receiving financing from officers at the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka. Visa Attache, Mazhar Khan, was caught red-handed at a meeting with a JMB operative in April 2015, who said that they were involved in pushing large consignments of fake Indian currency into West Bengal and Assam. Second Secretary, Farina Arshad, was expelled by Bangladesh in December 2015 after a JMB operative admitted to having received 30,000 Taka from her. An offshoot of JMB, the Neo-Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, effectively operates as the ISIL in Bangladesh.

Shahadat-e al Higma (SH) was founded by Abdur Rahman and gained public prominence in 2001 when bombs and documents revealing the activities of SH were discovered in



India should be wary of the release by the new dispensation of Islamist radicals having links with terrorist groups, including Jashimuddin Rahmani, chief of Ansarullah Bangla Team, an organisation that has links with Al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent. The ban on Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh has also been lifted. These steps now taken by the new dispensation raises concern over the safety of the minorities, intellectuals and politicians and party offices, belonging to the Awami League

Parbatipur in Dinajpur district. SH was banned on 9.2.2023 by the Bangladesh government. SH announced that it would wage an armed struggle to establish an Islamic State in Bangladesh. SH claimed that they had 35,000 "commandos" and "fighters". Its founder was arrested on 9.11.2005. The group was then reactivated by Jakir Khandakar in July 2014, who shifted the headquarters to Bandarban District in Chittagong. Towhidi Muslim Janata is mainly known for violent attacks on religious minorities in Bangladesh. How were these organisations financed? Investigations by the US Senate's Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations relating to HSBC Bank revealed that HSBC, in 2009 authorised its affiliates to supply Indian rupees to Saudi Arabia's Al Rajhi Bank, which, the report said, had links to financing terrorism. The report also said that Al Rajhi Bank handled International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO)'s 'charitable contributions intended to benefit suicide bombers by directing Al Igatha journal advertisements in Somalia, Sri Lanka, India, and the Philippines'.

The Daily Star, published on 18.7.2012, quoting from the report of the US Senate's Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations relating to HSBC Bank revealed its transactions with two of the Bangladesh Banks, Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd. and Social Islami Bank Ltd. Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd., (IBB) commenced its operations in 1983 in conformance with Islamic requirements,

and became one of the largest private banks providing a wide variety of individual and commercial banking services. Several of the senior officials of the bank were politically important figures within the country or in Saudi Arabia, leading to their designations as Politically Exposed Persons (PEP) in the 'World Check' database. IBB has a network of more than 600 correspondent accounts. IBB applied to open accounts with HSBC in 2000, and had accounts with HSBC Bank USA (HBUS) in 2000, and US dollar clearing accounts with HSBC India and HSBC Pakistan, in 2006. In 2007, the HBUS branch in Singapore also sought approval to open an account for the bank to supply it with US dollars in cash, US dollar monetary instruments such as traveller's cheques and money orders, process US dollar wire transfers, and provide other services. Proposals to open the 2007 HBUS account for IBB immediately raised Antimony Laundering (AML) concerns within HBUS AML Compliance, not only because the bank was located in a country ranked by HSBC as at 'high risk' of money laundering but also because members of the Al Rajhi group held a 37% direct ownership interest in the bank. HBUS' Singapore branch opened the account for IBB in December 2007. Christopher Lok and others approved the account, despite ongoing questions about its primary shareholder, Al Rajhi Bank, whose

past links to terrorist financing had received additional attention in the media in early 2007. HBUS also approved the account despite troubling information about IBB itself which was part of an internal report prepared less than a year earlier by HSBC's Financial Intelligence Group (FIG). The May 2006 FIG report disclosed that, in March 2006, 'Abdur Rahman, chief of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen of Bangladesh (JMB), and his second-in-command, Bangla Bhai, were arrested for being responsible for the terrorist bomb blasts of 17.8.2005 in Bangladesh'. The FIG report noted that Rahman had an account at IBB.

The FIG report also disclosed that an investigation by the Central Bank of Bangladesh found that two branches of IBB had been engaged in 'suspicious transactions' and urged the bank to take action against 20 bank employees, for failing to report the suspicious transactions. The KYC profile noted that, in 2006, FIG recommended classifying IBB as a 'Special Category Client', or SCC, HSBC's designation for its highest risk clients, but that recommendation was rejected, meaning that IBB need not be subjected to any enhanced monitoring. 18 months later, in May 2009, a FIG due diligence report prepared for another Bangladeshi bank with which HBUS did business, disclosed new information relevant to IBB. This information related to the IIRO, a Saudi non-profit organization which, in 2006, had two of its branches and a high ranking official designated by the US as terrorist financiers and added to the list of entities with which US persons are prohibited from doing business.

The 2009 FIG report stated that the IIRO had accounts at both Social Islami Bank (SIB) and IBB. It quoted a 2008 local press article saying that, in response to the action taken by the US in 2006, IBB had frozen its IIRO accounts. In 2010, an HBUS KYC profile for SIB referred a letter from the Bangladesh Central Bank, dated 30.6.2010, indicating that IIRO had accounts at three Bangladeshi banks, including IBB,

which needed to be closed.

IBB confirmed to the committee that IIRO had two accounts at the bank, which were opened in 1993 and 1994, when IIRO was a non-governmental organization in good standing. It stated that after the IIRO was added to a United Nations sanctions list in 2006, it froze the accounts and reported them to the Bangladesh Central Bank. In 2010, according to the bank, it received an 'instruction from the Central Bank at the direction of the Ministry of Finance' to unfreeze the accounts and 'transfer the accounts' to a government-owned bank, BASIC Bank, which it did.

In February 2010, HBUS AML compliance personnel reviewed the IBB account and recommended that the bank be designated a SCC, the reason given for the proposed SCC designation was IBB's links to the Al Rajhi group, noting that the vice-chairman of the bank and 10 per cent owner was Yousif Abdullah Al-Rajhi, that Al Rajhi interests held about a third of the bank's shares, and Al Rajhi itself had links to terrorist financing and the information provided in the 2006 FIG report, that the Bangladesh Central Bank had issued a 'notice of cause' to IBB 'to explain accounts owned by suspected Islamic militants', and reportedly fined the bank for the third time 'for covering up militants transactions'. Contrary to the outcome in 2006, HSBC designated IBB as an SCC client in 2010. Later in 2010, an Office of the Comptroller of the Currency AML Examiner reviewing emails related to Islami Bank characterized the information provided about the bank as depicting 'extreme circumstances', and recommended that the account be reviewed as part of a larger AML 'look back' effort at HSBC. In 2011, HSBC engaged in an extensive discussion with IBB regarding its AML policies and procedures, also noting in its KYC profile that the bank acted as a 'payout agent' for 53 money exchange businesses across the Middle East.

(Writer is former DG, DRI and former Member, CBIC)

where all parties who want to work on an agenda—a concrete and practical agenda to implement the two-state solution—can work together.

Second, we need to revitalize the Palestinian Authority to support their reform process, but also to support [them] financially. Third, [we have] to facilitate all attempts at dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.

Fourth, [we must] not give up on engaging with Israeli civil society, even in this context—and especially in this context. Everyone, not just the Europeans—Palestinians, and Arab civil society, must do it. I know how difficult it is to reconcile both narratives, but it is the only way to move forward... Fifth, the Palestinians have to reach a common vision, to overcome their divisions, because the more these divisions exist, the more they undermine the legitimacy and representativeness of the Palestinians.

(<https://www.commondreams.org/>)



'A new front is being opened with a clear objective: to turn the West Bank into a new Gaza—in rising violence, delegitimizing the Palestinian Authority, stimulating provocations to react forcefully, and not shying away from saying to the face of the world that the only way to reach a peaceful settlement is to annex the West Bank and Gaza'

Borrell asserted that "a new front is being opened with a clear objective: to turn the West Bank into a new Gaza—in rising violence, delegitimizing the Palestinian Authority, stimulating provocations to react forcefully, and not shying away from saying to the face of the world that the only way to reach a peaceful settlement is to annex the West Bank and Gaza."

Since last October, Israeli soldiers and settler-colonists have killed more than 600 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, including more than 140 children. Settlers have carried out more than 1,000 attacks including multiple deadly

pogroms, during which Israel Defense Forces soldiers stood by, protected, and even joined the attackers.

"Without action, the West Bank will become a new Gaza," Borrell stressed. "And Gaza will become a new West Bank, as settlers' movements are preparing new settlements." "Against this backdrop, it is clear that the prospect of a two-state solution—which we have been ritually repeating—is receding ever further while the international community deplores, feels, and condemns, but finds it hard to act," Borrell added.

"What can we do?" he asked, continuing: "We need to raise our voice at the next [United Nations General Assembly] and prevent a sort of 'Gaza fatigue,' which will embolden the extremists and postpone once again the idea of a political settlement. We have to launch a process

'Israeli impunity will lead to new Gaza'

BRETT WILKINS

European Union foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell on Tuesday urged the international community to stop "radical members of the Israeli government" from thwarting Palestinian statehood, and prevent Israel from turning the illegally occupied West Bank into "a new Gaza." Speaking to attendees of an Arab League conference in Cairo, Borrell lamented that a Gaza cease-fire agreement "has still not been signed and does not seem likely to be signed in the near future."

"Why? Quite simply, because those who are waging the war have no interest in putting an end to it," he continued. "So, they are just pretending... Because, as it turns out, their intransigence is accompanied by total impunity." "If acts have no consequences, if blatant violation of interna-

tional law remains disregarded, if institutions such as the International Criminal Court are threatened, if the International Court of Justice rulings are totally ignored by those who promote a rules-based order, who can be trusted?" Borrell asked.

"Not only is there no pause in the war in Gaza," he noted. "But what looms on the horizon is the extension of the conflict to the West Bank, where radical members of the Israeli government—Netanyahu's government—try to make it impossible to create a future Palestinian state." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of his far-right government have openly boasted about their efforts to derail the so-called "two-state solution," and Israeli lawmakers voted overwhelmingly in July to oppose the creation of a Palestinian state.



For a fair probe

Kejriwal bail order is a reminder to the CBI to dispel the perception of bias

A two-member Bench of the Supreme Court that granted bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi excise policy case was divided on the legality of his arrest by the CBI on corruption charges soon after he was given regular bail in connection with money-laundering charges. After the benefit was given to the co-accused, including Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Bharat Rashtira Samithi leader K. Kavitha, under the more stringent Prevention of Money Laundering Act, it was only a matter of time before Mr. Kejriwal was also released on conditional bail. Justice Surya Kant and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan were one in holding that he was entitled to bail and that there was no need, as the CBI wanted, to send him back to the trial court. However, while Justice Kant found no violation of procedure in his arrest, as the CBI had approached the trial court for permission to question Mr. Kejriwal and, later on, to arrest him, Justice Bhuyan bluntly observed that the timing of his arrest was “suspect”. Noting that the CBI did not feel the need to arrest him for 22 months, he questioned the urgency to arrest him “when he was on the cusp of release in the ED (Enforcement Directorate) case”. Justice Bhuyan also recalled precedents that say the existence of the power to arrest did not necessarily mean that there was a need to arrest.

Justice Bhuyan's observations also touched upon the CBI's reputation. Few would disagree with the view that the CBI should strive to dispel the notion that it is “a caged parrot”, and that its investigation should not give the impression that it probes cases and arrests people in a high-handed and biased manner. The judge has rightly emphasised the right of the accused to remain silent, and decried the propensity among investigating agencies to cite “non-cooperation” or “evasive answers” during questioning as a ground to keep suspects in prison. If the order of bail in the Manish Sisodia case was a reminder to all judges that bail cannot be denied as a matter of punishment, Justice Bhuyan's separate judgment will be notable for its reminder to the CBI about its obligation to keep its investigations fair. There is also some subtle criticism of the Delhi High Court's order rejecting bail to Mr. Kejriwal on the ground that he ought to approach the trial court first. Both judges noted that the High Court should have considered bail on merits, if it had not asked the petitioner at the threshold itself to approach the lower court, with one of them observing that the delay in issuing notice and hearing the matter at length resulted only in prolonging his incarceration.

Unrealistic outlook

India's efforts at peacemaking between Russia, Ukraine have limited potential

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval's visit to Russia had outcomes of potential bilateral and geopolitical consequence. At the meet of high-level security officials of the BRICS grouping, his one-on-one meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Chinese Foreign Minister and senior Chinese Communist Party Politburo official Wang Yi were in the spotlight as well. The meet of BRICS NSAs came ahead of the BRICS summit in October which will bring Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and the leaders of Brazil, South Africa, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia together for the first time since the grouping was expanded in 2023. The Doval-Wang meeting was no less important, given that the two high-level officials were meeting in the wake of intensified India-China contact to resolve the four-year-old military standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Their decision to “redouble their efforts” with “urgency” to complete disengagement along the LAC indicates that they hope to make progress in time before a possible Modi-Xi meet at the BRICS summit. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's comment that 75% of the disengagement has been completed seems to point to the government's determination to cease hostilities with China, albeit not one that would actually see a reversion to the situation at the LAC prior to 2020. Finally, there was Mr. Doval's meeting with Mr. Putin, which was a rare protocol exception. Mr. Doval's comments, that he had been sent by Mr. Modi to brief Mr. Putin “personally” about the Modi Ukraine visit could mean that India is essaying a more mediatory role in peacemaking.

If the government is indeed serious about such a role, it must be clear about what it entails. While officials have frequently said India has “conveyed messages” between Russia, Ukraine, and western countries during the war, mediating will require India to expend considerable goodwill, time and patience to achieve results. Türkiye, Indonesia and Hungary have been speaking to both sides since the 2022 invasion, and there are now many peace proposals from Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Mr. Putin, the Bürgenstock Communiqué, and even a six-point proposal by Brazil and China. The conflict is far from stable with ominous signs of an escalation including Ukraine's invasion of Kursk, Russian missile strikes, and Mr. Zelenskyy's persistent demand to be allowed to carry out long-range strikes on Russia using American and British hardware. Mr. Modi's travel to the U.S. this month for UN meetings, the Quad Summit and another meeting with Mr. Zelenskyy possibly, followed by his visit to Russia for the BRICS summit will carry much responsibility, but India's efforts at peacemaking must not be over-burdened by unrealistic expectations.

Imagine a summer evening in the United Kingdom, right before the Brexit referendum. Social media was flooded with posts and advertisements, each one more eye-catching than the other. But among these, a campaign called ‘Leave.EU’ began to stand out. The messages played on fears, hopes, and a sense of lost identity. ‘Leave.EU’ harnessed digital platforms to target individuals with calculated and data-driven content, shaping their perceptions and pushing them towards voting to leave the European Union.

Today, as we look back at the Brexit referendum, it serves as a potent reminder of how the structure of democracy is increasingly being defined by technology. Digital platforms, once seen as great equalisers that empowered the masses and amplified previously unheard voices, have become a double-edged sword. We see a similar trend in India where digital campaigns are now central to electoral strategies not only by national parties but even by regional parties. The same tools that can empower voters can also distort public discourse, as shown by the growing use of digital political advertisements by political parties. This was highlighted by the Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) studies on digital campaigns during the 18th election to the Lok Sabha (April–June 2024).

The economics

The expenditure reports from the 2023 Karnataka Assembly election clearly illustrate the translation of economic power into digital influence. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spent ₹7,800 lakh on digital advertisements, which is 52% of its total “party propaganda” budget. The Indian National Congress, on the other hand, spent ₹4,900 lakh, which is 55% of its total “party propaganda” budget. Conventional tools of publicity or propaganda such as flags, billboards, public meetings, and rallies, made up only 16% of the BJP's and 7% of the Congress's total propaganda spending. This shows a strategic shift toward digital platforms in the electoral strategies of political parties. Further underscoring this trend, the BJP became the first Indian political party to spend over ₹16 crore on Google ads in just five months, from January 2024. During the 2024 general election period from April 19 to June 1, 89,000 advertisements posted by the BJP were running on Google, on which more than ₹68 crore was spent. In contrast, 2,900 advertisements posted by the Congress were running during the same period, on which over ₹33 crore was spent.

An additional layer to this digital strategy is the use of micro-targeting, based on location, with parties reaching specific audiences all the way down to the panchayat level in each



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This new frontier in political campaigning marks a transformative shift in the democratic process, but the rulebook remains stuck in the past

advertisement. The BJP, for instance, was found to micro-target more than 1,700 pin codes in a single advertisement, demonstrating the profound capability of digital platforms in shaping electoral narratives with precision. This new frontier in political campaigning, where financial resources translate directly into targeted digital influence, marks a transformative shift in the democratic process.

The narrative

While the financial clout of major political parties is well documented, a more insidious force, or third-party campaigners, operates in the background. Although the information on Google Ads expenditure is publicly accessible, there is another ship at play, one not merely loaded with funds but armed with a potent mix of influence and manipulation – quietly anchored at the “offshore islands of parties,” and far from scrutiny and oversight. These ‘offshore islands’ represent third-party campaigners, a new phenomenon in Indian elections.

Another study conducted by the Lokniti-CSDS, analysing 31 third-party campaigners on Meta, showed that these entities spent over ₹2,260 lakh in just 90 days leading up to June 29, 2024. This brings up important questions about the motivations behind such substantial financial outlays. What makes these groups spend so much money on campaigns for certain parties or candidates? The *modus operandi* of these campaigners suggests a possible and covert *quid pro quo* with political parties, where the parties might be pulling the strings from behind.

Moreover, the content propagated by these campaigners is often more alarming than the money they spend on it. The study found that third-party campaigners also resorted to using Islamophobic language and derogatory slurs in their political advertisements. This contrasts sharply with the content of political advertisements posted by the official parties on Google, which, while critical, generally refrained from such inflammatory rhetoric. The proliferation of such content by third-party actors not only distorts the democratic discourse but also raises ethical and regulatory questions about the role of these entities in electoral processes. These entities blur the fine line between persuasion and manipulation, casting a shadow over the integrity of democratic engagement.

This discussion points to three major issues that are emerging in the realm of digital campaigning that demand urgent attention: regulation of expenditure; content oversight, and the challenges posed by platformisation. First, the disparity in financial resources among political parties is manifested by their digital advertisement spending, particularly on platforms such as Google. Wealthier parties can

dominate the digital landscape, creating an uneven playing field for existing and emerging players. This highlights the urgent need for ‘segmented caps’ on party expenditure, which would not only limit overall spending but also ensure balanced allocation across various campaign categories, such as digital campaigns and rallies..

Second, content regulation is brought into focus by the role of third-party campaigners. There must be strict expenditure reporting requirements for these non-contestants, similar to practices in the United Kingdom and Canada. Additionally, an independent agency should conduct an audit of their content after each election cycle to balance the right to free speech with the need for effective oversight. This audit would go beyond the current role of the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC), which has proven to be less than ideal.

Lastly, platformisation has led to varied content strategies across digital platforms. For instance, on Google, political advertisements by parties and third-party campaigners typically avoid overtly derogatory content, and there was no significant spending by third-party campaigners. In contrast, on Meta, a large number of third-party campaigners were among the top spenders, often featuring inflammatory or problematic content in their political advertisements. This disparity highlights the need for uniform, harmonised regulatory frameworks to tackle problematic digital content across platforms, which will also ensure that all tech giants are held to the same standards of accountability.

Need for reforms

In the digital age, the rules of the game have changed, but the rulebook remains stuck in the past, leaving regulatory loopholes and shortcomings. The task before us is to navigate this complex terrain, ensuring that technology serves to enhance, rather than erode, the democratic ideals that we hold dear. This can only be achieved through comprehensive studies in India's context, particularly in the emerging field of digital campaigning. To come up with robust solutions, we must move beyond the constraints of traditional political theories and build a body of literature that unravels the layers of the digital realm.

International Day of Democracy, celebrated globally on September 15 each year, has passed, but it is crucial to push for reforms that expand the definition of rule of law to encompass the digital realm. This expansion can ultimately bring the value of delight to our democracy by forging effective regulations in the domain of the digital.

The views expressed are personal

A human touch to India's mineral ecosystem

In the year 2014, the higher judiciary turned the spotlight on the allotment of coal blocks with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's report of 2012 focusing on the allocation of coal blocks between 2004 and 2009.

In 2015, the Narendra Modi government amended the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act mandating auctions. As a part of the Bill, the government created a new body in the form of a District Mineral Foundation (DMF) where licensees and leaseholders pay the DMF a certain amount of the royalty. This was driven by the Prime Minister's firm belief that local communities are the key stakeholders in the nation's natural resource-led development.

A transformation

Today, ten years later, the DMF has received a corpus of almost ₹1 lakh crore through which decentralised community-centric development works are carried out in mining affected districts. The journey from huge losses in crores to the national exchequer to an almost ₹1 lakh crore corpus in the DMF is a transformation worth narrating. September 16 is District Mineral Foundation Day as the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) scheme enters its tenth year. Today, the DMFs have resulted in three lakh projects being sanctioned across 645 districts in 23 States, transforming mineral wealth into a lifeline for development in mining affected regions. The objective in the PMKKKY is to implement developmental and welfare projects/programmes in mining affected areas alongside existing schemes/projects of State and central governments; minimising the impacts of mining on the people in mining districts and ensuring that those affected have long-term sustainable livelihoods.

At a recent DMF Gallery launch in New Delhi, I had the privilege of meeting some talented women from self-help groups set up by DMFs in Odisha. These women were not just artisans but



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Each District Mineral Foundation embodies cooperative federalism and is an example of how economic growth is being balanced with local welfare and rights

were also entrepreneurs in the making. In Katni, Madhya Pradesh, DMFs are helping young minds master drone technology. Many have landed jobs and others are gearing up for new opportunities.

In India's rapidly evolving mining landscape, where we have just launched the National Critical Minerals Mission to secure our footing in strategic and critical minerals and are expanding our global footprint through our international public sector unit, Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL), DMFs complement this goal through the welfare of the local communities in mining areas. DMFs institutionalise this strategy by making State governments active partners and stand as a veritable picture of the philosophy of ‘*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas Sabka Prayas*’.

With a District Collector at the helm, funds flow to where the needs are greatest. The ‘National DMF Portal’ digitises the administration and the oversight of DMFs across India, enabling greater transparency and efficiency in operations. DMFs are not only spearheading national priorities but also supplementing efforts of the district administration in improving the socio-economic and human development indicators of the region.

Innovation at every DMF

It is also interesting to note how every DMF is innovating to maximise the impact of the initiatives and devising strategies to address unique challenges and needs. For instance, some DMFs are ensuring inclusivity by including elected representatives in the governing bodies while some have non-elected members of gram sabhas as well. Some DMFs have also adopted measures such as establishing a dedicated engineering department and deputing personnel from the State Public Works Department to ensure the efficient implementation of projects.

Ensuring a well-planned outlook, DMFs are also chalking out a three-year-plan to ensure targeted goal achievement. After studying these

various models, our aim now is to ensure that such best practices are standardised across all DMFs without taking away the local context and knowledge that resides within the district. These efforts will ensure that DMFs take up long-term and well-planned projects while avoiding the earlier fragmented approach.

To further integrate DMFs operations, we are encouraging district administrations to dovetail the activities and goals of the DMFs with ongoing central and State schemes in aspirational districts and supplement efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We are also aiming to use DMFs to augment the livelihood of forest dwellers by taking up projects in the plantation, collection and processing of medicinal herbs. The DMFs will also identify and nurture rural athletes while developing sports infrastructure and facilities. DMFs, in short, can be seen as microcosms of the government's ‘whole of government’ approach, and will continue to be leveraged to reach out to the impacted communities

Advantage of convergence

The DMFs are a fine example of cooperative federalism and have the unique advantage of converging central and State schemes. Aligning goals and resources at three levels of governance ensures that national priorities meet local needs and amplify the impact and reach. Moving forward with a ‘whole of government’ approach, DMFs are becoming powerful tools for truly inclusive governance, reaching every corner of the nation. By tapping into India's mineral wealth, these initiatives are transforming historically underserved regions, turning natural resources into drivers of local development. Beyond just empowering marginalised communities, India is reshaping how the world thinks about resource management, setting an example of how nations must balance economic growth with social welfare and rights.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's about Hindi again

The question of the imposition of Hindi often crops up because of the unbridled enthusiasm of the present government to push for the adoption of Hindi as a sole language for administration and communication. The government's duplicity as far as the other languages of India are concerned is there for all to see. To have

the Union Home Minister say with pride that “Hindi should be generally accepted as the language of work with consensus” contradicts the provisions of the Official Languages Act on the continuation of English and the subject of the non-Hindi speaker. Why this contradiction and posturing?

V. Padmanabhan, Bengaluru

Buch's ‘investments’

A critical question that arises out of the ‘decision’ by SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch to “invest in Chinese funds” (‘Business’ page, September 15) is about whether it was a strategic financial decision or just a geopolitical one. The idea behind diversification is in reducing the risks associated with investing.

However, the allegation that the Congress party has levelled raises more questions.

Garima Singh, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Focus on jute

It is apt to popularise replacing plastic with jute as packaging material, especially as India has emerged as the ‘world's top plastic polluter’. The

government should be firm in making it mandatory to use jute, except where plastic is not replaceable. The quality of jute produced in Assam is good and has some ideal properties (‘In Frames: Jute — the golden fibre’, September 15).

Devashis Bose, Chabua, Assam

Comments on GST

An innocuous comment by

a renowned businessman and hotelier based in Coimbatore to put the issue of GST in perspective has been taken to be ‘offensive’. It is shocking that the comments made by the gentleman were not taken in the right perspective as is expected in a democracy. What is wrong with Indian democracy?

T. Mohan, Chennai

Realising the rural-urban continuum

This century is supposed to be India's urban century due not only to massive demographic shifts, with the country soon becoming more urban than rural, but also to the demand for the infrastructure required to support these large shifts. These demographic changes are occurring in Tier II and Tier III cities, as well as the peripheries of major urban centres and urban agglomerations. India addresses challenges by viewing them as either rural or urban; it needs to instead look at them as part of an urban-rural continuum.

Current policy framework
There has been an over-centralisation of finances in recent times. Financial decentralisation, which provides autonomy to local bodies, has been compromised. The 13th Finance Commission pointed out this issue by mentioning how local bodies were getting “asphyxiated”.
Some of these financial constraints arise from the tied nature of grants linked to centrally sponsored schemes and even financial devolution. For example, the rise in property tax in cities should be commensurate with the rise in the State Goods and Services Tax. If there is no linkage, most towns are at risk of losing tied money grants, which have increased relative to untied grants over the years.
Flagship programmes such as the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), launched by successive National Democratic Alliance governments at the Centre, miss the urban-rural continuum. As far as urban infrastructure for liquid waste management is concerned, funding is proposed under AMRUT, which initially covered 500 cities but has now been extended to all statutory towns. However, these towns account for only a portion of the urban population. Many people live in



Tikender Singh Panwar

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census towns (with a minimum population of 5,000) and in the more than 23,000 urban villages. These areas are contiguous, with census towns adjoining statutory towns, and urban villages accommodating large numbers of migrant and informal workers. When urban infrastructure for liquid waste, such as sewage treatment plants, is designed, and funding is sought under AMRUT, these contiguous areas do not qualify for funding. The waste flow in cities and peri-urban areas does not adhere to urban-rural nomenclature, yet the planning process is obsessed with it. This issue has been a challenge for many States, particularly Kerala. NITI Aayog has pointed out that 90% of Kerala is urban. In such a situation, AMRUT grants cannot be utilised to create infrastructure.
AMRUT also does not support solid waste management infrastructure in urban areas. This falls under the Swachh Bharat Mission, which is now Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0. The goals of the Mission are twofold. For Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban, the aim is to go beyond being open defecation-free to focusing on making urban India garbage-free and proposing sustainable solutions and practices for waste management. Similarly, Swachh Bharat Mission-Rural focuses on maintaining the open defecation-free status, managing solid and liquid waste in rural India, and constructing household toilets. It also addresses liquid waste management, which Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban does; however, treatment plants by the two cannot be built jointly.
Both these programmes, run by the Government of India, aim for nearly the same outcomes, so realising these through imaginative practices could yield better results. Solid waste management plants in peri-urban and urban areas could be designed collaboratively at the district or regional levels. Such liberty and autonomy will pave the way for better urban

India sees challenges as either rural or urban; instead, it needs to address them as part of a continuum

governance, rather than implementing programmes and projects from a centralised perspective.
Governance models
In this context, the the framework established by the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments needs to be revisited and strengthened. It appears that three decades ago, there was more imaginative thinking in addressing such challenges than there is now. Under this framework, District Planning Committees comprising the Zila Panchayats and urban local bodies need to be strengthened and mobilised. While the intended governance model envisioned the district bureaucracy being subordinate to the District Planning Committees, at present, in most States, the District Planning Committees have become appendages of the district bureaucracy. Stronger District Planning Committees can help address the challenge of a urban-rural continuum.
During a conversation with the Minister for Local Self-Governments in Kerala, I learned that a proposed solid waste landfill site in the periphery of a town had to be withdrawn due to public pressure. This was possible only because both rural and urban local bodies fall under the same Ministry. In other States, this would have taken much longer.
Thus, the urban and rural continuum in rapidly expanding urban areas needs urgent interventions at both the infrastructure and governance levels. The previous models of separate urban and rural local bodies need to be updated in today's India, which is fast becoming urban. We need to question why finances and resources are provided in such a compartmentalised manner to urban and rural India, when the lines between the two are blurred. There must at least be some liberty in imaginatively designing plans in a joint manner.

A hard nut to crack

The areca growers in Karnataka are facing a series of problems

STATE OF PLAY

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Areca growers in Karnataka experienced a rude shock recently when traders in north India rejected truckloads of their produce, citing poor quality. This hit the areca price in the market by nearly ₹10,000 per quintal. The growers, who were expecting returns up to ₹58,000 per quintal, are now selling their produce for around ₹47,000 per quintal.
Karnataka is the largest areca-growing State. The demand for nuts, particularly from the hilly Malnad region, is traditionally highest in north India, particularly in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. The agriculture economy of many districts in the Malnad region and central Karnataka depend on areca cultivation.
When the produce was rejected, co-operative bodies of areca marketing in the Malnad region appealed to both the growers and traders to prioritise quality. The rejections have led to a war of words between the growers and traders. The growers blame the traders. They allege that the traders mix different varieties of nuts and send loads of these to buyers in north India in the hope of higher returns.
Areca nuts are categorised as Nuli, Hasa, Rashi, Bette and Gorabalu depending on their look and feel, the experience of biting into them, their aroma, and so on. Nuli and Hasa are top quality nuts and are highly valued. Gorablu is of inferior quality.
According to marketing bodies, a few traders mixed Gorablu with Rashi and Bette. A truckload normally consists of 330 bags of nuts, each weigh-

ing some 70 kg. Farmers allege that traders mixed around 100 bags of Gorablu nuts with Rashi to make quick money.
As several truckloads of nuts have been rejected in recent months, the demand for areca nuts fell and the prices crashed. The growers maintain that they are suffering for no fault of theirs: they sell their produce to middleman, who in turn make a deal with traders. They allege that low quality nuts were mixed with better quality ones after the nuts were sold to middlemen. Meanwhile, according to the traders, a handful of farmers have begun using chemicals during the processing of nuts to enhance the look and feel of inferior-quality nuts. Processing involves removing the husk and boiling the kernels. While a majority of growers follow the traditional method of processing that does not involve chemicals, the traders say some have, which has landed them in trouble during quality checks.
While these issues are being sorted out by local authorities, a section of growers believes that there is a larger reason why the nuts from Karnataka were rejected. They believe that inferior-quality areca is being illegally imported from Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and other countries. The farmers have demanded that this stop. Office bearers at the Shivamogga district areca growers' association say the

Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court as well as Assam High Court have taken note of these illegal imports and the Centre should act to stop it.
The issue of produce being rejected is only the latest in a series of problems that the areca growers are facing. In recent years, areca cultivation has been badly hit by fruit rot and yellow leaf disease. This year, following heavy rains in July and August, nearly 40% of the total areca plantation in Shivamogga district was affected by fungal disease. The situation in other areca growing areas is no better. The infection reduces the yield substantially, causing a huge loss to the farmers. The growers have been following the advice of experts from the Horticulture Department and scientists and are desperately trying to protect their palms from the disease.
Vast tracts of areca plantations in Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga, and Uttara Kannada districts have already been hit by yellow leaf disease. The yield in these plantations has come down by nearly 90%. A team of scientists from ICAR-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute at Kasargod, Kerala, visited the farms in Malnad region to examine them. Despite a series of protests and demands by the planters, no solution has been offered to them. Many growers, particularly those in the traditionally areca-growing regions of Thirthahalli, Hosanagara and Sagar in Shivamogga district and Sringeri, N.R. Pura, and Koppa in Chikkamagaluru district, are even moving to bigger cities, abandoning their farms. While some of these problems require detailed research, the traders and growers need to work together to solve the immediate problem of a drop in demand.

The wind behind the Congress' sails in Haryana

Major accrual in the Dalit vote in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls gives the Congress a fillip

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan Srinivasan Ramani

In the run-up to the Haryana Assembly elections, which are scheduled to be held on October 5, we look at recent electoral contests in the State.
Haryana has been governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014. In recent elections, the State has followed a pattern corresponding to the nature of the contest – Assembly or parliamentary.
In the Lok Sabha elections held in 2019 and 2024, the contests in the Assembly segments were largely bipolar (**Table 1**) and mostly between the BJP and the Congress (**Table 2B**).
The BJP won 58.2% of the popular vote in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The high level of support for the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in Haryana was well in line with the vote shares that the party and its allies gained in the Hindi heartland (53.88% and 196 wins in 225 seats). The BJP led in 79 Assembly segments out of the 90 (88%) in Haryana (**Table 2A**).
However, in the Assembly elections held less than five months later, the BJP's vote share dropped to 36.5%. The Congress was not a beneficiary of the drop in vote share; the beneficiaries were regional parties such as the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), among others. They garnered the bulk of the remaining 21.7% points, helping them win 35.4% of the votes. Seat-wise, the BJP had to be satisfied with only 40 seats and had to be dependent on the support of the JJP to run the government.
Much water has flowed under the bridge in the last five years. The JJP is no longer in an alliance with the BJP. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the contest was back to being largely bipolar (**Table 1**). The votes of the regional parties

and others were limited to only 10.2%, a fall from 13.3% in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and a significant drop from 35.4% in the 2019 Assembly polls. The beneficiaries of the drop in vote shares were both the BJP and the Congress (an increase of 9.6 points and 15.6 points, respectively) in comparison to the 2019 Assembly elections. In seat terms, the national parties won five each in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.
The Congress's vote share (43.7%) was the party's best showing since the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, when the party won 46.1% of the votes, and the 2005 Assembly elections when the party garnered 42.5% of the votes. A significant increase in the votes it received in seats reserved for Dalits – a whopping 51.7% (**Table 4**) – helped the party dramatically increase its vote share. For the first time since 2014, the Congress gained a lead over the BJP in Scheduled Caste reserved seats.
That the Congress is hopeful of a wind behind its sails in the 2024 Assembly polls is understandable as **Table 3A and Table 3B** show – the party led by a margin of over 25% votes in 27% of the Assembly segments in the Lok Sabha elections in contrast to the BJP's corresponding number falling to only 9.1% (from 58.2% in 2019).
Both the JJP and the INLD depend on the support of the agricultural Jat community. The BJP in its choice of Chief Ministers during the decade-long rule – Manohar Lal Khattar and later, Nayab Singh Saini – has sought to consolidate the non-Jat Other Backward Classes vote while the Congress, under the leadership of Bhupender Hooda, expects to make a dent in the Jat vote bank as well.
If the Congress retains the Dalit support base that it received in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, it could make a splash in the upcoming Assembly elections as well.
We will take a closer look into these variables in forthcoming Data Points.

A two horse race

The data for the charts were sourced from the Election Commission of India and Ashoka University



Gearing up for a fight: The Congress candidate from Julana Assembly constituency, Vinesh Phogat, seeks blessings before filing her nomination papers for Haryana Assembly elections. PTI

In the tables, GE: General Election, AE: Assembly election

Table 1: The table shows the % of seats across various levels of competitiveness in Haryana over the years

Election	Uncompetitive	Bipolar	Triangular	Four cornered	Fragmented
2014 GE		22.2%	52.2%	25.6%	
2014 AE		7.8%	37.8%	41.1%	13.3%
2019 GE		73.3%	25.6%	1.1%	
2019 AE		14.3%	51.6%	26.4%	7.7%
2024 GE	1.1%	83.3%	15.6%		

Table 2A: The seat share (in %) of various parties in Haryana. For general elections, the share denotes the % of Assembly segments in which a party led

Election	BJP	INC	Others
2014 GE	57.8%	16.7%	25.6%
2014 AE	52.2%	16.7%	31.1%
2019 GE	87.8%	11.1%	1.1%
2019 AE	44.4%	34.4%	21.1%
2024 GE	48.9%	45.6%	5.6%

Table 2B: The vote share (in %) of various parties in Haryana

Election	BJP	INC	Others
2014 GE	34.8%	23.0%	42.2%
2014 AE	33.2%	20.6%	46.2%
2019 GE	58.2%	28.5%	13.3%
2019 AE	36.5%	28.1%	35.4%
2024 GE	46.1%	43.7%	10.2%

Table 3A: The table shows the share of seats (in %) won by the BJP across various vote margins in Haryana over time

Election	Vote margin in %				Share of seats won
	<=5%	5%-15%	15%-25%	>25%	
2014 GE	9.6%	15.4%	34.6%	40.4%	↓
2014 AE	29.8%	19.1%	36.2%	14.9%	
2019 GE	3.8%	11.4%	26.6%	58.2%	
2019 AE	27.5%	35.0%	30.0%	7.5%	
2024 GE	25.0%	31.8%	34.1%	9.1%	

Table 3B: The share of seats (in %) won by the INC across various vote margins in Haryana over the years

Election	Vote margin in %				Share of seats won
	<=5%	5%-15%	15%-25%	>25%	
2014 GE	26.7%	40.0%	26.7%	6.7%	↓
2014 AE	46.7%	33.3%	13.3%	6.7%	
2019 GE	10.0%	40.0%	10.0%	40.0%	
2019 AE	41.9%	38.7%	16.1%	3.2%	
2024 GE	22.0%	17.1%	34.1%	26.8%	

Table 4: The constituency-type wise vote share (in %) of the BJP and the INC

Election	BJP		INC	
	General	SC	General	SC
2014 GE	37.6	24.5	21.9	32.8
2014 AE	33.1	33.6	22.6	24.5
2019 GE	59.0	54.4	28.0	30.1
2019 AE	37.2	33.4	28.7	27.3
2024 GE	47.7	40.0	41.6	51.7

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 16, 1974

Gujral rules out radio licence fee abolition

Trivandrum, Sept. 15: There was no proposal now to abolish licence fees for radio sets because of the financial stringency, Mr. L.K. Gujral, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, said at a “Meet the Press” programme in the Trivandrum station of AIR to-day.
Pointing out that rural areas did not have more than 10 to 15 per cent of the total number of 1.5. crore licensed radio sets, he said this situation could perhaps be improved by abolishing licence fees for radio sets in those areas. But the more important thing would be to make available low-cost radio sets.
He said radio coverage had improved now to 90 per cent of the areas and 93 per cent of the population of the country from 67.6 per cent of the area and 56.6 per cent of the population at the beginning of the Fourth Plan. It was proposed to set up two transmitters as also studios in Lakshadweep. The areas left uncovered were broader areas and socially depressed areas.
He said commercial services would be started from the Trivandrum and Calicut stations in a couple of months.
On absorbing casual artistes into regular service, Mr. Gujral said he was personally against having two parallel services and in favour of a merger. But the leaders of their union were not for it. He said he was taking up the question of extending the pension benefit to these artistes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 16, 1924

Coimbatore water supply

Coimbatore, Sept. 14: The following Government order on the Coimbatore water supply scheme is issued: The revised estimate forwarded by the Sanitary Engineer for the supply of water to Coimbatore town with Siruvani River as the source of supply amounting to Rs. 41 lakhs are administratively approved. The estimate provide for the purchase in India of cast iron pipes of the British standard specification. The plans and estimates drawn up for the purpose are forwarded to the Public Works Department for technical sanction.
The Government are prepared to make a grant of half the cost not exceeding 20.5 lakhs and the Council will have to find the other half.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of prisoners of war swapped by Ukraine and Russia

206 Moscow and Kyiv swapped 103 prisoners of war each in a UAE-brokered deal. Russia and Ukraine have managed to swap hundreds of prisoners throughout the conflict — often in deals brokered by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey. AFP

Death toll in Myanmar in wake of Typhoon Yagi rises

113 The death toll in Myanmar in the wake of Typhoon Yagi jumped to 113 and more than 3,20,000 people have been displaced. Myanmar experiences extreme weather virtually every year during the monsoon season. In 2008, Cyclone Nargis killed more than 1,38,000 people.

Amount U.S. lenders say edtech firm Byju's has to pay

1.2 in \$ billion. U.S. lenders represented have countered Byju's founder Byju Raveendran's claim on verified debt on the company being merely around ₹20 crore, and have said that the edtech firm will have to pay the entire \$1.2 billion Term Loan B along with interest. PTI

Amount FPIs infused in equities in September so far

27,856 in ₹ crore. Foreign investors have infused ₹27,856 crore in domestic equities this month, due to the resilience of the Indian market and the potential interest rate cut in the U.S. FPIs have been consistently buying equities since June. PTI

Years of potential prison sentence Italy's Salvini faces

6 Italian prosecutors on Saturday requested a six-year prison sentence for right-wing League leader Matteo Salvini for his decision to prevent more than 100 migrants from landing in Italy when he was Interior Minister in 2019. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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A crucial election in Sri Lanka

Why is the upcoming election on September 21 significant for Sri Lanka? How has the political landscape in Sri Lanka changed in recent years, especially after former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was ousted mid-term during the island's economic crisis? Who are the leading candidates in the presidential election?

EXPLAINER

Meera Srinivasan

The story so far:

Sri Lanka will go to the polls on September 21 and the campaign has intensified with barely a week left. The election marks the first opportunity citizens will have to choose their leader, after they ousted former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, at the height of a crushing economic downturn two years ago. The crisis, which triggered unprecedented mass protests, was the worst the island nation has seen since Independence in 1948. Besides booting out Mr. Gotabaya, the *Janatha Aragalaya* (Sinhala term for people's struggle) sought to shake up the country's establishment with a loud cry for "system change". After Mr. Gotabaya fled the country and quit office, senior politician Ranil Wickremesinghe took his place through a parliamentary vote that he won with the support of the Rajapaksas' party, which still holds a majority in the legislature.

Why is this election significant?

It is the first poll to be held since the dramatic downturn of 2022 that saw citizens queuing up for fuel, gas, and medicines while contending with long power cuts. Elections to the country's local government bodies, which were due last year, were postponed due to a "lack of funds," while provincial council polls stand indefinitely postponed.

What is different?

Sri Lanka's political and electoral landscape has seen significant reconfiguration over the last few years. The once formidable Rajapaksas, who dominated the country's politics for nearly two decades, are out of focus this election. The country's two traditional parties — the centre-left Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the centre-right United National Party (UNP) — have been decimated, and now exist only in their rump, remnants, and records of history. Their breakaway formations have sought to detach themselves from the parent parties while drawing from their bases. Outside the SLFP-UNP domain, the National People's Power Alliance (NPP), led by the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP or People's Liberation Front), has emerged as a prominent third front challenging the old political order. In contrast to previous presidential elections, which were marked by a bipolar political contest, next weekend's poll is principally a three-cornered race.

Who are the frontrunners?

A record 39 presidential aspirants filed nominations for the September 21 election. One passed away and 38 are still in the race. Of these, incumbent Mr. Wickremesinghe, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, and yet another Opposition politician Anura Kumara Dissanayake are seen to be in the lead.

Which political camps do they represent?

Although President Wickremesinghe was backed by the Rajapaksas' Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP or People's Front that the Rajapaksas carved out of the SLFP they were originally part of) during the last two years, and still leads the UNP, he is running as an independent candidate. Mr. Premadasa is contesting from the main Opposition party, the *Samagi Jana Balawegaya* (SJB or United People's Front that broke away from the UNP). Mr.

With a three-cornered race and a complex preferential voting system, no candidate is expected to easily secure a majority

Race for change

A candidate must secure **more than 50%** of the total votes to be declared the winner.

The divided support base makes it challenging for any single candidate to secure a majority of over **50%**

If no candidate achieves a majority, a second round of counting will determine the winner based on the preferential votes of the **top two candidates**

Sri Lanka uses a preferential voting system, allowing voters to select up to three choices for presidential candidates on the ballot.

Election spirit: Sri Lanka is set to hold a crucial election on September 21, marking a pivotal moment in the country's political landscape. AFP

Dissanayake has been fielded by the NPP. The Alliance is a broad social coalition whose chief constituent is the JVP, a party with Marxist-Leninist origins that has led two armed insurrections of Sinhalese youth against the state in the 1970s and 1980s.

Additionally, Namal Rajapaksa, Hambantota legislator and son of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa is running from the SLPP.

What are they pitching?

Mr. Wickremesinghe, 75, is campaigning on a plank of "stability". With a poll slogan "We can, Sri Lanka", he is seeking a mandate to continue his government's economic reform agenda, crafted to meet targets set by an International Monetary Fund programme. He claims credit for setting the bankrupt country on a path of recovery over the last two years. Mr. Premadasa, 57, promises to build a resilient economy in which the fruits of development will reach all citizens while enhancing educational opportunities and governance with digital aids. The former deputy leader of the UNP accuses his former boss and current rival Mr. Wickremesinghe of siding with and protecting the Rajapaksas. Mr. Premadasa says his presidency will be a "win for all". Mr. Dissanayake, 55, is promising change by "weeding out corruption" and eliminating the old political culture enabling it. He blames the country's political elite, who held power since Independence, for its downfall, and assures he can fix it through a "national liberation movement" of the people. He says his leadership will build a "thriving nation and a beautiful life".

How is the winner decided?

Sri Lanka follows a preferential voting system in which voters can mark up to three preferences against the names of the presidential aspirants listed on the ballot. A candidate must secure 50% plus one vote to be declared winner. If no candidate garners the majority vote share, a second count of votes will be

used to pick the winner. The preferential votes received by the top two candidates will be factored in and the contestant who gets the highest number of votes will be named winner. Around 17 million voters, from Sri Lanka's 22 million-strong population, are registered to vote in this election.

What are the leading candidates' chances?

A three-cornered race within a fragmented electorate makes it challenging for any candidate to secure more than 50% of the vote. After a devastating economic crisis, the electoral appeal of the top three candidates rests on whether their messages speak to the concerns of common people, who are still struggling to cope with the high cost of living and their drastically altered lifestyles, marked by fewer meals or less nutrition in many cases. In addition to the vote of Sinhalese, who make up nearly 75 % of the population, the voting pattern of the island's ethnic minorities, such as the Tamils of the north, and east; the Malaiyaha Tamils from the hill country; and the Muslims, will decide the winner.

How will the minorities vote?

It is hard to say since the Tamil and Muslim political landscape is also more fragmented than before. In past elections, Tamils of the north and east consistently voted as a bloc against the Rajapaksas, who are accused of grave human rights violations during and after the war. In this election, however, there is no Rajapaksa contesting to win. Mr. Namal's last-minute candidacy is seen more as an effort to consolidate the party after many of its members decided to back Mr. Wickremesinghe. Tamils residing in the island's north and east appear torn between choosing one of the frontrunners, or a Tamil candidate fielded by some Tamil parties and civil society groups. It is their protest against the past failures of the southern leadership on justice, accountability, power sharing, and post-war economic

development. Tamil voters' dilemma is also linked to their own political leadership being deeply divided on the presidential election and several other questions of policy and governance.

While the prominent Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) is backing Mr. Premadasa, many other groups and politicians, including some within the ITAK, are canvassing for the "common Tamil candidate", even as some others are calling for a boycott of the polls.

Political representatives of the Malaiyaha Tamils are mostly backing Mr. Wickremesinghe or Mr. Premadasa. Workers on the tea and rubber estates — whose Indian ancestors were brought down by the British two centuries ago to work on plantations in Sri Lanka — are looking for relief after being severely hit by the crisis and its aftermath. They are also demanding housing and land rights that have been historically denied to them.

Although key Muslim leaders are part of Mr. Premadasa's alliance, the community which lives across Sri Lanka, is voicing diverse political views. This election is unlikely to see a bloc vote from the minorities.

What are the challenges ahead?

The new President's job will be far from easy. Sri Lanka is in the process of firming up its debt treatment plan with its creditors and still has a long way to go before meaningful economic recovery. Ordinary Sri Lankans are reeling under the impact of the crisis. As real incomes fall and joblessness grows, scores of citizens are desperately looking for jobs abroad. Further, Sri Lanka's general election is also due soon. The country's executive President will need the legislature's support for his — there is no women candidate running this time — policies moving forward. No leading contestant can be certain about securing a parliamentary majority in a highly divided legislature. The road ahead for Sri Lanka looks both bumpy and uncertain at this point.

THE GIST

Sri Lanka's election on September 21 is the first since the ousting of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa during a severe economic crisis two years ago.

The crisis, marked by shortages of fuel, gas, and medicines, along with power cuts, triggered massive protests and the call for systemic political change.

The dominance of the Rajapaksas has faded, and traditional parties like the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the United National Party have weakened.

Tamils and Muslims have diverse political stances, making it difficult to predict how their votes will be distributed.

The new President will face the ongoing economic recovery, debt negotiations, and the challenge of securing parliamentary support in a likely fragmented legislature.

BUILDING BLOCKS



Tuning in: Operators prefer television and signals to be analog because the receivers are cheaper. This is why radio broadcast signals are AM or FM. GETTY IMAGES

What are AM, FM, and signal modulation?

Signal modulation, including AM, FM, and PM, is crucial for transmitting information efficiently by adjusting wave properties like amplitude, frequency, and phase; these modulation techniques help manage signal interference and enable clear communication across different technologies

T.V.Venkateswaran

When you tune in to the radio, the announcer says, “Welcome to 100.1 FM Gold” or “You are listening to Akashvani at 783 AM”. The terms ‘AM’ and ‘FM’ refer to forms of signal modulation – a method at the heart of modern long-distance communications. Signal modulation simplifies the technologies required to send and receive good-quality signals carrying information, like the news and songs on the radio.

How do we ‘measure’ waves?
Imagine a vast, quiet lake. The water is as still as a statue. At the centre of the lake is a small island of pebbles. You pick up and drop a pebble into the water. A single wave ripples across the lake, forming a circle that expands in all directions. That is: a single, short disruption triggered the release of a single wave. After the wave passed, the lake became quiet again.
If you dropped a small gravel, the resulting wave would have had a short height. If the stone had been heavier, the impact would have been more energetic and the wave would have been taller. This height is called the wave’s amplitude. A high amplitude sound wave will be louder; a high amplitude light wave will be brighter.
Dropping a stone every second will create a series of waves, traversing the surface one after another in concentric circles. If I’m sitting in a boat at some distance from the tower, and the wave strikes the boat, it will heave up and down. By measuring how much the boat is lifted, I can calculate the amplitude and from that the weight of the rock you dropped. I can also determine how frequently you drop new stones by counting how often my boat seesaws.

The number of successive crests arriving at a spot per second is the wave’s frequency, measured in hertz (Hz). One Hz equals one cycle per second. This means the Chennai Akashvani radio station produces radio waves with 783,000 crests in one second. The interval between two successive crests (or troughs) is called the wavelength, measured in metres.

What are FM and AM?
Suppose we agree to use the Morse code: two stones dropped in quick succession equals a dot (•) and a longer gap between two stones is a dash (–).
When two stones are dropped one after the other, the waves are closely spaced, resulting in a higher frequency. If we drop the pebbles with a big time gap, the frequency drops.
By monitoring the frequency of the incoming waves far from the shore, I can distinguish between • and –. And based on the series of • and –, I can decipher the message.
This technique of information communication is called frequency modulation (FM). Here, we *modulate*, or adjust, the frequency to transmit a message.
We can also agree to another code: a heavy stone indicates a • and a light stone indicates a –. To convey • – • • • • (Morse for ‘air’), you drop heavy, light, heavy, heavy, heavy, light, heavy in that order, at regular intervals. The resulting waves will have varying amplitudes: tall, short, tall, tall, tall, short, tall. I can figure out the pattern by observing how much my boat sways and decipher your message.
This is amplitude modulation (AM). You fix the frequency by dropping the stones at fixed intervals. Instead, you change the pebbles’ weight, resulting in waves of different amplitudes.

What is phase modulation?
We can have two waves with the same frequencies but different phases, meaning one wave starts slightly later than the previous one. It is like in march-past in which one set of people are out of step. So the corresponding crests (or troughs) of the waves will be slightly out of phase.
When a crest meets another crest, they combine and become more prominent. When a crest hits a trough, they cancels out. This way, out-of-phase waves can be made to stack up uniquely to produce a bigger wave.
People use the phase difference between two waves of the same frequency to encode a message.
The advantage of Phase modulation (PM) is that slight changes in the signal amplitude won’t degrade the information it carries. This is because the modulating signal is not transmitted by the amplitude of the pulses, so pulse modulation is nearly impervious to amplitude fluctuations produced by interference and noise.
This is why operators choose PM over AM or FM for crystal-clear digital transmission, such as in Wi-Fi.

What are digital and analog?
PM is unsuitable for analog radio or TV broadcasts because it’s digital. When we use AM, FM, or PM modes to transmit • and – (or 0s and 1s), we have digital transmission. When we use AM or FM to propagate composite waves, it is analog transmission. Analog signals are continuous while digital signals are discrete.
In one critical respect, water waves and electromagnetic waves – such as radio signals – differ. Water waves travel on a medium.
Electromagnetic waves consist of electrical and magnetic fields oscillating in the three spatial dimensions.

This said, an electromagnetic wave’s phase, frequency, and amplitude can communicate messages the same way waves on the surface of an ideal lake can.

How is signal modulation used?
An important advantage of modulation is that multiple signals modulated differently can travel in the same channel – like the airwaves in a city or a fibre-optic cable – without interrupting each other.
In the same vein, lightning produces radio waves that interfere with signals, resulting in static and noise. They have little influence on digital transmission thanks to modulation. This is why we have advanced communications technologies like the internet.
Operators prefer television and signals to be analog instead because analog receivers are cheaper. This is why TV and radio broadcast signals are AM or FM.

The International Telecommunication Union allocates frequency bands to different services to minimise interference and increase transmission efficiency.
AM’s frequency range, from 535 to 1,705 kHz, makes room for high wavelength signals that can pass over mountains and buildings, providing more coverage.
FM provides superior quality since it is unaffected by static. However, because its frequency range is 88-108 MHz, the waves have lower wavelengths and the transmission distance is limited to line of sight. The receiver is also more expensive.
Nonetheless, as the prices of electronic components continue to decline, the world at large is moving from analog to digital broadcasting.
T.V. Venkateswaran is a science communicator and visiting faculty member at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali

THE DAILY QUIZ

The 95th edition of the prestigious La Liga for the Spanish football clubs kicked off on 15th August. Here is a quiz on La Liga

Soorya Prakash. N

- QUESTION 1**
Which club won the inaugural season in 1929-30 and which one won the latest in 2023-24?
- QUESTION 2**
Who holds the record for having scored the most goals in La Liga history?
- QUESTION 3**
Who are the two players holding the record for the most appearances in La Liga history?
- QUESTION 4**
How many non-EU players can be named by a side for

- each match?
- QUESTION 5**
What is the name of the second division to which lowly placed clubs in La Liga are relegated?
- QUESTION 6**
Name the founding member club of La Liga that got promoted for the current season.
- QUESTION 7**
Which are the three founding clubs that have never been relegated from the prime division in La Liga history?
- QUESTION 8**
Who scored the first hat-trick in the 2024-25 season?



Visual Question
Identify this legendary player and his distinction in La Liga history. AP

- Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:** 1. Who was the Norwegian grandmamma in *Witches*, who Dahl “absolutely adored” and who was “a wonderful story-teller”, modelled on? **Ans: His mother, Sofie Magdalene**
2. What connects Dr Seuss’s *Great Day for Up!*, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bed Book*, Joan Aiken’s *Arabel’s Raven*, and Roald Dahl’s *Matilda*? **Ans: They were all illustrated by Quentin Blake**
3. Dahl’s first commissioned work was published anonymously and was based on how he crash landed a biplane. **Ans: Shot Down Over Libya**
4. Dahl adapted six of his stories for a television series. Four of the episodes were directed by a man who once made his own film twice and who filmed a psychological thriller in a series of 10-minute takes to make it look like one shot. **Ans: Alfred Hitchcock**
5. The Royal Mint rejected the idea of a commemorative coin to mark the centenary of Dahl’s birth. **Ans: They said he was anti-Semitic**
Visual: This musical fantasy, for which Dahl wrote the screenplay, is based on a children’s novel. **Ans: Chitty Chitty Bang Bang**
Early Birds: Bharath Viswanathan | Tamal Biswas | Dodo Jayaditya | Tito Shiladitya



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

His taste in books is middlebrow

We can argue about this till the cows come home

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of the expression ‘till the cows come home’? (Geetha, Chennai)
Coined by John Dunton, this idiom has been part of the English language for over three centuries. The expression has several different meanings. On most occasions, however, it is used to mean ‘for a very long time’.
The kids were having such a good time that we ended up staying at the beach till the cows came home.
The expression is sometimes changed to ‘when the cows come home’ to mean ‘never’.
The students are likely to call off the strike when the cows come home.
In most European countries, farmers milked their cows early in the morning. Once the milking had been done, the animals were taken to the nearby fields and allowed to graze all day. They were usually walked back home late in the evening – and in some cases, early next morning. Cows, unlike other farm animals, walk slowly; their unhurried pace added to the impression of it having been a long and lengthy day.

Does the word ‘middlebrow’ exist? (R Haimavathi, Nellore)
Yes, it certainly does. There are three types of ‘brows’, actually – highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow – and all three words can be used to talk about people and things. When you refer to someone as being a ‘highbrow’, what you are implying is that the individual is an intellectual – or at least, pretends to be one. Being cultured and sophisticated, he shows interest in serious subject matter. A highbrow doesn’t waste his time reading trivial publications. He likes to read about and discuss rather complicated issues. He enjoys the classics – both in terms of literature and music.
I didn’t particularly care for the novel. It was too highbrow for me.
Seema had invited too many highbrows. The party was no fun.
At the other end of the spectrum is the ‘lowbrow’. Instead of being sophisticated, he is rather crude or vulgar. He is not very intelligent, and is quite ignorant of the world around him – this individual of very little taste has very limited knowledge about various subjects. A movie or a book that is ‘lowbrow’ is one that does not require a great deal of intelligence to understand; the plot is usually simple, and the characters, black and white. Both ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ can be used to indicate disapproval.
People with lowbrow tastes will really enjoy the movie.
A middlebrow is someone of average intelligence. He is moderately cultured and enjoys both forms of entertainment – highbrow and lowbrow. A work of art that is middlebrow is of good, but not great quality. The plot is not very complex, and therefore, easy to understand. It is very traditional.
My friend is writing a novel for people with middlebrow taste.
By the way, the ‘ow’ in ‘brow’ sounds like the ‘ow’ in ‘how’, ‘cow’ and ‘now’. The words are pronounced ‘LOW-brow’, ‘HIGH-brow’ and ‘MID-el-brow’
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Callow:
young and inexperienced

Synonyms: naive, untrained, immature

Usage: Voters are fed up with callow youths.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/callowpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /kəˈləʊ/

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

OUR VIEW



Investors are watching the Fed for good reason

Global investors anticipate a rate cut by the US central bank this week, but asset values are also subject to effects of the Federal Reserve's quantitative policy and hidden risks may lurk

The odds-on bet across financial markets globally is on a rate cut this week by the US Federal Reserve, now that inflation there looks closer to its 2% target and weak job growth is in focus. A rate reduction would mark a reversal of the central bank's hiking spree that elevated America's policy rate from 0-0.25% in early 2022 to 5.25-5% by mid-2023 to quell an outbreak of inflation it mistook as transitory. It was not as drastic as the Fed's rate spike of the early 1980s, but has again shown the power of costly credit against price flare-ups. If the US suffers only a slow-down in the wake of tight money (a 'soft landing'), the Fed would've staged a fine recovery from its pandemic stumble. Note that price instability had been fading as a scare in the US after the Cold War ended, thanks to globalization's gift of cheap imports, IT-aided cost efficiency and other factors. The Fed had seen the US economy expand faster without an over-tight labour market and payroll-pushed inflation. However, by the time covid disrupted supply chains, froze activity and pushed the Fed into ultra-loose money mode, at least one of those price deflators had weakened. With the outlook so dicey, holding prices steady was no easy task, surely. It took 30 months, but to the Fed's credit, the job is mostly done.

It is time, then, for the Fed to focus on job generation, the other part of its dual mandate. While this may mark a return to its rate policy as usual, with money being squeezed and eased gently to smoothen boom-and-bust cycles, it is also a good moment to ask if other risks lurk. The Fed's assets/liabilities had more than doubled within two years to about \$8.9 trillion by April 2022. Did this mega infusion of

money inflate asset values to such frothy levels that skittish markets are inevitable? Signs abound of equity inflation, with stock tickers in a league apart from business earnings. Bull runs on the back of easy money are only to be expected. The question is how far extra dollars at play can safely go. A roaring boom of the 2000s led by low-rate lending ended in a Great Recession (2008-09) as credit risks fell victim to complexity and spun out of control, sending shudders across the US economy and forcing bank bailouts to stall domino collapses. Some regulatory safeguards were imposed in response to that crisis, while the Fed's 'helicopter' shower of rescue dollars was backed by a *mea culpa* over its failure to fend off the Great Depression (1929-39) by easing money early. A new era of quantitative easing (QE) had begun, done via bond-buying in bulk to soften long-span rates. Subsequent moves to wind it down faced market tantrums, with private profits apparently aligned with—or addicted to—its QE policy. The Fed had been shrinking its balance sheet only gingerly when the pandemic prompted its biggest ever rescue.

The Fed's policy tightening of 2022-23 is yet to fully ripple across the US economy, but it may also be too early to tell how wisely (or not) its multi-trillion stimulus was used. Since QE tends to raise moral hazard and animate risk-taking, investors hope it didn't get too heady. Last year, a few banks wobbled as rising rates hit their bond portfolios. Other cracks could surface too. As the Fed moves to reduce rates, its asset/liability path will be under investor watch. A policy of ultra-easy money isn't costless. It has widened wealth inequality, for example, and whether it'll acquit itself on financial stability is a question worth trillions.

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoupled'

Success is a gift given by friends. There is a fallacy among talented people, especially if they are young, that they can be exempt from this rule because of their immense talent. But they will find out it is not true.

Even in the arts, and other solitary professions, the origin of success is in people who like you and for that reason do not find you very threatening. No matter what your calling is, to find success, you have to be part of a tribe. For that, you have to meet them often, and for that, you have to go out and eat sugar and deep-fried food and drink ethanol in its various forms, and eat more late in the night, and sleep late, and wake up late.

A prerequisite of modern success is indulging in unhealthy behaviour. This is because a majority of people like unhealthy behaviour, even though they fear death and wish to be healthy. Their joy of life comes from the very things that can kill them. And the friends they like the most are those who live like them.

This is why there is some truth in a saying that has never died on social media, which is attributed to various celebrities: "When you upgrade your life, you lose 90% of your friends."

It was not always so. There was a time, at least in the West, when people met useful people while walking through the woods. Every time I read science history, I wait for that part where this young scientist says something to a Nobel laureate, who is impressed, and invites the young scientist for a walk through the woods. If that was still the world, a very different sort of people would have risen to the peaks of their professions.

Even today, some unhealthy behaviour is not required for success. For instance, most 'networking events' are useless because nothing that is called networking is ever networking. People of consequence usually do not attend such events. So, most networking events are actually meetings where people who can't be very useful to one another socialize.

But there is such a thing as networking, and it never appears to be that. Powerful people meet their equals on someone's sofa, talking about things that do not appear to be work, and seekers who can infiltrate such a network without looking desperate

may get somewhere. But even these meetings usually happen late at night, over drinks and sugar by its many names.

In many professions, the sudden death of someone is accompanied by laments of excessive work pressure. But a bit of this seeming 'work,' or even a big part of it, is may get somewhere. But even these meetings usually happen late at night, over drinks and sugar by its many names.

In many professions, the sudden death of someone is accompanied by laments of excessive work pressure. But a bit of this seeming 'work,' or even a big part of it, is

a sort of person who would make his bosses nervous. In India, especially, people hang around the office late even if they do no work to impress their bosses.

In European cities, a funny thing happens to people who go for a run very early in the morning. Often, at say 6am, I have run past a crowd spilling out of a pub, people who are still drinking. They avert their eyes. Maybe they are sheepish. Yet, they form a large number of people in the world. When I see them, I am reminded this is where popular culture is created, this is where future success is created, and where deep friendships are formed. And they have a monopoly over what constitutes socializing.

As the healthy sleep, in other rooms of the world, powerful bonds are forged over conversations and liquor.

One of the strange things about English is that sex is referred to as 'sleeping' with someone, while this intense aerobic activity is the exact opposite of sleep. It is an underserving tribute to the night and an omen

that the modern world is designed in such a way that all fun is expected to happen only in unhealthy ways.

As a boy, I was a direct witness to the ways of a previous generation of alcoholic journalists and artists, and I know why the alcoholic male has a lot of friends—he reassures others that he is as doomed as the rest of them. The same principle is what makes your relatives go crazy the moment you choose a very healthy diet.

There is a movement in the United States to popularize a trend of morning parties where larks dance under the influence of fresh juice. I do not expect it to succeed. It is doomed because it is no match for human nature.

I think there is an ideal way to be. This involves absolute health, and for that, one has to sacrifice a bit of success—not all of it, but some of it. Even for this limited success, one has to go out and meet the tribe, and do all the unhealthy things it entails. Some people do choose never to leave their islands, and for that they make peace with professional failure. But this may not be so healthy. If you don't find even modest success, you will end up overrating success, which is a nice way of saying you would become bitter.

THEIR VIEW

Artificial intelligence will never turn human labour redundant

AI can make production increasingly sophisticated but consumption will need people with incomes



MANOJ PANT
is visiting professor, Shiv Nadar University

hence displacing labour. While this may have begun with less-skilled labour (for example, telephone answering services), even computer programmers could find themselves redundant in the near future.

In one sense, the hoopla around AI reminds one of the hype over the Y2K scare at the turn of the last millennium. The need to prepare computers for a switch-over to the new year 2000 from 1999 was seen as a godsend for India. Since many work-hours were expected to be spent on keyboard pounding to ensure a smooth transition to a new date system, Silicon Valley in the US transferred much of that work to India, which aided the growth of the Indian IT industry. Many years later, the Y2K worry turned out to be a red herring, as it created no disruption in national or international computer operations. Current calls to adopt AI or risk failure may well go the same way.

What exactly does AI do? After much discussion with experts in AI, here is what I have gleaned. New AI tools like ChatGPT, Bard and their advanced regenerative counterparts are like 'super search engines,' or superior Googles. Say, if you want hourly data of the last 25 years' temperatures in Delhi to calculate the average peaks and troughs, variance, etc, and to average out these averages after correcting for seasonal variation, AI search engines (paid ones) can do the math in a jiffy. No need to get together a battery of data crunchers or econometricians. But here is the catch. AI tools usually cite a single answer. You often have no idea how that number is generated, whether using charting, econometrics, non-linear methods or others. In fact, if someone were to challenge the answer with a new number, there is no way of working out the correct answer, except by the gut-feel of the researcher. Yet, AI advocates still expect programmers and econometricians to be displaced.

So, unlike traditional quantitative methods, AI gives an answer but can-

not guarantee that it is reliable. This can often be a drawback where issues of optimal efficiency arise.

But the greatest problem of today's obsession with AI is that it does away with analytical ability. Let me illustrate. While AI may actually generate the desired answer, it is still the individual who needs to determine why that answer is needed. Our focus on the technology (and power resources) used to generate an answer through these new search engines diverts attention from the need for an answer to begin with. (Shades of the Y2K story?)

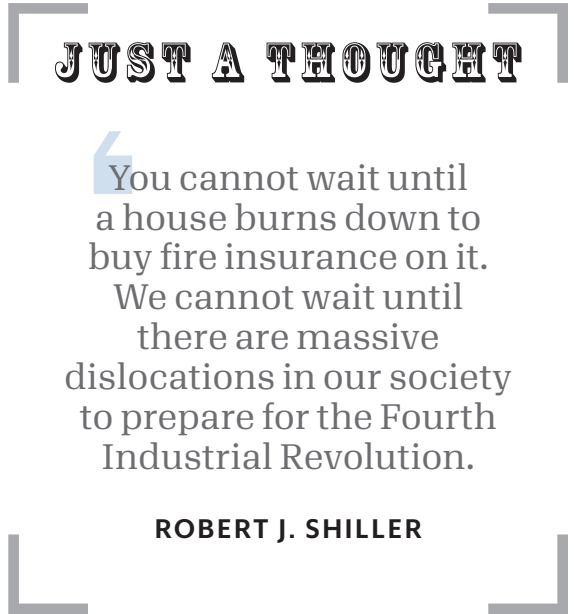
All these new technologies, from GenAI to blockchains for crypto currencies, are highly energy intensive. Yet, today the means seem to justify the ends.

In one sense, however, it is unlikely that AI tools will ever make labour redundant. AI is still a production-side initiative geared to create new products or services at presumably low production cost. But while it may displace labour on the production-side, as all supply-side technologies do, it still needs human consumption to hold up. New products do not create entirely new consumers. So, while robots may become efficient waiters at restaurants, only human labour can 'consume' their services (unless we somehow foresee robots serving robots).

In the end, as newer and newer technologies create newer and newer products while reducing the need for labour, the latter will still need to be around with the means to 'consume' the products created by technology.

So, ultimately, fears of labour displacement by new technologies like AI beyond a point are unfounded. There will only be reallocations of labour. While production methods can get more sophisticated, human beings have no competition as consumers.

Has AI begun losing its hype? Is the recent slide in the share price of Nvidia an indication of it? Only time will tell. But labour need not worry.



MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why success requires indulging in unhealthy behaviour

If socializing meant morning walks, other sort of people may have risen to the peaks of their fields

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Cool tempers in HP

Communal flare-up doesn't augur well for hill state

A communal flare-up is a rarity in Himachal Pradesh, which is fondly called *Dev Bhoomi* ('land of the gods'). After all, gods — and humans — of different faiths have coexisted there for decades, if not centuries. That's what makes the protests against the unauthorised construction of portions of mosques in Sanjauli (Shimla) and Mandi particularly disturbing. It is lamentable that the authorities failed to pre-empt or prevent a build-up of protesters — including VHP leaders, ex-councillors and panchayat chiefs — at the Sanjauli mosque. Seeking the demolition of the illegal parts, the agitators clashed with security personnel on September 11, breaking through barricades and hurling stones; the police had to use water cannons and batons to disperse them. A day later, members of the Muslim community demolished a mosque's wall that had been built on encroached government land in Mandi, but that did not stop Hindu groups from taking out a protest march in the town.

Unauthorised structures do not come up overnight, especially at a place of worship. Officials of the administration allow violations right under their noses; citing religious sentiments, they are reluctant to take action. It is this laxity that emboldens encroachers. In the Sanjauli case, this dereliction of duty gave rabble-rousers ample fodder to instigate people.

Encroachments are a bane of HP, which depends primarily on tourism for revenue. However, there should be no doublestandards when it comes to illegal construction. Targeting a particular community, which has become the norm in some states, dents the credibility of the authorities. The demand to verify the antecedents of 'outsiders' living in the state can be fraught with serious consequences and will only add fuel to the communal fire. Blessed with eye-catching beauty, *Dev Bhoomi* cannot afford to let religious tensions spoil its peaceful atmosphere, which is a major draw for domestic as well as foreign tourists.

J&K poll battle

Traditional powers vs Modi's 'new' vision

AS Jammu and Kashmir approaches its first Assembly elections since the historic abrogation of Article 370, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a fierce attack on the region's established political dynasties during a rally in Doda on Saturday. He targeted the Congress, National Conference (NC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), accusing them of promoting family rule over the interests of the people. He claimed that dynastic politics had 'hollowed out' the region and hindered progress. He positioned the BJP as the only political force capable of uprooting entrenched interests, offering a new beginning with youth-driven leadership and a focus on development.

The upcoming elections signify a watershed moment for Jammu and Kashmir. With Article 370 read down, the BJP seeks to establish itself as the dominant force in the region by presenting voters with a vision for peace, stability and economic growth. Modi underscored that only the BJP could bring in meaningful change, addressing the high unemployment rate and drawing investments to a region long stifled by political instability. His statement that 'terrorism is breathing its last' highlights the BJP's emphasis on security, a critical concern for the region's populace, worn down by decades of militancy.

However, the electoral outcome is far from predictable. The Congress and regional parties like the NC and PDP have vowed to restore J&K's special status, which was stripped with the revocation of Article 370. The Congress has pledged to reinstate full statehood, while the NC and the PDP focus on preserving the region's identity and democratic rights. Their alliance seeks to counter the BJP's narrative of development, positioning themselves as defenders of regional autonomy, capitalising on local discontent with Central policies. Ultimately, the elections will determine whether voters embrace Modi's vision of a 'terror-free, prosperous' J&K or remain loyal to regional powers.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1924

Mahatma's solution

AT last we have an authoritative version of the solution which Mahatma Gandhi has offered to the most burning of Indian problems, the problem of bringing all educated, self-respecting and politically minded Indians on the same platform with a view to the attainment of Swaraj. In a magnificent article in *Young India*, the Mahatma gives an outline of his main proposals:

- (1) The Congress should suspend all the boycotts except that of foreign cloth till the session of 1925.
 - (2) It should, subject to (1), remove the boycott of Empire goods.
 - (3) The Congress should confine its activity solely to the propaganda of hand-spinning and hand-spun *khaddar*, the achievement of Hindu-Muslim unity and in addition its Hindu members' activity for the removal of untouchability.
 - (4) The Congress should carry on the existing national educational institutions and, if possible, open more and keep them independent of government control or influence.
 - (5) The four-anna franchise should be abolished and in its place the qualification for membership should be spinning by every member for half an hour per day.
- The implications of these proposals, as per the Mahatma, are:
- (a) The Swarajists should be free to organise themselves without any opposition from the Congress or no-changers.
 - (b) The members of other political bodies should be invited and induced to join the Congress.
 - (c) The no-changers should be precluded from carrying on any propaganda, either direct or indirect, against Council entry.

From US to Kabul, 9/11 scars remain

Women of hapless Afghanistan have been abandoned by the global political leadership



CUDAY BHASKAR
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY
FOR POLICY STUDIES

THE 23rd anniversary of 9/11 — the unexpected and audacious attacks by a non-state entity, Al-Qaeda, that brought down the Twin Towers in New York — was observed in the US last week. In a rare but welcome gesture, bitter political discord was set aside — US President Joe Biden, his predecessor and one-time Republican adversary Donald Trump and Democratic candidate and Vice-President Kamala Harris stood together to pay homage to the victims.

The run-up to the 9/11 anniversary saw the global media engrossed with the high-octane Harris-Trump presidential debate. Predictably, 9/11 and its aftermath were used by the two opponents to score points but there was no substantive deliberation on this subject despite its seminal relevance to the US image and credibility on the global stage.

The US embarked on the global war on terror (GWOT) in October 2001 against the Taliban in Afghanistan for providing shelter to Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The Pentagon waged this war for 20 years but was unable to realise its objective and finally made an inglorious and sham-bolic exit in August 2021. The Taliban, who were forced to flee Kabul in the early stages of the war, outwitted and outwaited the formidable US military onslaught and came back to power in mid-August 2021.

This withdrawal was ordered by US President Joe Biden soon after he assumed office in January 2021 — and the war in



HOMAGE: Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris, US President Joe Biden, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Republican candidate Donald Trump attend the 9/11 memorial ceremony. AP/PTI

Afghanistan has been a contentious issue in the American public discourse. While Democrats criticised Republican President Donald Trump for hastily signing the Doha accord in February 2020, the GWOT imposed a huge cost on the US (almost \$2 trillion) and was unsustainable militarily and politically. Experts say that the withdrawal could have been managed better. While this is a debatable issue, the net result has been a major setback for the US and the global community that had initially supported the war on terror.

The US had expended vast amounts of resources — both human and fiscal — to defeat jihadi terrorism and its sponsors in Afghanistan and concurrently sought to introduce a form of liberal democracy and respect for women's rights in Afghanistan. The latter strand was not included in the text of the Doha agreement but was highlighted by US officials during the deliberations and assurances were sought from the Taliban in the matter.

When the Taliban swept to power in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, they imposed a harsh and inflexible sharia code of conduct for women. This was at sharp

Given its own bitter experience with the Taliban over the past 25 years, India has been relatively muted, like many of the major powers.

variance from the gender equity that women in Afghanistan had enjoyed for decades in the 20th century. At the time, the joke was that the Taliban did not allow women to wear even socks, for that was deemed to be 'sexy'. When the Taliban came back to power in August 2021, the many provisions for women, including education and a modest dress code, were all rewritten to go back to the pre-9/11 template and the penalties for non-compliance became even more harsh and callous. The international community chose not to confront the Taliban on this issue.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Life without liberty is far worse than death. — Hamid Karzai

A leftist who held rivals in high esteem

PRITAM SINGH

IN Sitaram Yechury's death, India has lost not only one of its best-known left-wing leaders but also one of the finest communist representatives in Parliament.

Yechury and Prakash Karat, two general secretaries of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), were my contemporaries at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Yechury did MA from JNU's Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, which was founded by the late Prof Krishna Bharadwaj, my MPhil supervisor. Prof Bharadwaj once remarked that Yechury's coursework essays were so good that even awarding the highest grade was not enough. He started working on his PhD under Prof Bharadwaj's supervision but could not complete it as he had to go underground and was eventually arrested for a brief period for his opposition to the 1975 Emergency.

Politically, Yechury and I were in opposing camps of left politics at JNU. I was part of a Trotskyist group which attracted talented and well-read left-wing students to its fold and was critical of the Stalinist orientation of India's communist parties (especially CPM). Yechury, as an activist of the CPM's student wing, the Student Federation of India, was part of the Stalinist heritage of Indian communists. However, at a personal level, we were friendly with each other. His first wife, Indrani Mazumdar, was also committed to the CPM's politics. They suffered a big blow in April 2021 when their son Ashish died of Covid-19.

When Yechury ran for the president of the JNU Students' Union in 1977, I publicly supported Rajan James, one of his rivals for the post. James had left the CPI-affiliated All India Students' Federation (AISF). Though the CPI has been comparatively less Stalinist, his departure from the AISF seemed to be a positive move away from Stalinism that deserved support. Yechury won the election, but he told James and me that he respected our democratic right to oppose him.

Yechury's ability to maintain friendly relations even with those with whom he disagreed was a testament to his character. This quality became one of the enduring aspects of his life when he rose to become one of the top political leaders in India. This trait did not remain personal; it became integrated into his vision of defending democracy, minority rights and federal devolution of political and economic powers. This vision envisaged giving a positive direction to governance to create a just polity for marginalised sections of society.

Yechury's decision to donate his body for medical research was a profound demonstration of his convictions. It underscored his belief in the importance of devoting one's life to the advancement of humanity.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Read the writing on the wall

Refer to 'BJP can't afford to take Jammu for granted' (*The Great Game*); the BJP had set a lofty target for itself in the Lok Sabha elections, partly because it felt that the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya would help it mobilise Hindu voters across the country. But the party's below-par showing in UP in the General Election has shattered the party's sense of invincibility. As the Assembly elections in J&K approach, the saffron party must read the writing on the wall — it can't take the Hindu-dominated region for granted. It cannot win the polls by campaigning on the abrogation of Article 370. If the party wants to win over the local voters, it must focus on creating better infrastructure and improving health facilities there.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

Keep an ear to the ground

With reference to 'BJP can't afford to take Jammu for granted'; the saffron party's hold on Jammu is slipping, and it is no matter of surprise. While the party's slogans proclaim peace, stability and progress, the reality on the ground tells a different story. Broken promises have left Jammu grappling with poor infrastructure. The business sector in the region has long been neglected. The locals have been treated like an afterthought. If the BJP continues to treat Jammu like a safe bet, the voters may teach the saffron party a lesson. The BJP must listen to the voices on the ground before it is too late.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

Stem the rot in police force

Apropos of 'Corruption within'; the rot runs deep in the police administration. The arrest of a drug inspector for allegedly colluding with narcotics smugglers should prompt us to ask ourselves: Who will police the police? There is a dire need to foster a culture of integrity, accountability and transparency in the law enforcement apparatus. Eliminating corruption would require a multi-pronged approach. Besides undertaking rigorous screening at the recruitment stage, the training of the personnel should focus on ethics, integrity and the importance of earning community trust. Independent oversight agencies and whistleblowers should be actively encouraged to report instances of unethical behaviour without any fear of retaliation.

treatment of women by the Taliban as 'gender apartheid' but none of the major powers in the UN Security Council have made this a consensual policy issue to be taken up with Kabul.

China, it may be recalled, was the first nation to accept a Taliban ambassador in January 2024. In August, the UAE followed suit. This is a political victory for the Taliban, given that the UAE was part of the GWOT and had supported the US effort till the very end.

The deep cynicism and indifference to women's rights the world over is magnified in a stark manner in Afghanistan. The women of that hapless nation have been abandoned by the global political leadership, and the more conservative faction within the Taliban has emerged triumphant in its harsh anti-women strictures.

Whether the next US President will review this matter in 2025 in a resolute manner is a moot point, dependent on a complex set of domestic issues that animate policy decisions in the Beltway. Given its own bitter experience with the Taliban over the past 25 years, India has been relatively muted, like many of the major powers.

Blood-soaked anniversaries punctuate history regularly. If the global community is unable to compel Israel to cease its genocidal war against Palestine (the first anniversary is on October 7), it is very unlikely that the plight of the women in Afghanistan will register on the global consciousness despite the enormity of 9/11. This is a bleak observation and perhaps hope — however slender — may lie with empathetic global NGOs and their intrepid representatives on the ground who are willing to take the kind of risks that governments are averse to taking. In the interim, the bravery of those Afghan women who are resisting this Taliban-imposed 'gender apartheid' and keeping the flame of defiance flickering must be applauded and supported.

tion. It is important to ensure that time-tested systems are put in place so that the personnel understand the implications of their actions.

AMIT BANERJEE, MUMBAI

Manipur remains on the boil

The situation in Manipur is worsening with each passing day. How can the government let the northeastern state continue to burn? If the ethnic strife between the two warring communities remains unresolved, Manipur will end up as yet another restive state, marking a victory for forces inimical to India's interests. The Governor's rule should be imposed in the conflict-torn state until normalcy is restored. Besides, the government should tap some representatives from both communities as advisers to ensure smooth governance.

COL SAJJAN KUNDU (RETD), HISAR

Save the tiger

Apropos of the front-page news report 'Take your tiger back: Rewari villagers force Rajasthan forest team to stay put'; human beings are inviting trouble for themselves by continuing to destroy the habitat of wild animals. It is unfortunate that, in a desperate bid to get rid of the big cat, the Rewari locals are threatening to take the matter into their own hands. The announcement of a reward for 'bringing down' the tiger and the locals' attempts to rope in hunters from Rajasthan and UP to kill the feline are alarming. The officials involved in efforts to capture the tiger should use drone cameras so that the animal can be promptly located, tranquillised and taken back to the Sariska Tiger Reserve.

COL RS NARULA (RETD), PATIALA

Do justice to your job

With reference to the middle 'The story of an exemplary worker'; the tale about a peon's dedication towards his roles and responsibilities was inspiring. The peon had made a name for himself in the office as a conscientious worker. And after he passed away, his son took on the role of peon with just as much dedication. We can all learn a thing or two from the story. Doing justice to our job and adopting the values that our elders pass on to us make all the difference.

GURINDER PAL SINGH, BY MAIL

Look beyond tree plantation to conserve forests



SP VASUDEVA
FORMER PRINCIPAL CHIEF
CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS, HP

INDIA'S forest conservation efforts have deep historical roots. Forests, and the customs surrounding them, are prominently featured in religious, historical and cultural texts. Various dynasties that ruled India left their mark on forest conservation practices, many of which are still followed. These traditions helped maintain a delicate balance between forests and other natural resources essential for human survival. However, this balance began to crumble during the post-industrial era, when forest cover and quality significantly declined due to population growth, urbanisation, globalisation and enhanced trade. These pressures led to environmental disturbances, including climate change and an increase in natural disasters, calling for an urgent intervention.

The British were the first to initiate scientific forest conservation in India through policy and statutory measures. The Indian Forest Act, 1927, introduced the concept of reserves and protected forests, with local communities actively participating in their upkeep.

The forest settlement operations, outlined in the Act, conferred forest rights on communities, while also assigning them the responsibility to conserve and protect forest resources. After Independence, initiatives like the Van Mahotsav — a tree-planting festival — were launched to extend forest conservation efforts. Protected area networks were established by creating wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. Afforestation and forest conservation were incorporated into river valley projects, flood-prone schemes and catchment area treatment plans. Wastelands were rehabilitated through afforestation and soil and water conservation measures. In 1990, Joint Forest Management Guidelines were issued to increase public participation in forest management. Community and conservation reserves for wildlife and biodiversity conservation were introduced through amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Despite these efforts, some conservation measures have deviated from their original goals. For example, the annual Van Mahotsav has become more of a political event, with public gatherings and speeches often overshadowing the actual needs of forest conservation. Though trees are planted on a small scale, the event does not address the larger, more pressing issue of forest conservation. Additionally, the Forest Rights Act, 2006, fast-



IMPERATIVE: The number of saplings planted should surpass the count of trees felled.

tracked the conferment of forest rights through community-empowered organisations. While this helped recognise forest-dependent communities, the grant of individual forest rights has contributed to forest fragmentation, reduced forest density and decreased the overall forest cover.

It is well established that natural forests provide more ecological services than planted areas, especially in mitigating climate change and disaster impacts. India has pledged to improve its forest cover, biodiversity and productivity in alignment with international forest conservation standards. The National Action Plan on Climate Change, formulated in 2008, aims to increase the

The diversion of forest land should be resorted to only when alternative non-forest land is not available.

country's forest and tree cover by 50,000 sq km and improve the quality of forests across another 50,000 sq km. India has also set ambitious goals to boost the economic productivity of its forests, seeking to increase forest-based livelihoods for about three million households. Moreover, the country committed to creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide stored in forests, as part of its Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015. By 2030, India aims to expand its forest and tree cover to 33 per cent of its geographical area, in line with the UN's Global Forest Goals.

However, as per the State of Forest Report 2021 by the Forest Survey of India, the country's forest and tree cover stands at around 25 per cent. Of this, 22 per cent is under forest cover, while 3 per cent constitutes the tree cover located outside designated forests. India is working to close this gap through various initiatives, such as the National Afforestation Programme, the Green India Mission, Compensatory Afforestation Fund, State Plan Schemes and externally aided projects.

Natural forest conservation remains crucial. The diversion of forest land for development should only occur when alternative non-forest land is not available. Although the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 initially aimed to prevent deforestation, its focus gradually shifted toward compensating for forest loss rather than preventing it. In many cases, highly biodiverse forests, which are nearly impossible to recreate, have been lost. The compensatory afforestation approach often cannot replicate the complex ecological functions of natural forests.

To achieve environmental stability, afforestation efforts and improvements in forest density must exceed the rate at which forest land is diverted for development projects. Tree plantation during festivals like Van Mahotsav, as well as agro-forestry initiatives, should surpass the number of trees felled in

urban and rural areas. This would add significant value to the ecological services provided by forests and trees.

In addition to afforestation, India needs a mass movement focused on preventing illegal logging, curbing forest encroachments and educating the public about the importance of forests and the negative consequences of their destruction. Forest diversion should be need-based, and the implementation of forestry schemes must be fast-tracked and carefully monitored. The country must ensure that its forest cover reaches the target of 33 per cent by 2030, as promised under both its National Forest Policy and international commitments.

Furthermore, reforms are needed within state forest departments to modernise operations and streamline conservation efforts. By focusing on natural forest conservation, India can not only meet its domestic and international environmental commitments but also boost its socioeconomic status, foster sustainable development and improve its GDP growth. Conservation of natural forests must become a priority over isolated tree-planting initiatives. Effective monitoring and evaluation of forest conservation efforts, including the number of trees planted and the area afforested, are essential to ensure long-term ecological and economic benefits.

Security forces gaining ground in Maoist bastions



MP NATHANAEL
FORMER IIG, CRPF

WITH six Maoists, including two women, killed in an encounter with the elite Greyhound commandos of the Telangana Police in Bhadradi Kothagudem district adjoining Chhattisgarh on September 5, the Maoists have suffered a serious setback. The incessant pressure on the Maoists by the security forces in Chhattisgarh had forced them to shift to Telangana, where the Greyhounds took them on.

On September 3, nine Maoists were killed in a joint operation conducted by the Central Reserve Police Force's 111th Battalion, Bastar Fighters and the District Reserve Guards (DRG) in the forests adjoining the Dantewada-Bijapur district border. Six of the killed Maoists were women. Macherla Esobu, a top Maoist carrying a bounty of Rs 25 lakh on his head, was also among the killed. With this success of the security

forces, the number of Maoists killed this year in India has risen to around 170 as against 46 in 2021, 30 in 2022 and 29 last year.

The penetration by the security forces into the hitherto untrodden territory of Abujmad last year has unnerved the Maoists. A series of setbacks in various encounters with the security personnel has depleted their strength and demoralised their cadre. This fear of getting killed has forced many of them to surrender at police stations or in Central Armed Police Forces camps.

As many as 22 Maoists have been killed this year in Chhattisgarh alone. These back-to-back operations are yielding satisfactory results, evident from the fact that around 670 Maoists were arrested this year, while 656 more surrendered between 2014 and 2022, of which 2,855 surrendered in 2022 alone. At present, only 38 districts are in the grip of the Maoist menace as against 96 in 2010.

Six of the eight Maoists killed in an encounter with a combined force of the DRG, Special Task Force (STF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Border Security Force (BSF) in the forests adjoining Farasbeda



ON THE RUN: With security forces in hot pursuit, Maoists are leaving behind their dead and their weapons.

and Kotmeta villages in Narayanpur district, Chhattisgarh, on June 15, carried a reward of Rs 8 lakh each.

Speaking after a review meeting in Raipur on August 24, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said 14 top Maoists had been killed this year. He also assured that India would be free of the Maoist menace by March 2026.

A recent trend seen after these encounters is that the Maoists are no longer carrying back their dead comrades or their weapons with them. In the past, they would carry their dead with them and give them a traditional cremation. Not so now. With the

Back-to-back operations by the security forces against Maoists and setting up of over 200 camps in their bastion Abujmad have almost strangled their movement.

security forces in hot pursuit, they fear that their escape will be hampered. In the encounters on September 3 and 5, a large haul of arms and ammunition was recovered.

While the security forces' recent success has brought them gallantry medals, rewards and commendations, it has sent tremors among the Maoist leaders who have fought the establishment for years. With many of their leaders dead, the morale among the rank and file is at its lowest. The security forces have set up over 200 camps in the last bastion of their refuge in Abujmad, a 4,000-sq km forest stretch. This has

almost strangled the Maoist movement.

As face-to-face confrontations with the security forces could lead to more killings among the Maoists, they will resort to tactics that would inflict maximum harm and casualties on the security forces with least damage to themselves.

Nothing could be safer for the Maoists than to plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs), trigger these from a distance and then escape into the adjoining forests. Usually, these IEDs are planted in advance when the roads are being laid. Later, when Maoists plan to attack the forces, they trigger it through batteries. Unfortunately, since these IEDs are planted deep in the soil, it becomes difficult to detect them with explosive detectors.

On June 23 this year, the CRPF lost two of its gallant Cobra commandos when a truck carrying rations for its personnel in Tekulagudem from its base at the Silger camp came under an IED attack. The IED triggered by Maoists hurled the truck high in the air, killing the two commandos.

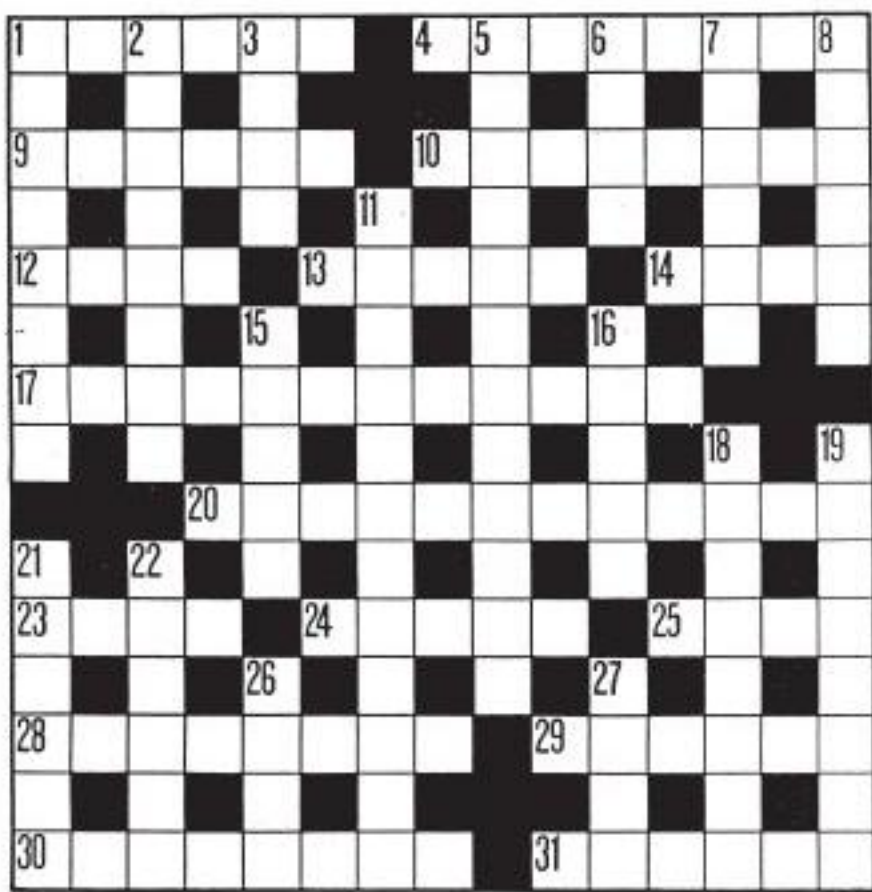
The Electronics Corporation of India Limited, Department of Atomic Energy and the Defence Research and Development Organisation have recently developed different explo-

sive detectors that may help avoid such attacks in future.

In a desperate attempt to regain lost ground, the Maoists may attack the security forces. With the forces closing in on Maoist leader Madvi Hidma, who has been instrumental in a series of attacks on them, he would desperately be looking for opportunities to carry out attacks. Carrying a reward of Rs 25 lakh, Hidma, a native of Puvarti village in Sukma district, is the most wanted Maoist in the region. A forward base set up in Tekulagudem, just a few km from Puvarti, has him on the run. It is believed that his arrest or killing in an encounter will break the backbone of Maoists in the area.

As the security forces gain a foothold in every bastion of the Maoists, the alertness among the personnel may wane. The stringent standard operating procedures may, at times, be thrown to the winds, and laxity may set in. Such a scenario would prove disastrous. The security forces need to maintain the momentum, based on hard intelligence, which, of late, has been pouring in steadily. They should remain on the offensive to avert casualties. The day may not be far when India will be rid of the menace of Maoists.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Unstinting (6)
 - 4 Intended for the initiated only (8)
 - 9 Punctilious (6)
 - 10 Crusade (8)
 - 12 Space under a roof (4)
 - 13 Convenient (5)
 - 14 A conflagration (4)
 - 17 Remain calm under stress (4,4,4)
 - 20 Neat, clean (5,3,4)
 - 23 Elliptical (4)
 - 24 Individual inclination (5)
 - 25 Leave one another's company (4)
 - 28 Soporific drug (8)
 - 29 Induce to commit perjury (6)
 - 30 Decorous (8)
 - 31 Go away (4,2)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Stiff, 4 Whisper, 8 Err, 9 As regards, 10 Leveret, 11 Apply, 13 Hard by, 15 People, 18 Press, 19 Algeria, 21 To speak of, 23 Vet, 24 Pretext, 25 Early.

Down: 1 Stealth, 2 In reverse, 3 Flair, 4 Warmth, 5 Ingrate, 6 Par, 7 Risky, 12 Paper over, 14 Besiege, 16 Exactly, 17 Racket, 18 Put up, 20 Gaffe, 22 Sue.

- DOWN**
- 1 Realistic (8)
 - 2 Confirmed (8)
 - 3 Influence (4)
 - 5 Have a prospect of success (5,1,6)
 - 6 Narrow strip of material (4)
 - 7 A partially dried grape (6)
 - 8 To transport (6)
 - 11 Get an opportunity (4,8)
 - 15 Take into a group (2-3)
 - 16 Merchandise (5)
 - 18 Express opinion frankly (5,3)
 - 19 Natural impulse (8)
 - 21 Mix socially (6)
 - 22 Structure (6)
 - 26 Deep resonant sound (4)
 - 27 Cunning subterfuge (4)

SU DO KU

2	4	1			6		
6		8		1	7		
	3		5		8		
4	7				9		
				6			
			4			2	5
	6			2	8		
	4		7		2	9	
	9			5	7	6	

EASY

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

9	4	1	3	7	5	6	2	8
7	8	2	9	4	6	1	3	5
3	6	5	2	1	8	7	4	9
4	1	6	8	3	9	2	5	7
2	9	8	4	5	7	3	1	6
5	3	7	1	6	2	9	8	4
1	5	9	7	2	4	8	6	3
6	7	3	5	8	1	4	9	2
8	2	4	6	9	3	5	7	1

CALENDAR

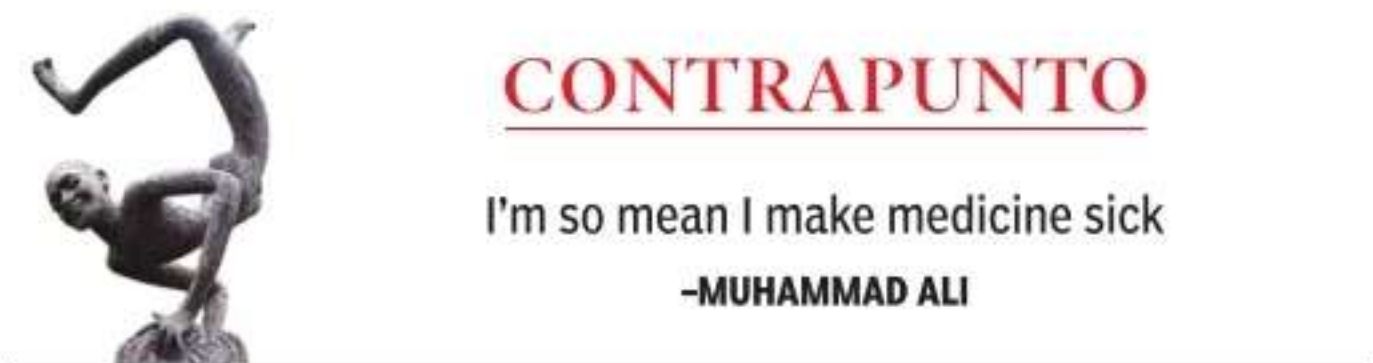
SEPTEMBER 16, 2024, MONDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1946
■ Bhadrpad Shaka	25
■ Aashwin Parvishite	1
■ Hijari	1446
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 13, up to 3.11 pm	
■ Sukama Yoga up to 11.41 am	
■ Dhnishtha Nakshatra up to 4.33 pm	
■ Moon in Aquarius sign	

FORECAST

SUNSET:	MONDAY	18:35 HRS
SUNRISE:	TUESDAY	06:04 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	24
New Delhi	35	24
Amritsar	35	25
Bathinda	36	26
Jalandhar	34	24
Ludhiana	35	25
Bhiwani	34	25
Hisar	35	24
Sirsa	37	27
Dharamsala	28	17
Manali	24	14
Shimla	24	16
Srinagar	31	14
Jammu	34	22
Kargil	25	12
Leh	23	07
Dehradun	32	23
Mussoorie	25	16

TEMPERATURE IN °C



Sunday Surprise

With Kejriwal's resignation, Delhi goes into campaign mode. Hopefully, polls will lead to normal govt

Last time Kejriwal resigned as CM, he returned to office with a landslide win. Much water, and waste, has flown in the Yamuna since. Over it, hangs almost a decade's worth of anti-incumbency. This can't simply be wished away by replaying the resignation card. But yesterday, in dramatically waving it around once again, Kejriwal conveyed, first of all, that jail hasn't made him cautious. Second, it was a call to electoral arms to AAP workers, upon whom too the last few months have weighed heavy. It was about energising them – albeit with a clear understanding that 'high command' will continue to be in charge irrespective of who it anoints as the 'interim' CM.

Hemant Soren and Nitish Kumar have found the business of retrieving CMship from the placeholders of their choosing, to be messy. These skirmishes will be remembered by Kejriwal, as he makes his calculations. But his situation is also distinctive. Not only



did he accrue political and then executive capital on a loud anti-corruption platform, this still remains the core AAP identity and draw, at least by his own accounting yesterday. That is why the pitch that Kejriwal will return to CM's office only after getting a "certificate of honesty" from the electorate, makes sense as political strategy. Whether BJP's label of "PR stunt" or the Kejriwal pitch proves

more sticky will be a measure of how robust Brand Kejriwal remains. And whether this test takes place in Feb as scheduled or gets preponed to Nov, keeping Maharashtra company, campaigning for the next Delhi election is now very much underway.

AAP has tasted success where TMC and BRS have failed. EC has accorded it the status of a national party. It has a super majority in the Punjab assembly and five seats in Gujarat. But what would AAP be without Delhi? In BJP, it has a relentless opposition. BJP has taken the blow of comprehensively losing the Delhi assembly polls to AAP, not once but twice. The party remains in good health. AAP doesn't have this luxury at all. As its principal campaigner, Kejriwal has to deliver big. He would also have considered the way in which SC bail conditions have anyway restricted his access to both the physical office of the CM and its official authority, conditions about which Justice Bhuyan even expressed "serious reservations". But in all this drama, the capital's citizens find themselves lost and unheard. At the end of elections, the national capital will hope to have a normal govt.

Drive To Kill

Only strict implementation of law, including for VIPs, can bring down deaths on the road

Disappointingly, the Nagpur drunk driving case, involving the son of the Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule, appears to be following a familiar pattern. CCTV recording from the resto-bar that Sanket and his friends visited before they went on their rash driving spree – hitting several vehicles and leaving two people injured – does not have their footage. Was the footage deleted to shield the VIP son? We don't know yet. Moreover, the local police have repeatedly said Sanket wasn't driving the car – even though the car belonged to him – and that it was his friend who was behind the wheel. They didn't even collect Sanket's blood-alcohol sample.

Same old story | All of this again smells of the system trying to protect a VIP progeny. We have repeatedly seen this pattern over the past few months. Be it the Pune Porsche case in May or the Mumbai BMW hit-and-run a few weeks later, initial outrage is followed by law enforcement dragging its feet to arrest VIP accused and throw the book at them.

VIP mentality | When it comes to rules of the road, VIPs clearly feel they don't apply to them. This, despite the fact that the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019 and BNS's Section 106 raised fines and punishment for drunk driving and acts of negligence leading to death. It's not enough though. In UK, driving above the legal limit of alcohol can get you six months' jail, an unlimited fine and a driving ban for at least one year. Causing death while driving drunk can get you life imprisonment.

Lax system | Of course, making penalties stiffer won't work if laws aren't implemented. Examples need to be made out of so-called VIP accused to send the message no one is above the law. But if the entire law enforcement system treats VIPs with kid gloves, statistics for rash driving leading to deaths won't come down. Drunk driving turns cars into weapons. This message must hit home.

Portrait of a serf

It begins nicely enough, with a great tech product

How are empires made in the age of Great Tech? No, not as they once were, through marauding horsemen with gleaming swords, sieges on castles, archers on towers, glory and betrayal. For we live in an age where kings have been replaced by CEOs, counts and viscounts by venture capital bros, ministers by boards of directors, and nations by corporations.

The first thing they do, emperors of today, is make a great technology product. As more users flock to it, that number itself, rather than the tech, becomes the empire's real asset. It is impossible to compete with 'free' or with something cheaper than the rest. The carcasses of competitors collect in great pyramids, and you wonder who is paying for it all, this war of ceaseless user acquisition. The venture capitalist cabal, with its endless coffers, that's who. And the war goes on until all the smaller kingdoms have bent their knees through acquisitions or been vanquished.

Then, what was free no longer is. A premium tier is opened up where you pay for privileges that were once taken for granted, the ability to consume content without seeing ads or sharing your password with friends. Those who do not pay have their experience continuously degraded so that they end up becoming premium users, not to get something better but to not get something worse. If you do not pay, we will show you more ads, first ads that could be skipped, then in a year, ads that cannot be. No longer is tech developed to push the boundary of what can be accomplished but to serve you more ads or to sell your data more innovatively. Capitalism won't save you no more; the competition is dead.

This brings us to the end game. Remember the gold the venture bros poured in to kill the enemies? Now is the time to win it back with much more gold, using strategies that even the Huns would find predatory. Now that the free has been flogged enough, monthly fees ramp up for premium users, spurious fees are tagged on, and you pay more and more, getting less and less. Just like serfs of yore, toiling in the fields, so are you, now in the service of the tech empires, slave to your habits, imprisoned by the digital confines in your mind.

BATTLE OF THE MEMES

Catlady vs The Don: why laughter has become serious political business

Indira Ghose



Will cat and dog memes decide the next US election? The highlight of the first presidential debate, pitting Kamala Harris against Trump, was when Trump, clearly rattled by Harris mocking his rallies, burst into a rant about pet-devouring immigrants in Springfield, Ohio.

Social media has since exploded with funny memes rallying pets in support of either candidate. Some show Trump as a superhero figure sprinting away from his dark-skinned pursuers, a kitten safely tucked under each arm, while others depict Harris smilingly inviting viewers to a feast of roasted cat. Not surprisingly, the creators of the satirical comic series *The Simpsons*, set in the (fictional) town of Springfield, have gleefully entered the fray.

However thin Harris might have been on policy, she beat Trump at a game at which as a rule he excels – riling an opponent by laughing at them. Whatever one might think about Trump, it is undeniable that he is a gifted comedian. Part of his lure lies in his talent for malicious sarcasm, insult comedy, and outrageous jibes, entertaining the crowd with his deadpan banter and surreal claims. An undertow of menace runs through his comic act. A case in point are his repeated, admiring references to Hannibal Lecter in the 1991 film *The Silence of the Lambs*.

As it happens, half a millennium ago Shakespeare anticipated the brand of humour that contributed to the rise of Trump. With Richard III and Iago he created characters who, like Trump, are malign jester-figures. Consummate performers both, they adopt a bluff, matey persona, indulging in badinage and crude jokes to cultivate a sense of collusion with the audience. We feel flattered to be drawn into their confidence – and ignore their horrific deeds. In truth, one reason we join in their vicious laughter is because we are secretly relieved it's not we who are the butt of the joke.

They also revel in their depravity, turning it into an article of pride. Richard III declares that since he is too ugly to fit the role of a lover, he is determined 'to prove a villain' and boasts of his plans to topple the state, while Iago preens himself on his ability to manipulate his chief victim, Othello, until he 'will as tenderly be led by th' nose' as an ass. What Trump shares with these

showmen is the canny ability to package malice as entertainment.

In the recent past, the political landscape of humour has changed. Satirical comedy used to be a preserve of the left. With the upsurge of ideological purity, liberals all over the world have been zealous in sniffing out offence in humour. Meanwhile, the extreme right has discovered humour as a powerful tool.

Humour thrives on transgression, on breaking taboos and upending norms. It caters to the hunger for disorder and destruction lurking in each of us. In

the contrary, nothing is serious – everything can be regarded as a joke, from cruel remarks to violent pranks (many of those who stormed the US Capitol on Jan 6, 2021, later claimed it was 'just a joke').

Now, it appears, liberals in America have rediscovered humour as a political weapon. Obama's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago last month, with his unforgettable, suggestive hand gesture indicating Trump's puerile obsession with sizes of all kinds, was the cue: Democrats are back in the laughter game.

The curious thing about humour, though, is that jokes can be read in radically contradictory ways. The very same jokes – say, images of Trump as a saviour of pets – evoke hilarity with both Trump-haters and Trump-lovers, even if for very different reasons. Those who consider Trump an embryonic tyrant have fun mocking what they regard as yet another example of his dangerous, unhinged rhetoric. Trump supporters, on the other hand, enjoy the jokes as a celebration of their idol, who in fact posted many of them himself, confirming their impression that Trump is simply more fun.

Humour, it appears, is largely a matter of affirmation, just as satire preaches to the converted. It is about forging a bond within a community of believers, not about changing people's minds. But there is another reason why humour plays such a huge role in our lives today. Neuroscientists tell us that laughter releases the neurotransmitter and feel-good hormone dopamine, which acts on our brain to create a sense of euphoria. They point out that dopamine

does not itself give us pleasure. Instead, it spurs us to reproduce a course of action that we know from experience will lead to pleasure. We are driven more by the desire to repeat pleasurable behaviour than by the gratification it delivers.

In other words: laughter is addictive. Its effect on us is not very different to other addictions – drugs, fast food, social media. In an age of instant gratification, we can't get enough of humour.

Turning Trump into a joke may or may not help Harris win the election and contribute to installing a woman with Indian roots in the White House. Much depends on the next instalment of the never-ending entertainment saga rolling off our small screens.

The writer is former professor, English Literature, University of Fribourg, Switzerland



Humour thrives on transgression, on breaking taboos and upending norms. A joke always involves an element of play, a fleeting moment in which we entertain an idea that by rights belongs in the realm of the imagination

addition, a joke always involves an element of play, a fleeting moment in which we entertain an idea that by rights belongs in the realm of the imagination.

While dour humour vigilantes insist on taking everything literally, alt-rightwingers maintain that on

Writing On The Kejriwal? Not So Good For AAP

If his decision to quit as CM is a tactic to burnish his aam aadmi creds pre-polls, he must contend with the reality that his party's halo has dimmed quite a bit

R Jagannathan



The surprising, and yet not so surprising, resignation of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and him seeking a new mandate for his party in the capital are unlikely to make waves beyond the media. While announcing this decision, two days after SC granted him bail, Kejriwal said he would not sit on the CM's chair "till the people announce their verdict."

Apart from claiming the victim's mantle, AAP will obviously seek to play this decision as that of a political leader who cares more about propriety than power. But a man who did not resign six months ago, when he was actually sent to jail, can hardly claim the high moral ground. Courts allowed him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, but the voter hardly seemed to care as BJP won all seven seats in Delhi, albeit with smaller margins than in 2019. Even in Punjab, the state where AAP swept to office in the 2022 assembly elections, the party is on the backfoot, having won just three of the 13 parliamentary seats in June. Earlier, in the Delhi municipal elections of 2022, AAP got a majority by winning 134 out of 250 seats, but the vote share difference between AAP and BJP was barely three percentage points.

AAP of today is not AAP of 2013-14. It faces the usual anti-incumbency that dogs any party that has been in govt for a decade or more.

Worse, for a party that came to office riding the crest of the anti-corruption wave, AAP has lost much of its halo, with the CM's actions echoing this fall. He came under personal criticism, first, for building a lavish official residence. Second, ED and CBI dimmed that halo further by accusing him of being

party to the liquor scam. His deputy CM Manish Sisodia was in jail for 17 months in connection with his alleged role in the scam. Another former minister, Satyendar Jain, is even now in jail along with MLA Amanatullah Khan.

Even assuming all the cases against AAP leaders were purely the result of a political witch-hunt, it is doubtful why courts would go along with this agenda for so long without some reason.



It seems reasonable to conclude that AAP does not quite retain its old image of a crusader in the cause of the "aam aadmi", delivering governance and positive outcomes for citizens of Delhi. We saw that recently when, with a CM in jail, Delhi govt failed to handle the summer water crisis in the capital competently, or deal with the monsoon floods that followed. Somewhere, underneath it all, the party has sent out a message that

staying in office matters more than governance. The party also spent several fruitless years trying to battle the Lt Governor instead of working with him, when previous non-AAP chief ministers managed to govern without much rancour.

So, Kejriwal's decision to resign and seek a new mandate must be read as a last-ditch attempt to refurbish his image, but his action comes too late for that. A resignation that comes barely five months before the normal date for the next election can hardly be called a political "sacrifice". The attempt clearly is to rescue Kejriwal and his party from any further loss of credibility.

This does not mean that the party will not return to office, but that will be more because alternatives don't look much better. BJP has not had a viable CM face since 1998, when it lost assembly elections to Congress led by Sheila Dikshit, and Congress has not fared any better after Kejriwal defeated Dikshit (and BJP) in 2014.

The uncharitable way to interpret Kejriwal's statement – that he will resign and a new CM will be appointed till elections are held – is that he cannot afford to hand over the mantle to another leader within the party for a longer duration. When other popular CMs like J Jayalalithaa or Lalu Prasad were arrested, new figurehead CMs were appointed in their place. Even recently, Jharkhand had a CM when Hemant Soren got arrested. Only Delhi missed out on even this ("temporary") transfer of power, pointing to some degree of insecurity on the part of Kejriwal.

Kejriwal is a much diminished politician today. The resignation gambit is a desperate attempt to cut his losses and, hopefully, rediscover some of the old mojo.

Calvin & Hobbes



Peaceful Conflict Resolution Is The Way Forward

Farida Khanam

American writer Michael Hart described the Prophet of Islam as the most successful person in history in his book *The 100*. What was the secret behind the Prophet's success? The secret lies in the Prophet consistently favouring peaceful resolutions over warfare. He followed a policy of avoidance and reconciliation regarding confrontation and unnecessary conflict, pivotal in his remarkable success on all fronts. His approach was not rooted in force or conflict but in diplomacy, patience, tolerance and practical wisdom, which won over hearts and minds. His goal was spiritual and intellectual transformation of individuals, which can only be achieved through peaceful environment, goodwill and wise planning.

This is why the Prophet's teachings are entirely based on peace. He was one of the greatest pacifists in human

history, using peaceful methods as his most effective tool.

The Prophet's commitment to peace was not just a tactic; he saw peace as a complete ideology. Highlighting this unique approach to conflict resolution, he emphasised, "God grants to peace what He does not grant to violence." Sahih Muslim, Hadith No 2593. He realised that peace is the most effective solution for any situation. His migration to Medina and the Treaty of Hudaibiya are two key examples of this. In the former, he quietly left his homeland at midnight to avoid confrontation with the enemy. In the latter, he unilaterally accepted all the conditions of his dire opponents, showing his unwavering commitment to peace.

In contrast, modern Arab leaders call for "peace with justice", which is unrealistic. Unlike the Prophet, they

have sacrificed countless lives in pursuit of this ideal, but to no avail. From the example of the Prophet, we learn that justice does not come from peace itself; peace creates opportunities, and justice is achieved by utilising them.

This principle, followed by the Prophet throughout his life, which is clearly demonstrated during the Treaty of Hudaibiya, is something Arab leaders today need to embrace fully. From the Quran and the Prophet's life, we learn that an ideal solution is not always possible.

For example, when the Prophet faced a conflict with his opponents, similar to the Arab Israeli issue in the Holy Land, he reached an agreement in 628 CE by unilaterally accepting all the terms set by the opposing side. This is one of the most notable examples of his peace-oriented strategy. The nonviolent resolution of this conflict

Sacredspace

Dance, when you're broken open. Dance, if you've torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance when you're perfectly free.

Jalal ad-Din Rumi





The Free Press Journal

Founder Editor: S Sadanand

Kejriwal's bail is not the end of AAP's problems

The Supreme Court's order on Friday granting bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is in consonance with the dictum about bail and not jail being the norm. The Aam Aadmi Party leader was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 and by the CBI on June 26 in the same liquor excise case. The CBI too had arrested him in the excise case on the eve of his getting bail from the apex court, another unwelcome feature of the investigations in high-profile criminal cases whether against politicians or others. With the release of Kejriwal, and earlier the release on bail of his close associate and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, most of the high-profile accused in the excise case are now out on bail. It can be no one's case that the central government has not pursued the investigations in this case vigorously. But Kejriwal has offered not even half a cogent reason for abandoning the controversial policy once the scandal hit headlines. Besides, the fact that in the Goa poll the party sought to match the other two parties in the use of political finance was borne out by all the externals of a well-oiled poll campaign as also from the statements to the investigating agencies that AAP candidates were provided through hawala sources up to Rs.90 lakhs each for electioneering. All this, of course, was aimed at fulfilling the AAP Supreme's ambition to become a national leader in his eventual quest for the highest office in the land.

Ambition is alright, but when the means used are corrupt, such as the AAP leader used by inflicting on the tippers in Delhi a one-sided excise policy regardless of its impact on the exchequer it did warrant a criminal investigation into the scandal.

However, like all other scams involving high profile politicians the fear is that this too may end up in judicial limbo. For, nearly two years now the trial has not begun, one ground for the apex court to free the jailed accused/suspects on bail. Again, looking at the fate of politicians across the board who had indulged in various acts of omission and commission while in power, the record of convictions in such investigations does not inspire confidence. For one Laloo Parsad Yadav, who has spent couple of years in jail in the Rs.800-crore fodder scam, one can hardly recall a notable politician who has been convicted for corruption. It does not suggest that all of them barring Laloo Yadav were lily-white and shunned the temptation to dip into the public till. Far from it. Scan around the country. Without an exception the political families in each State have risen from modest means to enormous wealth in double-quick-time. Indeed, it will be interesting to find out what, if any, day-job heads of these families held to pay for their luxurious life-style.

Kejriwal and others in AAP claim with a kernel of truth that not a penny has been found in raids from their homes or offices. But, the charges, on the face of it, seem convincing. Besides, IT, ED, CBI raids on various political dynasties, even under the Narendra Modi government, have failed to yield much. No. Not even an unaccounted penny, as far as we know. Yet, the miasma of corruption and malfeasance hangs around those raided. For two reasons. Politicians know how to game the system. And the ruling parties lack sincerity in investigating political corruption, merely weaponising the CBI, ED, IT, etc., to bend inconvenient politicians to their will rather than to penalise corruption per se.

The record of the Modi government in this regard is as bad as any government that came before it. We can recall the case of the late and celebrated Orissa politician Biju Patnaik. The actual charge for which he was arrested was that a couple of bottles of the then imported Black Label whisky were found in his house in violation of the excise law. That was in Indira Gandhi's Emergency. But before and after Emergency too central and state governments have gone after their critics, slapping various provisions in the penal code — not with the intention of upholding the majesty of law or to root out corruption, but only to teach their political opponents a lesson — or to make them join their ranks. As we have witnessed in recent times in Maharashtra, nay especially Maharashtra.

In the case of Kejriwal, it is quite likely that the BJP government would like to trip the AAP leader as he manoeuvres his way up the greasy political pole, keen to spread his footprint outside Delhi. Even a Congress government would have shown alacrity in going after Kejriwal had it been power because, more than BJP, the AAP took away the Congress vote-bank in the shanty colonies in the national capital on the back of freebies such as water and bijli. But Kejriwal walked into the trap owing to his burning ambition, resorting to all the tricks which the established parties resort to for raising funds. He was caught and must pay the price for his stupidity. Meanwhile, have some consideration for the taxpayers who are made to bear the enormous financial burden for costs of defending Kejriwal and others charged in the excise and a host of other cases in which AAP finds itself embroiled. And to say the least it has a special tendency to seek judicial intervention at every other step.



Ringside View

JAYANTA ROY CHOWDHURY

Last week for the first time since Bangladesh became independent in 1971, an event was held at Dhaka's National Press Club extolling Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a figure of hate to those who founded Bangladesh, as the language movement which eventually metamorphosed into a freedom struggle, started in right earnest after Jinnah ruled in March 1948 that "Urdu and Urdu alone" would be the national language of the newly-formed state of Pakistan.

On the fateful day of March 24, 1948, Jinnah, who was then Governor General of Pakistan, addressing a gathering at Dhaka University's Curzon Hall, made this declaration in a bid to stifle nascent demands that Bengali be given equal status along with Urdu as the national language of his country since a larger percentage of Pakistan's population lived in its eastern wing and spoke that language.

Earlier in the day he had met a cross-section of Bengali leaders and citizenry from East Pakistan and added insult to injury by asking them if they could point to any instance of great literature written in Bengali to back their contention that the language be given national status along with Urdu. (This despite the fact that the only Asian Nobel Laureate for Literature till then had written exclusively in Bengali!)

That single act of linguistic chauvinism on the part of the man who had been hailed as Quaid-i-Azam by his millions of followers was to cost Pakistan dearer than the any of the sinister theories its leaders have claimed responsible for breaking up that ill-fated nation or led to its current state of financial and political chaos.

On that fateful day in March, for the first time Jinnah was heckled by an audience in Pakistan and had to hear loud calls of "No, no", challenging his diktat which till then had been taken as the final word in his country.

In December 1971, after Bangladesh emerged from the senseless genocide which killed an estimated over two million people, Jinnah and Urdu were banished from the country's life.

However 53 years later, after a tumultuous student-led movement forced Awami League and Sheikh Hasina out of power, Jinnah seems to have come "alive" once more, as have forces which had then supported a united Pakistan.

Interestingly, last month, a proposal was floated by a former military officer Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, the son of former notorious Jamaat-e-Islami leader Ghulam Azam, to change Bangladesh's national flag and anthem — Rabindranath Tagore's "Amar Sonar Bangla" (My Golden Bengal).

Large numbers of people gathered in various places in Dhaka, Faridpur,

Chittagong and other places to sing the country's national anthem — a song of unity — against the Islamist and revisionist powers that they feared were taking over their country in the guise of a student revolt.

The sudden public display of patriotism by large numbers turned the tide and possibly forced the interim government to issue a statement denying any plans for a change, but the damage had been done. Loud and ever increasing murmurs against what many in Bangladesh see as the "Jamaatification" of its society and polity have started. Professors and vice chancellors of universities who were either Hindus or liberal Muslim intellectuals have been ousted and pro-Jamaat ideologues, some without the required degrees placed in their places.

In the very early days of the so called student takeover which saw Prof Muhammad Yunus flown in as interim prime minister, there were instances of defacing of Sheikh Mujib's statues as well as symbols of the 1971 liberation war. A popular backlash had however stopped further damage to recent history. Bangladesh's long silent and suffering minorities — Hindus, Buddhists and tribals — also came out in large numbers to protest in many parts of the country, including in Dhaka's Shahbag area, last week for a second time.

Their protest was against the wave

of attacks on their homes and forcible "collection" of protection money from them.

A report compiled by a leading Bangladeshi newspaper, *Prothom Alo* (First Light), which has otherwise been anti-Hasina and pro-Interim government, said 1,068 houses and business establishments owned by Hindus were attacked between August 5 to August 20, that is a period of just 15 days. Some 22 temples were also destroyed.

It also noted that attacks were also launched against members of the Ahmedia community, Christians and tribal ethnic groups. Among properties burnt down were large garments factories which fetch the country's its single largest source of foreign exchange. Many blame these attacks on Islamists and pro-Jamaat factions. The Jamaat-I-Islami (which later became Bangladesh Jamaat) along with Muslim League were the biggest supporters of Pakistan during the 1971 liberation war and opposed the formation of Bangladesh by helping raise armed Razakkar units which attacked people — freedom fighters' families, intellectuals suspected of supporting secession and of course minorities, forcing some 10 million people to flee to India as refugees.

The Jamaat and other pro-Pakistan forces did not die out with the birth of Bangladesh. They went dormant or underground. During the periods of military rule and at other times when

they found it expedient, they rallied and became a force in the country with or without popular support.

The less rabid Muslim League which too had supported Pakistan also calihgedits colours since 1971 and its members either joined the Bangladesh Nationalist Party floated by General Ziaur Rahman or Gen H M Ershad's Jatiyo Party.

However, the fact remained that a quarter of Bangladesh's population remained wedded to the idea of Pakistan or to Islamist politics. Another quarter to a third of its population supported independence and liberal politics, while the rest of the populace swayed from one side to the other.

This time round the "silent majority" seems to have voted on the streets against Hasina and Awami League. However that does not mean they have voted for the Jamaat's hardline anti-minority or anti-Indian vision or for against the idea of a sovereign Bangladeshi nation which has cut its umbilical cord with Pakistan.

Diplomacy and safeguards have to go hand in hand as India treads in its very difficult and very problematic neighbourhood.

(Read full article at freepress-journal.in/analysis)

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Consequences of the moral panic over transgender athletes

It is no accident that amongst the women athletes who have had their gender questioned the vast majority have been women of colour



Dissenters' Corner

CONRAD KUNAL BARWA

The outline of the controversy around Imane Khelif's participation in the Paris Olympics and accusations of her being a man, steeped in both transphobia and misogyny, have proven to be extremely damaging to all the individuals involved. It has revealed the still-ugly debate about the inclusion and status of transgender people, this time in sport, a debate which is characterised by blatant dishonesty, ulterior motives, and media manipulation. It has also exposed the mileage that is to be gained by mining the deep seams of latent and not-so-latent transphobia that exist, and the benefit derived from turning it into a veritable moral panic about gender roles in society. Most importantly, it demonstrates that while a simple gender binary is inherently unstable and needs to be transcended to allow the fair inclusion of transgender people; the very prospect of this evokes hysteria and fear amongst those unwilling to accept this fact.

Khelif herself has stated that she is a "biological" woman and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has recognised and accepted this. Despite this, Angela Carini's claims — after having conceded defeat after only 46 seconds — that she had never been hit so hard in her life, and feared

for her safety, were given wide credence with the added implication that Khelif was a male athlete competing against women. This led to an open season on Khelif with the usual suspects joining in from JK Rowling to Elon Musk, both of whom posted in support of Carini's claims and questioned Khelif's status as a woman. Her next opponent, the Hungarian boxer, Anna Luca Hamori, joined in by posting an appalling image of a hulking minotaur towering over a much smaller woman boxer, as a representation of the match between her Khelif. The dishonesty was exposed more clearly, when Khelif stated that she had trained in Italy, along with Carini's coaches and indeed had training sessions with her in the ring without any concerns being raised. Carini and Hamori's later mealy-mouthed apology to Khelif after these incidents, does little to alleviate the issue that they had placed a large target on her back, not only for the abusive online transphobic campaign against her but also risking her personal safety, given the status of transgender people in her native Algeria. Carini's protestations that her move was not pre-meditated and that she wasn't directly questioning Khelif's gender status thus seem extremely hollow. The expected nationalist battle lines were also drawn with Italian Prime Min-

ister Giorgia Meloni raising a complaint to the Olympic authorities on Carini's behalf, as did the Hungarian national boxing federation on behalf of Hamori. It was fortunate that both wider Algerian society and the Algerian government backed Khelif completely, supporting her throughout the tournament and celebrating her eventual gold medal.

It is not possible to overlook how this moral panic over transphobia has strong racist roots; it's no accident that amongst the swathe of women athletes who have had their gender questioned the vast majority have been women of colour; from the Indian athletes Dutee Chand and Santhi Soundarajan to the South African sprinter Caster Semenya, whose long struggles to be allowed to participate in women's sports is well documented. All too often the established gender binary is based on racial conceptions of femininity which see women as conforming to an aesthetic visual type that is predominantly Euro-centric. The colonial roots of medical accounts of female and male embodiment and the construction of femininity through conflation with whiteness needs to be both acknowledged and interrogated as well as superseded.

For while Khelif's struggle was to be accepted as a woman, rather than

a transgender athlete, this speaks to the elephant in the room — which is the actual participation of transgender athletes in women's sports. For if we accept that trans-women are women — and make no doubt about it, they are — then their exclusion becomes a matter of bias and bigotry, not science or some historically and dubious constructed notion of femininity. This cannot be sustained if we are serious about having public spheres of activity that are truly inclusive and welcoming to all members of society, not just conforming to cis-gender stereotypes.

What we can be assured of going forward is that trans-women in the public eye will continue to be targeted and subjected to transphobia and both cis-women and trans-women athletes who don't conform to the conventional gender binary that exists in many people's minds and who achieve success in their respective sports, instead of being feted and met with acclaim will be met with suspicion, allegations of cheating and vitriol. Removing this poisonous discourse from public life and ensuring that all women athletes, whether transgender or not, are not subject to it will be a truly Sisyphean task but one which must be undertaken nonetheless. A genuine commitment to fairness and equality must resist the

drive to read bodies along racialised gendered lines. We need to expand our understanding of athletic ability, which depends on a lot more than the features which have traditionally been regarded as determinants of gender (eg genitals, chromosomes, hormones). It cannot be left to traditional and inherited aesthetic ideas of what makes a woman and what compromises womanhood, an approach which historically has excluded and indeed denied the actual existence of transgender people. When observers such as the UK Culture Secretary, Lisa Nandy describe the match between Khelif and Carini "an incredibly uncomfortable watch" they are feeding into this bias and perpetuating such a system of exclusion. As Nandy said, we do need to get the "balance between inclusion, fairness and safety" right but that also entails coming to terms with the fact that this cannot be subject to the visual "uncomfortableness" or prejudice of cis-gender people. Inclusion and fairness always exacts a cost; it is time we pay it.

(Read full article at freepress-journal.in/analysis)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Growing tussle for land

Excessive modernisation has taken a toll on the living space of wildlife, and now comes a research study that says humans and animals may fight for more than half of the

Earth's land by 2070. Not surprisingly, the tussle for land is set to become more pronounced in countries with high population like India and China. In search for new pastures, the burgeoning human population can further intrude into wildlife habitats. Desolate

forests may gradually transform into a beehive of activity due to human intervention. Essentially it means there will be a great overlap of landscapes between human and wildlife populations. Human-animal conflict, loss of biodiversity and transmission of

MIKA'S MATRIX



diseases are all set to witness a new high over the next four to five decades. Among these, infections spread from animals to human beings could pave the way for rekindling of the zoonotic diseases that have cost humans a fortune besides their obvious, crippling, health effects. Dr Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

Spike in rape and murder

Incidences of rape and murder are growing solely due to the apathy of the government and the law-enforcing authorities. Rape and murder are viewed just as yet another crime and not with the seriousness required. What is appearing in the media is only the scattered incidents of those caught; those who are not caught must be carrying on unchecked. A detailed study should be conducted including the physiological factors responsible, and the government should act on the report with sincerity to build confidence in the minds of women. AG Rajmohan, Anantapur



Beware of opportunistic politicians

There was a time when in the Indian political field there were excellent leaders who irrespective of their parties and ideologies worked for the welfare of all the people and the nation. Unfortunately today experience, ability, prowess and intelligence has given way for instability, muscle and money power, crookedness and gimmicks. In current times the political scenario abounds with unpredictable occurrences and sad to say is packed with politicians who turn

out to be mere opportunists and sometimes go to any extent to achieve name and fame. Most of these politicians pose as leaders but lack leadership qualities. Politics today has become sort of a market only for selfish gains and power. But people have become more prudent and they are watching. It is here one remembers the words of Abraham Lincoln, who said, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time."

M Pradyu, Kannur