



## Telangana Today

FOR LOCAL TO GLOBAL NEWS

### Yet another tragedy on tracks

There is always a sense of déjà vu surrounding train accidents in India that occur with depressing regularity, followed by ritualistic announcements of compensation and inquiry. The death toll is eventually reduced to cold statistics and then it becomes business as usual. No lessons are learnt from the tragedies of the past. Another disastrous rail collision, this time in West Bengal's Siliguri involving Kanchanjunga Express and a goods train, has left nine passengers dead and over 40 injured. The mishap has once again exposed the chinks in the country's railway signalling and emergency response systems. It has now emerged that the driver of the goods train disregarded the signal and rammed into the Kanchanjunga Express from behind, leading to the derailment of three rear compartments of the passenger train. The ill-fated train, carrying over 1,300 passengers, was travelling from Agartala in Tripura to Sealdah in Kolkata when the tragedy occurred close to New Jalpaiguri station. A combination of a signalling fault on the tracks and human error by the driver of the freight train appears to have led to a deadly collision, a problem that is not unfamiliar in the Indian context. If only corrective measures were put in place learning from similar blunders in the past, the Kanchanjunga tragedy could have been averted. Moreover, 'Kavach'—the indigenously developed automatic train protection system to help prevent accidents if two trains are travelling on the same line—was not available in this particular section.

And, to add to the woes, the automatic signalling system between Ranipatna station and Chhatrapati Hat Junction, where the accident took place, was defective since the early hours of the fateful day. The latest tragedy comes a year after India witnessed one of its worst rail disasters—a collision involving Coromandel Express and two other trains in Odisha's Balasore district that claimed over 290 lives. The Balasore mishap had raised hopes that lessons would be learnt to prevent such accidents. However, the situation on the ground doesn't seem to have changed. In October last year, a collision between two passenger trains on the Howrah-Chennai line in Andhra Pradesh's Vizianagaram district claimed 14 lives; in February this year, a freight train ran driverless for about 70 km from Kathua (Jammu) to Dasuya (Punjab)—it was just a stroke of luck that no major accident happened. The spotlight is back on Kavach, the 'train collision avoidance' system aimed at preventing accidents due to human error. It is being implemented in a phased manner, but the pace of route coverage is rather slow—in stark contrast to the government's emphasis on speed on the rail tracks. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida have pledged to expedite the bullet train project, but the West Bengal mishap has shown that safety must take precedence over the glitz and glamour of ultra-fast trains.

Safety must take precedence over the glitz and glamour of ultra-fast trains

# 06

## VIEWPOINT

HYDERABAD, Wednesday, June 19, 2024



SHARAD PAWAR  
NCP (SP) chief

“In the Lok Sabha polls, we (NCP-SP) contested only 10 seats. But by electing eight candidates, the people sent out a message that the atmosphere of the State is changing



ANNIE RAJA  
CPI leader

I had raised this question when Rahul Gandhi contested, I am asking this question to Priyanka Gandhi today... who is your biggest enemy? Is it communal-fascist forces or Left parties?



MANOJ JARANGE  
Quota activist

The agitation of OBCs is vindictive. We will not intensify ours or make it bigger because of them but will take reservation from the OBC category and that too from the current quota of 50%

## Coalition govt & foreign policy

Decision-making is likely to remain largely consistent as reflected in the allocation of portfolios



Dr AKHIL KUMAR



ANUDEEP GUJJETI

After two successive general elections to the Lok Sabha, India has returned to an era of coalition politics. Naturally, this has sparked debates about the continuity of the policy trajectory adopted by the ruling political dispensation, with foreign affairs being no exception. Although no single party holds a simple majority in the lower house of Parliament, this may not impede or hinder the continuity of the existing foreign policy framework, which will likely remain unchanged. Most importantly, there is no change in leadership at the national level, as Narendra Modi and Dr S. Jaishankar continue to serve as Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister of India, respectively.

#### Examples from History

However, it is important to remember the significant influence regional parties have had on foreign policy during past coalition governments, especially regarding India's neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. During the coalition governments led by Dr Manmohan Singh from 2004 to 2014, regional parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) exerted some influence on foreign policy decisions. For instance, India's votes on Sri Lanka were significantly affected by the United Progressive Alliance's regional ally, the DMK, in Tamil Nadu, due to concerns about the Tamil population of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. Similarly, another ally, the All India Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, not only influenced the economic decisions of the government but also obstructed the Teesta River Waters agreement with Bangladesh.

Notwithstanding the exceptions mentioned above, it is preposterous to



conclude that coalition governments cannot succeed in foreign policy decision-making. Many significant decisions that have played an important role in India's standing in global politics were taken under coalition governments, for example, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's decisions on liberalisation, taken right after India lost a long-standing and time-tested partner Russia after the Cold War, thereby opening the Indian economy to the global market, Vajpayee's nuclear tests, which played an important role in India's security policy, and Dr Manmohan Singh's decision on the Indo-US nuclear deal wherein the continuity of the government itself was at stake as a no-confidence motion was moved regarding the same. Hence, the coalition governments also left an indelible impact on India's foreign policy.

#### Priority Areas

The current political dispensation under the leadership of Narendra Modi has some domestic factors to its advantage, unlike the previous coalition governments. One, none of the coalition partners of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) are ideologically divergent from its major partner, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). Two, even after adhering to the 'coalition dharma', the allocation of portfolios suggests that the BJP wanted to maintain continuity by retaining most of the cabinet-rank ministries, including the Ministry of External Affairs under Dr Jaishankar. Third, a strong leadership.

Even though the BJP lost a significant number of seats in the Lok Sabha, PM Modi still maintains a strong hold on the constituents who form the government.

This is important because leadership plays an important role in formulating foreign policy. Other than the domestic factors, international structure/system or international factors also play a key role in formulating the foreign policy of any nation.

In the current context, major powers of the world are going for elections this year, including the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, Canada and France amid growing anti-incumbency. This implies that Narendra Modi and Dr Jaishankar might have to engage with new world leaders, many of whom are inclined to foster strong relations with India.

Nevertheless, the pulls and pressures of coalition politics and the reinvigorated opposition with increased Lok Sabha seats would make the ruling NDA tread cautiously on contentious foreign policy matters. Within this context, the top priorities for the NDA in the next five years that might attract the scrutiny of the I.N.D.I.A bloc include securing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with various countries such as the European Union, the UK and Canada. This is crucial considering India's apprehensions with provisions related to agriculture, flooding of Chinese goods and its At-

A significant challenge arises from the opposition, which is expected to bring heightened scrutiny and vigorous debate on the validity of the policies

manirbhar Bharat policy. Another issue is India's policy towards West Asia. This includes India's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict, protecting sea lanes of communication in the Red Sea and Suez Canal which impact India's trade and energy supplies.

Moreover, the India-Israel-United Arab Emirates-United States (I2U2) initiative which was started in 2022 comes under scrutiny especially after the Israel-Palestine conflict even though the latest G7 communiqué committed to support the strategic initiatives under the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

#### Securing Neighbourhood

India's policy towards the Global South is another area of priority in the third term of Narendra Modi under a coalition government other than just focusing on South Asia considering the global ambitions of India. Securing the neighbourhood is any day a priority but at the same time committing to the leadership role while representing the interests of the Global South is as important especially when India needs its support in securing a seat at the high table in the United Nations.

India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which includes QUAD, needs to gain momentum especially when major powers in the region, the US and Japan, are going to elections amid the growing expansionist agenda of China in the region. The significant challenge for the NDA government is going to be on the issue of Kashmir. This is the first coalition government formed after abrogating Article 370. With a strong opposition in the Lok Sabha and increased threat perception with renewed terrorist activity in Jammu & Kashmir, the current dispensation would have to answer a lot of questions about internal security which has huge foreign policy ramifications.

To summarise, decision-making with regard to the foreign policy of the current government is likely to remain largely consistent. This continuity is reflected in the allocation of portfolios, with key ministries like External Affairs, Home Ministry and Commerce remaining unchanged. However, a significant challenge arises from the opposition, which is expected to bring heightened scrutiny and vigorous debate about the policies' validity and consequences. Although this scrutiny promotes a dynamic environment that incorporates diverse viewpoints and improves policy decisions, it may hinder the decisive policy-making approach seen during Narendra Modi's first two terms.

(Akhil Kumar is a PhD from the Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad. Anudeep Gujjeti is a PhD candidate from the Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad, Research Associate, Council for Social Development, and Young Leader, Pacific Forum, US)

### Letters to the Editor

#### No excuse

After the Balasore train accident in Odisha, the Railways has been hit by another major mishap, this time collision between a goods train and the Kanchanjunga Express in West Bengal has claimed many lives. Railways modernisation without safety measures will be of little use. Not many trains seem to have been covered by the Automatic Train Protection System. There is no excuse for not upgrading tracks and maintaining them. Railway stations and station masters badly need a refresher course. Besides, an overhaul of coaches cannot be stressed more.

Every Express train should possess the anti-climbing Vistadome Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches.

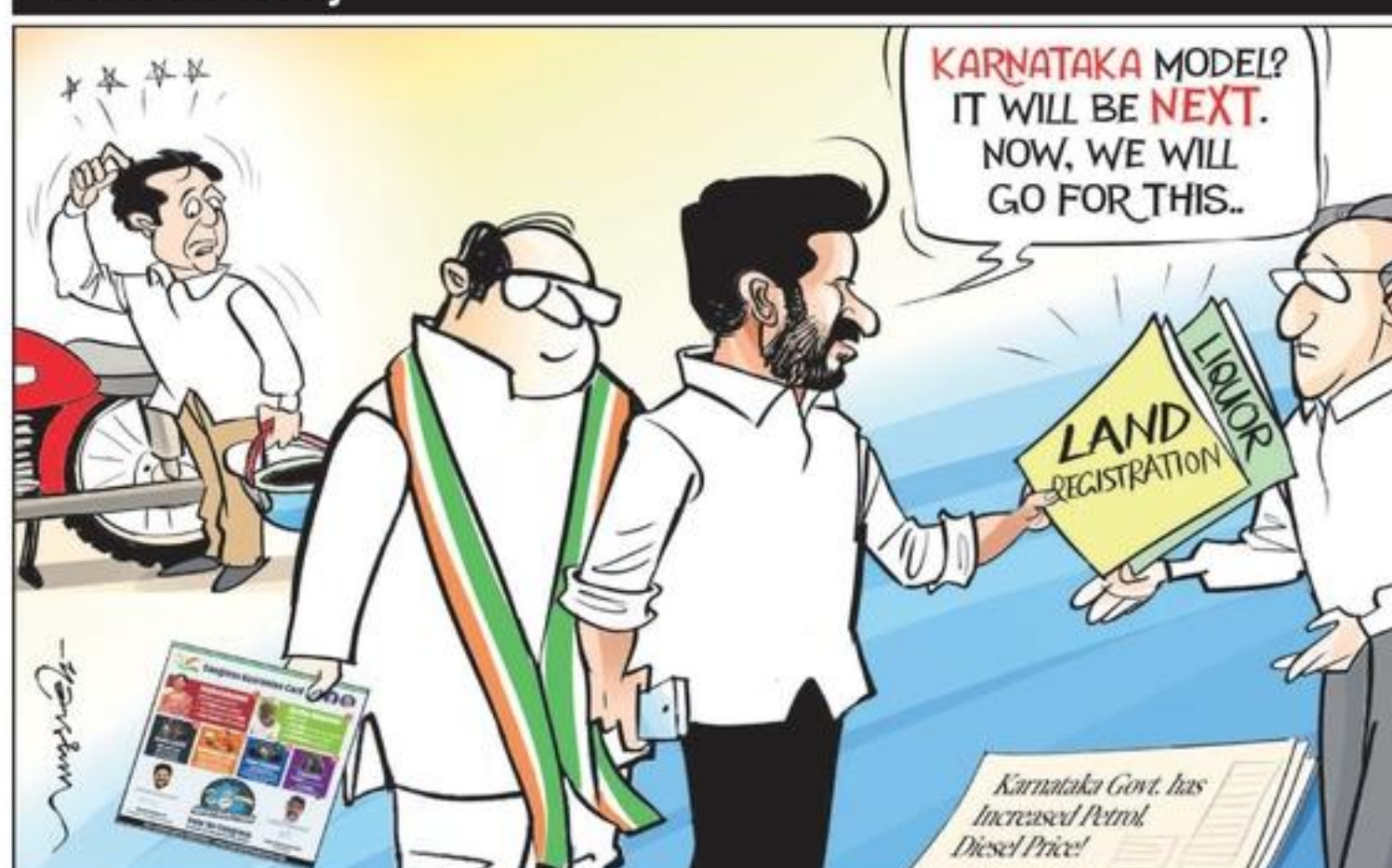
GANAPATHI BHAT, Akola

#### Lasting peace

At the just concluded G7 summit in Italy, India did not sign a joint communiqué on peace deal by contending that respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty can only serve as the basis for achieving lasting peace in Ukraine and called for 'sincere and practical engagement' between Moscow and Kyiv. To realise its vision of a developed economy by 2047, India needs to mitigate rising geopolitical risks by unleashing proactive diplomacy for global peace in a cautious manner.

KR SRINIVASAN, Secunderabad

### Cartoon Today



### India in the hotspot

Los Angeles Times

#### A striking setback for India's Modi

Narendra Modi emerged victorious in his third straight election. But the election was also a striking setback for him: his party lost more than 60 seats and its legislative majority, so he must now govern with coalition partners.

Guardian

#### Consensus or division?

Since the shock election result, Modi's messages have emphasised the theme of consensus... Yet this narrative has been belied by his cabinet appointments, where BJP successfully refused to relinquish powerful seats.

Toronto Star

#### Indian national extradited to the US

An Indian national, Nikhil Gupta, was extradited from the Czech Republic to the United States to face charges of murder for hire and conspiracy to commit murder for hire, Czech Justice Minister Pavel Blažek said.

Write to us at [letters@telanganatoday.com](mailto:letters@telanganatoday.com)



## Bridging a Divide

India's economic landscape presents a paradox of rapid growth alongside deep-seated inequality. The disparity between the prosperous and the impoverished is stark, with Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, highlighting the chasm. With an average annual income per capita of just Rs 60,000 in 2021-2022, Uttar Pradesh's economic struggles exemplify a broader issue that could threaten the stability and sustainability of India's growth. Economic growth in India has been impressive, averaging over 8 per cent annually and fostering a booming stock market. Yet, this growth masks a troubling reality: the benefits have been unevenly distributed. The top 1 per cent of India's population now commands nearly 23 per cent of the national income, a level of inequality comparable to the colonial era. This concentration of wealth is not merely an academic concern but a tangible threat to India's long-term economic stability. One of the critical drivers of this inequality is the structure of India's economic development. Over the past decade, the country's growth has increasingly been driven by a handful of large conglomerates that dominate the economic landscape, executing government projects and wielding significant pricing power. This model, while effective in driving infrastructure development and economic growth, often sidelines smaller firms and fails to create widespread, high-quality employment opportunities. The agricultural sector, which employs 43 per cent of the population, is particularly affected. Despite its importance, the sector has seen stagnant incomes and limited investment. Lower food prices, intended to tame inflation and support urban consumers, effectively subsidise the better-off at the expense of rural farmers. This perverse redistribution exacerbates rural poverty and deepens economic divides. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Improving competition within the economy is essential. Encouraging the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can diversify economic activity and create more employment opportunities. Additionally, investing in human capital through education and skills development is crucial. A well-educated and skilled workforce is the foundation of a robust and inclusive economy. Infrastructure development, particularly in underdeveloped states like Uttar Pradesh, is another vital component. Improved transportation, communication, and energy infrastructure can stimulate economic activity and attract investment. However, these efforts must be complemented by social policies that directly address inequality. This could include redistributive measures such as progressive taxation and targeted welfare programmes. Moreover, India's economic policy needs to shift towards inclusivity. Policymakers should prioritise reforms that enhance the economic participation of historically marginalised communities. Ensuring that economic growth translates into broad-based prosperity will require a concerted effort to overhaul the education system, scale up skilling programmes, and reform the agricultural sector. The path ahead is challenging, and there are no easy solutions. However, the stakes are high. If India fails to address its economic inequality, the resulting social unrest could undermine decades of progress. The country's leadership must recognise that sustainable growth is not merely about increasing GDP but about ensuring that all citizens share in the nation's prosperity.

## Cabinet Collapse

The dissolution of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's six-member war cabinet marks a significant turning point in the country's politics, underscoring deep-seated tensions within the government and highlighting the complexities of managing the Gaza conflict. This decision, spurred by the departure of centrist ministers Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, reflects broader issues that transcend mere cabinet reshuffling. Mr Netanyahu's choice to dissolve the war cabinet and consult with a smaller group of ministers, including Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, reveals an attempt to streamline decision-making processes in the face of a protracted and volatile conflict. However, this move also exposes the internal strife within Mr Netanyahu's coalition. The demands from nationalist-religious partners like Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir for inclusion in the war cabinet signal a struggle for influence and representation in critical security discussions. This internal discord is not merely a matter of political manoeuvring; it has substantial implications for Israel's strategic approach to the Gaza war. The inclusion of figures like Mr Smotrich and Mr Ben-Gvir could shift the government's stance towards a more hardline, nationalistic perspective, potentially alienating key international allies, including the United States. The delicate balance Mr Netanyahu must maintain between appeasing his coalition partners and adhering to international expectations is becoming increasingly precarious. The departure of Mr Gantz and Mr Eisenkot, both of whom cited Mr Netanyahu's failure to form a coherent strategy for the Gaza conflict, underscores a significant leadership vacuum. Their exit signals a profound dissatisfaction with the current administration's handling of the war, raising questions about Mr Netanyahu's capacity to lead Israel through one of its most challenging security crises. The absence of a clear, unified strategy not only hampers military operations but also diminishes public confidence in the government's ability to protect and advance national interests. Furthermore, the dissolution of the war cabinet can be seen as a reflection of Mr Netanyahu's broader political strategy, which often involves consolidating power and minimising dissent within his ranks. While this approach may offer short-term gains in terms of streamlined decision-making, it risks undermining the democratic principles of transparency and accountability. In times of war, when national unity and coherent leadership are paramount, such a strategy can be particularly detrimental. As Israel navigates the complexities of the Gaza conflict, the need for a comprehensive, well-articulated strategy becomes increasingly urgent. This strategy must not only address immediate security concerns but also consider the long-term implications for regional stability and international relations. The departure of experienced military leaders like Mr Gantz and Mr Eisenkot highlights a critical loss of expertise that could have provided valuable insights into crafting such a strategy. Mr Netanyahu's dissolution of the war cabinet is a stark reminder of the intricate and often contentious nature of coalition politics in Israel.

# Ifs and Butts

Cigarette filters, capturing some of the toxic chemicals from smoking, still harbour over 7,000 compounds, with at least 150 known toxins. Each discarded butt can contaminate up to 1,000 litres of water, releasing hazardous substances such as toxic metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and nitrogenic compounds. Studies reveal that these chemicals persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in organisms, and induce harmful effects. Most cigarette filters, despite seeming like cotton, are really composed of plastic fibres called cellulose acetate, which can take up to a decade to decompose



This summer, India endured an unprecedented heatwave, with Odisha facing the harshest brunt, recording 27 extreme weather days. Western Rajasthan followed with 23 days, Gangetic West Bengal with 21, and Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh, and western UP each with 20 days.

These figures, more than double the usual, highlight a growing climate crisis demanding urgent attention. We have often discussed and dissected the myriad factors causing these environmental issues in an intellectual manner, all while a burning cigarette dangles between two fingers.

This irony underscores our complacency, as the very act of smoking contributes to the degradation we so passionately debate. It's time to confront our contradictions and act decisively for the planet's sake.

"Smoking is injurious to health" is perhaps India's most well-publicized health warning, an omnipresent reminder of the personal toll tobacco takes. Yet, lurking beneath this familiar refrain is a less popular but equally critical truth: cigarettes wreak havoc on the environment. In the quiet corners of our cities, along the once-pristine banks of rivers, and scattered across our beaches, a silent scourge festers – cigarette butts.

These toxic remnants of a fleeting vice silently poison our planet, leaving an indelible mark on our ecosystems. As we grapple with the visible health impacts of smoking, it's imperative to confront its insidious environmental consequences.

Each year, the staggering worldwide production of 5.5 trillion cigarettes results in the inappropriate disposal of approximately 4.5 trillion cigarette butts. India's landfills receive over 100 billion cigarette butts per year.

Amidst the smoke haze of tobacco's impact on our environment, a startling statistic emerges: each year, our nation discards over 17 million kilograms of tobacco-related garbage. With legal cigarettes representing just 10 per cent of the market share, the alarming weight of bidi waste looms ominously, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive action to address this environmental crisis.

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Imagine a threat from plastic that has been quietly leaking lead, formaldehyde, nicotine, and arsenic into our ecosystems over a ten-year period. Every butt, a storehouse of dangerous substances, is a little time bomb waiting to devastate the ecosystem. As the most common form of anthropogenic litter, cigarette butts pose a dire environmental threat.

These ubiquitous pollutants wash into rivers, lakes, and oceans, becoming a fatal snack for unsuspecting birds, animals, and fish. These filters, non-biodegradable in nature, stubbornly resist the natural order of decay. While the sun's ultraviolet rays may eventually fragment them into smaller pieces, the toxic materials they contain persist, contaminating soil and water alike.

What we face here is not just litter; it's a global crisis. The implications extend beyond environmental damage. Cigarette butts have sparked wildfires, laying waste to wildlife, vegetation, and human structures.

On the other hand, the economic burden of clearing littered tobacco products falls unjustly on taxpayers, not the industry responsible. Annually, this expense amounts to approximately USD 2.6 billion in China

and USD 766 million in India, with Brazil and Germany each surpassing USD 200 million. Such enormous expenses underscore the urgent need for industry accountability and proactive solutions.

Recently, we graciously passed World No Tobacco Day on May 31, which is commemorated to raise public awareness of the risks associated with tobacco use, expose the practices of the tobacco industry, emphasize the WHO's anti-tobacco initiatives, and support future generations' health and protection.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has labelled tobacco as "a threat to our oceans." Article 18 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) urges countries to safeguard both the environment and public health. To address the significant environmental and health impacts of microplastics in cigarette filters, UNEP and the WHO FCTC Secretariat have partnered to raise awareness and promote action. On 5 February 2004, India became a signatory to the WHO FCTC. The agreement became operative on 27 February 2005.

On the other hand, decades of the tobacco industry's deception have ensnared generations, fuelling a global epidemic. This multi-billion-dollar behemoth preys on children and adolescents with cunning advertising by employing cinema and sports celebrities, launching products faster than regulations can keep pace.

Despite evidence-based measures and governmental efforts, these industries relentlessly expand their market share, prioritizing profit over public health and targeting our most vulnerable. As a result, people light up while at work and during leisure. In some colleges and universities, it becomes a tradition to permit smoking by students.

Recently, the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23 indicated an increase in spending on paan, tobacco, and intoxicants in both rural and urban areas.

Rural expenditure rose from 3.21 per cent (2011-12) to 3.79 per cent, while urban spending increased from 1.61 per cent to 2.43 per cent, indicating the production of more cigarette butts to fulfil the demand.

So, the time has come for collective action. It is crucial to understand that the fight against cigarette waste is a struggle for a healthier future as well as a cleaner environment as we tackle this widespread issue.

By addressing the root of the problem – holding the tobacco industry accountable, enhancing public awareness, and implementing stringent regulations – we can begin to reclaim our landscapes from this silent scourge.

Here the chronicle of the long-protracted battle provides us with encouragement in this regard. In 1970, Clara Gouin, a stay-at-home mother, sparked a grassroots movement against tobacco's grip. Fuelled by personal tragedy and societal indifference, she founded the Group Against Smokers' Pollution (GASP). Their mission: to challenge the social acceptance of smoking.

Though outnumbered, they fought valiantly, paving the way for today's citizens to reclaim clean air. A few well-known figures who effectively advocate for the rights of non-smokers are Luther Terry and John Banzhaf.

Today amidst mounting environmental concerns, local authorities must confront the lash of non-biodegradable cigarette butt waste. Initiatives like Nirit Datta's ButtRush campaign and Naman Gupta and Vipul Gupta's Code Effort, highlight the urgent need for action. But enlightenment alone is insufficient; laws and institutions must evolve.

Political manifestos should address cigarette butt pollution. People need to be forced. Here, we must choose between the democratic right to smoke and preserving the environment for future generations. And in the end, the true measure of our progress can be a world where cigarette butts are no longer a thoroughgoing blight but a relic of a past we've risen above.

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### ASIAN VOICES

## Among the world's worst for workers

The murders of two prominent trade unionists last year have earned the Philippines ignominy as one of the 10 worst countries in the world for workers. Red-tagging, abductions, arbitrary arrests, and violence resulting in death, such as in the case of Alex Dolorosa and Jude Thaddeus Fernandez, were factors why the country was ranked for the eighth consecutive year among the 10 worst globally by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) – a shameful record for a government that has promised to champion the rights of Filipino workers under the "Bagong Pilipinas" rebranding.

Last Sunday's editorial on a new law protecting the rights of television and movie workers may have been a positive development – though implementation has yet to be seen – but the fact remains that majority of Filipino workers across different sectors continue to suffer from unfair labor practices ranging from low wages, lack of security of tenure, and the curtailment of their rights to freedom of association or to organize.

These conditions have prevailed despite the many flowery promises made by leaders past and present to improve their plight.

The accountability, however, should not be entirely placed on the current administration. The previous administration, through the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-Elcac) formed in



2018, was notorious for Red-tagging and launching violent attacks on rights defenders.

"Workers and unions in the Philippines remained at the mercy of Red-tagging (being blacklisted by the government as a communist subversive and branded an extremist), violence, abductions, and arbitrary arrests," said ITUC in its country profile on the Philippines. It said the government "fostered a climate of fear and persecution, silencing the collective voice of workers."

Workers across many sectors still faced significant obstacles when attempting to form trade unions." ITUC's Global Rights Index 2024 report released on June 12 gave the Philippines a rating of 5 on a scale of 1 (sporadic violation of rights) to 5+ (no guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law).

This rating, which means "no guarantee of rights" for workers despite the enactment of laws, was unchanged from last year and was based on violations recorded annually from April to March.

No arrest has been made so far in the April 2023 murder of Dolorosa, a call center organizer who was among those who filed complaints against forced overtime in May 2019 and was found to have been stabbed multiple times.

Fernandez, an organizer from the Kilusang Mayo Uno, on the other hand, was shot dead in September 2023, during a police raid in Binangonan, Rizal.

Police justified the shooting due to Fernandez's resistance to a search warrant even though he was unarmed; he was the 72nd victim of labor-related killings since July 2016.

Workers' rights are enshrined in the 1987 Constitution with Section 3 on labor guaranteeing rights to self-organization, collective bargaining and negotiations, and peaceful concerted activities, including the right to strike in accordance with law.

However, ITUC observed that these rights are "strictly regulated" and that there is no adequate means to protect workers from anti-union discrimination.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## A beacon of hope

SIR, In a world ever yearning for greater interconnectedness, the recent G7 summit has unveiled a momentous initiative: the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

This visionary enterprise is not merely a new trade route but a grand tapestry of roads, railways, and maritime paths interweaving from the vibrant markets of India, through the strategic heart of the Middle East, to the storied economies of Europe. It is a grand vision, set to rejuvenate and redefine trade and economic relationships across the vast expanse of Eurasia.

The ramifications of this corridor extend beyond mere commerce. It promises a fertile ground for knowledge exchange, cultural interplay, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

In essence, the IMEC is envi-

sioned as a bridge – not just of goods and services, but of ideas, cultures, and aspirations.

In a geopolitical landscape often dominated by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the IMEC emerges as a compelling alternative.

While the BRI has undeniably catalyzed infrastructure development on a global scale, it has also been mired in controversies concerning transparency and the debt burdens it places on participating nations.

The IMEC, however, champions the tenets of sustainability, transparency, and equitable partnerships. This approach seeks to allay fears of financial dependency and exploitation, offering a more balanced and mutually beneficial model of development.

Countries wary of the potential entanglements associated

with the BRI might find in the IMEC a beacon of hope – a pathway to growth that is both prudent and progressive.

By emphasizing these values, the IMEC presents itself as a strategic and attractive proposition for nations seeking to enhance their infrastructure and economic horizons without incurring unsustainable debts.

The endorsement by the G7 confers upon the IMEC not just political gravitas but also a potential influx of financial support. Such backing is indispensable in transforming the corridor from a conceptual marvel into a palpable reality.

Yours, etc., Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh, 16 June.

### IN ATTENDANCE

SIR, The BJP governments across the nation are trying to erase the colonial legacies in a number of ways including change in names of regions, railway stations and

### TOY TRAIN SHOW

SIR, I refer to the local page news report "Century-old car completes world tour" published in the 14 June edition of your paper. The technical hitches in vintage motor cars owe their origin to non-availability of spare parts et al. Many readers of your paper feel nostalgic with regard to such a report of an odyssey in a vintage automobile.

It is commendable that *The Statesman* hosts the Vintage Car rally beckoning vintage car enthusiasts.

Being a toy train enthusiast, I implore the Ministry of Railways to embark on a vintage toy train rally on the narrow gauge trackbed of the Railway Museum. Toy trains abound in the UK whereas in India gauge conversions in the plains have limited the trot of the toy trains to the hill stations.

Yours, etc., Anindya Ghosal, Burdwan, 14 June.

roads. But why is there reluctance to do away with the privileges associated with elected representatives?

All personal attendants for them should be discontinued. It is usual for politicians in the West to do their own personal chores. It is not unusual to find a minister waiting patiently in a queue in a

mall or carrying his own luggage. Here there are plenty of underlings to do this work.

They can very well pay for the services from their own pockets. Payments from the public exchequer for such services should stop.

Yours, etc., Anthony Henriques, Mumbai, 15 June.





# Secularism can never be a binary concept

GAUTAM BHATTACHARYA

Perhaps in no other general election in the past have issues like 'uniform civil code', 'politics of appeasement', 'secularism', 'illegal infiltration', 'NRC' etc. been so much a part of the campaign of political parties as it had happened this time. Whereas the right-wing political parties had stepped up their pitch to prove that because of the policies of appeasement pursued in the past by the Congress and other left-of-Center liberal parties, the proportion of the Hindu population declined from 84.1 per cent in the 1951 Census to 79.8 per cent in 2011, others alleged that so long as fertility rates of women were declining fast amongst all communities, this kind of narration was aimed at dividing society to gain electoral dividends.

In Western nations, secularism is perceived as a doctrine where religion and religious considerations are not reflected in the policies of the state. If we go by this idea of segregation of state and religion, can a secular state allow its citizens to follow the life practices as per their own religious scriptures? Perhaps the founding fathers of the Indian constitution thought that the two were contradictory. However, at the same time they felt that Indian society at the time of independence was not prepared enough to appreciate such a stricter doctrine of secularism.

In consequence it was stated in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution that the "state shall endeavor to secure for citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". But no time limit for



such an endeavor was indicated. The framers of modern India perceived India as a nation where laws relating to the personal life of citizens viz. marriage, divorce, inheritance of property etc. should all be governed by a set of rules independent of religious affiliation of the citizens. Uniform civil code is, therefore, an integral part of a secular state if we go by the principle of segregation of state and religion.

The softer approach to secularism talks of providing equal status, recognition and support from the State to all religions. This doctrine allows different sets of rules to prevail in relation to personal life for people of different religions, depending on the respective religious scriptures. Since independence, India went by this idea of secularism and never took the idea of uniform civil code seriously. The idea of this article is not to

compare the merits and demerits of two doctrines but to introspect on different shades of secularism.

Let's first look at our neighboring countries in South Asia. Can a State be secular if it patronizes any particular religion? The Constitution of Bangladesh by an amendment in 1988 declared Islam as the State-religion, though secularism is mentioned in the preamble as a fundamental principle. Family laws there have separate provisions for different religious groups. Though the Constitution says that "the state shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions", the secular credentials of Bangladesh were seriously jeopardised after adoption of a State Religion.

Even in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Hindu Marriage Act was implemented in 2017 to register

marriages solemnised by Hindu rituals where husband and wife are both Hindus. Such rights relating to marriage or inheritance of property, granted to minority communities do not necessarily establish the doctrine that the citizens from all religions "are given equal status, recognition and support from the State".

If the State identifies one particular religion as a state-religion, that vitiates the eco-system essential to extend equal status, recognition and support to all. What is there in the statute is important but more meaningful is the ecosystem which reflects the mind-set of those who run the state.

The Supreme Court (1975) observed two conditions for secularism: "the State shall have no religion of its own" and "the people of the country shall be equally entitled to their conscience and have the right freely to profess, practice and propagate any religion". However, there are exceptions even in Europe. In Denmark and Greece where politics, education, science and social affairs are independent of religious dogmas and institutions, they have 'state-church'.

The antithesis of a secular state is a 'theocratic state' where the legal system is based on religious law. In certain theocratic states, the Head of State cannot be from any religion other than their own. In today's world, it is difficult to find a purely theocratic state. However, in Afghanistan, Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Sharia laws are retained for personal matters and in the absence of personal law, judges decide based on their own interpretations of Sharia law. In most of these countries, religious minorities, in gen-

eral, do not have the right to practice their religion openly.

Contrarily, there are Muslim majority states viz. Indonesia or Turkey where freedom of religion for individuals is recognized. Indonesia recognizes six official religions. In Malaysia, Islam is the state religion and non-Malay citizens can practice any religion of their choice, but one must be a Muslim to be considered as Malay. Syria has a dual legal system where civil and criminal cases are heard in secular courts and in parallel there are also Sharia courts to handle personal matters. Though Syria's constitution claims to be a secular one, the President has to be a follower of Islam. On the other extreme there are Communist countries where atheism is practiced by the State and people are discouraged from practicing religion. China and Vietnam are classic examples.

Secularism is, therefore, not a binary concept. There is a spectrum and the state has to evolve through a process towards the doctrine of separation between the state policies and religion, depending on the preparedness of the society. After the setbacks to the BJP-led NDA in the recently held Lok Sabha election, the present government with a razor-thin majority in all probability will not pursue contentious issues like Uniform Civil Code. However, the debate in civil society on UCC is likely to continue. We need to judge the issue of implementation of the uniform civil code in secular India from an unbiased assessment of readiness of the society.

(The writer, a former civil servant, is now an independent commentator on socio-economic issues and public policies.)

## 100 YEARS AGO OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE future of the Mosul Vilayet has been reserved for decision by the League of Nations. This is in accordance with the understanding arrived at during the discussions at Lausanne, where it was agreed that the matter should be omitted from the treaty for further examination by England and Turkey, or in the last resort by the League of Nations. The Turkish view is that geographically and ethnologically the province belongs to Turkey. The English view is that by the same test it belongs to Iraq. The Turks appear to have been surprised at the firmness with which the English view has been maintained, having expected a graceful withdrawal after the amenities of Lausanne. Iraq was constituted as an independent State in 1920, under the mandate of Great Britain. A treaty between the two States was signed in 1922, whereby England undertook to secure a speedy delimitation of the frontier, and to use its good offices to secure the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations. The census of 1920 gave the population as 2,849,282, including Mosul.

## NEWS ITEMS WORLD ADVERTISERS

### 250 WOMEN "BUSINESS CHIEFS"

FIFTEEN countries will be represented at the International Advertising Convention at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in July. Practically all the business communities of the world are represented with the exception of those in Central and Southern Europe, and it is hoped that with the interchange of ideas, methods of business, may be revolutionized.

No fewer than 250 women are taking part, chiefly from the United States, who will attend the Convention in their "own right" as business chiefs.

There are to be visits to Brighton, Margate, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Sheffield, and every opportunity will be taken of making the visitors thoroughly acquainted with British manufacturing and business possibilities. The chief manufacturers in practically every industry are arranging to show parties of delegates interested in their productions over their works.

The American delegates will arrive about July 12 in five ships specially chartered for them. The Lancastria and Republic will sail from New York, La Salle from Houston (Texas), the Samaria from Boston, and the Montcalm from Montreal.

## POPULAR TREATY BRITISH RECOGNITION OF ARAB CONFEDERATION

LONDON, JUNE 17

DR. NAJI ASSIL, King Hussein's envoy to London, has left for Mecca bearing a new draft of a treaty of friendship with Britain which, Dr. Naji has stated, contains formal recognition of the complete independence of the Arab Hassimite Government, and lays down with greater precision the bases of the confederation of countries under King Hussein.

It deals with the question of Palestine in a manner which he says is likely to be universally approved. Dr. Naji is confident that the treaty will be promptly signed.

## ALIPORE SESSIONS CUSTOMS OFFICER IN TROUBLE

THE case in which Singleton, a Preventive Officer of the Customs in charge of the Diamond Harbour Custom House, and Basanta Sing were charged under sections 120 B and 409 I.P.C. with conspiracy and criminal breach of trust in respect of 34 bags of peacock feathers worth about Rs. 17,000 belonging to the Government under circumstances already reported came on for hearing at the Alipore, Criminal Sessions before Mr. G. N. Roy, district and Sessions Judge, and a special jury of four Europeans and one Indian.

The Public Prosecutor, Mr. N. N. Banerji, conducted the prosecution and Messrs. J. M. Sen-Gupta and Manuel, counsel, with Babu Hit Lal Guha, vakil, appeared on behalf of Singleton, Babus Harsanath Banerji, Gonesh Chandra Sen, and Monindranath Banerji pleaders appeared for the second accused.

It was decided after some discussion that the case against Basanta Sing would be taken up after the disposal of the case against Singleton. The trial is proceeding.

# Can AI unlock productivity and growth?

ANDREW SHENG

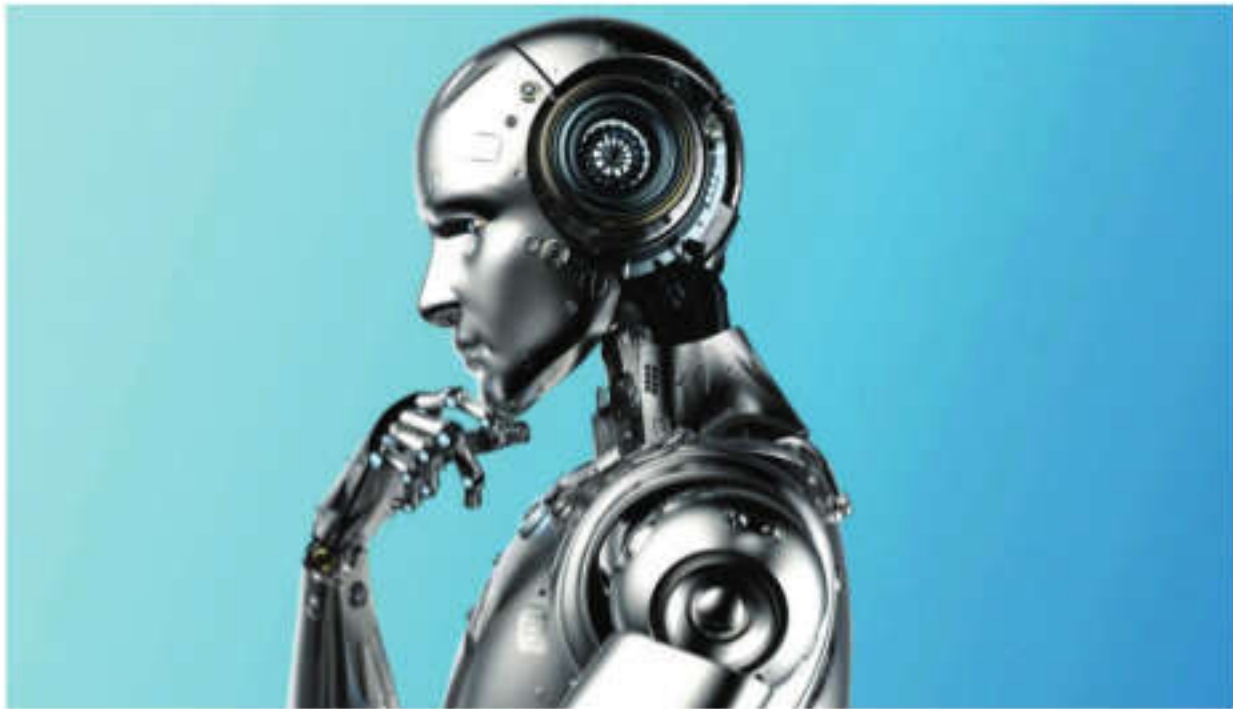
If you watched Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang's remarkable presentation at Taipei Computex last month, you would be convinced that AI has ushered in a new Industrial Revolution, in which accelerated computing with the latest AI chips has unleashed the power of doing everything faster, more efficiently and with less energy.

In this age of intense global rivalry and competition, including military power, AI, robotics and improved engineering promise a techno-utopian way to achieve dominance over rivals. McKinsey estimated that Generative AI's impact on productivity could add between \$2.6 trillion to \$4.4 trillion to the global economy annually. That's like adding one UK economy to the global economy every year.

Roughly three-fourths of productivity will come from business improvements in four areas-customer operations, marketing and sales, software engineering, and R&D. Think about it, instead of training everyone to learn coding, we bypass coding because AI can actually translate what you would like done through writing the script, creating the video, and even designing the process. Just ask ChatGPT's latest version.

The machine has the answers, but ultimately it is the human being who will either execute what is needed, or just not do anything.

The reality is that even though Generative AI will have a significant impact across all industry sectors such as retail, banking, high tech, and life sciences, whether or not the productivity (measured as output per capita) is achieved depends on how individuals, companies, communities and



nations are driving the productivity change. Since Generative AI changes the way we work by automating many individual activities, this is a social and political question. Cross-border language barriers are removed when AI can do the automatic translation, print the transcript and even indicate the next work agenda. Since McKinsey estimates that current generative AI and other technologies can automate work activities by as much as 60 to 70 per cent of present employee time, no wonder many in the workforce fear AI adoption with huge resistance and reluctance to change.

The latest European Union Competitiveness and Industry Benchmarking Report 2024 indicates how at the high level, the EU realizes that the region is racing against the clock as EU industry has been continuously losing ground on global markets in terms of market share. EU companies are becoming less relevant and EU's future technological leadership is at risk. The reason is obvious to all – the EU's market is much more fragmented than either US or China, being a

collection of national markets rather than a Single Market with one currency, the Euro.

The metrics speak for themselves. The EU's share of global trade has fallen by one third to second place (16 per cent of global trade in 2021), compared with China (28.3 per cent) and USA (14.5 per cent) since 2001. In terms of market revenue of companies in Fortune Global 500, EU companies have fallen to third place between 2005 and 2023. American companies lead with 31.8 per cent, Chinese are at 27.5 per cent and EU companies lag with 15.5 per cent.

Europe's adoption of 5G technology is way behind that of China or the United States. Since R&D is a key driver of innovation and technological leadership, EU has lagged with 2.3 per cent of GDP spending by 2021, behind China (2.4 per cent) and USA (3.5 per cent). This is particularly evident in industrial R&D investment amongst the world's largest 2,500 companies. EU's market share has fallen to third place of only 17.5 per cent, overtaken by China (17.8 per cent), whereas the

US leads with 42.1 per cent. Chinese EVs and engineering products (including industrial machinery) are already taking EU markets by storm.

Add to this the fact that the EU's energy costs are higher than the US or China, and that EU regulations are the most complex relative to other markets, it is not surprising that EU companies have been shifting their production overseas. Labour productivity has stagnated for years due to the highest social protection standards. As the report says, the EU's regulatory environment needs an upgrade to empower and reward innovators, a reduction of EU and national regulatory silo-thinking, and enhancement of technology deployment with stronger public-private collaboration.

These European lessons are salutary for real sector transformation for almost all emerging developing market economies (EMDEs). Despite being shocked by the global financial crisis of 2008, Europe has not undertaken structural reforms in the labour and corporate sectors to improve overall competitiveness. The financial sector, dominated by the fragmented banking system, remains risk-averse. German, French and Swiss banks are a shadow of their former global prowess, having been hit hard by tighter regulations and inept consolidations.

The real issue is who drives the structural changes. In America, it is quite clear that the private corporate sector remains dynamic and committed to profits and innovation. In China, the government or Party takes the lead, but allows enough corporate competition that is aligned with national goals. No one pretends that American or Chinese corporations are neoliberal by inclination.

EU and many EMDEs still suffer a

schizophrenic tension between the old neoliberal aim of free markets, with newer liking for state intervention and industrial policies. The neoliberal approach failed where governments and the public think that just passing more laws and regulations would solve social and market ills. As we all have learnt from bitter experience, policies and programmes are easily frustrated at the legislative or political levels, or mired in endless legal suits by vested interests against change.

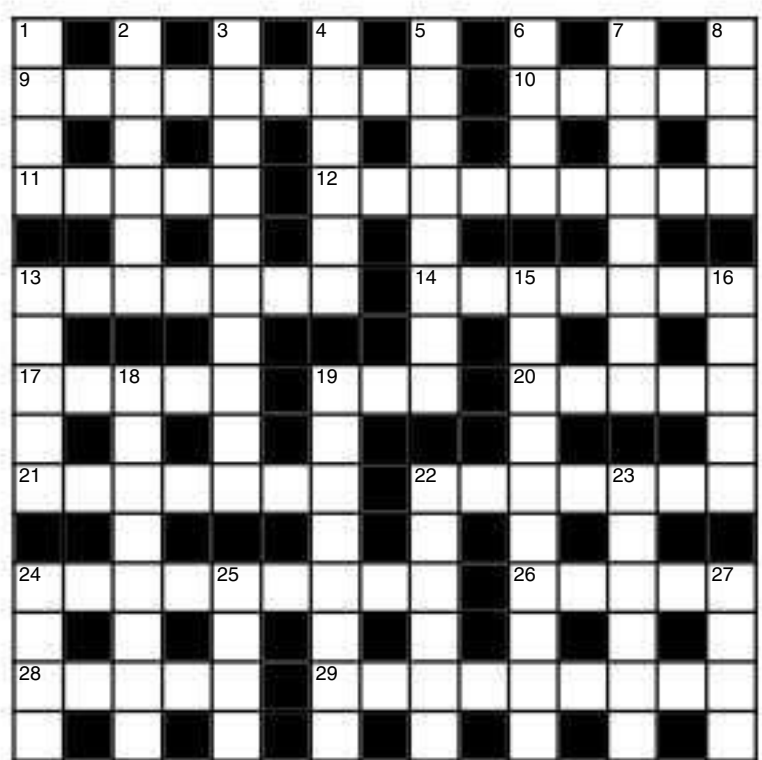
Eco-system change is complex and requires not only the construction of a common narrative of why you need change, but also concrete execution of visible projects that demonstrate determination and engender public trust. If you want the economy to change, appoint business leaders who understand how to manage institutional change that remains business-friendly. Indonesian President Jokowi's appointment of former tech platform Gojek President Nadiem Makarim as Minister of Education is an example of how to shake a traditional educational bureaucracy towards technological eco-system change. Radical change needs radical thinking, but by someone like Jensen Huang who understands both the role of technology and markets.

The AI revolution is already happening at frightening speed. Economies that mess up the transition will be marginalized. Those companies and communities that adapt well will not only survive but thrive. That is the cruelty of Darwinian competition.

(The writer, a former Central banker, is a Distinguished Fellow of Asia Global Institute, University of Hong Kong.)  
Special to ANN

## CROSSWORD

NO-292815



### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

INORGANIC M P  
N F A E HEATHER  
SETTLER E N O I  
U L DRAFTSMAN  
LEICOR P R O C  
A H P M SPANGLE  
TRADEMARK E  
E N D L A I N H  
T ATTENTIVE  
PREPAID E S S A  
E U D A A T R I S T  
GASTROPOD R W  
L E O T AQUARIA  
ENSUITE U C U V  
G T DEBUTANTE

### ACROSS

- 9 Butcher's wrapping duck — huge duck! (9)  
10 Flyer that talks about advanced inner personality (5)  
11 Somewhat eccentric, or mad, losing power to Democrat? (5)  
12 Greek leader soon brought about plucky Priam's end (9)  
13 50s rocker pinching golden chain is fired (7)  
14 See 6 Down  
17 Two characters abroad initially pursuing model (3-2)

### DOWN

- 19 His poetry no-go? Or prose uneven? (5)  
20 Peacock in mating frenzy on the way! (5)  
21/2 One 6 across left her shaken (7,6)  
22 Stanhope for one in time becomes mediocre (7)  
24 Carol eating cold and out-of-date bread (9)  
26 Retreat from Moscow? (5)  
28/4 Another 6 to trouble Longshanks? (5,6)  
29 Ray — powerful — toyed with male bears (5,4)

### DOWN

- 1 Like good brandy found in drainage ditch? (4)  
2 See 21 Across  
3 Note stain left surrounding crack in cathedral area (4,6)  
4 See 28 Across  
5 Chest-beater having breakfast in Chardonnay? (5,3)  
6/14 Novel bleak: an end should incorporate article in work of 23 (4,3,4)  
7 Mineral from old Roman watering-hole (8)  
8 This will break with martial artist coming round (4)

### DOWN

- 13 Theme work penned by Mark that remains unfinished (5)  
15 Mostly useless about missing staff turning up in city (10)  
16 One used to spin has some control at Headingley (5)  
18 One tends cows and three bats (8)  
19 Sweet bad stuck in gum (8)  
22 Respected heads of army units and air force (6)  
23 Person walking miles leaves old soldier (6)  
24 Very hard getting round London district (4)  
25 Much drama having no quiet songs (4)  
27 Culminating point of month in service (4)

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



# A strategic shift

Priyanka Gandhi to contest from Wayanad as Rahul Gandhi retains Raebareli Lok Sabha seat

It is official. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress, has been announced as the party's candidate for the Wayanad constituency in Kerala for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. This move comes as her brother, Rahul Gandhi, retains Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh. Priyanka Gandhi's candidature from Wayanad represents a calculated risk by the Congress to consolidate its influence in South India while retaining a foothold in the North. Wayanad, a constituency known for its high literacy rate and diverse demographics, is seen as a relatively secure seat for Congress. For Rahul Gandhi, retaining Raebareli, a Congress bastion, allows him to focus on Uttar Pradesh. This would ensure continuity and stability for the party in a seat that has been pivotal for the Gandhi family. Whereas by fielding Priyanka Gandhi in Wayanad, the party aims to bolster its appeal among the youth and the women electorate in Kerala. The state has been a site of intense political competition, especially with the rise of regional parties



and the Left Democratic Front (LDF). All three members in Parliament (Sonia Gandhi has moved to Rajya Sabha) indeed give Congress baiters a chance to accuse it of dynastic politics however at this point Congress seems to be more focussed on future electoral calculus. The BJP's downslide in the UP gives it more reasons to focus on the crucial state where it has an alliance with the Samajwadi party. Rahul Gandhi's presence in Raibareli directly links him to the state whereas Priyanka Gandhi's presence in the south would help it retain the turf. Priyanka's debut in electoral politics shows that she is getting more and more into active politics. This signals that she is geared up

to be part of core decision-making and would not be confined to electioneering and assisting her brother Rahul on an ad hoc basis. However, the road to Uttar Pradesh and for that matter retaining the lost glory of Congress is still a distant dream as most of its vote bank has either shifted or usurped by the regional parties which have become strong. This move could also signify a more prominent role for Priyanka in national politics, potentially setting the stage for her to take on greater responsibilities within the party. While these moves are strategically sound, Congress still faces significant challenges. The BJP's robust organizational machinery and resources present a formidable opposition. Additionally, regional parties continue to pose a challenge, potentially splitting the vote in key constituencies. Besides, Congress will need to address internal dissent and present a unified front to maximise its electoral potential. The real challenge is to offer a coherent and compelling vision that can galvanise support across diverse demographics and rejuvenate its cadre. A lot needs to be done on the organisational level as the party's cadre has been in disarray for a long time. The upcoming state elections in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Jharkhand will serve as a crucial test for these new strategies and the effectiveness of their implementation.



Farmers prepare bunches of harvested litchi, at an orchard, in Nadia

# Elder abuse remains an underreported crisis

There is a pressing need for unified and comprehensive action to safeguard the dignity and well-being of our elders

Every year on June 15th, the world comes together to recognise and address a silent yet pervasive issue: elder abuse. Despite numerous policies and initiatives aimed at safeguarding our seniors, elder abuse remains a deeply troubling issue, with alarming statistics underscoring the urgent need for concerted action. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) transcends mere awareness raising, it educates the public on various forms of elder abuse, empowering communities to identify and address these issues effectively. WEAAD also serves as a critical tool for policy advocacy, reminding policymakers of their responsibility to enact and enforce laws that protect older adults and ensure they receive adequate support. Despite global efforts like WEAAD, elder abuse remains a disturbing reality. The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 6 older adults experiences abuse in community settings, with even higher rates in institutions. However, these figures likely underestimate the true scope of the problem,



as elder abuse is vastly underreported due to fear, shame, or lack of awareness. In India, a society traditionally known for cherishing its elders, a HelpAge India survey revealed a startling reality. Approximately 71% of elderly respondents reported experiencing abuse, primarily by family members, particularly sons and daughters-in-law. This trend contradicts India's strong family values and respect for elders. Addressing elder abuse requires a multifaceted approach involving awareness, education, legal measures, and societal change. Both the elderly and the younger generations play critical roles in this effort. The elderly must be educated about their rights and the forms of abuse they might face. Empowering elders with

knowledge can help them recognise abuse and take steps to protect themselves. The younger generation must be educated about the importance of respecting and caring for the elderly. Schools, colleges, and community organisations can play a significant role in fostering empathy and understanding. Programmes that promote intergenerational bonding and respect can help bridge the gap and reduce incidents of abuse. Building strong community support systems can provide a safety net for older adults. Community centers, senior citizen groups, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can offer a range of services, from counseling and legal advice to recreational activities and social engagement opportunities. Efforts should be made to create an environment where elder abuse can be reported without fear of stigma or retaliation. Helplines, dedicated to elder support units within police departments, and community-based intervention programs can play a pivotal role in this regard. The Indian government has implemented various initia-

tives to address elder care needs. The National Programme for Healthcare of the Elderly (NPHCE) improves healthcare access, while the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007) safeguards elder rights. Policies like the National Action Plan for Senior Citizens promote active aging. However, challenges remain. The gap between policy and implementation is significant. Inadequate infrastructure, undertrained personnel, and insufficient funding hinder service delivery. Furthermore, awareness programs are needed, particularly in rural areas, to educate elderly people about their rights and available support. A comprehensive approach is crucial, addressing not only healthcare but also the social and psychological aspects of aging. Collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the private sector is essential to bridge these gaps and ensure proper care for India's elderly population. (The writer is Founder & President Wishes and Blessings NGO; views are personal)



GEETANJALI CHOPRA

# India's path from trade to industry

Transforming traders into industrialists poses significant challenges. While traders prioritise high profits, industrialists require a long-term vision

India has a large enough trading class. In fact, the Hindu caste hierarchy has traditionally allotted an entire arena of activity, i.e., economic, to the Vaishyas and Baniyas, Chettiars and Shettys, but that doesn't mean that they are all—or most of them—are potential entrepreneurs or successful industrialists. The reality is that it is difficult to buy the proposition that a first rate trader can easily develop into a first-class industrialist. The latter's priority is a rapid turnaround of turnover, ideally accompanied by high profit margins. An industrialist must have a long-term vision, patience for profits to turn in, and a virtually unlimited scope for expansion. Above all, he must have the nerve as well as the packet to absorb losses in the short term.

The only common factor between an industrialist and a trader is a sense of money. This would party explain why the Government of India took so long to divest itself of the ownership of Air India; the programme for the privatization of this "national carrier" has been slow. This again explains why the government has been having to focus its concentration on making the good old public sector more and more efficient, including the ordinance factories. A lot of the new expansion, especially in defence production has had to be undertaken in a kind of partnership with the large and established industrial houses. It was not so long ago that members of the intelligentsia used to say that a people whose ruler was a trader, would end up as a pauper. This, in actuality, was the story of the Indian economy until the Modi administration took charge. Choosing the right industry, running it efficiently with integrity are the sine qua non of success. The emphasis on these factors waxes or wanes with changes in ministries and/or governments. No ministry can claim to be forever engaged in policymaking on a single issue or industry. Incidentally, a leading management scientist had some time ago said that public institutions quite



often keep their doors open for the leakage of money. If this factor is to be kept in mind, a typical public sector unit or institution should not be expanded. If the state has to invest willy-nilly, the President of India certainly should not hold any shares. Banks and insurance companies like the LIC, GIC, etc., should invest, so that there is no obvious gateway to corruption. For long years, the majority of Larsen & Toubro's (L&T) shares were held by financial institutions, but hardly anyone knew this fact. The general impression was that L&T was a private sector company, like any other. There was no door available for misuse by political or bureaucratic agencies or factors. Another problem caused by the President of India holding shares, is that willy-nilly, the management tends to be directed by a joint secretary. A normal bureaucrat might have many virtues, but is seldom inclined to lay emphasis upon the delivery of results in the same way as an industrial manager would have to. The former is primarily, and mostly, concerned with rules and procedures. Profits come lower in

CHOOSING THE RIGHT INDUSTRY, RUNNING IT EFFICIENTLY WITH INTEGRITY ARE THE SINE QUA NON OF SUCCESS. THE EMPHASIS ON THESE FACTORS WAXES OR WANES WITH CHANGES IN MINISTRIES AND/OR GOVERNMENTS

his priority. Moreover, the bureaucrat's job is secure and therefore, he does not expect his head to roll if he cannot explain the losses the public sector company under his belt might have made. Although, he might spend a sleepless night or two if his head clerk were to point out a lapse in procedure. Being answerable to the minister, the bureaucrat does not have the ultimate authority, although he is influential day to day. Yet, anyone with contacts with the minister, i.e., the political executive, can influence the joint secretary. This does not add up to business management. On the other hand, banks and financial institutions investing in public sector units (PSUs) would be looking at how much they are earning on their investments. Otherwise, they wouldn't have any influence or any substantial contact with the PSU. In answer to this discussion, a suggestion emerges that proven top executives in the private sector could be given a chance to set up large industries. Instead of the country merely waiting for capable entrepreneurs to emerge

spontaneously, the successful top executives near their retiring age from their private sector assignments, would have a reputation, and a proven record of managing a large industry. Let the candidate invest 5 per cent of the estimated initial capital; another 5 per cent may be given as founder shares, making it a total of 10 per cent. But before that, it would be for him or her to discover the right project in answer to the country's needs. If foreign technology is needed, the executive's reputation should help him to locate the right foreign partner who could provide not only technology, but also some management, and possibly some investment, and reserve say, 26 per cent for financial institutions like banks, etc., and other the rest to the public. Some experiments might succeed while others might not. Some top executive candidates may discover that they are not equal to the challenge, and may even sell off their shares to a more confident entrepreneur. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**UNRELENTING HEAT WAVE**  
Madam — Apropos the news story "No let up in heat wave in Punjab, Haryana; Bathinda reels at 46.9 degrees Celsius," published on June 17, this is my response. The scorching heat wave sweeping across Punjab and Haryana for several days shows no signs of abating. Bathinda, in Punjab, reached a staggering 46.9 degrees Celsius on Monday, making it the hottest place in the region. Pindara in Haryana's Jind district also recorded the same temperature, solidifying the intense heat conditions in the state. Chandigarh, the shared capital of both states, experienced a maximum temperature of 44.5 degrees Celsius. Other cities in Punjab, such as Faridkot, Pathankot, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, Gurdaspur, and Ferozepur, also faced severe heat, with temperatures ranging from 43.8 to 46 degrees Celsius. In Haryana, Faridabad and Sirsa were particularly affected, recording maximum temperatures of 46.6 degrees Celsius and 46.2 degrees Celsius, respectively. Mahendragarh, Hisar, Gurugram, and Kurukshetra also experienced high temperatures, ranging from 43.8 to 46.2 degrees Celsius. The unrelenting heat wave has undoubtedly taken a toll on the residents of these regions, with people urged to take necessary precautions to avoid heat-related illnesses. The authorities must prioritize the public's well-being and ensure that adequate measures are in place to combat extreme weather conditions.

Pradyumand Singh | New Delhi

**ILLFOUNDED EVM CONTROVERSY**  
Madam — Apropos, "Musk's EVM remark sparks row in India," The Pioneer, Jun 17. The controversies over Electronic voting Machines EVM have come to the fore again, in the wake of the billionaire tech magnate Elon Musk's sweeping comment that EVMs should be shunned from using for elections as they are liable to be hacked. The Opposition found fresh ammo to target EVMs. But, it is time for our politicians especially, AICC former

### HP's new centre of excellence



Apropos the news story "Govt to establish a centre of excellence for the education of differently abled in Kandaghat: Himachal CM Sukhu," published on June 17, this is my

response. The announcement of a "centre of excellence" for differently abled individuals in Himachal Pradesh is a commendable move by the state government. This initiative signifies a commitment to inclusive education and comprehensive support for those often left on the margins of society. By ensuring quality education, residential accommodations, and facilities tailored to the needs of Divyangjans, the state is setting a precedent for others to follow. The Chief Minister's assurance of timely completion and allocation of resources reflects a proactive approach to social welfare. This project not only promises to empower 300 differently-abled students but also demonstrates the government's dedication to the rights and integration of marginalized groups. It is heartening to witness such efforts towards building a more equitable society.

Kularani Kapoor | Ranchi

president Rahul Gandhi to develop some scientific temper. Rahul and the Congress party first need to explain why the Congress government, which was in power between 2004 and 2014 when the UPA government led by the Congress party was in power, did not abolish it. It has become a fashion for political parties to praise EVMs when they win and blame them when they lose. Whether it is Rahul or anyone else who blames EVMs has so far failed to provide evidence that they can be tampered with. Indian EVMs are custom-designed, secure and isolated from any network or media. There is no connectivity, no Bluetooth, wifi, Internet, i.e., there is no way in. Factory-programmed controllers cannot be reprogrammed."

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

hard times when expenses go above your neck. You are in a good job, earn a fat salary and have a bright future. Yet, none of this is evident when you look at your savings. This is because young people often find it difficult to save in the initial years of their careers. Studies reveal that discretionary spending can be as high as 18-20% of the income for young people. A 2021 study by ASSOCHAM revealed that almost 35% of the urban youth spend up to Rs25,000 a month on clothing alone. Some say you should just note down the card details and then cut the card into pieces so that you can't use it anymore. To save money, keep your card in a paper sleeve with family photos as a reminder. Having served 38 years in banking, I learned that saving before spending is crucial. Cultivate saving habits for a secure, peaceful future. Save today for a better tomorrow.

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai



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Early childhood care and education is vital for India's development and prosperity



VENITA KAUL

India's perceived rise in international stature and its potential evolution into a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) is largely attributed to its demographic advantages. With over 50% of its population below the age of 25, India benefits from a youthful and dynamic workforce. This article explores the crucial areas that must be addressed to achieve the vision of a Viksit Bharat, focusing on nurturing human capital through investments in health and education, particularly in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Given the concerning statistics that only 44% of grade 5 students can read at a grade 2 level, it is imperative to identify and strengthen pathways that will allow India to fully leverage its demographic dividend. The National Education Policy (2020) rightly emphasizes the significance of early childhood, particularly the period before six years of age, as a critical phase in human development. Neuroscientific research indicates that this period is when the brain develops most rapidly, and its foundational architecture is formed. The brain's potential is significantly influenced by the nutritional, health, educational opportunities, and environmental experiences a child is exposed to in these formative years. Investing in high-quality ECCE not only enhances school learning outcomes but also positively impacts a child's overall personality development and social adjustment in the long term. Positive childhood experiences facilitated by quality ECCE programs lead to better social adjustment in work and family settings and increased economic prosperity in adulthood. Conversely, neuroscience suggests that adverse childhood experiences can lead to toxic stress, resulting in poor social and learning outcomes and higher rates of juvenile delinquency.



The benefits of ECCE extend beyond individual development to society at large. Quality early childhood care and education can help bridge and even close the social equity gap in children's learning, particularly in underprivileged contexts. Educating and skilling children from a young age can lead to higher economic growth and improved living standards across socio-economic strata. A World Bank study in India highlighted a return of INR 25 for every rupee invested in ECCE, with similar trends observed in global studies.

A report by Save the Children indicates that an ideal expenditure of 1.5 to 2.2% of GDP on ECCE is necessary, yet current spending is a mere 0.1%. This significant shortfall hinders the goal of spending INR 32,500 per child annually to achieve universal ECCE by 2030.

**Making ECCE Accessible and Available to All Children**

To bridge the significant gaps in ECCE implementation, several steps must be taken by the government:

1. Legal Inclusion: ECCE should be made an enforceable right by incorporating it into the RTE Act, 2009. This would ensure greater accessibility for marginalized socio-economic groups and hold state governments and institutions accountable for non-compliance.
2. Increased Public Spending: Current investment levels are insufficient to achieve universal early care for children by 2030. Public expenditure on ECCE needs substantial increases to meet these targets.
3. Enhanced Social Infrastructure: The lack of adequate social infrastructure contributes to the exclusion of young children from accessing ECCE and continuing their education. Investments in this area are crucial for providing universal access to quality early childhood education. Universalizing high-quality ECCE is akin to laying a solid foundation for India's future. It is time for political parties to commit to rectifying the exclusion of ECCE and support its inclusion as a fundamental right for every Indian child. After all, how can we build our dream of a Viksit Bharat without establishing a strong foundation?

(The writer is Professor Emerita Ambedkar University; views are personal)

# Heatwave could severely impact the economy

The ongoing scorching heat could undermine economic activity and underscores the critical need for climate-responsive action to safeguard both people and productivity



AS MITTAL

It's scorching hot today!" For many of us, this exclamation expresses our annoyance at the occasional inconveniences of the year's hottest months. The blistering heat waves across the country, especially in Northern India, persist as the maximum temperature soared to over 52 degrees Celsius in Delhi and Rajasthan, the highest of this season which caused a couple of people to die due to suspected heat-related ailments. Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh are also reeling with heat waves. Conditions are expected to worsen as the Meteorological Department predicts temperatures in northwest India also reached nearly 50 degrees Celsius, posing a threat to the millions of workers engaged in farming, construction, and industrial operations, signifying distress. For many economies, this poses a significant threat to productivity. Therefore there is an urgent need for a climate-responsive action plan. Effect on workforce and economy: The World Bank's report unequivocally states that as temperatures steadily rise in India due to climate change, the country is experiencing higher temperatures every year. By 2030, over 160-200 million people across the country could be exposed to lethal heat waves annually. Additionally, around 34 million people in India are projected to face job losses due to heat stress-related declines in productivity.

The impacts of rising average temperatures are being felt differently across various occupations and employment sectors. Jobs involving high levels of physical exertion or prolonged outdoor work are particularly affected by increasing heat levels. Specifically, agricultural and construction work, as well as work in steel plants and brick clans, are expected to be the worst affected.

According to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 1995, the working hours lost in India due to heat stress were 5.87% in agriculture and construction, 2.95% in industry, and 0.63% in services. These numbers are anticipated to increase to 9.04% in agriculture and construction, 5.29% in industry, and 1.48% in services by 2030. Heat stress is increasingly becoming an obstacle to economic activity. It reduces the ability of businesses to operate during the hottest hours, and temperature rises are expected to further diminish labour productivity, potentially rendering some agricultural areas unproductive and displacing a large number of farm workers. The global economic losses due to heat stress at work were estimated at US\$ 280 billion in 1995, and this figure is projected to increase to US\$ 2,400 billion in 2030.

Currently, the annual food loss due to heat during transportation is close to \$13 billion. By 2037, the demand for cooling is likely to be eight times more than current levels. This means there will be a demand for a new air conditioner every 15 seconds, leading to an expected rise of 435% in annual greenhouse gas emissions over the next two decades. Recognizing this challenge, India must deploy new strategic sustainable solutions to help people adapt to rising temperatures.

Scope of sustainable solutions: The World Bank study, "Climate Investment



THE WORLD BANK REPORT ALSO STAUNCHLY ADVOCATES FOR ACCELERATING THE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL ECONOMIES BY PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE, OR 'GREEN,' BUSINESSES

Opportunities in India's Cooling Sector", clearly indicates that utilizing alternative and innovative energy-efficient technologies is the key to combating the heat wave crisis. This approach has the potential to open an investment opportunity of \$1.6 trillion by 2040, significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create nearly 3.7 million jobs. The study strongly suggests that a more energy-efficient pathway could lead to a substantial reduction in expected CO2 levels over the next two decades. India's cooling strategy can save lives and livelihoods, reduce carbon emissions, and position India as a global hub for green cooling manufacturing. The report proposes a sustainable roadmap for cooling that could effectively reduce 300 million tons of carbon dioxide annually by 2040.

In 2019, the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) was launched to implement decisive and sustainable cooling measures across various sectors. These measures include indoor cooling in buildings, cold chain solar refrigeration in the agriculture and pharmaceuticals sector, and air-conditioning in passenger transport. The plan aims to reduce the demand for electricity-driven cooling by up to 25 per cent by 2037-38, potentially creating 2 million jobs for trained technicians and reducing the demand for refrigerants by around 31 per cent over the next two decades. Adopting climate-responsive cooling techniques: It is imperative to adopt climate-responsive

cooling techniques as the standard in both private and government-funded constructions to ensure that those at the bottom of the economic ladder are not disproportionately affected by rising temperatures. The report strongly advocates for the widespread adoption of such changes in India's affordable housing program, which could benefit over 11 million urban homes and over 29 million rural houses that the government aims to construct.

Public-private investments in district-level cooling technologies are crucial. These cutting-edge technologies produce chilled water in a central plant, which is then distributed to multiple buildings through underground insulated pipes. This drastically reduces the cost of providing cooling to individual buildings and can slash electricity bills by 20-30 per cent compared to the most efficient conventional cooling solution. The Punjab Energy Development Agency (PEDA) office in Chandigarh stands as a prime example of a climate-responsive building, delivering a cooling effect in the hottest months and warmth in winter. This example can be replicated at large in future green building construction. To combat rising food and pharmaceutical wastage during transportation due to higher temperatures, the World Bank report unequivocally recommends addressing gaps in cold chain distribution networks. Investing in pre-cooling and refrigerated transport can substantially decrease food loss by

about 76 per cent and reduce carbon emissions by 16 per cent. India is resolute in its aim to phase out the production and use of ozone-depleting hydrochlorofluorocarbons, used as coolants in air conditioners and refrigerators. The report emphasizes the urgency of improving servicing, maintenance, and disposal of equipment that uses hydrochlorofluorocarbons, alongside a swift shift to alternative options with a lower global warming footprint. **The way forward:**

It is crucial to comprehend the implications of climate change for the workplace, particularly for those most affected and vulnerable. The World Bank report also staunchly advocates for accelerating the structural transformation of rural economies by promoting the development of responsible and sustainable, or "green," businesses.

This will reduce the exposure of agricultural workers to high temperatures and minimize physical exertion in such conditions. Other imperative policy measures include skills development, fostering an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, and substantial public investment in infrastructure to address the climate crisis.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy & Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

# Startups must innovate and execute for commercial success

India's startup ecosystem has emerged as a dynamic force but despite its rapid evolution, it still navigates challenges typical of nascent market

The startup ecosystem in India has made significant progress in the past decade, though it still trails behind global benchmarks. The potential for growth is vast, bolstered by supportive government initiatives such as tax exemptions and financial subsidies. Many funders are committed to nurturing India's youth and anticipate a surge in startup numbers over the next decade due to these favourable policies and our dedicated efforts.

Many startups falter because young entrepreneurs, brimming with promising ideas, lack essential knowledge in operations, financial management, and resource utilization. Fresh out of college, they aspire to make a difference but often lack critical skills for suc-



SUBHAKAR ALAPATI

cess. Drawing from my over 12 years of experience and a robust network, I can say with confidence that young Indian entrepreneurs have the mettle to succeed, all they need is method. They need to focus not only on funding but also on cultivating expertise in finance, operations, and overall business management to bridge crucial knowledge gaps and foster growth. The primary challenge lies in

their dearth of operational and financial management skills among young entrepreneurs, who struggle with executing their innovative ideas. I would like them to address this gap. This is where funders like YEA pitch in by offering comprehensive mentoring alongside financial support. Mentors must guide startups in enhancing operational efficiency, managing finances, and leveraging governmental incentives, thereby enhancing their prospects for success. Today, many startups in India are spearheaded by young entrepreneurs lacking experience in company management and operations. Funders like us prioritise delivering detailed operational plans to these individuals, who possess great ideas but require guid-

ance in execution. They need to grasp cost dynamics, optimise operations for efficiency, and access resources to ensure our investments are well-utilised. Additionally, funders provide expertise in financial management and navigate them through governmental policies, such as tax exemptions. As funding needs evolve at various stages, our extensive network enables us to secure



additional funds from external investors, ensuring sustained success. Most funders like YEA seek innovative ideas capable of disrupting industries, not mere replicas of existing models. Our rigorous selection process involves meticulous scrutiny, including detailed proposals, questionnaires, and presentations. Once selected, startups benefit from personalised

mentorship and gain access to the network of experts and resources. This comprehensive support aims to foster sustainable growth and eventual success. We funders recognise the pivotal role of genuine innovation in entrepreneurship. Our stringent selection criteria filter through numerous applications to identify truly groundbreaking ideas. We often encounter applications proposing generic concepts lacking substantial differentiation, which we regretfully have to decline. Our focus remains on nurturing startups with the potential to become the next Google or Facebook—ventures with unique propositions and scalable models. Entrepreneurship demands more than passion; it requires

meticulous planning, resilience, and patience. Success is not instantaneous but evolves through iterative refinement and adaptation. Entrepreneurs must remain steadfast in their vision, continuously learn and adapt, and seek mentorship to navigate challenges effectively. To aspiring entrepreneurs, both new and seasoned, I emphasize that while interest and intent are commendable, launching and sustaining a company demands much more. It necessitates thoughtful planning, unwavering commitment over time, and resilience in the face of challenges like funding setbacks or idea evolution. Drawing from my own journey as a first-generation entrepreneur, Today's startups often aim for

rapid multi million or billion-dollar success, yet such achievements are rarely immediate. It's encouraging to witness more individuals embrace entrepreneurship, yet true success hinges on sustained commitment, focus, and perseverance. Securing funding marks just the beginning of an entrepreneur's journey, not its conclusion. Entrepreneurs must recognise that building a thriving enterprise demands continual effort to benefit themselves, investors, clients, and stakeholders alike. (The writer is president of the Young Entrepreneurs Association and initiated Rs 500 million investment fund aimed at nurturing and mentoring promising Indian startups; views are personal)



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Negligence of safety rules led to WB train accident

Criminal negligence in following rules for safe operations led to a horrendous train accident in which 11 lives of crew and passengers were lost. The most basic SOPs in the event of failure of the automatic signalling system, especially as an express train and a goods train were running on the same track, were not followed leading to yet another crash that points to the inefficiency of the Indian railway system.

The probe may not go very far in fixing accountability as the locomotive pilot of the goods train also died as well as the guard of the express train. This is another mishap which casts the entire system in poor light. It appears that safety is no concern when it comes to operating trains and talk of arming all trains with the 'Kavach' shield system, which has been available for decades, is just that — mere talk.

It was up to the Opposition to point out that not a single kilometre of the Kavach anti-collision system had been added since the Balasore accident in June 2023. The unfortunate ones were those travelling in the Kanchenjunga Express, slowed to a crawl by regulations governing train running after failure of signals by which trains are allowed to go through red lights too, but only with several precautions.

In a clearly irresponsible case of a speeding goods train there will be far less sympathy for the driver who ran into the train in front of him and carrying 1,300 passengers. Regulations stipulate that in rainy conditions, drivers must keep trains under a speed limit of 10 kmph.

Mercifully, parcel vans took most of the impact of the collision thus reducing the derailling of passenger coaches to just one. Had the train configuration been different, the fatalities would have been far more than 11 people, nine of them being fare paying passengers besides two staffers.

It was after more than two hours after the signalling system failure that the crash near the New Jalpaiguri station took place, which goes to suggest that messages were either not transmitted to engine drivers to remind them of SOPs in such conditions or the drivers ignored it as it may have been in the case of the goods train.

In the modern age, communication is possible in real time, but that is only if safety is an absolute priority in the running of trains. The criticism of basic callousness in train operations, which the latest accident also exemplifies, is not unfounded.

The crash also reflects that not much has been learnt from one of the worst railway accidents in history with three trains crashing in Odisha when a signalling error and failure of the automated electronic interlocking system, which should ensure that trains do not crash head-on, led to an accident in which nearly 300 passengers died.

Again, it was up to the Opposition to point to an NCRB report putting out a ballpark figure of one lakh deaths from railway accidents between 2017 and 2021 and the fact that despite severe manpower shortage, particularly in the important area of locomotive pilots, too many posts have gone unfilled among the three lakh vacancies that are said to exist now. In short, Indian Railways has been going off the track and sadly for the dead it takes fatalities to point this out.

Priyanka enters the fray

A sense of déjà vu prevailed on all those who have watched Congress politics for the last few decades when the party decided to nominate its general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra for the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat which her brother and former party president Rahul Gandhi, who won the seat along with the family borough Rae Bareli, will vacate after winning both.

Ms Vadra has been a presence in the Congress Party ever since her brother won the Lok Sabha election from Amethi in 2004. She took to active politics upon her nomination as AICC general secretary in 2019. The present nomination only shows that the Congress has grown confident now to field her in a constituency which still is a safe bet, given its past record and the current political realities. And she, too, may have felt the need for a larger and meaningful role to play in parliamentary politics. Her win will create a spectacle where all the eligible members of the Congress' first family will be in Parliament now.

Was Ms Vadra the only possible choice for the seat? The party which had disastrous runs in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections nearly touched the three-digit mark this time under the leadership of a president who does not come from the Gandhi family. It only goes to show that the party has no dearth of talent outside of it. Whether to employ it or not is a call it has to take.

Ms Vadra's candidature will refuel the BJP tirade against dynastic politics. It may, however, be remembered that the BJP's campaign against dynastic politics attracted not much traction as the Opposition, led by alliance partners whose leaders were steeped in dynastic traditions, performed remarkably better this time around.

Ms Vadra's main opponent will be fielded by the CPI, a partner in the INDIA alliance. It will be interesting to watch how the partners explain the contradiction as the by-election is sure to evoke national interest.

Subhani



War crimes, genocide rise as world ignores ICJ, ICC



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

Two major wars are currently raging across the planet — the first for the past 28 months in mainland Europe between the white Christian nations of Russia and Ukraine, and the second for over eight months between historical enemies Israel, the Jewish state, and Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, widely believed to be supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The question that now arises is: are those engaged in these conflicts willfully indulging in war crimes, even genocide in certain cases, in complete and utter disregard of international law?

What makes these conflicts unique is that every country disagrees with others on how these wars should end. The big boys of the West are also playing a grossly partisan role, following their own agenda, not bothering about the human tragedy of either Eastern Europe or the Levant. The West seems to be reveling that they aren't losing their diminishing demography.

The landmark verdicts of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) are being scorned, scoffed at and contemptuously ridiculed by a global superpower like the United States. This only shows the arrogance of power. All through the 20th and now the 21st century, the West has prided itself as the ultimate economic, political and military role model which follows the values of "democracy and rule of law" and abides by a "rules-based international order", which should be emulated by the rest of the world. All that seems to be forgotten now.

Even before the UN's top judicial arm, the ICJ, had ordered Israel to "immediately halt its military assault on the Gaza city of Rafah" on May 24, US President Joe Biden had

given the White House's verdict on May 20: "What's happening in Gaza isn't genocide. We reject that." However, EU foreign affairs chief Joseph Borrell urged Israel to "obey the UN court on Rafah". The worst, however, came from Lindsay Graham, US Republican Senator from South Carolina, who said "ICJ to go to hell" for ruling against Israel on Rafah, which the judges described as a "disastrous humanitarian situation".

The ICJ was not the only one to face the ferocity of the very nations that champion the cause of a "rules-based" world order. When the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court sought arrest warrants against Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defence minister Yoav Gallant for "war crimes and crimes against humanity", the entire American political system burst into flames.

US Senators and Congressmen of both parties proposed sanctions on the ICC. However, earlier, when the same ICC issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin, the US and Europe both welcomed it. Today, Europe appears divided over the ICC verdict against the Israeli leaders, while America is united in opposing it. The Labour Party in Britain, poised to come to power next month, backed the ICC and Germany said it would arrest or deport the Jewish state's leader. Spain too "requested South Africa to intervene in the Gaza genocide case against Israel".

In this toxic environment, an explosive report on May 25 in London's *Daily Telegraph* stood out: "Real reason why Biden considering sanctions against ICC", and it said: "Biden's position on ICC underscores holowness of his rhetoric on America's role in world". It said that all through his

**Influential US legislators have spelt out that the US is fiercely opposed to ICC manoeuvring 'not only for outrage against Israel but to protect, in future, our own interests'**

presidency, Mr Biden had "emphasised the importance of a rules-based order", had condemned "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine" to justify extensive US support of Kyiv, and yet "when it comes to Israel, Biden seems to take offence at an institution trying to uphold that order".

Influential US legislators have spelt out that the US is fiercely opposed to ICC manoeuvring "not only for outrage against Israel but to protect, in future, our own interests". US politicians "know very well that they have more to lose than any other country over an emboldened ICC willing to challenge American actions". As "self-appointed world police, the US has regularly violated sovereignty of other countries", the newspaper said.

America's two-faced policy in the Levant now appears to be running out of steam, with the presidential elections looming back in the US amidst internal turbulence on the "Gaza genocide", where it's 1,500 (Israelis killed) versus 40,000 (Palestinians dead). Understandably US secretary of state Blinken is intensively lobbying Middle East leaders to pressure Hamas to accept the Gaza ceasefire.

The UN's efforts to make international law enforceable through the ICJ and ICC on war crimes and genocide has become the butt of jokes. Why can't the warmongers of the West refresh their memory to apply the anti-war instruments to halt the manslaughter of the 21st century? So many agreements have been signed to ensure the peace, but when push comes to shove, virtually all agreements, treaties, protocols and conventions

fall flat as nations follow the principle of "might is right".

Implied as a basic precept of international law is the concept of collective security and collective wisdom, despite its frequent breaches. Of all factors of international relations and conflict, however, "war crimes" and "international crimes" emerge as the most vexatious. Introduced 1906, the terms are defined as "cruelty that violates international laws governing the conduct of international armed conflicts". The prohibition against the "killing of hostages, abuse of civilians in occupied territories and devastation that isn't justified by military necessity" have been on the books for over a century but seems to be quickly forgotten amidst mindless butchery of "anything that moves" by fanatical fighters among the belligerents.

To tackle all these came into being the "15-member permanent tribunal of the ICJ, the principal judicial organ of the UN" in 1945, followed by another "court established by statute of the ICC (effective 2002), with jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and aggression". The apparatus exists with all the paraphernalia, yet nothing happens except mass murder because that is the shortest and quickest way to prosperity, money, profits and road to neo-imperialism through the work of arms merchants and their clients masquerading as political leaders of the strong and mighty.

And that never ends. Just pick the wisdom of greats of the past to ponder over today's mutilated, rotten corpses on the streets. British philosopher Isaiah Berlin referred to the 20th century "as the most terrible century in Western history", and William Golding, the 1983 Nobel laureate for literature, felt that "this has been the violent century in human history". The intellectual giants were right then on both counts but will fail to have any impact today as no one appears to be listening.

*The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal.*

LETTERS

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

Modi and his team overplayed their Hindutva hate speeches and divisive politics and took a direct hit to the ruling party. UP, considered their fort, failed them and this factor along with the frustration of the common man accentuated by the rising food prices and unemployment was the crucial factor in BJP not getting an absolute majority and to depend on its coalition partners this time. It is a retribution and Modi and his team would do well by resorting to cooperative federalism eschewing their autocratic policies.

Jayanthy Subramaniam  
Coimbatore

BRING FUEL UNDER GST

The GST Council Meet is scheduled to be held on June 22. GST showcases a negative impact on the people since the rates from the Centre and the States shoot double arrows on the buyers. Formerly no one except the BJP with a thumping majority had to decide everything and as a result petrol and diesel prices were sky high with VAT, central excise duty and CST for long. If the prices of petrol and diesel are brought under GST, the cost may decrease considerably. I wish and hope that the key coalition partner, the TDP will play a significant role in the GST affairs in bringing reforms in the rate rationalisation process that would benefit the people of all the other states.

Rajakumar Arulanandham  
Palayamkottai

EVMS IN FOCUS

EVMS have once again come into controversy. Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla and SpaceX, suggested eliminating the machines following the reporting of irregularities in Puerto Rico's primary elections. A software issue that caused machines supplied by Dominion voting systems which incorrectly calculated vote totals. A faulty software is enough to create trouble. Rahul Gandhi had called it a 'black box'. Opposition leaders too question its transparency. Digital frauds using AI are on the increase worldwide to defraud gullible people. Furthermore some 120 world nations use ballot papers in elections.

Sravana Ramachandran  
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Maleeha Lodhi

View from Pakistan



Leaders lack will to initiate policy, build team to save nation from crisis

Pakistan today is at an inflection point. It faces unparalleled challenges in an environment of political polarisation, economic fragility and institutional decay. All of these are converging to reinforce each other and create an overall challenge more formidable than any single crisis. This at a time when national self-confidence is at a new low. An Ipsos survey in May found 82 per cent of people felt the country was heading in the wrong direction.

True, Pakistan has weathered many storms in the past and rebounded from crisis. But present-day challenges are fundamentally different as they are the cumulative consequence of decades of misgovernance and squandered opportunities. Solving these problems can no longer be postponed. In fact, the country is already paying the price of postponed reforms, especially economic reforms, to deal with structural issues. All these challenges have to be addressed.

The polycrisis today has resulted from and reflects the persisting gap between challenge and response, between rule and governance and between power and purpose. Successive governments have simply muddled through without a plan or strategy to deal with long-standing problems. The overarching missing element over the years has been leadership. Wielding power doesn't make for leadership. Nor is a manager a leader; managers uphold the status quo while leaders are

agents of change.

What then is leadership? What are those essential qualities in a political leader that can enable him or her to shape the environment, unite people and lead a country to transformation and change? It is above all a vision that can inspire the people. A vision is what makes for transformational leadership. Leadership is also strength of character, commitment to ethical practices and setting an exemplary standard of integrity. It is about building institutions and learning from the past, not living in it.

Leadership involves fashioning a strategy to execute a vision, and then staying on course to achieve that. Visionary leaders set a clear direction, confidently embark on that path, are willing to take risks and are unafraid of the opposition they inevitably face from vested interests and entrenched elites. Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership embodied these qualities. But most of the country's leaders who came after the Quaid were both uninspired and uninspiring.

Effective leadership not only requires setting out a vision about the future but also a strategy to implement it. Evaluated against this criterion, it is apparent many of the country's leaders' have fallen short. Politics here has long been about power, privilege, patronage and vanquishing opponents rather than offering a coherent programme of policy actions. Slogans there have been

aplenty but platitudes have substituted for policy and rhetoric for solutions.

Leadership in government also means executing a strategy by placing the right people in the right positions. Only by assembling a competent team can a vision be translated into reality. Pakistan's experience over the years shows that factors other than merit and competence were given more importance. A personalised approach to team-building took precedence over considerations of expertise or competence. The premium was on proximity to the 'boss' and other 'connections'.

A third ingredient of leadership is the ability to motivate and inspire people to support the government's policy goals. This involves connecting to citizens, understanding what they want and winning their confidence. It also means communicating effectively. The answer to the question whether the country's leaders are able to do this is obvious. The paradox that defines the country today is that leaders are elected to public office but without the vision or means to enthuse and unite the country.

Looking at the experience of countries that have faced economic crisis but used it as an opportunity to bounce back stronger and more resilient, the distinguishing factor that made this possible was the quality of leadership. Success depended on leaders who ran a competent government that was committed to structural reforms and had the moti-

vation, political will and credibility to take measures that were painful in the near-term but yielded rich and enduring dividends in the long run.

Countries that achieved such an economic turnaround, for example in Southeast Asia and South America, all deployed capable teams of professionals who assisted their governments to craft and implement reforms. This enabled the country to navigate through the crisis towards sustained recovery and growth. In every successful case of a country that took the path to a better economic future, the quality of professionals who shaped and oversaw the reform process was significant. But again, it was the leadership that chose the right team and then guided and inspired them to deliver.

In his thoughtful book, *Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy*, the late Henry Kissinger wrote that "without leadership institutions drift and nations court growing irrelevance and ultimately, disaster". Leaders who Kissinger deemed to have provided strategic leadership were all bold, courageous, decisive and had a powerful vision and strong sense of reality. They did not hesitate to court controversy or take on entrenched interests. That he regarded as "the price of making history". Do we in Pakistan have leaders who can forge history and extricate the country from its polycrisis?

—By arrangement with Dawn



# T20 World Cup enters the knock-out phase

UPSETS have always been a part and parcel of the cricket game. The T20 World Cup, too, has had its fair share of highs and lows as the event has now reached the business end of the month-long exercise, which took off on June 1. In the first 18 days, the cricket fans saw fancied teams like Pakistan, New Zealand and Sri Lanka crashing out of the tournament, tamed and beaten into submission by lesser-known and unfancied teams. On Tuesday morning, the host and mercurial West Indies team put up an aggressive, muscular game to demolish the Afghanistan team by 104 runs to make Match 40 memorable. Nicholas Pooran, the swashbuckling left-hander, rustled

up the tournament's highest score by piling up 98 runs in just 53 balls. This game was more of a one-upmanship between the two contenders, as they are already in the Super 8 phase, which is beginning today night at Antigua. From the spunky performance of the co-host USA team to determined displays by the other participants in patches, the World Cup with a total of 55 matches has had its memorable moments. Of course, there have been many references to the pitch condition and the wayward weather which has caused unexpected outcomes. Having begun as a global game at the end of 19th century in America, cricket over a century has been

confined to a dozen-odd countries, primarily erstwhile colonies of the British. Having seen many advancements to keep the interest in the sport consistent, cricket has been immensely popular in independent India for over five decades and more. Home-spun superstars in this phase, beginning with Sunil Gavaskar who took over the mantle from his celebrity seniors like C K Nayudu, Lala Amarnath and a few more in the swinging 1970s, and a clutch of icons in the recent past from Sachin Tendulkar to M S Dhoni have immortalized themselves among their fans globally. At present, Indian fans are keen to see how a faltering Virat Kohli,

who has his own records to protect and perpetuate, will perform from here on, along with the team captain Rohit Sharma and the dashing Ravindra Jadeja, who will have to bow out of the game soon, completing long careers in the field. The T20 format's initial World Cup tournament was bagged by our team nearly 17 years ago, but since then it has been a wavy, see-saw kind of a phase the game has seen at our end. With only Bangladesh and Afghanistan to be tackled, Indians may have missed out the adrenaline-pumping encounters with Pakistan at this level, which has always been theirs to win in the last two decades. Yet, the host teams,

West Indies and USA, have proven that they are no pushovers and are hopefuls for lifting the Cup. By the end of the month, the new boss of T20 game at the world level would have been decided. Many have a sneaking feeling it could be Australia once again as they have already snapped up the World Championship of Test cricket, the One-Day International Cup in this year and would gladly want to add one final Cup to their kitty. This would surely give them an exalted status, which many teams can only aspire for. However, cricket is a glorious game of uncertainties and as neutral followers of the game, the best thing would be to wish that the best team wins.

## LETTERS

### Suitable choice for Speaker of Lok Sabha

MANY names are doing the rounds on the Speaker of 18th Lok Sabha. Om Birla, Purandeswari of BJP or anyone else from NDA group seem to be among the options. Telugu Desam choice has fallen on AP State BJP President, the MP of Rajahmundry and former Congress Minister in Union cabinet. She is a renowned orator on subjects of great value, and daughter of former CM of AP NT Rama Rao and not but not least a good listener. She is expected to bring laurels and honour as the good conductor of Lok Sabha.

N Ramalakshmi, Secunderabad

### Rahul should bear re-election costs

Mr Rahul Gandhi contested from two constituencies - Rae Bareilly and Wayanad - and won both seats. As he has to keep only one, he is vacating the latter. Ethically and morally, he is obliged to bear the costs of re-election expenses towards bye-poll of Wayanad since he is fully responsible as he contested from two places due to lack of confidence in self. Further, it is justified as his sister is contesting who has very high chances of winning. By doing so, he will be settling a new trend in Indian politics which will be welcomed by people, particularly taxpayers.

Dr O Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

### Oppn keeps harping on EVM hacking

REF: Anything can be hacked: Musk. June 17, 2024. This refers to mischievous comments on EVMs made by Elon Musk, who has no business to either comment or give his opinion on the time-tested EVMs that have been in use since 1982, in the country. The Congress did not complain about the machine when the party was in power for decades. The EC already clarified that the EVM is a standalone system with "robust administrative safeguards" which is not programmable, having no wireless communication capabilities. It should have taken the air out of Opposition sails. Rahul Gandhi's comment on the EVM being a 'black box' speaks of his mediocre intelligence; albeit, the Opposition was invited to try their hands at reprogramming the EVM, an open challenge that had no takers - the grumbling however persists on their part to confuse the electorate.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

### India should explore ways to end war

NARENDRA Modi's tryst with G7 bigwigs in Italy was an occasion to discuss conflicts that are upending the world order, and to forge a peace plan for Ukraine. Ostensibly, except for the commitment of \$50 billion loan to Ukraine, nothing concrete could be accomplished on peace after Russia had laid preconditions for negotiations. Despite two years of death and destruction, it is shocking there is no sign of ceasefire coming through due to the bitter truth that both Russia and Ukraine are willing to wait, watch and accept the war outcomes. All in all, the summit's efforts did not move too far to restore peace in the absence of Russia; however, India in the meantime can utilise the time to study in-depth the peace moves and come out with a clear blueprint that may be helpful to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict and bring lasting peace in the region.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

### Are all the citizens equal before law?

THE Karnataka High Court advised the State government not to arrest former Chief Minister Yediyurappa on POCSCO allegations until further time. The HC observed that the CM is "not Tom Dick or Harry" that he can just be arrested. Then there is another case of the serving CM of Delhi before the Delhi High Court, who is sent to jail, and the HC observed that the CM cannot be treated any different from an ordinary citizen. Is Judiciary really serious of treating all citizens as equal before the Law?

P R Ravinder, Hyderabad

### NCERT's exclusionary role not wise

NCERT is in news yet again as in XII class political science text book, topics like Godra riots and Babri Masjid demolition have been deleted and the text books are used for political propaganda. (No need to teach about riots; NCERT chief, 17 June). In this regard, the chief of NCERT has come up with a weak explanation that students need not be taught about communal violence and riots. The NCERT, while keeping in view the role of education in shaping national identity, should strive to remove political influence in academic content and ensure that education is accurate, balanced and inclusive, to foster informed and critical citizens.

P H Hema Sagar, Secunderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### Muttiah Muralitharan to invest Rs 1,400 cr in Badanaguppe

BENGALURU: Heavy and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil said that famous Sri Lankan cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan is starting a soft drink and sweets business in Badanaguppe of Chamarajanagar district and will gradually invest a total of Rs 1,400 crore.

The minister held talks in this regard with Muttiah, who met him here on Tuesday. Speaking later, the Minister said that Muralidharan was starting his business in Badanaguppe under the brand name 'Muttiah Beverages and Confectioneries' and initially a plan was made for an investment of 230 crore rupees. Then it is now touching thousand crores. He explained that Muttiah told him that it would be Rs 1,400 crore in the next few days.

For this Muralidharan has already been given 46 acres of land. There were some minor complications with this. The authorities concerned have been instructed to rectify them immediately. He said that the production activity will start in Badanaguppe in coming January.

The minister said that in the coming days, Muttiah will set up a unit of his business in Dharwad as well. Industries Department Principal Secretary Selvakumar, Commissioner Gunjan Krishna, KIAD CEO Dr. Mahesh, Udyoga Mitra Managing Director Dodda Basavaraju were present on the occasion.

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

# What will AI make of your resume?

THE artificial intelligence (AI) revolution has begun, spreading to almost every facet of people's professional and personal lives - including job recruitment.

While artists fear copyright breaches or simply being replaced, business and management are becoming increasingly aware to the possibilities of greater efficiencies in areas as diverse as supply chain management, customer service, product development and human resources (HR) management.

Soon all business areas and operations will be under pressure to adopt AI in some form or another. But the very nature of AI - and the data behind its processes and outputs - mean human biases are being embedded in the technology.

Our research looked at the use of AI in recruitment and hiring - a field that has already widely adopted AI to automate the screening of resumes and to rate video interviews by job applicants.

AI in recruitment promises greater objectivity and efficiency during the hiring process by eliminating human biases and enhancing fairness and consistency in decision making. But our research shows AI can subtly - and at times overtly - heighten biases. And the involvement of HR professionals may worsen rather than alleviate these effects. This challenges our belief that human oversight can contain and moderate AI.

### Magnifying human bias

Although one of the reasons for using AI in recruitment is that it is meant to be to be

more objective and consistent, multiple studies have found the technology is, in fact, very likely to be biased. This happens because AI learns from the datasets used to train it. If the data is flawed, the AI will be too.

Biases in data can be made worse by the human-created algorithms supporting AI, which often contain human biases in their design.

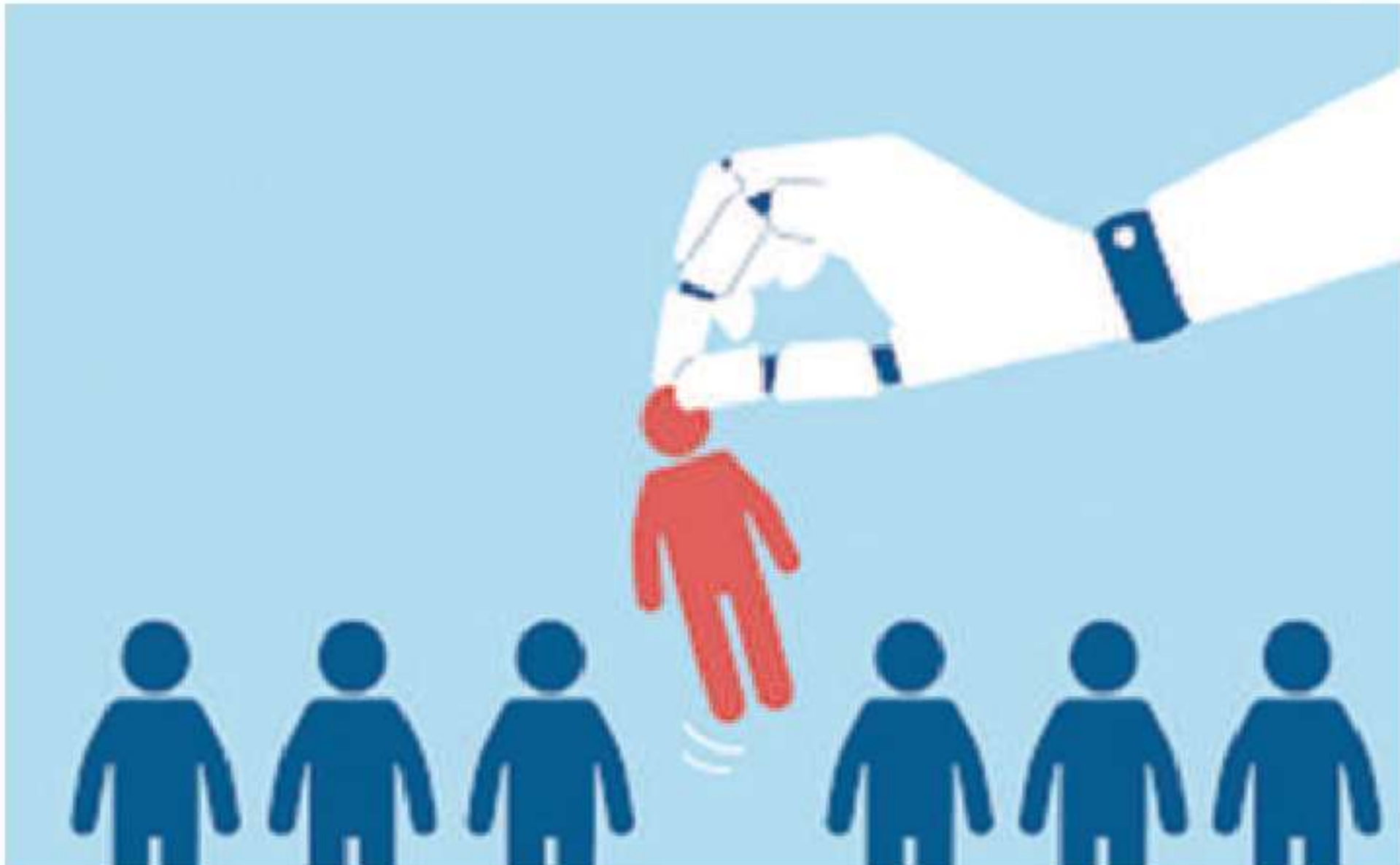
In interviews with 22 HR professionals, we identified two common biases in hiring: "stereotype bias" and "similar-to-me bias".

Stereotype bias occurs when decisions are influenced by stereotypes about certain groups, such as preferring candidates of the same gender, leading to gender inequality. "Similar-to-me" bias happens when recruiters favour candidates who share similar backgrounds or interests to them.

These biases, which can significantly affect the fairness of the hiring process, are embedded in the historical hiring data which are then used to train the AI systems. This leads to biased AI.

So, if past hiring practices favoured certain demographics, the AI will continue to do so. Mitigating these biases is challenging because algorithms can infer personal information based on hidden data from other correlated information.

For example, in countries with different lengths of military service for men and women, an AI might deduce gender based on service duration. This persistence of bias underscores the need for careful planning and monitoring to ensure fairness in both human and AI-driven



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recruitment processes.

### Can humans help?

As well as HR professionals, we also interviewed 17 AI developers. We wanted to investigate how an AI recruitment system could be developed that would mitigate rather than exacerbate hiring bias.

Based on the interviews, we developed a model wherein HR professionals and AI programmers would go back and forth in exchanging information and questioning preconceptions as they examined data sets

and developed algorithms.

However, our findings reveal the difficulty in implementing such a model lies in the educational, professional and demographic differences that exist between HR professionals and AI developers.

These differences impede effective communication, cooperation and even the ability to understand each other. While HR professionals are traditionally trained in people management and organisational behaviour, AI developers are skilled in data science and technology.

These different back-

grounds can lead to misunderstandings and misalignment when working together. This is particularly a problem in smaller countries such as New Zealand, where resources are limited and professional networks are less diverse.

### Connecting HR and AI

If companies and the HR profession want to address the issue of bias in AI-based recruitment, several changes need to be made.

Firstly, the implementation of a structured training programme for HR profes-

sionals focused on information system development and AI is crucial. This training should cover the fundamentals of AI, the identification of biases in AI systems, and strategies for mitigating these biases.

Additionally, fostering better collaboration between HR professionals and AI developers is also important. Companies should be looking to create teams that include both HR and AI specialists. These can help bridge the communication gap and better align their efforts.

Moreover, developing culturally relevant datasets is vital for reducing biases in AI systems. HR professionals and AI developers need to work together to ensure the data used in AI-driven recruitment processes are diverse and representative of different demographic groups. This will help create more equitable hiring practices.

Lastly, countries need guidelines and ethical standards for the use of AI in recruitment that can help build trust and ensure fairness. Organisations should implement policies that promote transparency and accountability in AI-driven decision-making processes.

By taking these steps, we can create a more inclusive and fair recruitment system that leverages the strengths of both HR professionals and AI developers.

(<https://theconversation.com>); Written by Melika Soleimani, Ali Intezari, David J Paulsen, and Jim Arrowsmith of School of Management, Massey University, New Zealand)

# More support ICC case against Israel

A joint statement calls on "all States to ensure full co-operation with the Court for it to carry out its important mandate of ensuring equal justice for all victims of genocide, war crimes, [and] crimes against humanity."

Ninety-three nations on Friday, all them state parties to the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court, reiterated their support for the ICC as it assesses an application for arrest warrants of high level Israeli government officials accused of perpetrating war crimes in Gaza.

The 93 countries - including Canada, Bangladesh, Belgium, Ireland, Afghanistan, Costa Rica, Chile, Germany, France, Mongolia, Mexico, New Zealand, and scores of other - cited separate ICC statements defending its mandate for independence and upheld in their joint statement "that the Court, its officials and staff shall carry out their professional duties as international civil servants without intimidation."

Though neither nation is named in the joint statement, both the United States and Israel have publicly condemned ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan for his May 20 arrest warrant applica-



With their show of unified support for the ICC and its mandate, the countries said they aim to "contribute to ending impunity for such crimes and preventing their recurrence while defending the progress we have made together to guarantee lasting respect for international humanitarian law, human rights, the of law and the enforcement of international criminal justice"

tions for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant over alleged "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity" in the Gaza Strip. Khan also submitted arrest warrants for Hamas leaders Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri, and Ismail Haniyeh

for their alleged roles in the October 7 attack on southern Israel. Following Khan's announcement in May, U.S. President Joe Biden said, "Whatever this prosecutor might imply, there is no equivalence - none - between Israel and Hamas. We will always stand with Israel against threats to its secu-

rity."

In April it was reported that the U.S. government was working behind the scenes to block the ICC from issuing any arrest warrants targeting Israeli officials. Neither Israel nor the U.S. is party to the Rome Statute, though the United Nations has recognized the

ICC's jurisdiction over the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), where the alleged war crimes by the occupying power, Israel, took place.

After Khan made his application for warrants, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said, "We've been really clear about the ICC investigation. We do not support it." On June 4, Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives, along with 42 Democrats, passed a measure that would sanction ICC officials if the arrest warrants for any Israeli officials were approved or carried out. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, was among those who applauded Friday's public statement.

Rajagopal thanked the signatory nations "for defending the ICC and standing up against the bullies, including the relics from the U.S. Senate whose idea of engaging with the world is to use threats," a possible reference to Sen. Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.) who denounced Khan's applications as "outrageous," applauded the House approval of sanctions, and vowed further punishment for the ICC.

Such punitive measures and high-profile threats directed at the ICC appeared to be the exact kind of intimidation Friday's joint pledge of support is responding to.

"The ICC, as the world's first and only permanent international criminal court, is an essential component of the international peace and security architecture," the statement reads. "We therefore call on all States to ensure full co-operation with the Court for it to carry out its important mandate of ensuring equal justice for all victims of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression, grave crimes that threaten the peace, security and well-being of the world."

With their show of unified support for the ICC and its mandate, the countries said they aim to "contribute to ending impunity for such crimes and preventing their recurrence while defending the progress we have made together to guarantee lasting respect for international humanitarian law, human rights, the of law and the enforcement of international criminal justice."

(Writer is managing editor of Common Dreams. <https://www.commondreams.org/>)









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## Rhetoric won't suffice in Manipur

The question of whether the Home Minister convened a high-level meeting to review the situation in Manipur based on the public advice of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat is incidental. What truly matters is that a week after his suggestion, Home Minister Amit Shah held the meeting — one notable for the conspicuous absence of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh. Shah's promise that violence will not be tolerated and that efforts will be made to foster reconciliation between the Meiteis and the Kukis is welcome but not novel. Similar statements have been made before, with little tangible impact on the ground. It is a grave mistake to oversimplify the violence in Manipur as merely an ethnic conflict. The recent turmoil is the product of a deeper conspiracy aimed at consolidating political power.

The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that the chief minister, who allegedly commands both militias and the police, cannot travel freely within his own state, as evidenced by the deadly attack on his advance convoy. Social media are rife with images of gun-wielding militias obstructing even army vehicles, highlighting the complete breakdown of law and order. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reluctance to visit Manipur since the outbreak of violence in May 2023 has not gone unnoticed, even within his own party. Bhagwat rightly pointed out that Manipur had enjoyed a decade of peace, making the current violence a stark indicator of governmental failure, both Central and state. The BJP's electoral defeat in Manipur underscores this political mismanagement.

Amit Shah must address a critical question: Why is the chief minister — under whose regime 225 people have been killed, 50,000 displaced, and thousands of children deprived of education — still in office? In other states like Gujarat and Haryana, chief ministers have been removed for far less. The ongoing suffering in Manipur is not confined to a single community; it affects the entire state, underscoring the urgent need for decisive action against those who flout the law in the name of politics, religion, or ethnic identity. Restoring law and order in Manipur requires more than just promises and high-level meetings. It demands an immediate crackdown on all those who perpetuate violence. The guilty must be held accountable, and the state's security apparatus must be empowered to operate without political interference. Only through decisive and impartial action can peace be restored, and the people of Manipur can hope for a return to normalcy.

## A tale of two contests

When Rahul Gandhi clinched victories in both Raebareli in Uttar Pradesh and Wayanad in Kerala, it was inevitable that he would relinquish one seat. The twist in this political saga is the decision for his sister, Priyanka Gandhi, to step into the Wayanad fray. Naturally, the BJP has pounced on this, raising eyebrows over the Congress's silence on the matter and crying foul over dynastic politics. However, let's dial down the outrage a notch and consider the BJP's own strategic manoeuvring. It has only has itself to blame for enabling Rahul Gandhi to keep his intentions under wraps until the Kerala polls concluded. After all, this was part of the grand strategy to save Varanasi for the final phase, giving Narendra Modi the stage to criss-cross the nation in a frenzied campaign blitz.

And let's not forget, Modi himself played a similar game in 2014, running from both UP and Gujarat without revealing which constituency he would honour with his undivided attention. This political sleight of hand isn't new; it's a tradition dating back to the first elections in 1952, with candidates routinely keeping their cards close to their chests. As for Priyanka Gandhi, she's hardly a novice in the political arena. After her brother, she's arguably the Congress's star campaigner. The dynasty argument? Well, it rings a bit hollow when the Modi government's own cabinet boasts nearly 20 ministers who owe their political careers to their familial legacies. Her candidacy in Kerala underscores the Congress's ability to think beyond regional biases. Contrast this with the CPM's internal strife, where Sitaram Yechury's Kerala ambitions were squashed by party parochialism.

In the end, both Modi in Varanasi and Priyanka in Wayanad have the right to contest where they choose. Let the battle be fought on policy and vision, not on the bogey of dynasty.

*Both Modi in Varanasi and Priyanka in Wayanad have the right to contest where they choose. Let the battle be fought on policy and vision, not the dynasty bogey*



**Fuzzy Logic**

ROHIT CHANDAVARKAR

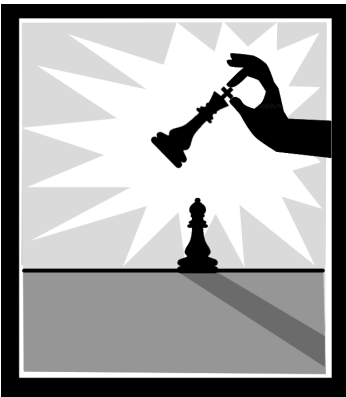
It was an important day for the Bharatiya Janata Party on Tuesday as Maharashtra Deputy CM and the BJP's most powerful strategist in the state, Devendra Fadnavis, held discussions with the party's central leadership about how to proceed for the upcoming state Assembly elections. The central agenda at these discussions is about how to ensure the transfer of votes between candidates fielded by the BJP and its alliance partners as the feeling right now is that vote transfer has somehow not happened in the Lok Sabha polls especially in the case of Ajit Pawar's NCP and the BJP.

A setback for the BJP in Maharashtra in the Lok Sabha polls has been taken very seriously by the party high command. What went wrong in Vidarbha which is the party's bastion, how did the vote transfer between alliance partners not take place in Western Maharashtra which is NCP's home turf and why even in a city like Mumbai where the party won all six seats last time, this time the performance

was dismal? Are some of the main questions being discussed by the party high command with the state leadership.

Some party insiders say that the assessments show that the vote transfer did not take place between Ajit Pawar's candidates mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, because the political ideological gap between Ajit Pawar and the BJP remains wide. Ajit Pawar has insisted that he will not toe the Hindutva line of the BJP and Secondly because the grassroot workers of the NCP just have not been able to gel with those of the BJP in regions such as western Maharashtra.

In terms of their political ideology, the BJP and Ajit Pawar's NCP remain poles apart. In the recent past since he decided to cross over to the NDA alliance, Ajit Pawar was seen avoiding attending many events held by the saffron organisations that are part of the BJP grouping; on the other hand he was seen attending many events organised by the minority community. Ajit Pawar understands that his core vote bank includes the masses that



belong to SC/CT community, minorities and other segments which are opposed to the Hindutva ideology of the BJP, and he is aware that even if he crosses over to the saffron alliance, the hard-core saffron voters may not be voting for him in any case. The second part is about grassroots activists not gelling with each other. In western Maharashtra in every cooperative organisation there has been a harsh tussle between the NCP and the BJP. In cooperative banks, credit societies, sugar mills and educational institu-

# Crises and promises: A tale from rural Maharashtra

Politicians shower promises of water infrastructure development. Yet, despite decades of assurances, little has changed on the ground



**Guest Column**

PRABHAT SINHA

In the heartland of Maharashtra lies Mann Desh, a region steeped in the proud nomadic traditions of the Dhangar community. For centuries, these shepherds have roamed the Deccan Plateau, their survival dependent on their knowledge of finding water sources among the dry landscape. Yet, despite being the first inhabitants of this land, water has remained elusive for the people of Mann Desh.

As a 35-year-old resident of rural Maharashtra, specifically Mann Desh, I've witnessed the relentless struggle for water that defines our daily lives. In an era dominated by technological advancements, from AI to digital payments, the absence of adequate water resources continues to plague our community. Despite numerous movements and initiatives over the past three and a half decades, the water crisis in Mann Desh endures. Interestingly as a country we have reached Mars and exploring space, but no technology or innovation has been able to provide basic water supply to our own citizens.

Climate change has exacerbated our plight, hitting our farmers particularly hard. In villages like Mhaswad, where I reside, water supply has dwindled to a mere hour once in a every twelve days. This dire situation spells disaster for drinking water, water for animals and agriculture, leaving farmers grappling with zero harvest and meagre prices for their produce. Despite global dis-

course on climate crises and initiatives like the UN's declaration of 2023 as the year of millets, the harsh reality is that millet farmers remain among the poorest in our nation. A farmer named Gaikwad from Karkhel has sold all his cattle, and now surviving with only goats; needless to say that all his farm-field has dried up and there is no water, he receives 2000 litres of water once in a every 12 days. The 60-year-old's sons have migrated to Mumbai for wage labouring jobs, and he lives along with his wife and grandkids in hope to get water before he dies. The entire family uses the same water which they took bath in for utensils and clothes, and again the same water is provided to the mango tree in front of his house.

Growing up in the village, I've witnessed firsthand the daily struggle for water, with women queuing for hours to fill their pots. Now, in 2024, the situation has reached unprecedented levels, with the government providing a mere hour of water supply every twelve days. As I traversed the weekly market, I heard farmers lamenting the difficulty of even digging wells deep enough to find water, but they are unsuccessful.

In a year marked by the Lok Sabha elections, politicians have been quick to capitalise on farmers' plight, showering promises of water infrastructure development. Yet, despite decades of assurances, little has changed on the ground. Instead, we witness a spectacle of extravagant

*bhumipujan*, where more money is spent on ceremonial rituals than on the actual implementation of schemes. At one place, *bhumipujan* was done three times. Imagine the money which was spent three times on the same *bhumipujan* — it could have helped thousands of farmers like Gaikwad.

In the turmoil of a water crisis, the reality of our nation is stark: the average citizen's struggle to reach the highest strata of authority is similar to scaling Mount Everest. Even the simple prospect of meeting a collector or a high-ranking bureaucrat resembles a Herculean feat, entangled in bureaucracy and red tape. In this complex system reminiscent of colonial bureaucracy, people without connections must navigate a maze of steps just to get a meeting. Ironically, even the lowly peon stationed outside the collector's office wields more influence than a farmer, determining who gains access to power/meet with the collector and who languishes in the shadows.

In the village of Mhaswad, amidst intense protests and hollow promises, a glimmer of hope emerges in the form of an unlikely hero: Panda, or as the villagers fondly call him, "Panniwala Panda". A contractual employee of the local government, Panda earns a modest living of 12,000 rupees per month, tirelessly serving his community for the past decade. His mission: to ensure equitable distribution of water among the village's disparate communities, an endless

task compounded by inadequate water pipeline infrastructure and dwindling water reserves.

Panda is the busiest man I have ever met; I would say busier than the US President. Panda's daily routine resembles a whirlwind, over 150 calls per day from anxious villagers enquiring about water release schedules. He is armed only with a simple black-and-white Nokia phone and an uncanny ability to recognise callers by their voices, since he has no time to store thousands of people's names. Despite facing the brunt of villagers' frustrations, Panda remains steadfast in his commitment, sacrificing personal milestones and familial obligations for the greater good.

Panda is considered like family by everyone in Mhaswad, regardless of their background, castes, or religion. Transcending these barriers, Panda has forged deep bonds with every household in Mhaswad. He's often invited into people's homes for meals, tea, and to take part in important events like weddings and funerals. He's so connected with the community that he knows who's away from the village, who's getting married, and all the little details of people's lives. This year, however, has been tough for him. Some people are upset with him because water comes once in twelve days; people also know that Panda has nothing to do with the water policy. Despite facing criticism, Panda remains patient because he understands the challenges. He's sacrificed a lot for his job, even

The minority votes getting consolidated in favour of the Congress party in Maharashtra has given the BJP an unexpected surprise

Rohit Chandavarkar is a senior journalist who has worked for 31 years with various leading newspaper brands and television channels in Mumbai and Pune

missing important family events. He once couldn't attend his cousin's funeral because he was busy with water supply duties; he literally found out about his cousin's death when he saw the funeral procession. He even missed his granddaughter's birth. All Panda hopes for is that water becomes more reliable in the coming year so he can attend his own son's wedding. Yet, amidst the relentless grind of his duties, Panda harbours a solitary wish: for a future where water flows freely every day, and he can partake in the joys and sorrows of his own family. Until then, he remains the unsung hero of Mhaswad, a beacon of resilience in the face of adversity.

As Maharashtra continues to allocate substantial funds towards water irrigation, the reality remains unchanged for regions like Mann Desh, where water remains a distant dream. Like the mirage bird, we continue to gaze at the sky, hoping for a drop of relief amidst the parched landscape.

In the face of such adversity, the simple plea of our farmers for access to water for their families and livestock rings louder than any political rhetoric. Until that plea is answered, the cycle of migration and hardship will persist, leaving behind a trail of broken dreams and unfulfilled promises.

Prabhat Sinha is the Founder of Mann Deshi Champions (prabhat@manndeshi.org.in)

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### Work on water woes

We in India have not taken the issue of water as a top priority. Still there are no proper and concrete guidelines to restrict the malpractices of misutilisation of water. There is no segregation of

water in India. Drinking water is used for washing clothes, gardening, cleaning cars, roads and the most important usage is huge and bulk by the housing sector. There is no policy for industrial water and wastage con-

tinues in every field without anybody bothering about this crucial question. There is no policy of restricting the usage of drinking water for multipurpose requirements. It is a matter of great regret that we pay water tax and

impure water is supplied at the doorstep which is then purified by various processes to obtain drinkable water.

**CK Subramaniam**

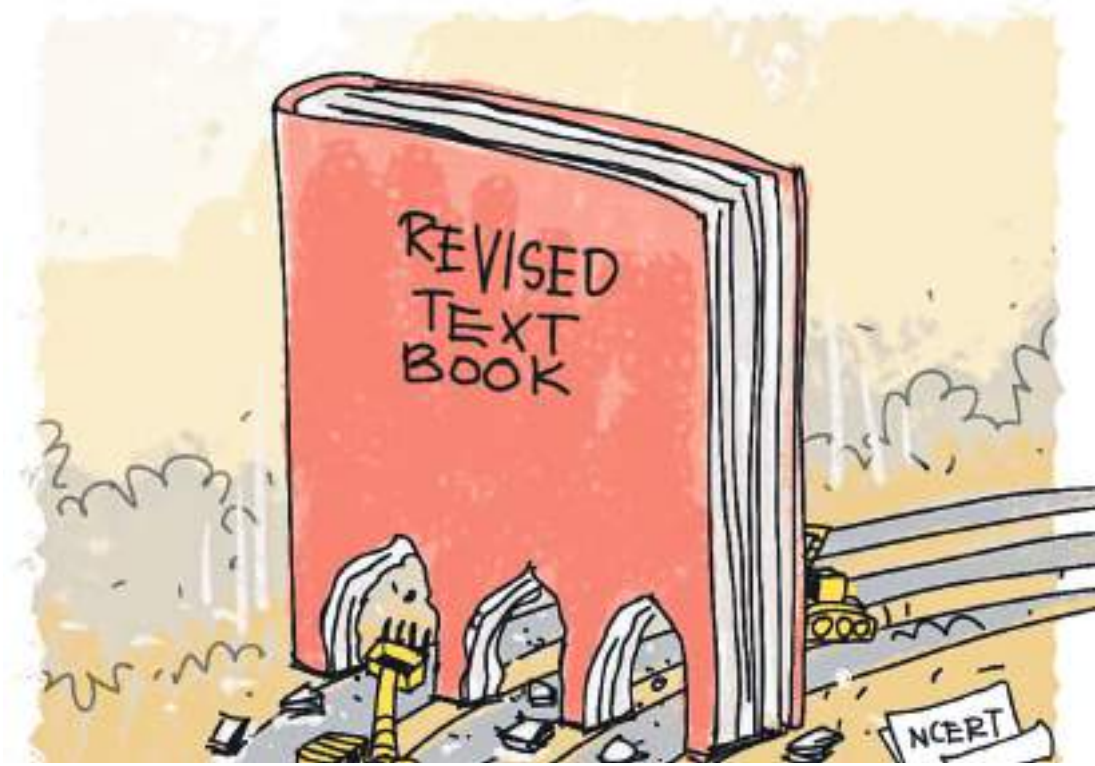
Galloping population and depleting resources have resulted in water conservation becoming one of the biggest issues of our time. Despite water covering three-fourths of the earth's surface, only 1% of this resource is available for consumption. This poses the serious challenge of water resource management. Government campaigns are all well but the question remains how much they actually reach the people on the ground.

**Ayani Dangi, Ujjain**

### Inhuman act

It is highly condemnable that some residents in Gujarat have opposed allotment of a flat under the CM's scheme to a Muslim woman. Isn't a criminal act to divide society on the basis of religion? Are we living in a secular democratic nation or a theocratic setup? Let us learn to treat all Indians equally, irrespective of their caste, community, creed or religion, and live in harmony.

**Tharcius S Fernando**



### The travails of domestic workers

They may have been elevated, in terms of politically correct vocabulary, from "servants" to "maids", and now as "domestic workers". However, much remains to be done to improve the lot of this workforce. They need official recognition and protection from exploitation and abuse. It is a unique relationship between employer and employee, where the former's home is the latter's workspace, and in which other factors such as caste, gender, vulnerability, internal work hierarchies and unenforceable contractual obligations are embedded. Laws and policies will remain statements of intent unless they draw from lessons gained from the ground.

**Sanjay Chopra**



NEW TALES

Education has a single function: creating positive citizens. So argued the director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training, Dinesh Prasad Saklani, when faced with the outrage at the new deletions in NCERT textbooks of various classes. These include the erasure of the Gujarat riots and the removal of two pages out of four about the events in Ayodhya. The focus in the latter is the Supreme Court's verdict that led to the raising of the temple and an account of the welcome it is supposed to have received. Mr Saklani feels that accounts of riots and the events in Ayodhya would create depressed and violent citizens. In an extended defence against the charge of saffronisation of the curriculum — they say only ladies protest too much — Mr Saklani said there was nothing wrong in emphasising the court verdict as it was a fact. History is based on facts, it is not a battleground. Then it must be asked if the existence of Babri Masjid was a fact. Why is it a nameless “three-domed structure” in the texts? Mr Saklani claimed that knowing about riots would create “offensive” citizens, spread hatred and produce feelings of victimhood. Hatred and violence are not subjects of teaching, he said; so are these only for practice?

The deletions are part of the “rationalisation” in line with the National Education Policy that requires a lighter syllabus. That includes dropping the contributions of the Mughal emperors — gradually since 2014 — as well as deleting Mahatma Gandhi's calming influence on sectarian riots, the reasons for his murder and all details about his killer except his name. Also this time, as over the years, people's movements and uprisings from underprivileged castes are seen to be vanishing, together with anything that endangers the Narendra Modi-led government's chosen narrative. Mr Saklani insisted that these are experts' decisions with no pressure from above. Strange, then, that the authors of textbooks published in 2006 should now threaten legal action unless their names are removed. They object to the deletions and the addition of a paragraph on “minority appeasement”. Their expertise does not support the Bharatiya Janata Party's highly edited view of history with the magical disappearance of all things uncomfortable for the party. That diet is the recipe for producing “positive citizens”. Knowledge has nothing to do with it.

DERAILED

Yet another major train accident — several people died when a goods train rammed into the Down Kanchenjunga Express near Rangapani railway station in North Bengal — must prompt conscientious citizens to ask the government the following question: has the railways been derailed on account of compromises in safety standards? Answers to questions specific to this tragedy must also be found. For instance, why was the goods train allowed to run at a speed higher than the prescribed norm? How did both ill-fated trains land on the same track? Was the accident the result of human error? The chairman of the railway board has blamed the mishap on the driver of the goods train. But human error does not happen without a cause. Data suggest that over 18,000 posts for loco pilots and assistant loco pilots have been lying vacant for years. The resultant shortage of manpower has led to train drivers working far longer shifts, enhancing the chances of mistakes. The working conditions during summer are an additional challenge too. The disburial of modern technology has not been up to the mark either. Senior railway officials have stated that Kavach, an automatic train protection system, field trials for which began way back in 2016, has been deployed in less than 1,500 kilometres of railway tracks: the Indian Railways, incidentally, covers a total of 70,000 km in terms of tracks.

The political Opposition is, unsurprisingly, eager to ask tough questions of the powers that be who seem to believe that they are above the principle of accountability. The politics is of secondary importance, but not the queries. This is because the railways has suffered serious accidents in the recent past, raising concern not only about tardy investments in safety equipment but also the government's lopsided priorities. There is, in fact, a case to argue that the Narendra Modi government accords greater importance to populism — is India's bullet train initiative meant to camouflage critical gaps that are endangering the lives of ordinary passengers? — than the health of the railways. The needs of the hour should be obvious. The modernisation of railway infrastructure along with the completion of safety templates like Kavach must begin on a war footing. The excuse of prohibitive costs cannot be used as a fig leaf any longer. There must also be a complete re-evaluation of railway projects so that passenger safety gains priority over expensive undertakings that may turn out to be the proverbial white elephant on tracks.

SCRIPSI

‘A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened.’

ALBERT CAMUS

A victory for constitutional values  
Beloved document

ARGHYA SENGUPTA

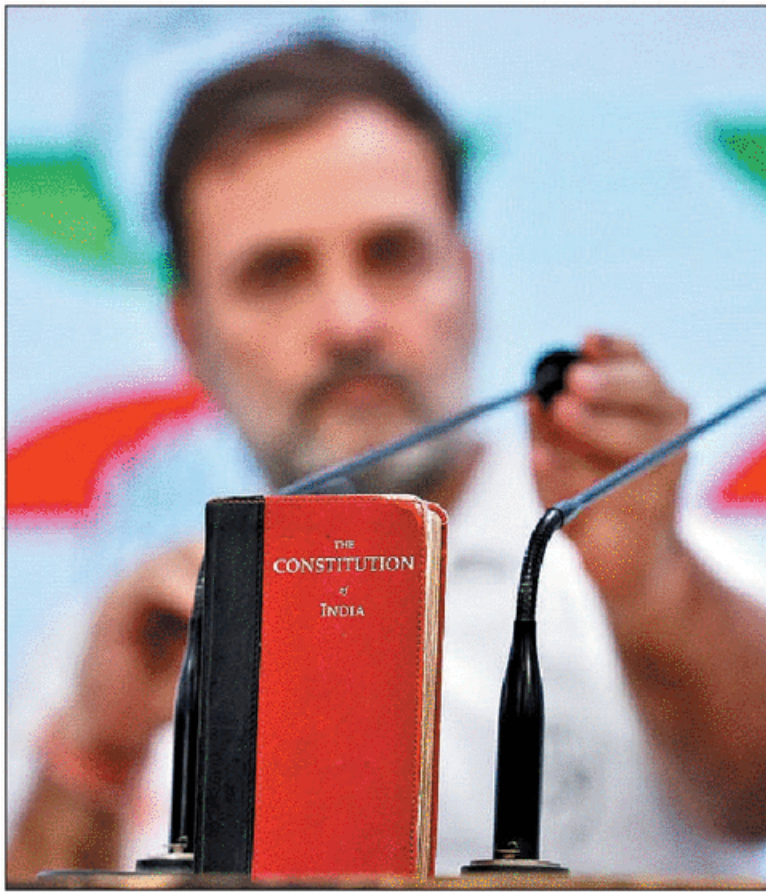
Prime Minister Narendra Modi took his oath of office on June 9, Sunday, swearing true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India. What his faith and allegiance to the Constitution actually entail became a bone of contention in this election campaign. A testament to the centrality of the Constitution was the sight of Rahul Gandhi holding up a pocketbook copy of it in the INDIA bloc's first press conference after the results were announced. The campaign had been a “fight to save the Constitution” he declared and congratulated all those who had fought and won. That the Constitution has won the day has been a common refrain since. But what does it mean for the Constitution to win?

Symbolically, the Constitution won in two distinct ways. First, it became a topic of everyday conversation in a way it has rarely been in independent India. The Constitution, the longest of any country, written in dense legalese, has always remained a somewhat abstract thing. Engagement with its concepts — like liberty, equality and fraternity — was left to courts, its promises — special measures for backward classes, temple entry for all — mostly the stuff of political rhetoric. Apart from a brief period during the Emergency and the Janata Party government that followed, it has never been perceived by ordinary citizens as shaping everyday life in India.

But over the course of the last two months, the Constitution came alive. During my travels, from Manipur to Mumbai, it became clear that voters were struck by concern that a landslide majority for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party may lead to an upending of their everyday lives and opportunities. While this was a vague apprehension in the beginning, by the end of the campaign it had morphed into a distinctly articulated fear — that the BJP would fundamentally alter tribe and caste-based reservations promised by the Constitution.

With the public narrative being set in these terms early in the campaign, both sides, the government and the Opposition, tried to outdo each other in declaring their fidelity to the Constitution. This was not in the form of a constitutional debate about the merits of caste-based *versus* economic criteria-based reservations. Indian elections have rarely turned on such policy questions with deep ideological roots. Neither did this one. Instead, it was a dog-and-the-bone style contest to claim the constitutional handkerchief. The Constitution won because its moral force was plain for all to see.

Substantively, the election results were more directly a victory for the people, rather than the Constitution itself, which was reinforced as a result. The lessons from this mandate are many. But a headline that has emerged is that a mighty, majority government has now



been forced to be accommodative to stay on in power. This is a classic case of a popular belief in checks and balances — that if the people in power are forced to work with people they would rather not work with, decisive outcomes will follow. India's liberalisation came from such a government, as did the nuclear tests in Pokhran. The 2024 mandate is a pause button on *baahubali* politics and a return to the coalition era that preceded it. The way the NDA 3.0 government has taken shape now — with a majority of BJP ministers holding plum ministries — may appear to belie this belief. But the vagaries of coalition politics — compromise and conciliation — will soon become clear for all to see.

The ideas of such coalition governments, and checks and balances more broadly, were not core to the framing of the Indian Constitution. Quite to the contrary, the Constitution creates a mighty government, untrammelled by too many internal checks, from the judiciary or the legislature, or external ones, like referendum or recall by citizens. It was written at a time when a majority government was inevitable and was designed to equip it with the powers necessary to deliver change. The people's mandate this time — accommodate others or perish — is a triumph of electoral democracy.

Equally, it is a triumph of the Indian federal set-up. The Constitution creates a federation but then vests a whole range of powers in the Union government that makes it all-powerful. The last 10 years

of non-coalition governments meant that this constitutional vision was serviced by the ‘One Nation, One X’ range of programmes. Whether that is desirable or not is a distinct matter and depends on what X might be. But as a philosophy, it is homogenising, often unable or unwilling to recognise India's greatest source of uniqueness — its diversity.

A key takeaway of the 2024 mandate is that the four most politically significant states in national politics in terms of seats if not importance, in the North, South, East and West — Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Maharashtra — have voted decisively against the incumbent government in New Delhi. The message is loud and clear from four wings of the country — India is one, but its oneness should not be mistaken for sameness.

The Constitution wins when its values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity win. The election results are an expression of free popular will, a contest about what it means to be equal, a renewed commitment to secure justice for historic wrongs, and a clear message that fraternity is not the same thing as uniformity. Prime Minister Modi and his NDA government are the people's choice to deliver on this mandate. But this time, when they ascended the steps of Rashtrapati Bhavan to take their oath of office, the values of the Constitution reinforced authoritatively by the voters perhaps rang a little more loudly in their ears. Only time will tell how it shapes their decisions.

Arghya Sengupta is Research Director, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. Views are personal

Uninvited guest

■ Sir — While addressing an outreach session on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Italy, the prime minister, Narendra Modi, stated that the Lok Sabha election results, which gave him a historic third term in power, were a victory for democracy. Modi seems to have conveniently forgotten the fact that he was given a stern warning by the Indian electorate — the Bharatiya Janata Party lost majority in the Lok Sabha for the first time in 10 years and had to depend on its allies to form the government.

The results highlighted that an autocratic style of governance, fostering religious polarisation and the suppression of the Opposition, all of which the Modi government has done, will not be taken lightly by the voters. This should be a lesson for other democracies in the world.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

■ Sir — The Bharatiya Janata Party leader, Subramanian Swamy, has raised a pertinent question: why did Narendra Modi speak at the G7 proceedings when he was not invited to do so? India is not a part of the G7. Modi's presence at the Summit, Swamy argues, was an attempt to “bluff” Indians. The trip was an exercise in self-aggrandisement as Modi wanted to bask in the glory of the results of the general elections.

Tharcuis S. Fernando, Chennai



Honesty counts

■ Sir — It is very common for job applicants to inflate their past work experiences and embellish their professional qualifications on resumes in order to stand out in a highly competitive environment. In fact, reports show that in the United States of America the number of people looking to lie on resumes has increased by nearly 20% from 2022 to 2023. But a recent job applicant in a Bengaluru-based company stood out for being candid. When asked to describe the reasons that make one a good fit for the role, the applicant wrote that he desperately needed the job so that he could marry his childhood sweetheart. While the answer may not say anything about his professional skills, he might have scored brownie points with the hiring manager for his honesty.

Niket Lakhani, Gurgaon

■ Sir — In “Guest appearance” (June 16), Mukul Kesavan ponders whether India should ever have been at the G7 Summit. Narendra Modi's visit to the summit is being touted as an achievement. But this was no different from the many foreign trips that he has made over the years that failed to achieve meaningful bilateral cooperation. It reminded me of the old Hindi prov-

erb, “*Begani shaadi mein Abdullah deewana*” (being overtly involved in someone else's affair). Modi should have skipped the summit and focused on crises at home.

Avinash Godbole, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh

Vendetta politics

■ Sir — The lieutenant-governor of Delhi, V.K. Saxena,

has granted the Delhi Police sanction to prosecute Arundhati Roy under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for comments she made at a seminar in 2010 that allegedly promoted Kashmiri separatism. This indicates that the newly sworn-in Narendra Modi government is keen on continuing with its old ways of suppressing dissent and incarcerating activists, public intellectuals, academics and journalists. The bid to prosecute Roy in a 14-year-old case is a glaring misuse of power.

As a citizen of a democratic country, Roy is entitled to freely express her views. Roy has been a staunch critic of the policies of the ruling dispensation. The decision to prosecute her is thus an instance of vendetta politics.

G. David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ Sir — The prosecution sanction against Arundhati Roy and the Kashmir-based academician, Sheikh Showkat Hussain, under the stringent provisions of the UAPA ignites an old debate about how the law has been



Victim of vendetta

Complex rhetoric

SAMIR NAZARETH

I recently came across a video on social media showing a young lady complaining about an incident at the airport that had embarrassed her parents. She was taking her parents on their first flight and they had stopped to have a bite inside the airport. The food was served with cutlery. But her parents did not know how to use these and, she claims, were embarrassed as everyone else was using them. The provision of cutlery and the absence of wash basins near eateries, she argued, were symbols of colonisation. The video ended with the demand that spaces be decolonised.

The concept of decolonisation is not new; nor does it have a single route. The many battles against the colonising British and, then, the freedom struggle were all attempts at decolonising. The establishment of India as a nation was the first step of decolonisation. The Constitution, too, is a tool of decolonisation because it rebuilds what colonisation and millennia of monarchy left asunder. The now-forgotten five-year plans, India's Panchsheel, the G-77, Saarc and so on were all efforts at decolonisation.

However, the concept of decolonisation took on a new face after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his ‘1200 years of slavery’ speech in 2014. What was till then a silent national effort morphed into a pseudo-revivalist nationalistic exercise that involved government policy-making and socio-religious reconfiguration to promote a version of history that is at invariance to what had actually occurred.

Decolonisation is the process of the indigenous taking back all that has been influenced through centuries of colonisation. The concept is amorphous and, therefore, can include everything, from language to food to social spaces to education and so on. But who defines what is indigenous? Who defines the colonial period? Who defines what needs to be decolonised? These questions, and many others, are important given India's varied and rich history and the potential conse-

quences of these answers on today's India.

For example, as per the Indian Tea Association, tea, which originated in China, was introduced to India by the British in 1774. ‘Chai’, the Indian word for tea, comes from the Mandarin word, *ch'a*. The Portuguese call tea ‘*cha*’. The Portuguese reached India in 1498 and China in 1513. Is it then possible that it was the Portuguese who introduced tea to India? Given that India is one of the largest consumers of tea, who then colonised whom in this instance?

Decolonising would also necessitate discussions on the idea of the indigenous. The *Hindutva*-led indigenous Aryan theory posits that Aryans were from the subcontinent, while the Out of India theory, backed by scientific rigour, suggests that Aryans are Indo-European. If Aryans, indeed, are not indigenous, who would be the colonisers in this instance? What then becomes of this land's philosophy and the myriads of indigenous religions? What about *Hindutva*'s aggrieved self-righteous reclamation of the past? What would it stand on?

The removal of cutlery as a decolonising putsch of Indian cuisine will be a sham given the nation's salivation over the *samosa* and the *jalebi* — both of which have foreign origins, as does the ubiquitous potato. But then would Hindustani and Carnatic music be better without the Mohan veena, violin and trombone?

Many identify *Hindutva* as an attempt to decolonise India and Indian mindsets. Thus, the new Parliament building, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the Ram *mandir* and the muscular foreign policy. The decolonising project should logically include supplanting it with something indigenous and, therefore, better. But has the *Hindutva*-led decolonising of our mind and country freed us from bigotry, casteism, divisiveness, and the feudal mentality that lead to unaccountability, subservience and fealty to authority?

Decolonising the mind and spaces is as important as that which replaces it. If decolonising leads to another form of colonising, is it not just shifting people from the proverbial frying pan to the fire?

Samir Nazareth is the author of 1400 Bananas, 76 Towns and 1 Million People

methodically used by the government to silence critics. One wonders whether the lieutenant-governor was provided with adequate evidence against Roy and Hussain to arrive at his decision.

S.K. Choudhury, Bengaluru

Inherent flaws

■ Sir — Around 90 countries participated in a summit in Lucerne, Switzerland, last week to end the Russia-Ukraine war (“Drums of peace”, June 15). This is a welcome step. However, Russia, the aggressor in the conflict, and its key ally, China, were not part of the summit. Any peace resolution adopted at the meeting will thus not be binding on them.

In another case, a ceasefire backed by the United States of America to ensure peace in Gaza has been accepted by both Israel and Hamas. But with the Israeli leaders stipulating a rider — Tel Aviv will not stop the war until the Palestinian armed group is obliterated — the deal is destined for failure. These have stoked misgivings about the success of such collective global efforts.

Sanjit Ghatak, South 24 Parganas

■ Sir — The editorial, “Drums of peace”, expressed pessimism over the sincerity of the recent global initiatives for restoring peace in strife-torn Gaza and Ukraine. In fact, the mediators among the warring factions have been acting on their vested interests, making it difficult

to achieve peace. For instance, the US and the West are serving their own strategic interests by supplying arms to Ukraine which is, in turn, boosting their domestic economies. The world will continue to be marred by perennial conflicts with such half-hearted attempts at peace.

Ardhendu Chakraborty, Calcutta

■ Sir — “Drums of peace” exposed the farce that was the Ukraine peace summit. A peace treaty is not possible without the presence



Flawed approach

of both Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the negotiation table. Superpowers being engaged in the arms race is also hindering peace.

Brij Bhushan Goyal, Ludhiana

Letters should be sent to: The Telegraph, 6 Prafulla Sarkar Street, Calcutta 700001, ttedi@abp.in



## To tax, and to please

Personal income tax regime cries out for reform

Reducing personal income tax and simplifying individual tax laws should be a priority area in the upcoming Union Budget for 2024-25. It has been five years now since the Centre transitioned domestic companies to a lower tax regime. It is moot if this has led to higher capital investments or job creation by India Inc. But it has certainly led to more pressure on the individual taxpayer to do the heavy lifting on tax collections, while she faces a peak tax incidence of 40 per cent or more.



There is acute disenchantment among the middle-class with the last two NDA governments for not giving them any tax concessions. Though individual taxpayers have been offered an exemption-free, new regime, there are not enough incentives to make the switch. Material changes are therefore in order. Rising cost of living has substantially lifted the threshold income for the salaried class to make ends meet, especially when they migrate to the cities for employment. Tax-payers simply do not find the new tax regime rewarding enough, especially if they're eligible for exemptions and deductions under the old one. What's needed are sunset clauses for the popular exemptions/deductions under the old regime while increasing the standard deduction to a respectable level of at least ₹1.5 lakh in the new one, from the current ₹50,000, to incentivise the shift. This will also help cover expenses such as rent which non-salaried professionals are eligible to deduct from their income. The basic slab at ₹3 lakh in the new regime is, again, too low and has not kept pace with inflation. The Centre must consider raising the zero-rated slab to at least ₹5 lakh.

Tax incidence on middle-income earners in the new regime is also too high with the 30 per cent rate kicking in at an income level of ₹15 lakh; this needs upward revision to say, ₹20 lakh. Section 80C has outlived its utility and it's time for a sunset clause. Forced savings in the Employees Provident Fund, Public Provident Fund, insurance-cum-savings plans etc are sub-optimal for young savers targeting inflation-beating returns; they are gravitating towards market-linked products. A high standard deduction can help these savers to invest in instruments of their choice. If the government is keen to nudge savers towards specific instruments such bank deposits or government bonds, returns on these instruments should be exempt from tax. The deduction on home loan interest in the old regime can be phased out and substituted instead by an interest subvention scheme for one self-occupied property.

Finally, there is a lot of angst about the surcharge on incomes above ₹50 lakh. But this is a levy that needs to be retained. India is home to large income disparities. Making the top percentile of earners part with more for welfare spending on the less well-off is critical to delivering equity, without recourse to draconian methods such as wealth tax.

## POCKET

RAVIKANTH



MANAS R DAS

Good infrastructure projects ensure good economic growth. However, building infrastructure is full of uncertainties and risks for all stakeholders.

Besides, such projects are highly capital-intensive, time-consuming and vulnerable to cost overruns due to delays at various stages.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, by December 2023, out of 1,820 infrastructure projects with investment of over ₹150 crore each, 431 reported cost overrun to the tune of ₹4.82-lakh crore.

Due to these issues, initially, the governments used to build infrastructure. However, with the government finances running into deficits over time, private entrepreneurs were invited to fund, build and run these projects either in partnership or singly. The private stakeholders raised capital (equity and debt) through several means including the capital market, and borrowings from banks/non-banks.

The infrastructure projects propelled the country's gross fixed capital formation/gross domestic product ratio (at current prices) from 26.9 per cent in 2019-20 to 30.8 per cent in 2023-24. Similarly, the NSE-30 Infrastructure Index (closing values) zoomed from 2,360.50 (March-end 2020) to 8,336.0 (March-end 2024).

### INFRASTRUCTURE LOANS - RISKS

Infrastructure loans are 'lumpy', and the financiers (banks/non-banks) encounter several risks of which, in our view, two are important.

#### Asset-Liability Mismatch (ALM)

**Risk:** Banks mobilise short- and medium-term savings (in India, maximum up to 10 years) from a multitude of savers and lend these to several potentially profitable investments (including long-term projects). Banks balance this process of 'financial intermediation' in such a way that their depositors, in general, can withdraw their deposits with interest 'on demand'.

In case a bank defaults in paying off these depositors, then a liquidity crisis is most likely to emerge, which, if not managed properly, may eventually trigger a bank run. Liquidity crisis is exacerbated because such 'lumpy' projects are normally 'illiquid'.

For example, the Northern Rock, a small bank in Northern England and Ireland, failed in the aftermath of 2007-09 crisis due to ALM coupled with inappropriate liquidity management.

**Concentration risk:** In general, the concentration risk arises from "imperfect diversification". According to the Basle Committee on Banking Supervision, one of the two types of imperfect diversification that makes banks' credit portfolios vulnerable to this risk, is the "sector" concentration which

# Impact of RBI's draft project finance norms

**RISK WORRIES.** The way forward lies in allowing banks to mobilise long-term deposits and reviving development financial institutions



EMMANUEL YOGINI

occurs when a bank is unable to perfectly diversify the systematic components of risk across sectoral factors.

Several banks incurred huge losses following failures of 'lumpy' projects like Enron, Worldcom and Parmalat. Even the systemic stability was threatened.

### RBI DRAFT FRAMEWORK

The RBI Draft "Prudential Framework for Income Recognition, Asset Classification and Provisioning pertaining to Advances - Projects Under Implementation", released for comments on May 3, 2024, aims at harmonising "prudential framework for financing of projects in Infrastructure, Non-Infrastructure and Commercial Real Estate sectors by regulated entities."

The Draft proposes to increase the provisioning requirement on standard assets to 'up to five per cent' by March 2027.

Other proposals include higher provisions for delayed projects, tightened exposure criteria, classification of such loan accounts, and maintaining project-specific data.

### LIKELY IMPLICATIONS

The guidelines are a dampener for project finance and will adversely affect credit availability to the infrastructure sector. Given the earlier experience, besides likely delinquencies, the low interest yield and tenor mismatch would make it a commercially marginal proposal.

The guidelines will adversely affect credit to infra sector. Still, the interest rate will likely remain below that for agriculture and MSMEs.

Some view the guidelines as favourable because these will reduce the big headache of financing infrastructure projects stuffed with several risks, and to manage these banks don't have the required skillsets and technical capabilities. They are happy with the pure 'financial intermediation' function of banks.

However, the worried lot is the entrepreneurs including the government sector for whom the cost of borrowing will increase. Still, the interest rate for infrastructure loans will likely remain below that for agriculture, large industries and Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises.

The Date of Commencement of Commercial Operations is emphasised in order to motivate the entrepreneurs to reduce delay in starting operation and cost overruns.

### IS ALM LURKING?

As mentioned earlier, the crucial ALM risk undermines the core function of banks. But the question is: has there been an ALM 'event' at the system level in the recent years, especially favouring long-term projects?

Since bank balance sheets don't disclose maturity bucket-wise distribution of their deposits and loans over five years, it is conjectured that perhaps the draft guidelines are a proactive measure against the possibility of any ALM risk in the near future.

However, based on the March-end 2023 data on concentration of loans in the top 20 borrowers in 21 banks (12 public and nine private), it was observed that the concentration per borrower was as high as ₹5,085 crore, implying inclusion of some project/infrastructure loans. In aggregate, such borrowers constituted 12.5 per cent of the total outstanding loans of 21 banks.

### SOME PROPOSALS

Will the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development along with the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, the country's first sovereign wealth fund, be able to meet the humongous demand for infrastructure loans?

It is felt that perhaps the government may have to revive the 'Development Financial Institutions' concept which existed earlier, and these institutions (e.g., Industrial Development Bank of India, and Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India) had access to assured sources of long-term and low-cost funds. These institutions were converted into universal banks following the S H Khan Committee Report (1998).

The commercial banks can help provided they are allowed to mobilise long-term deposits, say, for over 10 years' maturity.

The hurdle is how to determine rates of interest for 'over 10 years' deposits? This can be mitigated by the increasing availability of data and advanced econometric models now.

Another proposal is to allow the Domestic - Systemically Important Banks as well as select big banks (may be after another round of mergers) to enter into infrastructure projects.

Banks should have their own project appraisal, monitoring and evaluation specialists from various disciplines depending on projects they are financing. Outsourcing these functions, instead of doing in-house, is vulnerable to window-dressing.

Finally, banks should disclose the maturity pattern of their assets and liabilities for 'over five years' too.

The writer is a former senior economist, SBI. Views expressed are personal

# Running family businesses can be quite a challenge

CEOs need to navigate the complex web of familial relations and deliver results

P Saravanan

A Paul Williams

India's business landscape is marked predominantly with family-run conglomerates, a fact that presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for C-suite executives. Navigating this environment requires a deft touch, blending professional acumen with an understanding of intricate family dynamics. CEOs and other C-suite leaders must master the art of balancing authority with diplomacy.

These leaders often report directly to family patriarchs or matriarchs, who may hold strong opinions and preferences. Decision-making can be swift, driven by a deep understanding of the company's history and values, but it can also be susceptible to emotional factors and interpersonal relationships.

### NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE

At the heart of many family businesses lies a complex web of relationships where personal ties intertwine with business interests. This unique dynamic often gives rise to a phenomenon known as the principal-agent conflict; a concept rooted in agency theory. This theory examines the relationship between

principals (owners or shareholders) and agents (managers or employees).

It highlights the potential for agents to prioritise their own interests, which may not align with those of the principals. In the context of family firms, the principal-agent problem takes on a nuanced dimension. Family members entrusted with leadership roles may be motivated by transferring the wealth to the next generation possibly at the expense of maximising profits. This misalignment of interests can manifest in various ways, from nepotism and information asymmetry to entrenched power and lack of accountability.

Appointment of outside leaders is recognised as a viable strategy to mitigate the above issue. External experts inject objectivity and impartiality into decision-making processes, as these leaders are not bound by family ties or loyalties. Their decisions are driven by what is best for the business, free from emotional biases that might influence family members.

Outside leaders often bring a wealth of experience and specialised knowledge gained from working in diverse environments, which can prove invaluable in tackling complex challenges and driving innovation. The fresh perspectives that they offer could



**FAMILY BUSINESSES.** Change and continuity/ISTOCKPHOTO

challenge existing assumptions, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Their presence also helps to defuse tensions and conflicts that may arise among family members competing for power or influence. However, the challenges faced by outside leaders are also unique.

### BALANCING ACT

While family businesses value skilled professionals who can drive growth and innovation, they also prioritise the involvement of family members, often in key positions. This creates a unique power dynamic where C-suite executives must not only deliver outstanding results but also navigate the complex web of familial connections. Building trust and

rapprochement with both family and non-family stakeholders is essential.

Despite the challenges, many executives find family businesses to be incredibly fulfilling. The close connection to ownership often translates to greater autonomy and a deeper sense of purpose. The shared values and close-knit culture can create a strong sense of community within the organisation.

Moreover, family businesses often take a long-term view, prioritising sustainable growth over short-term gains.

In conclusion, leading within the family business structure is a unique journey, fraught with challenges yet brimming with the potential for immense satisfaction. It necessitates a special blend of business acumen, interpersonal finesse, and cultural sensitivity.

This unique blend of professional expertise and familial understanding can create a powerful formula for success, enabling C-suite leaders to leave a lasting impact on both the business and the family behind it.

Saravanan is a Professor of finance and accounting at IIM Tiruchirappalli and Williams is Head of India at Sernova Financial

### LETTERS TO EDITOR

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

### Rationalising taxes

In the backdrop of a continuing slump in household consumption and subdued private sector investments, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman could consider measures aimed at rationalising tax structure, tinkering specifically with the tax rates for lower income segments in the union budget 2024-25 to be unveiled soon. Rationalising tax structure would

help boost household consumption, thereby pushing private capital in consumer-focused sectors and providing a fillip to economic activity. Along with a comprehensive review of existing tax systems in the country, GST rates also need to be rationalised, which now affects a wider segment of the population. Concerted measures to increase the tax base, reduce

the tax burden, and ease compliance also brook no delay.

### M Jeyaram

Sholavandan,

### Food worries

Apropos, 'A volcano of food scarcity is waiting to explode', (June 18). One of the most significant impacts of climate change is on our food system. It affects the way we produce as well as consume food. The impact is even more on a

predominantly agrarian economy like India. Climate change damages the crop, and food supply, prompting a phenomenal rise in the price of food products.

### N Sadhasiva Reddy

Bengaluru

### Polarised polity

Apropos the article 'The paradoxes of polarisation', (June 17), the author rightly portrays the fallacies perpetrated on our polity by the left

vs right narrative and resultant intellectual corrosion by converging in their follies.

The supposed predominance of vociferous advocates of either side creates an eco-system that beats its own trumpet.

The author's lament, "what worse fate can befall a society", echoes the feelings of a vast majority of concerned citizens.

### Jose Abraham

Vaikom (Kerala)



## Banks and climate finance

A to-do list for bankers is essential

**PVS Suryakumar  
N Srinivasan**

Two decades ago, the RBI recognised the necessity of managing risks and issued guidelines for establishing risk management departments (RMDs). Risk management practices are integral to banks today. Specialised staff identify, quantify risks and suggest risk mitigation plans.

Climate change has brought a new category of risk that banks need to reckon with. Risks to assets, population and economy are real. Identification and quantification of risks posed by climate change at borrowers' and bankers' level is complex. Protocols have to be established to assess and measure risks, increase capacities of borrowers and bankers, ensure their adaption and eventually integrate climate risks into the overall risk framework.

In comparison, standalone RMDs' tasks are simple and yet took time to establish. Risks posed by climate change are non-linear, not backward looking and difficult to model/predict. Bankers must, therefore, prepare for the long haul, by nudging staff to develop competencies.

The RBI is a member of Basel Committee on bank supervision and adapted its principles of climate-related financial risks. It presented a discussion paper on climate risks in July 2022, made three announcements in its February 2023 MPC statement and issued draft disclosure guidelines on climate related financial risks in February 2024.

The guidelines mandate disclosures on governance, strategy, risk management, metrics and targets, and a glide path to enable banks and borrowers address climate related risks and transition to low carbon economy. Establishment of a robust ESG framework in financial sector entities and synchronised reportage at country level is the ultimate objective.

Banks have to apply a climate lens to their credit appraisal and risk management systems, measure risks and incorporate them in loan pricing. But its operational path is intricate.

As a bank, initial work relates to identifying differences between: (a) ground level climate resilience (green initiatives) that need financing; and (b) bank level climate risks to its assets and its operations. RBI guidelines primarily focus on banks' recognition of their climate risks (especially disclosures), leaving



**RISK.** Banks must hone measurement skills

green financing aspects to 'governance and strategy' of banks. Banks should focus on measurement and disclosures as also on financing green activities. It is in this context, a 'To-Do' list is proposed.

**Set up an internal team** to strategise and operationalise RBI's draft disclosure guidelines. Bottom-up thinking and learning-by-doing builds ownership.

**Banks should** categorise their existing loan assets as 'green' (positive effect on climate), 'blue' (no positive or negative effect) and 'grey' (negative effect). Banks must develop an internal working-framework, take help of experts, if need be, as official taxonomy is under development. Development of 'simple and non-negotiable norms' to qualify assets.

**Colour classification** of assets and measurement of risk gives a broad measure of climate risks. Exact measurement is not easy, but without measurement we cannot move ahead!

**Enhance appraisal** and risk rating process with climate related financial risks including credit decision parameters.

**Develop and incorporate** climate risk indicators in the enterprise risk framework. The indicators can be based on sensitivity to temperature/water/extreme weather/GHG emission/etc.

Transforming climate science into climate economics is not straightforward. Assumptions that some assets are green could be fallacious. EVs are considered green. But what about thermal power which is charging EV batteries? Likewise, new-age fuel hydrogen has three shades [green, blue and grey].

Everyone is trying to learn and measure climate change related financial risks. It is good to hone the skills and knowledge internally.

Suryakumar is former Deputy Managing Director, NABARD. Srinivasan is a development consultant. Views are personal

## Can ties with China improve?

The ties look stalemated, for now. In border regions both sides have been building their capabilities

### THE WIDER ANGLE.



PARAN BALAKRISHNAN

It's the great question that Indian foreign policymakers have to confront: Is the India-China relationship going from bad to worse? That's the issue the Modi government has to face now that it has won another election — albeit with a smaller majority. It has sent out one signal by announcing that we are going to rename 30 places in Tibet. For its part, China's President Xi Jinping hasn't congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his election victory. That's obviously a signal of sorts. But Xi did take a month to wish Joe Biden after his election.

The Chinese are very clear about India. It's the largest of the Asian powers — except possibly Japan — but it shouldn't aspire to play in the same league as China. We can hold innumerable rounds of border talks but shouldn't expect them to move back even an inch in regions like the Depsang Plains and Demchok. If they aren't going to budge on the border should we cave in to their demand to separate the military stand-off from relations on all other subjects? That definitely isn't about to happen in the near future. So India-China relations look stalemated for the foreseeable future. Says one China expert: "The Chinese keep saying the border dispute should be kept in its proper place. What we have occupied you should take it that it is ours. And you should not say anything about it."

How could that change in the coming years? India's efforts to stop buying Chinese products have been unsuccessful and imports from China have climbed to \$101.7 billion in fiscal 2024, making it our top trading partner, even ahead of the US. Still the Chinese recognise that India could be a huge market and, if we show signs of rapid growth, they'd like to be in the game.

China and Xi Jinping see the world as a troubled place in which the US is trying to maintain its hegemony above everyone else. All other countries like



**PUSHING AHEAD.** China's President Xi Jinping has instructed the People's Liberation Army that it should take an aggressive stand

India are bit players in the titanic battle between the two giants. A small set of Chinese scholars reckon that India has tried to steer a neutral course in the past but they are in a tiny minority.

In a world where the US is determined to maintain its hegemony, China must also flex its muscles to show that it means business. From 2013 onwards Xi instructed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) that it should take an aggressive stand in every theatre. For India that meant an increasing number of stand-offs between the PLA and Indian troops. At Galwan in 2020 that finally turned into a full-fledged battle with casualties even though no shots were fired.

**China has built hundreds of xiaokang or model villages near the Indian border. These could serve a military purpose in case of conflict.**

Since then, India-China relations have been down in the dumps. In the border regions both sides have been building their capability. China has built hundreds of *xiaokang* or model villages near the Indian border. These could serve a military purpose in case of conflict. Also, it has been upgrading its air defences in Tibet. India too is upgrading its strength and currently building a second parallel runway at its Leh airbase.

**ACTION IN NEIGHBOURHOOD** But the greater battle between India and China is possibly in the Indian Ocean and also surrounding countries like Pakistan, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. India has been flexing its muscles to prevent China's survey ships from docking in Sri Lanka. In the Maldives, these survey ships have only docked but not conducted any research in Maldivian territorial waters.

China's economic slowdown has also meant that it's throwing much less money into the Belt and Road Initiative

(BRI). Work on the Colombo Port is still ongoing but many other projects in South Asia have slowed or even halted. China has a 99-year lease on Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port but very few ships dock there. It's strategically placed near India but brings in hardly any revenues. And when Sri Lanka was in dire economic straits it was India which stumped up about \$4 billion in cash and commodities. The Chinese declined to ease up on its debts.

Pakistan's debts to China have also climbed steeply and it's clear the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects won't generate much revenue. Pakistan had hoped to turn Gwadar Port into a 'mini-Dubai' but that was obviously pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking. Gwadar will basically only benefit the Chinese.

The fact is that China also has its own economic issues to deal with and rising youth unemployment. Under these circumstances will we see a slightly less fire-breathing dragon? That's an outcome that India can only hope for.

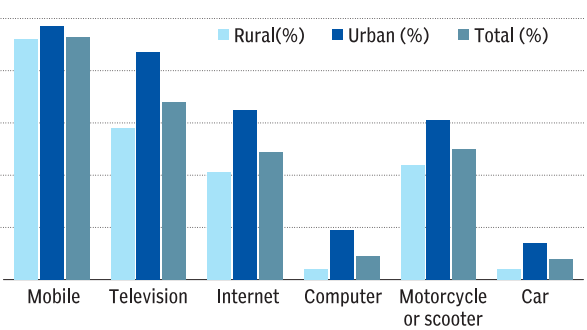
### STATISTALK.

Compiled Arunachalam Vaidyanathan | Graphic Visveswaran V

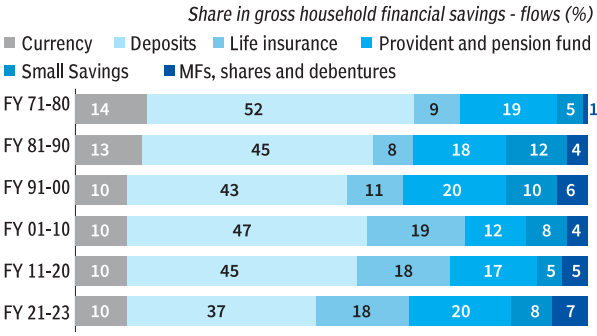
#### Insights on India's household sector

A report on financials of Indian households has provided some interesting insights. While the availability of mobile phones is ubiquitous across India, less than 10% of households possess cars. The savings rate of Indian households is noticeably higher than those in many developed countries. India's debt-to-GDP ratio is significantly lower than that of many developed countries, thus not posing any systemic risks. While the share of deposits in financial savings has decreased steadily, that of life insurance and equities have increased. The rapid surge in demat accounts points to higher equity holdings in the future.

##### Percentage of households possessing various goods (%)

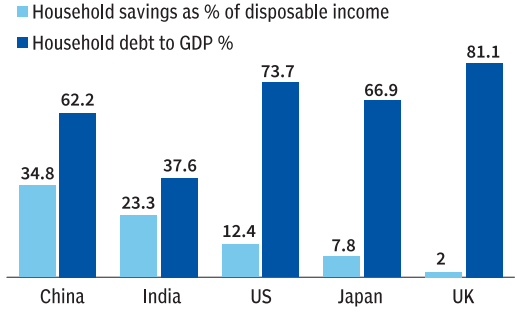


##### Decadal distribution of flows into financial assets

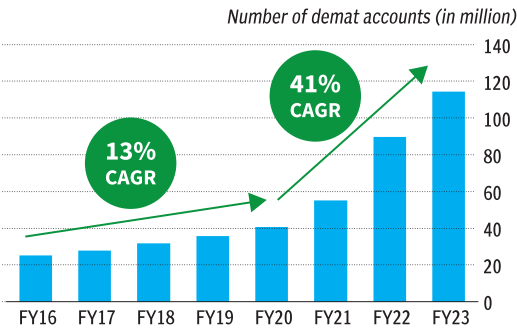


Source: 360 ONE Report

##### Cross-country comparison



##### Sharp surge in demat account opening



### thehindubusinessline.

#### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 19, 2004

##### Relief package for farmers announced

The United Progressive Alliance has announced a comprehensive debt-restructuring package for the country's agricultural community. All farmers who have suffered losses on account of successive droughts, floods or other calamities in districts declared as 'calamity-affected' by the State Governments concerned will be given the facility of debt rescheduling.

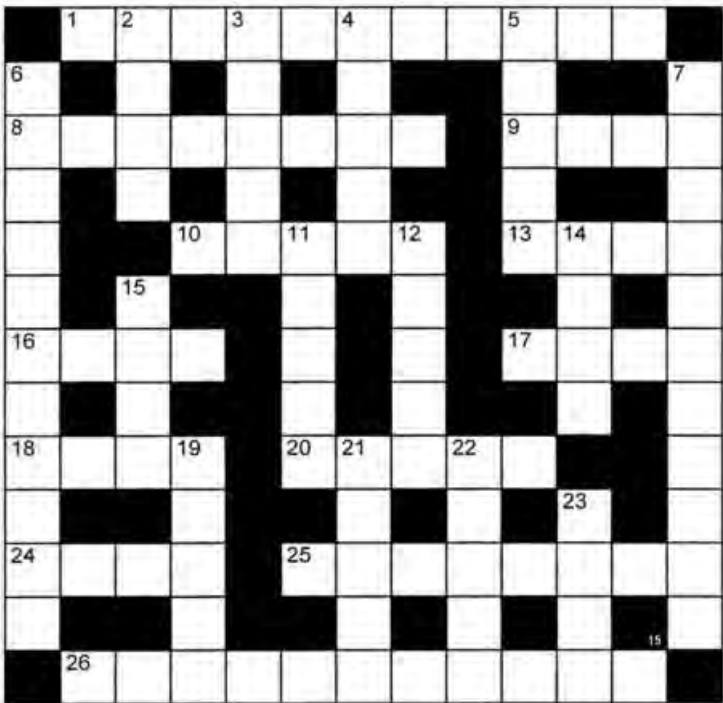
##### States agree to implement VAT from April '05

Broad consensus has emerged among most of the States to implement a value added tax (VAT) regime that would replace sales tax from April 1, 2005. The phase out of the central sales tax (CST) would now be "co-terminus" with the implementation of VAT. Indications are that the CST rate would initially be brought down from 4 per cent to 2 per cent before being eliminated.

##### Global Trust Bank awaits RBI nod for fresh capital infusion

A deal for fresh infusion of capital into the cash-starved Global Trust Bank (GTB) is expected to be finalised before soon. According to sources, the bank has approved a proposal from a foreign investor to bring in ₹500 crore. The San Francisco-based, investment firm, Newbridge Capital, is the name doing the rounds.

### BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2464



#### EASY

##### ACROSS

- Smugglers; illicit distillers (11)
- Wanders about aimlessly (8)
- Material for pudding (4)
- Ghastly pale (5)
- Aspect (4)
- Highway (4)
- Conquer (4)
- Hefty book (4)
- Prepares for publication (5)
- Done with (4)
- From the underworld (8)
- Gets around (11)

##### DOWN

- Gemstone (4)
- Knots, lumps (5)
- Quadruped; clothes ailer (5)
- Blackboard support (5)
- The coming into a country of people (11)
- Takes industrial action (5,2,4)
- For this reason (5)
- Biblical girl's name (5)
- Was indebted (4)
- Unruffled (4)
- Mistake (5)
- Jeans material (5)
- Yonder (5)
- Furrow the brows (4)

#### NOT SO EASY

##### ACROSS

- They illicitly run ... still? (11)
- Wanders about and names Red at random (8)
- Gas-ring used for stirring pudding (4)
- Looking white, like an ambassador going north (5)
- Seem to be fifty, nothing more, and get go-ahead (4)
- The way for piece of angler's equipment to have a content (4)
- Get the better of another pulse (4)
- Book that met with disaster around the ring (4)
- Cuts tape as tide's changing (5)
- Too many for six to be delivered? (4)
- Gather N American Latin leaders come from nether region (8)
- Cutlass-top cuts vermin about and thus gets around it (11)

##### DOWN

- Oil one had left father replaces with stone (4)
- Poles hold a bit of poetry: they're swell (5)
- The cavalry sound croaky (5)
- When to get in the fish for support (5)
- Entry from overseas (11)
- Factory let our upset be seen and takes industrial action (5,2,4)
- From this time onward, away with you! (5)
- Girl makes one grumble to see her back (5)
- The ring to marry has yet to be paid (4)
- State militia leader is not rough (4)
- 'It is the very \_\_\_\_\_ of the moon' (Othello) (5)
- Material to be dug up (5)
- Half the team embraces her: I told you so! (5)
- Make jumper heal like bone (4)

#### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2463

**ACROSS** 1. Bulldogs 4. Spit 8. Inn 9. Photo 10. Air 11. Grows up 12. Keels 13. Day in, day out 17. False 18. Provoke 20. Egg 21. Chalk 22. Eye 23. Task 24. Serpents

**DOWN** 1. Brings 2. Lingo 3. Group 5. Plateau 6. Thrust 7. Donkey-work 9. Pestilence 14. Alleges 15. Affect 16. Recess 18. Place 19. Ocean



## Drive to Dalal Street

Hyundai's listing will be positive for Indian markets

The filing of a draft red herring prospectus by Hyundai last week indicates the South Korean chaebol is looking to unlock value in its highly successful Indian subsidiary. The prospectus says the parent will be looking to sell a 17.5 per cent stake in the company, amounting to 142 million shares in what is now a 100 per cent subsidiary. Investment bankers estimate this initial public offering (IPO) would help raise around ₹25,000 crore with an implied valuation of about ₹1.45 trillion for Hyundai Motors India. Around 35 per cent of the issue would be reserved for retail investors. Hyundai would have to eventually dilute its ownership further to comply with the shareholding norms in listed companies.

The IPO size would be a record, since the largest Indian public issue so far has been of Life Insurance Corporation of India, which raised ₹21,000 crore in May 2022. This will also be the first large IPO in the automobile segment since 2003, when Maruti was listed. India is the world's third-largest automobile market (behind China and the US). Hyundai is the third-largest auto manufacturer globally and holds around a 14 per cent market share in the Indian car market. It is number two in India, behind Maruti Suzuki in terms of unit market share, and it may be outpacing the top firm in profit margins because the average selling price per unit is higher due to the larger number of sport utility vehicles (SUVs) it sells. Over 50 per cent of Hyundai sales in India consist of SUVs, Hyundai Motor India generated over ₹61,571 crore of revenues in 2022-23 with net profits of around ₹4,709 crore. India operations contributed around 18 per cent in volumes to Hyundai's global sales and it is the fastest-growing market.

The company has been present in India since 1996, when it set up its facilities in Chennai. It has been continuously focused on greater localisation of components and claims over 90 per cent indigenisation of components, although research and development is from the parent. The Chennai facility is said to be running at 97 per cent capacity. The company has also been looking to use Chennai as an export hub for sales to South Asia, West Asia, and Africa. Hyundai India has also focused on premiumisation, selling vehicles with a higher average price and better margins. It also aims to challenge Tata Motors' dominance in the electric-vehicle (EV) market.

Although the proceeds would go directly to the parent, it may or may not choose to reinvest some of it in India. There are some implications for investors to consider. The company will eventually sell another tranche of shares to dilute stake. It could be looking to raise funding locally for a big push into EVs, where it may need to set up charging infrastructure, tighten the supply chain, and roll out a stronger distribution network. Overall, however, the move must be welcomed because it would allow Indian investors to be part of one of the largest auto companies operating in India. With public shareholding, its operations would be more open for shareholder scrutiny. For the company, the IPO is well timed because of the high valuations in the Indian stock market. Hopefully, it would encourage other large multinational firms operating in India to list in India and make Indian investors part of the wealth-creation process.

## Safety first

Railways must address the basics

The tragic collision between the Sealdah (Kolkata)-bound Kanchanjunga Express and a goods train in northern Bengal suggests that the Indian Railways has not taken on board the lessons from the three-train crash in Balasore, Odisha, just a year ago, which resulted in significant casualties. The cause of one of India's worst train crashes in decades was the result of flaws in the signalling system. Now, preliminary investigation by the Railways into the Kanchanjunga Express tragedy, in which 10 people have died and over 50 injured, suggests that the accident was caused by a defective automatic signalling system compounded by speeding violations by the driver (since deceased) of the goods train.

Fortuitously, the rear compartments of the Kanchanjunga Express were parcel coaches, which limited the number of casualties. Because of the signalling system failure, both the passenger train, which plies between Kolkata and Agartala, and the goods train were issued a mandatory written order (known as a TA 912), which authorises drivers to pass automatic red signals after observing standard safety protocols. This involves bringing the train to a stop ahead of a signal, waiting one minute in the daytime or two minutes at night, and proceeding at a maximum speed of 10 km per hour after exchanging a confirmatory whistle with the guard and maintaining a 150-metre gap with a preceding train if the latter has not yet crossed a signal. According to the investigation, the driver of the goods train did not observe the speed limit and crashed into the rear of the Kanchanjunga Express, which had crossed nine signals and was awaiting clearance at another to proceed.

Human error or otherwise, the accident still raises fresh questions about the Railways' attention to basics. As with the accident in Balasore, Kavach, the automatic train-protection anti-collision system indigenously developed by the Indian Railways Research Designs and Standards Organisation, was not operational on this line, either. The electronic system is designed to activate the train's braking system automatically if the driver fails to follow speed restrictions. But the system is functional only on 1,500 km of track — the Railways has a track length of 99,000 km — and the utility plans to add it to another 3,000 km this year. Such snail's pace progress must surely be questioned when signal failures are emerging as a crisis point in railway operations. The Railways has seen a massive increase in capital expenditure and it must pay adequate attention to safety aspects.

It is true that the incidence of "consequential" train accidents — those involving the loss of life, injuries, disruptions, and damage to railway property — has fallen by 90 per cent in the past two decades. But at an average of 44 consequential accidents every year — or three or four a month — in the five-year period ended FY23, the Railways cannot be deemed an entirely safe way to travel. By comparison, there have been only few air accidents in India in this century. Surely, the same level of safety standards enjoyed by a sliver of affluent Indians should be accorded to the 90 per cent of the population, who avail themselves of one of the world's largest mass transport systems.

# A blueprint for boosting exports

Nine suggestions to revitalise trade and spur economic growth

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



India's foreign trade, valued at \$1.63 trillion in financial year 2023-24, constituted 41 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP), underscoring its vital role in the nation's economy and job creation. The sector faces significant internal and external challenges. Here are nine suggestions for the new government to boost trade and economic growth.

**Revive labour-intensive exports:** Exports in most labour-intensive sectors were lower in 2023 compared to 2015. Key product categories include garments, textiles, fabric, yarn, fibre, carpets, leather products, footwear, diamonds, and gold jewellery. These sectors generate more jobs per unit of investment compared to others.

Bangladesh and Vietnam, relying on imported fabric to make garments, have outpaced India through focused measures over the last two decades. The production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for textiles is a non-starter and might be better scrapped. Technology is not the issue. An honest appraisal of the sector, rather than consultant reports promising distant rosy futures, is needed. If the export slide does not stop, we will see imports in these sectors rise.

**Diversify service exports:** Three-fourths of India's service export earnings come from software & IT and business services. In these two sectors, India has a high 9.0 per cent global share. This category accounts for 36 per cent of global services exports. Services other than these two represent a large 64 per cent of world services exports, where our share is a low 1.9 per cent.

A few such services, along with India's global share in the category, are transport and travel (2.4 per cent), maintenance and repair (0.24 per cent), insurance and pension services (1.38 per cent), financial services (1.30 per cent), and charges for the use of intellectual property (0.23 per cent). India needs to work to enhance its share in these sectors to achieve a stable service export performance.

**Cut critical dependence on China:** It accounts for an average of 30 per cent of India's global imports

in industrial products. Here are a few products with China's share of India's imports. Telecom and smart-phone parts (44 per cent), laptops and PCs (77.7 per cent), digital monolithic integrated circuits (26.2 per cent), assembled photovoltaic cells (65.5 per cent), lithium-ion batteries (75 per cent), diammonium phosphate (40.9 per cent), radio transmission and television apparatus parts (68.5 per cent), antibiotics (88.4 per cent).

From 2019 to 2024, India's exports to China have stagnated at around \$16 billion annually. Meanwhile, imports from China have surged from \$70.3 billion in FY19 to over \$101 billion in FY24, resulting in a cumulative trade deficit exceeding \$387 billion over six years.

The US and EU are cutting imports from China by imposing higher tariffs. Australia is asking China-linked investors to divest shares in Australian rare earth mines as the sector becomes strategic for green energy and defence. In India, imports from China are set to increase with the entry of Chinese firms into India through joint ventures or standalone operations. India needs to do a strategic reassessment, work to diversify import sources, and enhance domestic production capabilities.

**Ensure FTAs do not aggravate the inverted duty structure:** An inverted duty structure occurs when import duties on finished goods are lower than on raw materials. For example, if copper scrap (raw material) and copper pipes (finished goods) have a 5 per cent tariff, and a free trade agreement (FTA) reduces the tariff on pipes to zero, local production of pipes becomes less competitive. This discourages local manufacturing as firms prefer cheaper imports.

Earlier, budgets were used to correct such anomalies. However, the increasing number of FTAs has complicated the issue by allowing zero-duty imports on most industrial products. Higher import duties on raw materials from non-FTA countries and duty-free finished goods from FTA partners incentivise imports over local purchases.



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

## Green agenda of Modi 3.0

In his very first speech to party workers after the election results were announced, Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked about the unfolding "green era" and how India seeks to be a leading player in green industrialisation, green energy, and green mobility. This gives an indication of the priority that will likely be attached to a green development path.

In terms of green energy — mainly solar and wind — India already figures among the top countries in annual additions, and is working on expanding the domestic manufacturing base to support this. Every country that is trying to localise manufacturing is facing unique challenges. For instance, policy is continually being tweaked in the US to ensure that the combination of incentives and disincentives for domestic manufacturing remains compelling, while generation capacity addition is also appropriately supported. With the elections in India wrapped up and Renewable Energy Minister Pralhad Venkatesh Joshi in charge, there is now scope to dynamically balance multiple objectives and meet specified goals.

As the demand for electricity hits new highs in the face of extreme heat, there is a case for increasing the share of renewable energy at an accelerated pace. According to the latest data from the Central Electricity Authority, pertaining to April 2024, renewables (including large hydro) make up almost a fifth of the country's generation. Solar accounts for almost half of this output, followed by large hydro and wind power.

The green mobility wave has seen a bit of a slowdown globally. Under BloombergNEF's Economic

Transition Scenario, which tracks how current techno-economic trends are expected to drive the energy transition with no new policy intervention, electric car sales are set to rise from 13.9 million in 2023 to over 30 million in 2027. Over this period, electric car sales are expected to grow at an average of 21 per cent annually, compared to the average of 61 per cent between 2020 and 2023. India is expected to be among the fastest-growing markets in the emerging economies. The entry of players like

Vietnam's Vinfast and Tesla could give a boost to the market.

Meanwhile, there may be lessons to be gained from the decision of the European Union last week to impose additional tariffs on electric cars shipped from China starting in July. The Commission said it had "provisionally concluded that the battery electric vehicles (BEV) value chain in China benefits from unfair subsidisation, which is causing a threat of economic injury to EU BEV producers."

The initial economic road map

of India's new administration will become clearer with the presentation of the Budget. Mr Modi reiterated the country's commitment to net-zero emissions by 2070 at the recent G7 Summit in Italy.

**EVs and oil:** BNEF estimates that EVs of all types and fuel-cell vehicles could displace almost 4 million barrels of oil per day by 2027 — more than double the current level of demand destruction. It also expects peak road fuel demand by 2027. For context, oil demand is estimated at almost 104 million barrels per day in this quarter, according to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Under BNEF's Economic Transition Scenario, oil



VANDANA GOMBAR

**Publish data on FTA performance:** India has 14 comprehensive FTAs and six smaller scope preferential trade agreements. The government should publish the data to see whether the FTAs have met expectations or if course correction is needed. The learnings will also aid ongoing trade negotiations.

**Counter effects of European climate regulation:** The EU's deforestation regulation, carbon border adjustment measures (CBAM) regulation, foreign subsidies regulation, and German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act will hurt and add uncertainty to India's exports. Unconfirmed reports from the EU say less than half of Indian exporters have filed data with the EU for CBAM compliance.

When fully implemented, CBAM will result in a 20-35 per cent import tax on Indian firms. A firm has to share all plant and production details with the EU. Also, firms may need to run two production lines to compete effectively: One, an expensive yet greener products for exports to EU countries, and another for standard products for the rest of the world. It is time to prepare a plan to counter EU regulations and hit imports from the EU in equal measures.

**Improve quality systems:** Recent concerns raised by Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States about the quality of spices from top Indian brands highlight the need for urgent action. Indian food and agricultural exports often face rejection from the EU and the US due to exceeding maximum residue limits (MRLs) of pesticides and other quality issues.

India should align its quality standards with international norms to reduce rejections, expand farm-to-fork blockchain tracing for major exports such as vegetables, spices, and dairy products, issue quality control orders after consulting with industry, and sign mutual recognition agreements with key export partners to boost global acceptance of Indian products.

**Enhance ease of doing business:** We need to transform the government-business interface to be business-centric and not government-department centric. Currently, exporters have to deal with various government organisations separately. Creating a user-friendly online National Trade Network for all compliance processes would allow businesses to file all compliance in one place. This change could enable at least 100,000 small firms to start exporting within a year.

**Other export promotion measures:** Automate customs processes to reduce delays and costs, invest in modern ports, efficient logistics, and digital systems. Export high-value goods to existing markets, help small businesses boost their global presence, improve small firms' access to finance, promote e-commerce exports, and work to reduce non-tariff barriers in key markets.

Economists suggest that to boost export growth, a country should lower import tariffs, sign FTAs, and integrate into global value chains. However, these strategies will only be effective if the country first reduces costs and improves its business environment. Lowering tariffs without improving the ease of doing business could result in increased imports replacing local manufacturing and jobs.

The writer is the founder of Global Trade Research Initiative

## Modernity with Chinese characteristics



### BOOK REVIEW

RAVI BHOOTHALINGAM

This is an era where most books about China written by Indians have tended to address the geopolitical rivalry between the two nations or the even more vexed boundary issue. It is, therefore, a relief to read a work that covers a different and vastly wider canvas. This book is Poonam Surie's attempt to look at the many dimensions on which China's trajectory towards modernity intersects with its traditions and historical currents. For the author, such an endeavour is not new: This book is a logical follow-on from her two previous works where she has explored related themes. Her first book covered ancient Sino-Indian links and the return of reli-

gion to today's China, and the second examined the modern revival of Confucianism in that country, whose official ruling ideology remains "Socialism with Chinese characteristics".

To do full justice to a subject such as "Tradition and Modernity", however, is a challenge. The conventional response would require treading the academic route, which would probably entail the production of several heavily-annotated volumes covering the history, philosophy, economy and sociology of China. That would not only be a time-consuming task, but the end product would be accessible to a select few, leaving aside the larger public. Ms Surie, therefore, has chosen a different approach, which works far better in carrying the reader along the journey of her narrative.

The first chapter titled "Confluence and Eternity" sets the keynote for the reflective tone of the book, much of which was written at the time when we all remained isolated in our homes while the Covid pandemic surged around us. In those fraught years, which brought us

face to face with existential questions about life, Ms Surie put together her thoughts about living and travelling in China. Though conventionally arranged in chapter form, the book's chapter headings are at best loosely indicative, allowing her to range as widely or as deeply as she chooses.

To repeat the metaphor of a journey, Ms Surie invites us to join in her personal quest to discover how today's China approaches modernity. This journey is somewhat like a spiral ascent around a tall mountain. As we ascend, the terrain around us changes, as do the views below. We see that the "same" landscape when viewed from different heights and angles appears different, much like it does at various times of day or when we are fresh or tired.

Take the example of climate change and the environment, the subject of the book's last chapter. Here, Ms Surie covers not only the anticipated impact of climate change on both China and India, but the civilisational logic of sacred groves and tree spirits; how behavioural

economics values the environment, and traditional or developmental approaches to nature in the two countries, among other issues. But the environment has many more intersections, revealed in the other chapters. Urbanisation and its pressures on women appear in the chapter on gender. Chapter 13 is a fascinating discourse titled "Animal-Human Interface" on the emergence of zoonotic diseases (such as Covid) emanating from human encroachment into forested areas. Ms Surie also examines the ecological significance of animal imagery in Chinese and Indian mythology. Chapter 14 deals with children growing up in an urbanised society of one-child multi-generation families, living in the embrace of a highly digitally-connected environment and an edgy surveillance state. Old customs and ancient traditions linger or are transformed in strangely adaptable



**CONTEMPORARY CHINA: Tradition and Modernity**  
**Author:** Poonam Surie  
**Publisher:** KW Publishers  
**Pages:** 253  
**Price:** ₹1,380

the peoples of the two nations: Occasionally, we see such geopolitics injecting itself — jarringly — into the otherwise philosophical discourse. Ms Surie has no set prescriptions for the way forward. Still, there are indications aplenty that open-minded dialogue between the two peoples remains the only positive option for both. But how? Every journey leaves a mark,

sometimes as a blinding revelation, but mostly as new ideas or pathways to explore. For this reviewer, the insights from this virtual journey appeared as several questions. How can two large and populous nations like India and China — locked into an uneasy embrace by legacy problems — get themselves to cooperate innovatively? And address existential threats that will endanger their future and create planetary havoc? Can both peoples harness their creativity to look beyond the tactical and the binary? Why can the myriad common challenges facing both India and China not be the subject of a wider and more diverse dialogue, particularly including the younger generation who will have to face the consequences of today's decisions (and evasions)? Are there nuggets in our civilisational knowledge that might point to such a new path?

As Ms Surie hints in this unusual and thoughtful book, that path might well be "the road less taken", which can make "all the difference" (Robert Frost). Which direction will we choose?

The reviewer is a corporate coach and an honorary fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi



## EU's Ill-Fitting Suite For 'Greener' Norms

Doesn't really address problems of fast fashion

Changes to EU's Ecodesign Directive banning destruction of unsold textiles — and footwear — purportedly to establish sustainability requirements, will have its biggest impact on Asia, where these are made. Distribution and retailing of textiles have less than 5% contribution to emissions. The rest are on account of all the steps that go into production and transport. Emergence of fast fashion favours overproduction, and EU's attempt to discourage it will have a bearing on export earnings of several Asian economies, including those of India. The EU ban provides carve-outs for small exporters. However, these may not be adequate safeguards against trade dispute challenges. But has the EU pushed all its policy levers to curb fast fashion before imposing the hard action?

Since material and labour costs in the textiles industry are low relative to design, marketing and retailing, fashion brands have an incentive to overstock. This is encouraged by economies of scale that push production costs further down. There is the added effect of economies of scope, where variety, instead of volume, tends to lower costs. All of this ends up in higher unsold stocks. However, banning their



destruction — or, for that matter, their re-export to poorer countries — doesn't adequately address the force driving fast fashion: booming online sales, backed by legal assurance in EU of return of clothes that don't look or fit or feel right. Offline sales don't have this legal remedy, but competitive intensity makes it an industry-wide practice.

The EU, and its trading partners, would have benefited from upstream interventions that raise awareness over fast fashion. It could have required brands to disclose more about their unsold inventories before it moved on banning textiles destruction. It could also have behavioural policy to guide fashion-purchasing behaviour. In a way, simultaneously hard and soft policy actions send out a stronger message of intent. EU will have to work intensely with its trading partners to adjust to its new ecodesign rules.

## Don't Scrimp on Train Travel Safety

While more Indians are travelling by air than ever before, more than 22 mn on an average still travel in 13,000-plus passenger trains daily. This means we can't afford to be lax on safety. Monday's disaster involving the Sealdah Kanchanjungha Express and a goods train in West Bengal shouldn't have happened. The much-flaunted anti-collision system, Kavach, is currently operational on only 1,500-odd km of rail track, with plans to extend coverage by another 3,000 km by end-2024. Indian Railways has cited costs and practical challenges to 'explain' its limited operationality. In circa 2024 India, this 'explanation' no longer cuts ice. Ways must be found, like defence spend measures, not to scrimp when it comes to safety of rail passengers.



IR must expedite Kavach's implementation across its entire 1 lakh-plus-km network. At the current rate of 1,500 km a year, or even with the proposed rate of 5,000 km a year by 2025-26, it will take years before the entire system can be protected. Kavach's deployment is being handled by five companies. But manufacturing, deployment and maintenance capacity of Kavach is necessary to maintain the pace of deployment.

To achieve this, GoI must substantially increase the budgetary allocation this upcoming budget from ₹560 cr allocated in February. Collaborating with industry, GoI should also enhance availability of trained manpower needed to ensure effective deployment and maintenance of the system. Additionally, the Railway Board should reassess its order of priority to maximise safety during the deployment process. Currently, high-density routes are prioritised over highly-used ones, followed by passenger high-density routes. A more detailed approach within these categories needs to be taken.

### JUST IN JEST

Addiction to multi-season, infinite-episode streaming shows is serious

## Binge-Watching is Injurious to Health

We hear that US surgeon general Vivek Murthy is keen to have a warning label on social media platforms telling parents that using social media may damage the mental health of young people. Such a plan of action, requiring US Congress approval, is sweet. After all, how many millions, nay, billions, would have benefited if a similar statutory warning went with what earlier generations of guardians would fret over: TV-watching. So, while backing Murthy's concerns as we keep on scrolling, may we highlight the need for a similar warning for another recreational blight: binge-watching.

Binging-streaming programmes has become the new malaise. Let there be a message before each OTT multi-season, infinite-episode show rolls: 'Excessive consumption of streaming shows may lead to acute square-eyeball syndrome, chronic couch potatoism and severe reality detachment.' We have all faced the horror of realising we've just spent the last 36 hours in a dimly-lit room, the only movement being the occasional stretch to grab another snack, or the Herculean effort of pressing 'Next Episode'. The warning could also include symptoms such as forgetting how to participate in normal human conversation, starting to speak in TV quotes and developing an unrealistic expectation that life's problems can be solved in 30 mins. Or 50, if you press pause too many times.

**SWAMISPEAK** Services exports have more potential than manufactured exports to create jobs

## In Search of 'Decent Work'



Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

Top economists agree that India faces a chronic under-supply of government-supplied public goods. These include basic education, health, nutrition and infrastructure. The supply is hamstrung by, among other things, grossly insufficient decentralisation of power to cities and villages; lack of quality administrative services and domain knowledge; lack of strong independent institutions; and a police-judicial system plagued by delays, callousness and political weaponisation.

Having agreed on these points, economists nevertheless differ radically on the path forward. Consider the sharp difference in employment emphasis between former RBI deputy governor Rakesh Mohan and former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan.

In his PR Brahmananda Memorial Lecture delivered in February this year, Mohan had discussed whether India would get into a lower-middle income trap. He highlighted the need for better public goods, which required far greater employment — and quality — in government services.

Mohan said India could not break out of lower-income levels without massive employment in low-wage manufacturing. Lack of 'decent jobs' was so acute that Uttar Pradesh had 4 mn applicants for 60,000 constable jobs. India's labour force participation was barely 50% against 78% for Vietnam, 76% for China, and 65% for Indonesia. This underemployed mass could not be employed fully in services. So, it was essential to boost manufactured exports — that alone would produce enough 'decent jobs'.

Rajan has long opposed this view. His latest book with Rohit Lamba, *Breaking the Mould: India's Untrav-*



Apna kaam millega

elled Path to Prosperity, repeats his belief that India has missed the low-wage manufacturing bus, and mustn't waste time and resources on this path. Instead, it should aim to harness its growing advantage in services requiring higher skills and paying higher wages.

Mohan disagrees, saying we can have both low-wage exports and higher-wage ones. Western dema-



nd may not grow fast. But Asia overall has a massive consumer class of 4 bn people with rising incomes requiring low-wage goods like textiles and footwear. So, there are plenty of buses to catch — provided India turns its attention from the West to the East.

Not so, argues Rajan. China has, through massive scale economies and export support, engaged in price-cutting that has removed the economic 'rents' that poor countries could once earn from exporting low-wage goods. So, India must focus on developing its human capital, which is very competitive in higher-skilled manufactures and services.

I agree with Rajan. As he says, China's provision of public goods is excel-

lent while India's is poor. China's good education, health, infrastructure and judicial speed — plus decentralisation of power and competition between provinces — have created cost advantages that India's political system cannot match. No state government wants cities to become alternative power centres, and so thwart decentralisation.



India must focus on developing its human capital, which is very competitive in higher-skilled manufactures and services, says Rajan

will not catch many buses that still run. Lower-wage countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam and Laos are beating us. Textile factories in Ethiopia owned by Indian companies claim local wages are one-fifth India's. Low-wage manufacturing is already shifting from Asia to Africa.

Meanwhile, India inflates labour costs in the formal sector by making companies contribute heavily to employees' provident fund, pension, health insurance and gratuity. Competing countries have far lower imposts. Hence, many Indian manufacturers prefer to stay small and informal, avoiding such costs. With subsidies and protection, labour-intensive sectors can improve somewhat. But not re-

### Millionaires on the Move

Around 128,000 of the world's millionaires are projected to migrate to a new country in 2024, with the UAE and the US topping the list of destinations, according to a report released by Henley & Partners. The UAE tops the list for the third year running while China is expected to be the biggest millionaire loser again. The report said India has "stemmed its wealth exodus, dropping to 3rd place after the UK with just 4,300 millionaires projected to leave the country in 2024 (compared to 5,100 last year)". A look:

| Projected millionaire migration 2024 |         |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|
| GAINERS                              |         | TOP 10 COUNTRY NET INFLOWS & OUTFLOWS |
|                                      |         |                                       |
| UAE                                  | 6,700   |                                       |
| US                                   | 3,800   |                                       |
| Singapore                            | 3,500   |                                       |
| Canada                               | 3,200   |                                       |
| Australia                            | 2,500   |                                       |
| Italy                                | 2,200   |                                       |
| Switzerland                          | 1,500   |                                       |
| Greece                               | 1,200   |                                       |
| Portugal                             | 800     |                                       |
| Japan                                | 400     |                                       |
| LOSERS                               |         |                                       |
|                                      |         |                                       |
| China                                | -15,200 |                                       |
| UK                                   | -9,500  |                                       |
| India                                | -4,300  |                                       |
| South Korea                          | -1,200  |                                       |
| Russian Federation                   | -1,000  |                                       |
| Brazil                               | -800    |                                       |
| South Africa                         | -600    |                                       |
| Taiwan                               | -400    |                                       |
| Nigeria                              | -300    |                                       |
| Vietnam                              | -300    |                                       |

Note: The above figures are provisional for the full year 2024, based on year-to-date HNWII movements to June 2024; figures are rounded to the nearest 100. 'Millionaires' and 'HNWII's refer to individuals with liquid investable wealth of USD 1 million or more. \*Difference between the number of HNWII's who relocate to and the number who emigrate from a country

### Bell Curves ■ R Prasad



Circuit is also joining our college. He topped NEET this year!

## iCET On the Right Path



Subimal Bhattacharjee

US NSA Jake Sullivan's two-day visit to Delhi, the first official visit from Washington since the new NDA government took office, has turned out to be a productive one. Along with meeting S Jaishankar, Sullivan chaired the second meeting of the India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), which was launched in January last year, with his Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval. At the dialogue, the two 'set the vision for the next chapter of our strategic technology partnership'. So, what does that mean?

In the 17 months since iCET's launch, both countries have deepened and expanded their strategic cooperation across sectors such as defence, space, semiconductors, advanced telecommunications, AI, quantum computing, biotechnology and clean energy. iCET's dynamic nature is its strength, and the bilateral initiatives have ensured that both sides go beyond a government-only approach to a mix of government, industry and academia engagement. This is welcome. Starting from only a foreign military sales (FMS) approach of defence items to involving Indian supply chain, and now to co-production and co-development, it has come a long way.

With the embedding of digitech in key strategic areas, carving the cooperation and tech ecosystem management has been iCET's hallmark. It has gone further to sustain the ecosystem, like focusing on the semiconductor supply chain and protecting critical minerals, and defined usage and looking at other emerging areas of synthetic biotechnology.

The focus on innovation, advanced by the US Defence Innovation Unit and India's Innovations for Defence Excellen-

ce (iDEX), to accelerate joint adoption of cutting-edge commercial tech for military solutions and capability enhancement of defence ecosystems and the 'Innovation Handshake' have allowed wider startup engagements. The India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) has shown momentum for wider industry participation. With seed money of up to \$1.2 mn disbursed to 10 American and Indian companies under Joint IMPACT (INDUS-X Mutual Promotion of Advanced Collaborative Technologies) 1.0 challenges, and the identified areas under IMPACT 2.0, the roadmap augurs well.

India's focus on indigenisation has been steadily accepted by the US administration and adopted by US industry in many of the current engagements. This will be one of the defining features of the newer defence and strategic security projects, including deliberations of the Advanced Domains Defense Dialogue.

This approach is visible beyond defence, in other strategic sectors, particularly in space. As a case point, Indian startups 114ai and 3rdiTech have partnered the US Space Force (USSF) for working on advancing space situational awareness, data fusion technologies and infrared sensor semiconductor manufacturing. Engagements in Open Radio Access Network (ORAN) collaboration have progressed significantly. Qualcomm and Mavenir are testing its



Ordering techways

ORAN stack network in partnership with Bharti Airtel.

The semiconductor sector has seen a few investments as India incentivised the sector, and laid out the red carpet for further investments and collaboration on strategic cooperation. The joint semiconductor readiness assessment fostered by the US Semiconductor Industry Association and India Electronics and Semiconductor Association has identified near-term industry opportunities, and outlined longer-term strategic development of complementary semiconductor ecosystems.

As the world grapples with AI challenges, India and the US have been in dialogue in many areas of the AI ecosystem. This includes fostering a regulatory framework for the global community. US companies are at the forefront of many AI developments and deployments, and many of them have Indian participation at resource and collaborative levels.

Much of iCET's visible gains will be witnessed in this sector, as AI and semiconductor chips make computing faster and more intense. Likewise, quantum computing, with its dimensional transformational capabilities, is a focus area. Already, work is happening in quantum communication, post-quantum migration and security, and digital twins — digital representation of a physical object, person or process, contextualised in a digital version of its environment — besides facilitating the Indian tech community and academia in US quantum labs.

iCET is delivering. The decision by the Association of American Universities and the Council of Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT Council) in September 2023 to establish a joint Indo-US Global Challenges Institute — as a virtual network of universities fostering research partnerships and people-to-people exchanges between institutions in both countries aimed at solving significant problems — will give the right fillip to enhance the momentum.

The writer is a commentator on digital technology issues

### PEAS IN A PODCAST

#### Mudlark Along the Thames

You're in London, away from the blistering heat. Why don't you step outside and roll up your sleeves for some mudlarking — scavenging the banks of the Thames to find what could be a valuable item. Using old maps as guides to old boatyards, bridges and jetties, summer mudlarks/mudlarkers scour the Thames shore to look out for Roman-era brooches, Victorian shoe buckles and mesolithic flints.

To prepare for your first mudlarking expedition, you gotta tune in to the episode, *What's a Mudlarker?*, of the podcast, 'Stuff You Should Know',



hosted by Josh Clark and Charles W Chuck Bryant. This is great edutainment, using so much pop culture as reference. In this 17-min episode, SYSK hosts discuss the history of mudlarking, and why it became a popular pastime. The two also meander through the Thames clean-up story, the kind of 'treasures' that are found, and whether mudlark finders are legally keepers. By mudlarking on the Thames, who knows, you may even get a clue as to how poverty in Victorian London driving 'manual scavengers' to pick up filth could turn into a pleasant expedition in the sunshine in Viksit Britain.



THE SPEAKING TREE

## Empathetic Power of Fear

SUMIT PAUL

One of the most powerful quotes of all time is Umberto Eco's, 'Nothing gives a fearful man more courage than another's fear.' It speaks of the power of motivation when one is knocked down. It implies that when faced with fear, one's courage can be bolstered by the fear experienced by others. This is cathartic and creates an opportunity to use the fear of others as a catalyst to proactively tackle challenges rather than allowing those challenges to paralyse us. Fear is a universal emotion, and it's important to understand that more or less, every individual has it. This is a comforting thought, nay, an assurance. The empathy of fear binds us together. It's like, 'Dil bahal to jaye-ga, iss khayal se/ Haal mil gaya tumhara apne haal se' — my heart will feel better after realising that we're sailing in the same boat.

The comforting assurance that I'm not the only 'fearful' person may help us go on without throwing in the towel. To quote Urdu poet Afaaq Kashmiri, 'Ek akela tu hi khaufzada nahin/ Aur bhi log hain tujh se zyada khaayaf' — you're not the only fearful person/ Others are even more fearful than you are. Fear's egalitarianism brings all of us together and places all humans on the same (ordinary) plane. Mind you, human emotions are universally empathetic. Even a so-called negative trait, instinct or emotion has a deeper connotation. Humans are dovetailed because of the medley of emotions; fear being the most overwhelming of them.

### Chat Room

## Varanasi Mistake Fixed in Wayanad

Apropos the news report, 'Rahul Gandhi Retains Raebareli, Priyanka to Contest Wayanad Seat' (Jun 18), it is a good strategy since Rahul Gandhi's decision to retain his Raebareli seat would help him expand Congress' presence in UP. The party blundered by not fielding Priyanka Gandhi in Varanasi, which she would have won with a thumping majority. However, the loss has now been made good by selecting Priyanka to contest in the Wayanad seat, which her brother is vacating now. A resounding victory for Priyanka will help Congress form the next government in Kerala. This would also allow the Gandhi siblings to play their roles effectively in the Lok Sabha.

THARCIUS S FERNANDO  
Chennai

## Chopping Histree Makes Us Rootless

This refers to the Edit, 'Knowledge Economy, Not Silly Conformity' (Jun 18). The raison d'être of studying history is to learn from it and not to perpetuate our ancestors' mistakes, notwithstanding how uncomfortable our past may be. For instance, in German schools, children learn about the horrendous Holocaust, and they visit the synagogues and concentration camps that makes them acknowledge their Nazi history, making them informed citizens and helping them navigate a harmonious future. Negation, censorship or fabrication of historical facts blocks the wisdom of experience from future generations. As George Santayana aptly said, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

ABHYUDITA GUPTA

Ujjain

## Broken a Record? Conditions Apply

In sport, especially cricket, when a player claims to have equalled or broken a record, we should also consider the conditions under which the record was made. Sunil Gavaskar broke Don Bradman's record under similar conditions as both faced fast bowlers of their time donning a cap, not a helmet. Helmets were introduced when Ravi Contractor got nearly killed facing fast bowlers in West Indies. Not taking away from later players with protective gear, but is it right to consider Gavaskar's record broken?

RAHUL KUMAR  
Byemail

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# The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

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## LEARNING BY ACCIDENT

Train collision in West Bengal, its high toll, raises important questions over railway safety, accountability, policy priorities

WITH AT LEAST nine people having lost their lives, the collision involving the Sealdah-bound Kanchanjunga Express and a goods train in West Bengal's Darjeeling district has registered the highest toll in a railway accident since Balasore, Odisha last year. Initial reports point towards the possibility of human error, but the precise cause of the crash will only be known after the investigation by the Commissioner of Railways Safety is complete. For now, it is critical that the tragedy prompts the Railways to shine an unsparing light within.

It must investigate why accidents happen, and precious lives are lost, in a system that has, over the years, shown improvement across safety parameters. Kavach, an indigenously developed, automatic train protection system, has been deployed on 1,465 route km and 139 locomotives on South Central Railway as on February 2024. Kavach tenders have also been awarded for several thousand route kilometers. Reportedly, the railway ministry took steps in the aftermath of the Balasore train accident to remove obstacles in carrying out work in safety areas like signalling and interlocking. But it must be asked whether more steps need to be taken, and more urgency shown, for a faster Kavach roll-out. While funding now appears to be less of a constraint — in 2023-24, the capital outlay of Indian Railways was pegged at Rs 2.4 lakh crore, nine times the outlay in 2013-14 — it must be asked if there has been a disproportionate political and policy focus on the more eye-catching aspects of modernisation such as Vande Bharat, and whether it is taking a toll on other critical aspects of the system. There are other questions too. Are the communication and feedback mechanisms that are central to operational safety functional and robust? Will responsibility for such accidents be fixed in a system that all too often finds ways to dilute it?

While every life lost is one too many, the number of consequential train accidents has fallen from 473 in 2000-01 to 48 in 2022-23. Over the same period, the number of derailments has also fallen from 350 to 36. The accident in West Bengal, and the toll it has taken, however, underlines that much more needs to be done. As it transports millions of passengers and tonnes of cargo across the length and breadth of the country every day, the Indian Railways is an integral part of the country's logistical frame. Upgrading infrastructure would mean little unless it translates to greater safety for those who travel. But safety is not an isolated aspect. It is embedded in every function and operation of the Railways. Improving it calls for a more encompassing and comprehensive approach.

## IT TAKES TWO

Without Russia, Ukraine peace meet is unlikely to be of significance in the long term

GOING BY NUMBERS alone, it would seem that the Ukraine peace summit held in Switzerland over the weekend made significant headway. Of the 90 countries that attended the summit, 82 backed the communique that called for the safety of all nuclear installations — including the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, which has been at the centre of fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces. It also asked for the free flow of Ukrainian agricultural products and the return of prisoners of war and displaced Ukrainians, especially children. However, despite a majority backing the communique, the summit suffered from a glaring absence and some notable abstentions.

Among the countries that did not endorse the demands were India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the UAE, Thailand and Indonesia. They represent important regional powers and significant players in the Global South. Many, like India, have an ongoing and important engagement with Russia. Significantly, the G7 summit held just before the Switzerland meet took the severe step of committing to a \$50 billion loan for Ukraine, secured via interest on Russia's frozen assets in the West. New Delhi's rationale for the abstention — echoed by others — is that peace in Ukraine requires "all stakeholders and a sincere and practical engagement between the two parties to the conflict". Without Russia's presence, then, the peace conference may not have had a significant impact. On the other hand, the delicate balancing act that India has thus far managed between maintaining ties with Moscow even as it deepens its engagement with the West, may become harder to sustain if and when the conflict deepens and intensifies.

The fact remains that Russia's entrenched position and its violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity cannot be addressed without a meaningful dialogue and compromise. Vladimir Putin's current rigidity is bolstered by the fact that the West is not completely united on how to deal with the Ukraine conflict and that Russia's economy has not suffered as much as was initially believed. The longer the conflict drags on, the greater the chances of the differences within Europe, between Europe and the US and within America becoming sharper. Another Donald Trump presidency — and the rise of the far right in European powers like France, for example — could alter the geopolitical picture. In fact, in such a scenario, all major and middle powers, including India, might recalibrate their position. For now, given these uncertainties, it seems that the peace summit may not be as consequential as it was expected to be.

## SURPRISE, SURPRISE

As the Super Eight Stage kicks in, the T20 World Cup is poised on a knife edge

TWO FORMER CHAMPIONS from the subcontinent, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, bombed in the group stage of the T20 World Cup; perennial bridesmaid New Zealand caught an unusually premature flight back home. Some of the other powerhouses suffered scares — Nepal were two runs away from upsetting South Africa, rain saved England from the blushes against Scotland. Afghanistan and Bangladesh emphasised that calling them minnows is condescending. In that great Hollywood tradition of movies like "Any Given Sunday", "Rocky" and "Remember The Titans", co-hosts United States topped Pakistan, gave India a scare and advanced to the Super Eights for the first time. The David slaying Goliath thread has only enlivened the tournament, compensating to an extent for the substandard pitches (in New York), unexpected rain (Florida), empty stadiums and bizarre match timings.

The wave of surprises flows with a fine tradition, beginning with upstarts India stunning the all-conquering West Indies to lift the 1983 50-over World Cup. The T20 version is a more favourable stage for lower-ranked teams to pinch the established ones. An incisive spell or a burst of boundaries, a mind-stopping catch or run-out is all it sometimes takes to put the most perfect team under pressure. The tacky nature of pitches further reduced the gap between the elite and non-elite teams. Besides, the mere idea of playing a World Cup match is an extra motivation, a spur for lower-ranked teams to exceed their capabilities.

The end product is a fascinatingly unpredictable tournament where anyone could beat anyone else on their day, an air of suspense and intrigue hanging over every game. The event is buzzing on a knife edge, as the Super Eight Stage kicks in. Bigger teams are wary of the threat the US possesses, or the giant-slaying knack of Afghanistan and Bangladesh, two exceptionally gifted teams often undone by freezing in big games. It would not be a surprise if one of them, or even both, progresses to the last four. For this has been a tournament of underdog thunder so far, akin to the most scintillating Hollywood sports narratives.



ALOK KUMAR VERMA

THE INDIAN RAILWAYS is back in the news after a freight train rammed into a passenger train on Sunday, June 16, near Siliguri in West Bengal, which left at least nine people dead and more than 40 injured. Since 1995, the country has witnessed seven deadly train accidents, five of which took more than 200 lives — the highest number of deaths, 358, was recorded in the Firozabad collision of 1995. The multiple train collision at Balasore in Odisha, about a year ago, claimed 287 lives. Together, these seven accidents took more than 1,600 lives.

Among railway planners, it is widely held that a large, densely populated developing country like India should have a strong railway system that can compete with road and air transport to serve the needs of the people and economy. Neither the Railway Board nor the Centre has ever denied this imperative. In fact, plans have been repeatedly announced to double the speed of trains while improving safety and drastically increasing line capacity, as most trunk routes have faced acute congestion. But the results have been very discouraging.

The Indian Railways has consistently lost market share in both passenger and freight streams. In fact, since 2010-12, the total volume of both freight and passenger traffic has stagnated or declined, while air and road modes have seen growth of 6-12 per cent each year. Between 2014-15 and 2019-20, passenger traffic declined from 995 billion pass-km to 914 billion pass-km, and freight stagnated between 682 and 739 billion net tonne-km. For the period after 2019-20 to the present, the Railways has not made these traffic figures public.

It is no exaggeration that the Indian Railways (IR), which enjoys a monopoly on rail transportation, is facing a severe crisis. If the present trend of declining market share continues for another decade, which

West Bengal train accident highlights need for review of misplaced priorities of past two decades

The Indian Railways is back in the news after a freight train rammed into a passenger train on Sunday, June 16, near Siliguri in West Bengal, which left at least nine people dead and more than 40 injured. Since 1995, the country has witnessed seven deadly train accidents, five of which took more than 200 lives — the highest number of deaths, 358, was recorded in the Firozabad collision of 1995. The multiple train collision at Balasore in Odisha, about a year ago, claimed 287 lives. Together, these seven accidents took more than 1,600 lives.

seems likely in view of the failure to raise speed, increase line capacity, and improve safety to the required standards, IR could be relegated to a secondary role where it primarily carries heavy freight and some slow-moving passenger trains, as in large, thinly populated, economically advanced countries like the US, Canada, and Australia. Surely, with its high population density, a large developing country like India can't afford such a decline in rail transport.

Rail safety must be viewed in this larger context. Over the past two decades, the Railway Board, the highest administrative body under the Union Minister of Railways, has been a rudderless ship, marked by abrupt changes in policies and plans for the future growth and expansion of the IR network. It has failed to raise the speed of its excruciatingly slow trains, the punctuality of trains has shown no improvement, and safety has continued to be an issue.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has recently issued two important reports on safety, speed, and punctuality on IR. The report on speed and punctuality for the years 2019-20 says that between 2014 and 2019, there has been no increase in the average speed of mail and express trains — this has remained at 50 to 51 kmph, contrary to claims of achieving an average speed of 75 kmph under Mission Raftar, which has appeared in some form every five to seven years since 2005. As for freight trains, the average speed actually declined marginally, contrary to the Board's claims of doubling the speed. It is pertinent to mention that 20 years ago, IR acquired technology and manufacturing capabilities to build coaches and locomotives to raise the maximum operational speed from 110-130 kmph to 160-200 kmph.

The second CAG report, which is on accidents, is equally sobering. Though there has been a reduction in the number of acci-

dents, it is largely a result of the manning of unmanned railroad crossings. And the improvement with respect to derailments and collisions is not good enough. The report has expressed serious concerns about the continuing high rate of asset failures, particularly signal failures and rail fractures. Some of the worst accidents on IR have been due to these. Last year's multiple train collision at Balasore was caused by a signal failure. The essence of these two CAG reports is that this high asset failure rate, coupled with numerous speed and capacity bottlenecks in the existing IR network, has led to inadequate safety and punctuality and stagnant speed.

While the IR's existing network was caught in a downward spiral, with increasing intensity every passing year, the country was inundated by big plans for extremely costly projects with seriously questionable financial viability. This included, for example, plans for several standalone bullet-train lines which would be cut off from the main broad gauge network because these lines would be built on standard gauge, and dedicated freight corridors (DFCs), exclusive to heavier and longer trains.

Construction of the first bullet-train line started in 2017. Earlier, in 2012, construction of two DFCs had begun. In the past three years, the nation has seen the introduction of about 50 pairs of "semi-highspeed" Vande Bharat trains, which are more about luxury and cosmetics than speed.

Clearly, a thorough review of the misplaced priorities of the past two decades that are driving IR to a continuing decline is absolutely required. Will the new government pick up the gauntlet?

The writer a former  
Railway Chief Engineer



SUANSHU KHURANA

IN THE TENSE moments during the 2003 Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Australian captain, a slightly out-of-form Steve Waugh who'd been dealing with questions of retirement, found himself facing the last ball of the day, just two runs short of a century. The 100 would have been his 29th Test ton, equaling cricketing giant Don Bradman's record.

In the build-up that can be called theatrical at its best, English captain Nasser Hussain took his sweet time to set the field, while the crowd roared. And then, just like that, commentator Kerry O'Keefe broke into 'Lose Yourself' by Eminem. He rapped, on air, "Lose yourself in the moment, you own it... from the middle of the piece that begins with... If you had one shot or one opportunity/ To seize everything you ever wanted in one moment/ Would you capture it or just let it slip?"

Waugh smacked a four of the last ball. The song, from *8 Mile* (2002), a film with autobiographical elements about Eminem's struggles in Detroit and the eponymous street that acted as a de facto divider between White and Black, rich and poor neighbourhoods, won an Oscar (the first hip-hop piece to do so) and a Grammy. It stuck, not just with O'Keefe, but also with the 2003 English rugby team, blaring it in the dressing room as a motivational anthem. Then there was actor Jodie Foster, who recited it at the University of Pennsylvania's commencement address in 2006. But what one absolutely needs to

## THE REAL SLIM SHADY

With 'Houdini', Eminem revisits his heyday

marvel at is how the song by Marshall Mathers as Jimmy "B-Rabbit" has zipped along, for years, and is pitched up on the Billboard charts yet again, right after he released his latest single, 'Houdini'. The song is a prelude to the rapper's upcoming 12th album *The Death of Slim Shady (Coup De Grâce)*, which will drop later this summer.

While the critical response to the rhyme schemes, lyrics, cadence and delivery has been unenthusiastic, even frosty at times, the song went straight to No 1 on the US iTunes chart. It was interesting and a little strange to watch a creatively weak piece by Eminem climb the charts in this manner. Its video trended at No 1 on YouTube. And despite Taylor Swift's pervasive sway, it's selling like hotcakes.

What 'Houdini' also did was bring 'Lose Yourself' back to No 10 on Billboard's list of best-selling rap tracks besides spending 475 weeks on Rap Digital Song Sales chart. As if this wasn't enough, 'Lose Yourself' was also presented as a cover by Grammy-winning singer SZA, who sang it like a soft ballad.

But why is Eminem, once a tsunami, making waves again? This is in spite of not really being the most important or the most controversy-generating rap star at this point. Is it nostalgia? Or popular culture's current affection for the Y2K era? Or is it about an older, once supremely famous musician, back in the game like a bolt from the blue — Eminem saying, "Hey, y'all always

asking for the old me, well here you go". Or is it only now that Gen Z, whose parents were once Eminem fans, are discovering him? Generations streaming his music together. I think the answer is all of the above.

In the 'Houdini' video, his Slim Shady avatar steps out of a wormhole from 2002. One hears the old refrain, "Guess who's back", a tribute to his 2002 No 1 single 'Without Me' along with the 1982 song 'Abracadabra' from Steve Miller Band.

In terms of music, the charm of 'Houdini' lies in its light, unpretentious tenor. While it harks back to the nostalgia of the older, notorious days and equally notorious hooks, it is unlike the darker and intimate space Eminem once touched, speaking intimately of his personal life: His absent father, his complicated relationship with his mother and his difficult childhood. He won the Black game as a White guy with his talent.

But he was almost always provocative (like the shot he takes at Megan the Stallion, or his own children in "F" "k my own kids, they are brats"). In 'Houdini', they are shown with squeamish expressions). Yes, he's being Eminem. But at 51, one also expects him to grow up and talk of real things. Maybe a take on Gaza? Or the war in Ukraine? We'll need to wait and watch.

But love him or not, Slim Shady is back and he wants the spotlight.

suanshu.khurana@expressindia.com

## JUNE 19, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### ARMY WITHDRAWAL

THE ARMY WILL hand over control of law and order in Punjab to the paramilitary forces in stages over the coming few weeks. It has already launched phase III of Operation Blue Star, which is aimed at flushing out terrorists from the countryside in the state. These announcements were made to the international and national press, who were acquainted with the flushing-out operations that were carried out across temples and gurdwaras in Punjab, as well as the terrorist fortifications around the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

### TRIPURA LANDSLIDE

AT LEAST 12 people were buried alive and

about 20 others are missing in landslides across three villages under the Sonamura sub-division, which is about 80 km from Agartala, on June 18. The villages are — Thalibari, Dhupchhera and Monalpathar. Official sources said that the heavy landslides on the Assam-Agartala road in the Atharamuga ranges have rendered the highways unmotorable, as two important bridges have collapsed.

### EXTREMISTS ARRESTED

IN THEIR CONTINUED action to root out terrorism in Punjab, the security forces raided more hideouts and arrested 76 extremists, seizing a sizable quantity of arms and ammunition on June 18. The security forces also shot dead an individual who was at-

tempting to escape custody. Meanwhile, normalcy returns to Punjab, as day curfew restrictions are relaxed and rail traffic is restored.

### RAILWAY ROW

A SERIES OF feuding letters have been exchanged between Railway Minister A B A Ghani Khan and his junior colleague, Minister of State CK Jaffer Sharief. Sharief's letters are just short of being abusive, calling out Choudhury's "behavioral eccentricities" and luxurious lifestyle as being a burden on the railway exchequer, as well as the indiscriminate ordering of passenger trains, diverting line capacity for essential materials to the disturbed north-eastern region.



# Be self-assured, don't overreach

As the NDA government enters its third term, it must square up to at least five major challenges on the international stage



RAJA MANDALA  
BY C RAJA MOHAN

AS THE NDA government settles down to govern in the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, five new themes will shape its engagement with the world. Delhi now faces an international context that is quite different from 2014 or 2019. Deep structural changes are unfolding in the international system that demand major adjustments in India's worldview and adaptations to its domestic policies. The five imperatives outlined below are by no means the only challenges that will confront the new government, but they are among the main geopolitical imperatives.

The first is the return of great-power rivalry that demands an approach driven by interest rather than ideology. The renewed conflict between the West on the one hand and China and Russia on the other has begun to produce a very different set of external conditions for the conduct of India's international relations than the one it had to deal with in 1991. At the end of the Cold War marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Delhi had the room to engage with all the great powers without looking over its shoulder.

It was widely presumed that India can replace its policy of "non-alignment" between competing powers with the idea of "multi-alignment" — of cooperating with all the great powers. However, several trends make the idea of "multi-alignment" problematic. So long as the major powers got along well with each other, it did not matter what you called your policy. The conflict between the great powers has intensified since 2019, when Modi's second term began. The freedom to do what you want with each one of them without incurring costs with the other has begun to reduce.

Multi-alignment also gives a false sense of symmetry in the relations with the major powers. In the real world, though, there is considerable variation in the current economic and security salience of these relations and their future possibilities. For example, the trade and technology relationship with the US and Europe far outweighs that with Russia. While Moscow was a major defence partner in the past, Delhi's security ties are far more diverse now. India's large trade relationship with China is marred by massive deficits and security challenges. Equally important is the logic of geography: Unlike in the Cold War, when the great powers were some distance away, today the second-most important power, China, is India's neighbour. And to make matters worse, Delhi is locked in a wide-ranging conflict with Beijing that is at odds with Washington and getting closer to Moscow.

The expansion of India's own weight in the international system has certainly given some space to Delhi in navigating the new great-power rivalry. But that space is limited and is shrinking. This means India will



C R Sasikumar

have to make choices on the issues at hand in the unfolding great-power contestation. Ducking can't be a permanent strategy. These choices on each issue will have to be based on a cold calculation of material interests and not slogans like "multi-alignment" and "multipolarity".

Second is the changing structure of the global economy that demands more reform at home. If India adapted to the logic of economic globalisation at the turn of the 1990s, it must now deal with the impact of geopolitics on the global economy. To be sure, the Modi government has broken away from the faith in economic globalisation since it walked out of the Asia-wide free trade negotiations (RCEP) in 2019. And the efforts of major Western economies to reduce the dependence on China have opened new opportunities for India to enhance its geo-economic position.

However, Delhi is some distance away from seizing those possibilities. Delhi does chant the mantra of trusted geographies, resilient supply chains, and freer trade with strategic partners. But it is yet to translate those slogans into concrete outcomes for trade cooperation. Meanwhile, there is concern that the government's capacity for much-needed reforms to cope with the new global dynamic is constrained by the outcome of the 2024 election. Dispelling the fears about the government's will and capacity to pursue domestic economic transformation will be a major task for the new government.

Three, the unfolding technological revolution promises to redistribute global power and is now an integral part of great-power competition. This again has opened the door for accelerated advanced technological development in India. The initiative on critical and emerging technologies (ICET) with the US, which was reviewed by the national security advisors of the two countries this week in Delhi, points to that. To take full advantage of the new possibilities, though, India will need a modernisation of the advanced S&T sector that has been under the

Delhi needs to tone down its expansive rhetoric on India's rise. There is no doubt that India, well on its way to becoming the third-largest economy, is climbing up the global hierarchy. But its aggregate GDP of nearly \$4 trillion should not obscure the fact that India's per capita GDP is barely \$2,800. If India's developmental challenges are huge, so is the problem of dealing with growing inequality within. India's growing global influence must, in essence, be about leveraging the world for the rapid expansion of domestic prosperity and equity.

domination of state monopolies.

Four, Delhi must adapt to the rise of new regions that break down old regional categories. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific over the last decade cutting across many traditionally defined regions such as South Asia and Southeast Asia is one example. The financial power of the Arab Gulf, Africa's rapid economic growth, and Europe's southern outreach point to the exciting new opportunities for India to the west of the Subcontinent. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is just one sign of the things to come. Delhi must now invest more resources — diplomatic, political, economic, and security — in engaging with Africa, Southern Europe, and the Middle East and erase the old mental maps that saw these regions as separate entities.

Five, Delhi needs to tone down its expansive rhetoric on India's rise. There is no doubt that India, well on its way to becoming the third-largest economy, is climbing up the global hierarchy. But its aggregate GDP of nearly \$4 trillion should not obscure the fact that India's per capita GDP is barely \$2,800. If India's developmental challenges are huge, so is the problem of dealing with growing inequality within. India's growing global influence must, in essence, be about leveraging the world for the rapid expansion of domestic prosperity and equity.

Delhi must also remember that world history is littered with rising powers that crashed on their way up the global order. While its newfound self-assurance is welcome, Delhi should avoid the evident dangers of overreach. Overestimating India's strength and underestimating the challenges at hand lead to geopolitical hubris and complacency in policymaking that could cost Delhi dearly.

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

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The dissolution of the war cabinet forum deprives Netanyahu of legitimacy and constricts his manoeuvring room. Now, the US has no forum to engage with. The dissolution may not affect policy, but weakens Netanyahu politically even more..."  
— THE GUARDIAN

# Riding out a heat wave

We need to prioritise public-health interventions based on intensity and duration, recognise broader implications in context of climate change



KRISHNA S VATSA

THE RECENT SURGE in temperatures across North India has caused serious concern, with cities facing intense and prolonged heat. Maximum temperatures have exceeded normal levels by 4-8°C across Haryana-Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Odisha, and West Bengal. Rising humidity and warmer nights have significantly worsened heat stress, especially in warm-humid and moderate climate zones. So even when the temperature is relatively lower, it feels much hotter.

A heatwave is declared when the departure from normal temperature is between 4.5°C and 6.4°C, and a severe heat wave is declared when the departure exceeds 6.4°C. However, the entire region is currently experiencing heatwaves based on actual maximum temperatures above 45°C. When such extreme heat conditions persist for an extended period, they can pose risks to public health and infrastructure. Historically, heat waves in India lasted for five to 15 days. This year, it has persisted through most of May and June.

Cyclone Remal, which originated in the Bay of Bengal, disrupted the arrival of monsoons from this region, exacerbating the intensity of heat waves. The monsoon stream through the Arabian Sea has also progressed steadily, sparing South India from similar heat wave conditions. This changing pattern underscores a direct link between monsoon variability and the duration of heat waves.

Cities are particularly vulnerable due to the urban heat island effect, exacerbated by greenhouse gas emissions. Factors such as increased congestion, paved surfaces, depletion of water bodies, loss of vegetation, and high-density settlements trap heat and contribute to higher urban temperatures. Additionally, cities are no longer cooling at night at the same rate as a decade ago. Heat waves are interconnected with other hazards, such as forest fires, electrical faults, droughts, water scarcity, and lightning.

The socioeconomic impacts of heat waves in India are pronounced. Workers in sectors such as construction, hawking, and vending are disproportionately affected. Women working in kitchens and residents in tin-roofed homes also face extreme discomfort. Reliance on air conditioning is not a sustainable solution.

Large gatherings, such as pilgrimages and elections, magnify the heat wave's impact. The proximity of people in crowds creates a microclimate where body heat accumulates, leading to hyperthermic syndrome, a form of heatstroke. This is further exacerbated by high humidity that hinders the body's ability to cool itself through sweat evaporation. The recent general elections saw polling officials lose their lives due to heatstroke in several states, including West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. In 2023, when 14 people died during a political rally at Kharghar in Navi Mumbai, humidity played a significant role.

These incidents highlight the severe risk to public safety during such events, emphasising the need for better preparedness and immediate measures to mitigate heat-related hazards.

Longer and more intense heat waves result in a higher relative risk of mortality, falling into two categories: Direct heat stroke deaths and increased cardiovascular disease (CVD) incidence. Each 10°F increase in mean daily temperature can lead to a 2.6 per cent rise in CVD mortality. However, accurately measuring heat wave-related deaths presents challenges. The government's health-related illness surveillance has significantly improved preparedness, keeping annual heat stroke deaths below 100. Despite this, the increasing burden of diseases poses a significant public health challenge. Prioritising public health interventions based on the intensity and duration of heat waves and recognising their broader implications in the context of climate change is essential.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has initiated heat action plans (HAPs) — with the first HAP for Ahmedabad. NDMA is encouraging the preparation of local HAPs to address specific needs at the district, city, and town levels. Appointing dedicated heat officers could enhance the coordination and implementation of these plans. These HAPs require the participation of local governments, civic groups, and communities, promoting behavioural change, adaptation, and urban planning. There are three key strands of support that HAPs must offer.

One, it is crucial to improve temperature monitoring across cities and towns through a dense network of weather stations. This network should provide granular data on microclimates, enabling the identification of high-risk areas.

Two, preparedness measures are essential to mitigate the immediate effects of extreme heat. Regulating working and school hours can help protect vulnerable populations. Ensuring adequate water availability through public drinking water facilities and awareness campaigns is vital. Enhancing health system preparedness by training healthcare workers to recognise and treat heat-related illnesses will improve community resilience.

Three, implementing solutions such as improving and restoring water bodies, increasing vegetation cover, and promoting cool roofs and better ventilation in buildings will enhance thermal comfort.

In the next few years, cities will require significant knowledge support to prepare and monitor heat action plans. Further, financial support for HAPs needs to be evolved based on a pooling arrangement, with governments at different levels and the private sector contributing to the cause. While heat waves are currently considered local disasters, their increasing severity will necessitate a broader national approach.

The rising temperatures forecasted by climate models are becoming a reality, demanding a comprehensive and coordinated response. We must marshal all available resources, wisdom, and commitment to develop effective adaptation and mitigation strategies to protect our communities and ecosystems from the escalating threat of heatwaves.

*The writer is member, National Disaster Management Authority. Views are personal*

# Lessons from a Greek tragedy

Why the ancient play 'Persians' has resonance today — in India and beyond



VIJAY TANKHA

WHAT COULD THE earliest extant Greek tragedy have to say about the recent elections? Nothing one would expect. Aeschylus' *Persians* is an account of the battle of Salamis in which the Athenian fleet destroyed Xerxes' invading flotilla. In keeping with tragic conventions, there is no action, only reports of the battle, staged before the tomb of Xerxes' dead father, Darius. There is much lamentation for the Persian dead and their grieving families.

How could this possibly be a trope for the recent electoral victory and defeat of the contending parties? And yet, the play, a commentator reminds us, was often recalled in very different contexts. It was performed in Germany during the war years, emphasising heroism, and the grief of women waiting at home. More frequently, it was staged to protest *against* war, in the former East Germany, explicitly anti-fascist and anti-imperialist, equating Xerxes with Hitler.

Later, it was inspired by US involvement in Korea and subsequently turned into a protest against the Vietnam War; then used to question the bombing in 1993 of Iraq by the UN. Although emblematic of a Eurocentric view of the Orient, the play has recently been viewed as emphasising the need for a humane and pacific world order.

In an ongoing tussle between two parties, we can read in it familiar electoral vocabulary: *Fought* between politically distinct formations with their respective *allies*, with ground troops and commanders attacking

opponents, resorting both to bribery and threats. Traps are set, deception and guile are routine. Key themes in the play resonate with the present. Consider the numbers: The vast strength of the invading forces corresponds to the exaggerated outlook flashed by exit polls, making even the doubtful doubt their disbelief. These dubious figures ("such a huge flood of men... an invincible sea wave") are apt metaphors for the asymmetry between the contenders. Nor do ships and men come cheap. The Persians outnumbered the Greeks because of their vast wealth and resources (Xerxes' palace is "rich in gold"), a theme that runs throughout the drama, pitting wealth against courage.

In the play, the catastrophe is over-determined many times over, but for Aeschylus, the victory belonged entirely to *the people*, the ordinary citizens, not to their leaders. There was no implication that particular Athenians were superior by birth, class, or rank. While numerous Persian nobility are named, not a single Greek leader is. This democratic depiction was as much at odds then as it is now, but fundamental to the electoral process, as in the naval battle, is the temporary erasure of all distinctions of wealth and birth.

Those citizens ("called neither the slaves nor subjects of any single man") fought for democracy and freedom. The narrative lifts the sea battle from just another fight between aggrandising monarchs to an ideological plane, represented through the polarities of

freedom/ slavery and democracy/ tyranny. The self-image of the Athenians as democratic, non-hierarchical, espousing ideals of moderation and self-restraint, fits well with the moral dimension of traditional Indian political ideology, which was confronted, as the Athenians saw themselves, with the loud arrogant and boastful rhetoric of their adversaries. In the Greek imagination, the excessive wealth of the Persians led them to hubris and insatiable greed as they trampled all that was regarded as decent and holy.

Although the play is titled *Persians*, the invaders are regularly referred to as "the barbarians", a pejorative term at this time, cognate with its familiar adjective "barbaric". Their acts had all the hallmarks of what we now would call barbaric and unholy: the destruction of civic institutions (Athens was burnt, its sanctuaries defiled) meant that the gods themselves were on the side of justice and morality. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, writing a good three generations later, must have a tragic hero, whose fall from a position of greatness is the result of a flaw. Aeschylus had not read Aristotle, but commentators find the flawed figure necessary to tragic outcomes in Xerxes.

Xerxes, combining foolishness with characteristic arrogance, is likened to a god ("an equal of the gods, born of the golden race"). He exacts the obedience masters demand of slaves. A familiar Greek trope characterised the Persians as a nation where only one man was free. His arrogance (hubris) comes from

excessive power and wealth (His mother fears "great Wealth may kick up a cloud of dust from the ground and overturn prosperity"). With the defeat of his forces, he returns to Susa. The transition is pictured in the rags his otherwise sartorial elegance is reduced to. His mother, Darius' queen, acutely aware of the importance of his regal apparel, is more upset by his torn clothes than the prospect of the wholesale slaughter of Persian forces.

The defeat of the Persians, the queen fears, will result in loss of control over his vast empire. The chorus laments that imperial rule is in danger, that the king's subjects will no longer prostrate themselves before him, or keep their opinions to themselves ("Men will no longer curb their tongues/for people are released to talk freely when a strong yoke has been removed"). Despite this, the Queen reminds them, whatever else happens, the King will remain unaccountable to the people (distinguishing him from the Athenian officials who had to have their "accounts" examined at the end of their tenure). Absolute rulers, unlike democratic ones, are immune to scrutiny.

Xerxes, though defeated, was not dethroned. He went on to rule for another decade or more. But the spirit of freedom and democracy set alight by that struggle lived on for more than a century: A lesson that we are now perhaps fortunate to learn.

*The writer taught Philosophy at Delhi University*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TEACHING HISTORY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Infantilising learners' (IE, June 18). The NCERT has incorporated significant changes in its coverage of Ayodhya, a historically sensitive and controversial topic. These changes reflect a marked shift in the narrative presented to students, sparking a debate about the portrayal of historical events and political intervention in education. Educational materials play a crucial role in shaping young minds. The quick pace at which abrupt changes are being made to the curricula is not prudent. In science and technology, a periodic revision of the syllabi is necessary to keep pace with the times. There should be no unnecessary alterations in political science or history books. The NCERT must not play with history.

*SSPaul, Nadia*

### GIG WORKERS' PLIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'High cost of convenience' (IE, June 17). Any economic growth is undesirable if it benefits only the privileged. Even modern marketing management has moved away from a "customer-oriented approach" to a "holistic approach," emphasising aspects like employee well-being and work environment. Terming

delivery personnel as "delivery partners" does not make them real partners unless provided with an equitable share in earnings and a respectable work environment. Amazon, Zepto and app-based transport companies like Uber and Ola, exploit workers under the guise of so-called innovation. This practice also seems to be encouraged in the public sector, where contractual jobs with no social benefits and low pay become more prevalent.

*Nitin Navin, Delhi*

### INCLUSIVE MANDATE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Against arrogance' (IE, June 18). Iron can only be destroyed by its own rust, symbolising that power is ultimately undone by its own flaws. With power comes arrogance, often leading to blindness and ignorance of one's surroundings. The Congress party, which ruled for many decades, mistakenly believed it was unconquerable. Political parties must remember that their power is granted by the mandate of the citizens. The BJP should learn from this lesson and strive to lead inclusively, focusing on national development, involving all representatives, and the welfare of the people. They must not confuse majority support with true democracy.

*Ajay Corria, Vasai*





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#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)**THIS WORD MEANS****PRO TEM SPEAKER**

A senior Lok Sabha MP who is temporarily appointed Speaker and administers oath to new Members

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

THE 18TH LOK SABHA will hold its first session between June 24 and July 3, during which the new Speaker will be elected. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will move the motion for the election of the Speaker in the Lok Sabha on June 26. Congress leader K Suresh, an eight-term MP, is expected to be appointed *pro tem* Speaker.

**Who is a *pro tem* Speaker?**

As the Presiding Officer of Lok Sabha, the Speaker has to fulfil certain duties and is elected by a simple majority vote in the Lower House. Until the Speaker is elected, the *pro tem* Speaker is appointed to administer some important duties. '*Pro tem*' means 'for the time being' or 'temporarily'.

The Constitution does not mention the post, but the official 'Handbook on the Working of Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs' mentions the appointment and swearing in of Speaker *pro tem*.

**How is the *pro tem* Speaker chosen?**

The handbook states that when the Speaker's post is vacant before a new Lok Sabha meets, "the duties of the Speaker are to be performed by a Member of the House appointed for this purpose by the President as Speaker *pro tem*". Normally, the seniormost MP is ap-

pointed as the Speaker *pro tem*. Three other MPs, the next in terms of seniority, are appointed to assist the Speaker *pro tem*.

As soon as the new government is formed, the Legislative I Section of the Legislative Department of the government prepares a list of the seniormost Lok Sabha members. It is then submitted to the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs or the Prime Minister for identifying an MP as Speaker *pro tem* and another three members for oath-taking.

**How are oaths administered?**

After the Prime Minister's approval, the Ministry gets the consent of these MPs. The Minister then submits a note to the President, seeking approval for their appointments. The date and time for the ceremony are also decided.

Once the President approves, the Ministry informs the appointed members. Finally, the President administers the oath to the Speaker *pro tem* at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The other three members appointed by the President are administered the oath by the Speaker *pro tem* in the Lok Sabha.

The Speaker *pro tem* then administers the oath or affirmation to the newly elected MPs with the help of the other three members. Since the session of the Lok Sabha starts at 11 am, the time generally fixed for swearing in of the Speaker *pro tem* is on the morning of the same day at 9.30 am, subject to the convenience of the President.

**EXPLAINED SCIENCE****DORMANT SUPERMASSIVE BLACK HOLE ROARS TO LIFE: NEW STUDY**

RESEARCHERS SAID on Tuesday they have observed a dramatic brightening at the heart of a galaxy, apparently caused by a supermassive black hole awakening from dormancy and beginning to gorge itself with nearby material. It marks the first time this process has been seen as it happens.

Galaxy SDSS1335+0728 is located roughly 360 million light-years from Earth. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, or 9.5 trillion km.

**What are the findings?**

Black holes are extraordinarily dense objects with gravity so strong that not even light can escape. The environment around a supermassive black hole can be violent, as it gulps the material within its gravitational grasp.

The researchers found that a spinning disk of diffuse material has formed around the SDSS1335+0728 supermassive black hole, with some of the matter being consumed. Such a disk — called an accretion disk — radiates energy at very high temperatures, sometimes outshining an entire galaxy.

A bright and compact region such as this, powered by a supermassive black hole at the centre of a galaxy, is called an "active galactic nucleus."

"These nuclei are characterised by emitting large amounts of energy at a variety of wavelengths," said Paula Sanchez Saez of the European Southern Observatory in Germany, lead author of the study published in *Astronomy & Astrophysics*. "Studying active galactic nuclei is crucial to understanding galaxy evolution and the physics of supermassive black holes."

**What activated it?**

"At the moment, we do not know," Sanchez said.

Another researcher said it could be a natural process, as galaxies pass through different phases of activity and non-activity during their lifetime.

If the observations represent something other than the onset of an active galactic nucleus, it would have to be an astrophysical phenomenon never before seen.

REUTERS

**ANJALI MARAR**

BENGALURU, JUNE 18

ON ALMOST all days in June so far, North and Northwest India have experienced 'heatwave' to 'severe heatwave' conditions. The southwest monsoon that made an early onset over Kerala has advanced until Maharashtra, but maximum temperatures in the plains of North India have sustained around 45-47 degrees Celsius.

**Monsoon basics and dates**

The June-September southwest monsoon brings more than 70% of India's annual rainfall. Climatologically, the monsoon arrives over the Andaman Sea in the third week of May and advances into the mainland through Kerala, June 1 being the normal date of onset.

It then advances in surges — typically, the progress until central India is fast, after which it slows down. The monsoon normally reaches north Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and neighbourhood areas by the end of June, and covers the entire country by July 15.

An early or timely onset of the monsoon does not guarantee good rainfall or its distribution over the country throughout the four-month season. And a delayed onset does not necessarily mean below-average rainfall for the entire season.

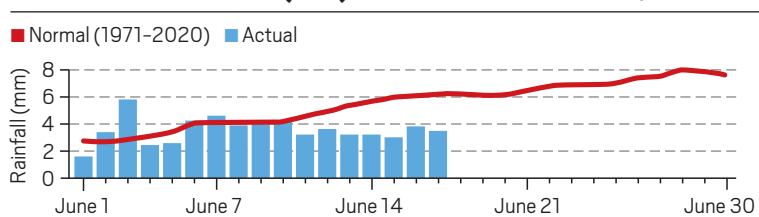
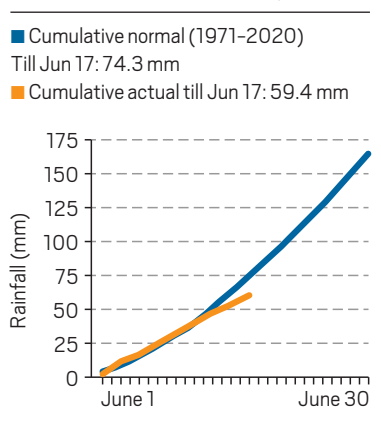
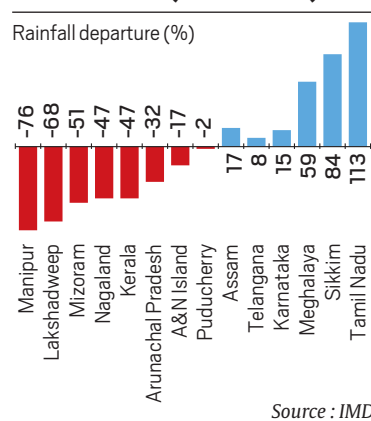
Cumulative rainfall over the country from June to September depends on multiple factors. It also shows natural inter-annual variability, which makes every monsoon different. Alongside the quantum of rainfall, its distribution is also vital.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast 'above normal' rainfall this season. Quantitatively, it is expected to be 106% of the Long Period Average of 880 mm (1971-2020 data).

The 'above normal' rainfall is being attributed mainly to the soon-to-emerge La Niña conditions, which are known to positively influence the Indian monsoon, and a positive phase of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD).

**Good start followed by dry spell**

The monsoon arrived over the Andaman Sea and Nicobar Islands on May 19, and hit the Kerala coast on May 30, two days ahead of its normal date. It reached over Nagaland,

**DAILY MEAN RAINFALL (MM) OVER INDIA AS A WHOLE, 2024****CUMULATIVE RAINFALL (MM) OVER INDIA AS A WHOLE, 2024****RAINFALL STATUS AFTER ONSET OF MONSOON (JUNE 1-18)**

Source : IMD

Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and parts of Tripura six days early — marking a rare but not-unheard-of simultaneous onset over Kerala and large parts of Eastern India.

After May 30, the monsoon progressed every day, and it had covered Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Mahé, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karnataka, Telangana, and large parts of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra by June 10.

This kept the all-India rainfall positive at 36.5 mm, or 3% surplus as on June 10. Over all these states and UTs, the monsoon arrived three to five days early.

From June 11 onward, the monsoon has remained stagnant, and dry and hot conditions have returned to the Southern peninsula. Over the past week, all-India rainfall has been consistently below average. On Tuesday, it was minus 20% (64.5 mm against normal 80.6 mm).

"Initially, the monsoon came in as a big current but did not bring much rain. This is not a typical monsoon flow, compared to what was expected," M Rajeevan, former secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said.

On Tuesday, the Northern Limit of Monsoon — the imaginary line indicating the monsoon's progress — passed through Navsari, Jalgaon, Amravati, Chandrapur, Bijapur, Sukma, Malkangiri, Vizianagaram and Islampur.

The overall deficit is mainly due to states where the onset of the monsoon has been delayed. These include Odisha (minus 47%), West Bengal (minus 11%), Bihar (minus 72%) and Jharkhand (minus 68%) as on Tuesday.

The return of dry conditions over Manipur, Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Nagaland, Kerala, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar islands, too, has contributed to the deficient all-India rainfall.

**Disease that has struck singer Alka Yagnik****EXPERT EXPLAINS**

KALPANA NAGPAL

IN A post on Instagram, Bollywood singer Alka Yagnik on Monday revealed that she has been diagnosed with a "rare sensory neural nerve hearing loss", known as sensorineural deafness, after suffering from a viral infection. A leading ear, neck, and throat (ENT) specialist explains what sensorineural deafness is, what causes it, and how it can be prevented.

**What is sensorineural deafness?**

The human ear consists of external, middle, and inner structures. When you listen to a sound, your eardrum or tympanic membrane (which divides the external ear from the

middle ear) vibrates. The vibration passes on to three tiny bones — malleus, incus, and stapes — in your middle ear. These bones transmit the sound waves to the cochlea — a fluid-filled chamber in your inner ear — which is lined with tiny hair cells, called stereocilia, that vibrate when the sound waves hit them. These hair cells convert the sound waves into an electrical signal, which is then sent to the brain, through the auditory nerve — a nerve that runs from the inner ear to the brain.

Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when the inner ear is damaged. In this case, stereocilia or the auditory nerve is not able to function properly, leading to deafness.

Unlike in the case of damage to the external or middle ear, deafness due to damage to the inner ear may not always be cured if not addressed promptly within 48 hours. Ideally, you should consult a specialist within a week.

**How can the inner ear be damaged?**

Like in the case of Yagnik, the inner ear

can be damaged by a viral infection, leading to sensorineural deafness. The infection typically triggers inflammatory responses and swelling, which puts pressure on the inner chamber. The situation can worsen as stem cells in the ear are not able to quickly repair the damaged tiny hair cells.

This season, many people with viral flu have been diagnosed with sensorineural deafness. Every year, the flu season has certain dominant characteristics — this time, it is hearing loss.

The inner ear can also be damaged due to a head injury, exposure to very loud sounds, or loud sounds that last for a long time.

**What are the symptoms?**

The sense of hearing drastically goes down or you cannot hear at all. You are not able to catch words coherently when others are talking and they may seem like mumbling. There can also be a ringing or buzzing sound in the ear. Numbness can also occur.

**What is the treatment?**

If a patient goes to the doctor within a week of the symptoms surfacing, doctors can administer steroid injections in the eardrum. It will improve the hearing and relieve the swelling. If the damage is more serious, then there are solutions such as hearing aids, which can amplify sounds near the patient. You can also opt for cochlear implants.

**How can it be prevented?**

The forms of flu are becoming more aggressive with each passing year. As a result, one should try their best to avoid catching it — wear a mask in public places, and take an annual shot of flu vaccine. To protect yourself from any kind of hearing loss from external sources, wear good earplugs.

Dr Nagpal is a senior consultant at the ENT in Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi. She spoke to **Rinku Ghosh**.

**Strategic imperative and environment concern in Great Nicobar project****NIKHIL GHANEKAR**

NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

THE CONGRESS party has described the proposed Rs 72,000-crore infra upgrade at the Great Nicobar Island as a "grave threat" to the island's indigenous inhabitants and fragile ecosystem, and demanded "immediate suspension of all clearances" and a "thorough, impartial review of the proposed project, including by the Parliamentary committees concerned".

Great Nicobar is the southernmost and largest of the Nicobar Islands, a sparsely inhabited 910-sq-km patch of mainly tropical rainforest in southeastern Bay of Bengal. Indira Point on the island, India's southernmost point, is only 90 nautical miles (less than 170 km) from Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra, the largest island of the Indonesian archipelago.

Great Nicobar has two national parks, a biosphere reserve, small populations of the Shompen and Nicobarese tribal peoples, and a few thousand non-tribal settlers.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a cluster of 836 islands, split into two groups — the Andaman Islands to the north and the Nicobar Islands to the south — by the 150-km wide Ten Degree Channel.

So why does India want to develop Great Nicobar, and why has the proposed three-phase, 30-year project faced sustained criticism from conservationists, wildlife biologists, and some local tribal councils?

**The infra project**

The mega infrastructure project — which is being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) — is proposed to include an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), a greenfield international airport with a peak hour capacity to handle 4,000 passengers, a township, and a gas and solar-based power plant spread across 16,610 hectares.

The project for the "holistic development" of Great Nicobar Island was implemented after a report by NITI Aayog. A pre-feasibility report flagged the opportunity to leverage the location of the island, which is roughly equidistant from Colombo in Sri Lanka to the southwest and Port Klang (Malaysia) and Singapore to the southeast.

It is close to the Malacca Strait, the main waterway that connects the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, and the ICTT is expected to "allow Great Nicobar to participate in the regional and global maritime economy by becoming



a major player in cargo transshipment". A proposed "greenfield city" will tap into both the maritime and tourism potential of the island.

The site for the proposed ICTT and power plant is Galathea Bay on the southeastern corner of Great Nicobar Island, where there is no human habitation. The project was granted in-principle forest clearance and environmental clearance in October 2022. A detailed project report (DPR) has been prepared, and the union government is likely

to invite bids for the initial phase of construction of the terminal in the coming months.

**Strategic importance**

The Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean region are of vital strategic and security interest to India as the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy seeks to expand its footprint across the region. India is wary of a build-up of Chinese maritime forces at the Indo-Pacific choke points of especially

Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok. China's attempts to expand its footprint in the region includes building a military facility at Coco Islands (Myanmar) lying just 55 km to the north of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

In April this year, *The Indian Express* reported that a major military infrastructure upgrade was underway at the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, including revamping airfields and jetties and building additional logistics and storage facilities, a base for military personnel, and a robust surveillance infrastructure. The upgrade is aimed at facilitating the deployment of additional military forces, larger and more warships, aircraft, missile batteries, and troops.

Close surveillance of the entire area around the archipelago, and the building up of a strong military deterrence at Great Nicobar is crucial for India's national security.

**Environmental concerns**

The proposed infra upgrade has been opposed on grounds of the threat it poses to the ecology of the islands. The opposition — by wildlife conservation researchers, anthropologists, scholars, and civil society apart from the Congress — has focused on the potentially devastating impact on the Shompen, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) of hunter-gatherers with an estimated population of a few hundred individuals who live in

a tribal reserve on the island.

It has been alleged that the project violates the rights of the tribal population, and will impact the island's ecology with the felling of nearly a million trees. It is feared that the port project will destroy coral reefs with spinoff effects on the local marine ecosystem, and pose a threat to the terrestrial Nicobar Megapode bird and leatherback turtles who nest in the Galathea Bay area.

The Congress statement, issued by senior leader and former Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, has also pointed out that the proposed port is in a seismically volatile zone that saw permanent subsidence of about 15 ft during the 2004 tsunami. The statement has accused the local administration of not consulting the Tribal Council of Great and Little Nicobar Islands adequately as per legal requirements. In November 2022, the tribal council revoked a no-objection certificate it had issued for diversion of about 160 sq km of forest land, saying they had not been given full information.

In April 2023, the Kolkata Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) declined to interfere with the environmental and forest clearance granted to the project. The Tribunal, however, ordered that a high-power committee should be constituted to look into the clearances. An appeal against the NGT's order was dismissed in 2023.





## New dynamics

The G-7 must review its own purpose in a rapidly changing world

Welcoming leaders of 10 countries including Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the “G-7 Outreach” Summit, Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said it was important to step away from the old trope of the “West vs the Rest”. That sentiment explained Italy’s decision to invite mainly the Global South countries including BRICS notables such as Brazil, India, and the UAE, to hold an outreach with seven African countries on energy issues, and to host the summit in the Mediterranean Apulia region. The G-7 was once hailed as a dynamic group of the world’s most developed democracies where heads of state would roll up their sleeves once a year to effect real solutions to global financial and development issues. However, with manufacturing slowdowns, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and western sanctions, the grouping has appeared more tired, and its meetings less effective. The shaky electoral fortunes of most of the G-7 leadership did not enhance that image at the summit. The joint communiqué read more like a laundry list of the world’s problems, than it did as a strong call to action on resolving them. Most salient was the G-7’s continued “military, budget, humanitarian, and reconstruction support” for Ukraine, but with no constructive plan on how to end the war. A Gaza ceasefire appeal has also not been accepted by Israel. The G-7’s focus on China in the Indo-Pacific and on “industrial targeting” and unfair practices was particularly sharp, but it remains to be seen whether any member-country will reduce its own considerable trade ties with Beijing. A line in the communiqué that recommitted to about eight infrastructure corridors, including the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, reinforced the lack of focus on executing (as distinct from discussing) projects.

Given the G-7’s current situation, India, in attendance for the eleventh time, could well take stock of the engagement’s utility. While the event was an opportune moment for Mr. Modi, now in his third term, to meet with some of the world’s top leadership, the meetings themselves did not yield many outcomes. Formal bilaterals with the leaders of important partner the U.S., and fractious relationship-ridden Canada, did not materialise. Mr. Modi focused on India’s elections as a “victory for the democratic world”, on the importance of harnessing technology and artificial intelligence to bridge global inequalities, and on the value of the Global South, especially Africa. It would seem most of those issues would be better addressed in a larger and more representational format such as the G-20, while the G-7 may wish to review its own identity and purpose amidst a rapidly changing global power dynamic.

## Drastic decline

Anodyne approach to oppositional politics has made BSP a shell of its past

In Indian democracy, if a ruling party does not perform according to the expectations of the electorate, the opposition always gets the opportunity to win back the support of the people, provided it works towards earning it. This is evident in the contrasting fortunes of the Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance and that of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), in Uttar Pradesh in the general election. The SP-Congress alliance took recourse to coherent messaging, targeting the Union government on issues related to protecting constitutional rights and freedoms and economic problems, while managing to stitch a new alliance that transcended the politics of narrow caste arithmetic reminiscent of the Mandal years. This helped it win 43 seats, boost its vote share and gain support from OBCs and Dalits. In contrast, the BSP’s vote share fell to 9.4% – a nearly four point drop from the 2022 Assembly elections – as even its loyal Jatav backers split their support between the three major political forces in the State. Other non-Jatav Dalits, OBC sections and the minorities (overwhelmingly in their case) endorsed the SP-Congress alliance.

The BSP, a party, which began as a movement led by Kanshi Ram, reached its apogee in the late 2000s after being part of a series of post-poll coalition governments before winning power on its own in a split polity in 2007. By this time, its ideology had also shifted from being a “bahujan” (a term connoting the subaltern) to that of a “sarv-jan” party, a catch-all phrase for an alliance of contradictions in order to win a broad-based vote. In government, the BSP accorded dignity to the Dalit population in the State and engaged in a fervent politics of Dalit symbolism, but showed little gumption to address socio-economic issues through steps such as redistribution or enlightened governance. Out of power since 2012, the party has remained an anodyne force, with its leader Mayawati abjuring agitational politics and largely limiting her political messaging and activism to statements and press releases. Her party has retreated into a cocoon even as it has sought to be a spoiler in the parliamentary elections by promoting a political messaging that relied on a false equivalence of the BJP and the SP-Congress. After her defeat, Ms. Mayawati blamed EVMs, the weather and the lack of trust among Muslims, while still refusing to acknowledge her own lack of agency that has resulted in the BSP’s decline. To revive itself, the BSP can learn from the experiences of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi or even the fledgling Aazad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) that have taken to ideological and agitational struggle to represent the interests of Dalits, allowing these parties to punch above their weight.

The 2024 general election verdict has many takeaways. While some say that it has enlarged what was becoming a shrinking space for dissent and democracy, others say it has created hope for change in the future by reining in what would be called Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s virtual dictatorial run.

But these are only the visible effects. There is something deeply philosophical about this verdict. It is actually a civilisation-strikes-back occasion for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ecosystem. The Hindutva project, that is spearheaded by Mr. Modi, has re-opened the old civilisational suspicion in the minds of the religious have-nots among Hindus. Far from creating a Hindu monolith, it has resulted in only counter-polarisation among Hindus themselves.

Clearly, Hindutva’s civilisational call to Hindus to unite against a perceived enemy, mainly Muslims and liberals, and to reclaim Bharat’s “glorious” past has proved counter productive. The 2024 verdict has proved that Hindutva politics has ended up polarising Hindus instead of uniting them.

### The Constitution as turning point

This has been amply borne out by the subject of the Constitution gaining huge currency in the 2024 battle. The Constitution has been under attack from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ecosystem right from the time it was being formulated and debated. With Mr. Modi riding a wave of unprecedented popularity, the Hindutva ecosystem thought it had the numbers in Parliament and also sufficient moral authority to start talking about “changing the Constitution”.

It began by blaming the Opposition for orchestrating a ‘false’ campaign against the BJP that it would change the Constitution to rob the backward castes and tribes of their affirmative action privileges guaranteed by the statute. But the Opposition was only picking up points from the several statements made by the BJP’s own leaders and poll nominees.

Mr. Modi also entered the election with a repeated and strident call for 400 seats for his party. A relevant question was why was this number needed if not for changing the Constitution?

When some questions began to be asked, Mr. Modi tried every trick to neutralise any perception over the issue of the Constitution. But the impression had percolated deep and the damage had been done.

The most encouraging takeaway from this battle between Hindutva’s civilisational haves and have-nots is that the Constitution – which embodied the essence of the civilisational course correction painstakingly championed by the leading lights of Independence struggle – itself proved to be the reason for this realisation about the real intent of Hindutva’s civilisational project.



Vivek Deshpande

freelance journalist based in Nagpur, was with The Indian Express

The Constitution of India has struck back, rebuffing the ruling party and its misconceived campaign against ‘a perceived enemy’

This was to resurrect the so-called great and glorious past of Hindu civilisation and to “decolonise” Hindu society’s collective mindset through a project that essentially relied on poisoning people’s minds with a pathological hatred for those who do not belong to Hindu civilisation.

The Constitution itself was necessitated by the deeply dehumanising inequalities inherent to Hindu civilisation. In fact, Constitutions all over the world were necessitated by similar concerns.

Right-wing intellectuals, however, very insidiously try to belittle the path-breaking contribution by the makers of modern India by arguing that the statute book has great values in it not because of any outside influence, but because those values have flowed in from the “great” Hindu value-system.

One of the most commonly cited examples of this argument is that secularism was always inherent to the Hindu way of thinking. And, as such, it found its expression in the constitutional scheme of things.

The Hindutva protagonists, however, in the same breath, also prove themselves wrong by indulging in a demonising of Muslims and other minorities.

This hatred for non-Hindus is not the only thing that contradicts their own claims of “justness” in Hindus’ ancient civilisational past. It is the affirmative action part of the Constitution that Hindutva revivalists often find tough to sit pretty with. So, while overtly supporting reservations, many Hindutva protagonists often openly denigrate it and also form the vanguard of “save merit” campaigns.

It also shows up when they start glorifying the *Manusmriti* and also try to introduce it in school and university curricula.

Clearly, their line of the Constitution being a reflection of past glory is subterfuge to cover up their ideological forefathers’ past sins of opposing the Constitution in Constituent Assembly debates as well as in articles in right-wing publications when the Constitution was in the making. But the cover-up has been exposed.

### ‘Political acumen’ that was overestimated

The Hindu have-nots have a clear sense now of the possibility of the BJP turning the Constitution on its head by altering it to suit the BJP’s idea of India that is anchored in some deeply problematic sociological premises. This realisation has had its singlemost profound impact in the 2024 elections – in a humiliating reversal for Mr. Modi’s mission. And, as it is there for all to see, the BJP has only itself to blame. The Opposition only found the weak spot and exploited it to stunning effect.

What Mr. Modi and the whole Hindutva ecosystem must understand is that their social engineering and Hindu consolidation efforts over the past many decades have been brought to a

naught by themselves alone. They tried to stand on two stools – an anti-minority plank and Constitution misdeemeanour – and only ended up falling between the two. They tried to unite caste Hindus (upper castes were always organically on board) against Muslims and also antagonised caste Hindus, who were their foot soldiers in the anti-Muslim project, with their anti-Constitution bravado. In the process, they paid a heavy price.

There are several examples that underline this boomerang effect in this election. But nothing illustrates the issue in this way than the BJP’s own defeat in Ayodhya in this election. The fact that the Opposition candidate, a Dalit candidate fielded by the Samajwadi Party, won shows that the people were not receptive to the Ram temple as something with which to cover themselves in glory, and that social justice was the real public concern. It also exposed the overestimated political acumen as well as the vulnerabilities of the BJP’s self-styled Chanakyas.

So, where does the Hindutva project, in decline, go from here? Will this suspicion in the minds of the Hindu have-nots remain etched or will it wither away with time?

Going a bit deeper into the subaltern side of this election, it looks that the advantage of the BJP’s *labharthi* (beneficiary schemes) was mostly cancelled out by the *Samvidhan* (Constitution) buzz since the labharthi section is largely the same as those disturbed by the BJP’s *Samvidhan* plan. With this, the BJP’s best bet becomes ineffective.

### The Opposition must rediscover its voice

With Mr. Modi now having to run a coalition government, the Constitution debate might remain latent, unless the Opposition keeps it burning.

And burn it must, because a vast majority of Hindus have been fooled into believing that their real battle is with Muslims and not with the Hindutva haves, when actually, if at all, it is the other way round.

The makers of the Constitution had such deep divisions within India, and Hindu society in particular, in mind when the Constitution was being drafted. The non-BJP regimes managed to keep the Constitution’s basic structure intact, keeping not only Hindus and non-Hindus together but also a deeply divided Hindu society as one whole.

Now, the Constitution has struck back, giving the BJP a civilisation rebuff.

The Opposition has its task cut out. It must keep this fight of social justice alive and prevent the misuse of Hindu have-nots to achieve Hindutva’s communal goals.

The Hindu have-nots must cease to be a part of the right-wing’s project as they have their own battles to wage and win against those who have misled them into believing that their real battle lies outside the Hindu fold.

# The high cost of a global economic decoupling

The announcement by United States President Joe Biden, in May, to slap a fresh round of tariffs on a range of Chinese imports, has refuelled fears of a new phase of decoupling in the world economy. Siding with Washington, policymakers in Europe are also deliberating having a ‘united front’ to counter China’s pursuit of coercive economic practices.

While this may define the trajectory of China-U.S. relations, it is not clear what the long-term costs are going to be. With China, the West’s trade risk calculations have increasingly become a function of national security. Contesting the liberal premise, the new political rhetoric in Washington assumes that since economic interdependence does not benefit China and the U.S. equally, it is likely that Beijing will weaponise vulnerabilities to its ends. In fact, the Biden administration’s decision to resume a tariff war with China, reveals how political, and not economic, considerations become key in deciding what goods would receive tariff increases.

### The story in the tariffs

The latest tariff on Chinese electric vehicles (EV) is a case in point. Given that the U.S. imports few EVs from China, the decision reinforces Mr. Biden’s pro-union stance and his support for the ongoing efforts of the United Auto Workers (UAW) to scale up EV manufacturing domestically. Conceived as a pre-emptive measure, the quadrupling of tariffs from 25% also explains the fear that the American auto union has *vis-à-vis* the fast-growing Chinese car and battery industry and its ability to outcompete traditional domestic automakers in no time.

The new tariffs on medical devices, on the other hand, are a straightforward way to grow independent of China. For a decade now, China has been the primary source of medical equipment to the U.S., with imports nearing \$640 million in 2023.

Many American health-care businesses have



Priyanka Pandit

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Intensifying geopolitical rivalry and a fragmentation of the global economy are threatening the liberal international order

their manufacturing and research laboratories in China, and they have been ramping up their investments owing to China’s growing health-care needs for the elderly and demand for quality health-care services. However, the deepening mistrust between the leaders of China and the U.S. creates pressure on the private sector and is likely to increase the burden of health-care costs on domestic patients in both countries. What protectionist enthusiasts often forget is that the costs of protection are borne through higher prices paid by consumers.

### The long-term effects

While continuity with the Trump-era tariffs seems to be the obvious answer to deal with an aggressive China, the world economic situation is at odds with the geopolitical realities. The vicious cycle of tit-for-tat tariffs further exacerbates the dangers arising out of protectionism, encouraging other countries to follow suit. Moreover, the new import restrictions on Chinese clean energy products would delay the green transition targets and the expansion of renewables worldwide. As China faces slowing growth and rising household debts, many western multinationals dependent on China’s vast consumer market will see a dip in their earnings.

For resource-rich countries such as Australia and Brazil, a slowing Chinese economy would not only hurt their exports in various commodities but also create downward pressures on iron-ore prices. For these economies that are heavily dependent on China for their exports, diversifying into other markets is never an easy task.

Similarly, the European Union’s approach to de-risking trade in critical raw minerals with China may entail a greater risk of Beijing tightening its iron grip on the supply chain. As the scramble to control the value chain of rare earths intensifies, one cannot rule out the possibility of a mineral-rich grouping, led by China, trying to dictate the terms of green trade

in the years to come.

Southeast Asia has also not been immune to the effects of protectionism and great power competition. While the region is said to benefit from production and investment shifting from China, the dependence on Beijing for technology and investment continues to run high. And the region’s prospects of replacing China as the major supplier of components and manufactured goods could dim if Washington imposes stricter rules of origin and eschew access to goods from third countries that use components either made in China or by Chinese firms located in these countries.

With a burgeoning consumer market, India remains next in line in expecting to benefit from the decoupling dynamics. But, one is not sure of the extent of gains in terms of global market share and the time this transition would take. The reason is that India’s manufacturing continues to be in a catching-up phase despite several initiatives by the government. New Delhi faces tough competition in low-end manufacturing from its South and South-East Asian neighbours, and its deep economic entanglements with China remain.

### A potential crisis

One, therefore, sees no end in sight if this cycle of escalation continues. More than its real significance, global investors would deeply feel the psychological effects of decoupling. What makes this strategy worse is its deliberate distancing from the World Trade Organization (WTO). Once a flag bearer of WTO rules, Washington continues to block the appointment of judges to the WTO Appellate Body, rendering the adjudicatory process paralysed. While a direct collision between the two is unlikely, the intensifying geopolitical rivalry along with the fragmentation of the global economy puts the future of the liberal international order at a high risk. And, it would benefit neither the U.S., China or the rest of the world.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Rail accident

The train accident in West Bengal’s Darjeeling district (Page 1, June 18) has highlighted the perilous state of rail safety in India. The hasty imputation, without proper inquiry, that the accident is due to human failure, is premature and inconsistent with the

rules. The Railways must wean itself away from ‘vanity projects’ and focus on rail safety. Restoring the exclusive Railway Budget is also an imperative need.  
**N. Sadasivan Pillai,**  
Guntakal, Andhra Pradesh

**The Congress’s next move**  
Congress leader Priyanka

Gandhi Vadra did emerge as a star campaigner in the general election, but it is too early to perceive what extent her impact as a lawmaker will be, if it materialises. Wayanad, in all likelihood, will give Ms. Gandhi a thumbs up, but her litmus test will be the State Assembly elections.

How far she will succeed in countering challenges posed by the formidable saffron party, swinging votes in her party’s favour, remains to be seen.  
**V. Johan Dhanakumar,**  
Chennai

The Congress has rolled its last dice as the Congress’s

‘Brahmastra’ will be on test in the political battlefield. Parliament and its business are a different game altogether. It remains to be seen how the Gandhi siblings steer and rebuild the party, by encouraging new talent.  
**S. Venkataraman,**  
Bengaluru

### Testing time

When aspirants have to undergo much stress during their appearance for NEET, those who facilitated paper leaks and committed other offences need to face severe punishment. Hard-working students deserve better.  
**A.P. Thiruvadi,**  
Chennai



### *Welfare, voters, and mobilisation*



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Indian professionals facing learning barriers: LinkedIn**

**91** In per cent. A new research by LinkedIn suggests work and family pressure pose as learning barriers for Indian professionals. Many are adopting 'Loud Learning' to overcome these barriers. PTI

**The number of States to fill legislative council vacancies**

**4** Bypolls will be held on July 12 in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh, to fill five vacancies. Elections to three of the five seats were necessitated due to the resignation of members. PTI

**Passengers who arrived at Sealdah by Kanchanjunga Express**

**850** Scheduled to reach Sealdah at 7:20 PM on Monday, the unaffected coaches began their journey from the accident site. The train had collided with a goods train, resulting in 10 deaths. PTI

**The light combat helicopters to be procured by Ministry**

**156** The Defence Ministry has started the process to procure light combat helicopters from Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL). A request for initial tender has been issued by the Ministry. PTI

**The number of safety category posts that are vacant in Railways**

**1.52** in lakh. Out of the around 10 lakh sanctioned posts under the safety category in the Indian Railways, more than 1.5 lakh were vacant. PTI

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# Does H5N1 pose a threat for humans?

Can the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 strain spread from cattle to humans? What is the strategy to identify and contain the spread of the virus? What is the concept of 'One Health' and how is Kerala using it to limit the spread of avian influenza?

## EXPLAINER

C. Maya

### The story so far:

The highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 strain has been affecting cattle across several States in the U.S., and for the first time, three cases of human infection in dairy farm workers were also reported, raising fears of the risks of a wider transmission of this virus from cattle to humans. The districts of Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta in Kerala, where water bodies, migratory birds, fowls and integrated farms form part of the ecosystem, have reported H5N1 outbreaks in 19 places since April. However, the death of crows in large numbers in Alappuzha, and subsequent confirmation of the H5N1 virus in their carcasses have given rise to concerns that the virus could spread far and wide.

### How dangerous is it?

Ever since it emerged in 1996, H5N1 has resulted in the mass killing of billions of wild birds as well as fowls. The virus's jump to some 26 mammalian species, especially cattle and the now emerging proof that it can infect humans, has heightened the threat perception that H5N1 could lead to the next global pandemic. Of particular concern are the facts that herd-to-herd transmission of H5N1 is now taking place in the U.S., involving some 12 States and that the virus has been detected in raw milk and in milking machines. According to scientists, the virus lacks changes that would make it better adapted to transmit between people and therefore, the risk to human health remains low. However, the potential for influenza viruses to rapidly evolve and the wide geographic spread of H5N1 signals that more human infections should be expected.

### What is the level of risk to humans?

The virus seems to spread from



All risk evaded: Ducks being killed by the Animal Husbandry Department, in Alappuzha, on April 19. PTI

birds/animals to humans who may be closely interacting with these, without adequate personal protection.

According to the WHO, between 2003 and April 1, 2024, close to 900 human infections of H5N1 have been reported from 23 countries, of which, more than half were fatal. Even though the risk of human infections from H5N1 is still perceived to be low, this can change rapidly as the virus spreads to more animals, especially cows or domestic mice, which have closer contact with humans. In districts like Alappuzha where water fowls, chicken, dairy cows and humans share the same environment, the opportunities for human infections should be perceived as high.

### What are the symptoms of H5N1?

The common symptoms of H5N1 are similar to those of influenza-A illnesses,

including respiratory difficulties, fever, cough, sore throat and pneumonia, all of which can potentially worsen, especially in those who are immunocompromised or have underlying conditions. In the U.S., conjunctivitis or pink eye was the only symptom that was reported in one of the farm workers who was infected.

In April itself, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had sent out a health advisory that clinicians should consider the possibility of H5N1 infection in persons who report with respiratory illness or conjunctivitis, if they have had exposure to livestock or dead birds. Early detection and containment of the infection is important to prevent the extensive spread of the virus.

As of now, in Kerala, as only the poultry has been found affected in all outbreaks, the strategy adopted for containment is the mass culling of birds

within a certain radius of the reported infection. However, the incident of the mass death of crows has now changed the equation, as it is possible that the infection may have been taken by the crows beyond the current surveillance zone. Continuous surveillance by testing environmental samples – water, faecal matter of birds – as well as Influenza-like illness human samples would be necessary in designated surveillance zones. People who have livestock and birds at home are being advised to wear masks, and the antiviral Tamiflu is being prescribed as prophylaxis to people wherever H5N1 positive cases are found.

### What are the necessary precautions?

People should avoid unprotected exposure to infected birds or animals or their contaminated environments. If at all one has been exposed to a possible H5N1-contaminated environment, they should monitor themselves for new respiratory illness symptoms, including conjunctivitis for 10 days and seek proper medical advice. It would be better to ensure that people use only pasteurised milk and poultry meat and eggs should be well-cooked to prevent any possible food-borne transmission of H5N1.

In a recent editorial, *The Lancet*, spoke about the need for a robust and coordinated response to H5N1. It pointed out that the concept of 'One Health', although often acknowledged, is rarely prioritised and operationalised.

Kerala, however, has taken 'One Health' beyond the conceptual framework and the project is currently being implemented as part of the World Bank-aided 'Rebuild Kerala' project in four districts – Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Idukki. It has established a community-based disease surveillance network, with 2.5 lakh volunteers trained in the 'One Health' concept in these districts, who will report any unusual events or death of animals/birds in a locality so that early warning and early preventive or control measures can be taken.

## THE GIST

The districts of Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta in Kerala, where water bodies, migratory birds, fowls and integrated farms form part of the ecosystem, have reported H5N1 outbreaks in 19 places since April.

The virus seems to spread from birds/animals to humans who may be closely interacting with these, without adequate personal protection.

In a recent editorial, *The Lancet*, spoke about the need for a robust and coordinated response to H5N1. It pointed out that the concept of 'One Health', although often acknowledged, is rarely prioritised and operationalised.

# How can Himachal Pradesh fight against forest fires?

What does the State need to do in order to democratise forest management and curtail raging forest fires?

Tikender Singh Panwar

### The story so far:

Himachal Pradesh (H.P.) is witnessing widespread forest fires across the region. According to the Himachal Pradesh Forest department, there have been a total of 1,684 forest fires since April 15. These fires have damaged a total of 17,471 hectares of forest land, resulting in significant loss to wildlife. From 2001 to 2023, H.P. has lost 957 hectares of tree cover from fires and 4.37 thousand hectares from all other drivers of loss.

### How do forest fires start in the State?

Fires in the Himalayas occur during the pre-monsoon summer period of moisture stress, due to the resultant depletion of snowmelt water. The moisture conditions of the pre-monsoon season, characterised by rainstorms, play a critical role in determining the nature of forest fires. The less moisture there is, the greater the impact of the fires. Human activities such

as unattended campfires, discarded cigarettes etc., are also some of the common causes for forest fires.

These fires are also a major source of pollutants, including black carbon, which significantly contribute to glacier melt in the Himalayas and negatively influences the regional climate. The primary causes of these forest fires are faulty forestry practices, and treating forests from a utilitarian perspective, excluding people's participation.

### Have the Himalayan forests undergone a transformation?

The Himalayan forests have been systematically transformed over the last two centuries. A crucial watershed moment in Indian forestry began with the construction of railways in the 1850s. Lord Dalhousie's understanding about railway construction was that the railways were to be constructed not just to market British goods but also to serve as an outlet for British capital seeking profitable avenues. Unfortunately, the profitability

of Himalayan forests continue to be a driving force. From 1853 to 1910, the construction of around 80,000 kms of railway track led to an assault on forests and the extinction of the customary rights of the people. Between 1869 and 1885, 6.5 million sleepers were made of Deodar, and the area for Chir pines was expanded for timber and resin. Total trees from which resin was tapped between 1910 and 1920 increased from 2,60,000 to 21,35,000. Resin was used for commercial and industrial applications, and its extraction continues to be a major source of production from pine forests. Verrier Elwin, an Oxford scholar and renegade priest, wrote in the early 20th century that State-managed forestry led to the gradual replacement of the Banj oak, a source of fuel, fodder, and leaf manure, with the Chir pine, which was more valued commercially as a source of timber and resin. Ecologically, Banj forests absorb a high content of rainwater, leading to better moisture retention and water springs in the mountains.

Currently, more than 17.8% of the total 37,033 square kilometers of forest area is covered with Chir pine trees in H.P. Chir forests are very vulnerable to forest fires.

### What needs to be done?

Democratisation of forests is essential to ensure that people and communities who have lived in and around forests are made part of the forest management process. The rights of the local community have been periodically curtailed, and as a result, when forest fires start, first responders are nowhere to be found.

The traditional forest rights of Himalayan dwellers included the right to extract wood for fuel, timber, fodder, and other activities. H.P. is under Schedule V of the Indian Constitution, which requires community assent for development activities in the region. However, for large projects like hydro power generation, road widening, and four-lane highways, forests are being diverted with ease.

What the Himalayan States now need is to build mixed forestry and remove pine trees; ensure that both scientific and community knowledge converge and forest management is conducted in a participatory manner; implement check dams and other methods to revive water springs; create environmental services at the village level; and articulate their case with the ongoing 16th Finance Commission, seeking help apart from disaster mitigation funds.

Author is former Deputy Mayor, Shimla, and Member, Kerala Urban Commission.

## THE GIST

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The traditional forest rights of Himalayan dwellers included the right to extract wood for fuel, timber, fodder, and other activities.



"It is an "invented word that combines parts of two words and their meanings." The word 'brunch' for example is a portmanteau word, it combines parts of two words, namely 'breakfast' and 'lunch'. The br of 'breakfast' is combined with the unch of 'lunch'; and we have a new word 'brunch', which means "a meal that is eaten in the middle of the morning." The word 'smog' is another example of a portmanteau word. The words 'smoke' and 'fog' are combined to give this word. A 'smog' is a mixture of smoke and fog and is usually found in highly industrialised areas. 'Motel' (motor and hotel), 'tigon' (tiger and lion), 'gerrymander' (Gerry and Salamander) are other examples of portmanteau words. Such words are often called 'blend' words because they combine, blend parts of two words to produce a new word. A man who excelled in the art of inventing such words was the mathematician Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. He coined words like 'chortle' (combination of chuckle and snort), 'mimsy' (miserable and flimsy) and 'stithy' (slimy and lithe)."

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OPINION

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

# Congress eyes UP gateway to power

Rahul Gandhi's decision to retain Rae Bareilly seat is key to his party's heartland revival

That Rahul Gandhi would have to give up either Wayanad or Rae Bareilly has been clear since June 4 when he won both Lok Sabha seats — the former in Kerala that saved him the blushes after he lost in Amethi in 2019 and the latter a family pocket borough in Uttar Pradesh (UP) once held by his grandfather, grandmother and mother. This week, Gandhi decided to hold on to the UP stronghold and give up the Kerala seat for his sister, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, to make her Lok Sabha debut. Her political trajectory will be important to track but the real import of the decision is not in the verdant hills of the Western Ghats but the dusty plains of central UP that have cradled generations of prime ministers.

The biggest story of the 2024 elections was the surprising verdict by UP, considered the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s strongest fortress. It housed the constituencies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and defence minister Rajnath Singh, and had popular chief minister Yogi Adityanath, who created history two years ago by winning a second consecutive term while helming the campaign. Yet, when results streamed in on June 4, across India's most populous state, and especially in its eastern belt, the BJP suffered dramatic reverses. The Samajwadi Party emerged as the single-largest party, winning 37 seats compared to the BJP's 33. Its principal ally, the Congress won six seats, including its strongholds of Amethi and Rae Bareilly. Crucially, the Opposition bloc won back votes from lower caste communities that had drifted to the BJP over the last decade. Consolidating these gains is crucial if the Congress has to revive in the state that still holds the keys to power in Delhi, and where assembly polls are due in two years. That cannot happen if its biggest leader, Rahul Gandhi, keeps away at the precise moment the BJP's aura of invincibility in UP has been somewhat dispelled.

The other facet of the decision is connected to the Congress's weakness in head-to-head contests with the BJP. The party improved its strike rate from 9% in 2019 to 28% in 2024 but still has a long way to traverse. Against this backdrop, Gandhi's decision to retain his heartland stronghold is a symbolic nod to the importance of the Hindi belt and the Congress's resolve to fight back in a region dominated by the BJP. Whether the bet will pay off is yet to be seen. But for the first time in 15 years, the Congress has registered its presence on the political chessboard of UP.

# Tragedy on rail tracks flags uphill battle

The ten lives lost in the crash in Rangapani, West Bengal, early on Monday are a tragic reminder of how railway safety continues to challenge the Indian Railways (IR). Just over a year after the worst rail accident in three decades — the Coromandel Express crash in Odisha on June 2, 2023, that claimed 296 lives — a freight train rammed the Kanchanjunga Express. Early reports suggest that a combination of signal failure and human error caused the accident. However, IR documents show that the automatic signalling system between stations before New Jalpaiguri, some 30km from the crash site, had failed. While the rules for passage in such situations limit train speeds to 10km per hour in the event of rain — which was the case on Monday — the freight train driver was said to have been in breach of this.

The final Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) probe report should make things clear. But the fact that signalling error continues to be a pain point for the Railways underscores the gaps that remain in modernisation of the rail system. To be sure, there has been significant progress made over the last two-and-a-half decades. As per government estimates, accidents per million train kilometres have declined from 0.1 in 2013-14 to 0.03 in 2021-22. The Kavach automatic train protection system, which was rolled out in 2020, can bring this down further. The Railways, however, is yet to operationalise this on the Delhi-Guwahati route — only 1,500km of the 68,000km-long railway network has been secured so far with Kavach. As India moves on the track to modernise the railways, with a focus on faster trains and enhanced passenger experience, safety will remain the true gauge of the effort. The Railways needs to revamp wearing tracks, rickety bridges and signalling systems for this crucial mass transport system to achieve a zero-accident record.

# Treating heatwaves as health care emergency

Measures for protection have to be at the personal, household, local and national levels

Even as 2024 enters the record books as the hottest year so far in human history, it wouldn't be a surprise if it lost the title to 2025. Heat records will be reset repeatedly in the years to come, as the climate crisis worsens, thanks to human follies, and heatwaves become a leitmotif of this. It is estimated that one billion Indians experienced temperatures above 38 degrees Celsius in April 2022. The number will be higher for May-June 2024. The impact of heat is exacerbated by high humidity (leading to a condition called moist heat), and the adverse effects on human health can manifest even at lower temperatures. There will be many harmful impacts on health, as heat torments the body and mind. We need to reduce those ill effects, both through determined mitigation efforts on the climate crisis front, and effective adaptation to the warming.

The health effects of heatwaves range from heat exhaustion and heat stroke to much worse outcomes such as circulatory failure and death. Loss of water from the body compounds the heat stress on blood vessels, with an increased propensity for clotting, leading to brain strokes and heart attacks. Decreased blood flow to the kidneys can result in renal dysfunction and failure. Chronic lung disease

can worsen. Mental health disorders can manifest or worsen from existing levels. Even eyesight can worsen through hastening of cataracts.

Infants and young children predictably are more vulnerable than adults since their bodies have more water content and physiologic systems have not matured enough to enable rapid responses for effective heat adaptation. The elderly, too, are quite vulnerable. So are persons with pre-existing health conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney dysfunction, or cancer. Severe heat also results in adverse pregnancy outcomes, from stillbirths to low birth weight. Persons living in informal settlements are more exposed to severe heat than those in regular housing. Dharavi, the mammoth Mumbai slum, was observed to be 5-6 degrees Centigrade hotter than its somewhat green neighbour, Matunga.

Global attention has turned to coping better with the effects of the climate crisis — or adaptation — in recent years. While the Conference of Parties (CoP) at Paris in 2015 articulated the need for adaptation, the 2023 CoP at Dubai underscored the need for strengthening national capacities for this. It is also well recognised now that low- and middle-income countries, which contributed the least to the climate crisis by way of both per capita and cumulative emissions, are the worst victims of the climate crisis and, therefore, most in need of adaptive protection.

Measures for protection against

heatwaves have to be at the personal, household, local and national levels. Personal protection consists of avoiding or limiting exposure to the sun, especially in the 11am to 4 pm period of intense heat, and moving in shaded paths while wearing loose-fitting, light-coloured cotton clothes. Protecting the head with a cap and eyes with sunglasses would be prudent. Children and pets should not be left exposed to the heat, including in parked vehicles. It is important to keep well hydrated with water as the main source of fluid intake. Air conditioning or fans help to keep the house cool, while moist curtains may serve as a substitute. Homes should be well ventilated. Green areas, in and around the house, have a cooling effect. Alcohol and caffeinated beverages cause dehydration and are best avoided.

That said, protection against extreme heat should not be viewed merely as the responsibility of individuals and households. It is a collective civic responsibility. As urban areas become overcrowded in an unplanned manner, increased vehicular density and peri-urban industries add to the emission load, leading to higher warming. Green areas are exhausted to accommodate the urban sprawl.

All urban areas will need to develop heat adaptation plans, with green areas in residential areas of all types, shaded walkways for pedestrians and cyclists, water stations at accessible points, and transport-call and medical care for victims of



K Srinath Reddy



The health effects of heatwaves range from heat exhaustion and heat stroke to much worse outcomes such as circulatory failure and death

AFP

heat-related emergencies. Buildings (especially roofs) and roads can be designed, or even retrofitted, to reduce exposure to heat. According to the Smart Cities Coalition, increasing the reflectivity of roofs and pavements can send 80% of the incoming heat back into space and reduce radiant heat. Cool roofs reduce the urban heat island effect. Porous pavements too reduce radiant heat. Porous parking lanes can drain stormwater and prevent run-offs while cooling cities. The potential of dense rooftop solar for cooling, apart from energy generation, also needs to be explored. Local, state and national governments, of course, must urgently provide policy frameworks for such steps. Schools, where children spend a large part of their time, must be ventilated, with green surroundings. Class timings are already being adjusted to reduce exposure to severe heat, and even online schooling during heatwaves is catching on. With all efforts made to minimise learning loss from the latter option, schools must explore making these a rule for heatwave conditions. Those who suffer long exposures to heat outdoors (such as manual labourers, gig workers, and traffic policemen) need to be given rotational shift duties to decrease the frequency and duration of exposure.

Rural residents are at risk, too, when work involves outdoor activities, such as farm work. Shaded heat shelters and water stations should be made available there too. Public education on heat effects and protective measures must have an extensive outreach. Emergency transport services must be available, in both urban and rural areas, for moving persons with severe heat-related health problems to medical facilities equipped to deal with this, especially to handle a heat "epidemic". People should also be trained in providing first-response care for cooling down those suffering a heat stroke.

Adaptation, of course, will be a key piece of action as extreme heat becomes a common occurrence, but we must not lose sight of mitigation. We will exhaust our capacity for adaptation if we keep on heating the planet. There is no substitute for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, stalling deforestation and increasing efforts at reforestation, if the planet is to be kept from getting hotter. That alone can help save lives in the long-run.

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# Capturing curriculum to sculpt young minds

Sudhir Kakar, who passed away in April, and his teacher, Erik Erikson, spent their lives studying identity — its cultural moorings and public implications. Sudhir Kakar's early major work, *The Inner World*, was a study of mother-son relations in Hindu society during infancy. It showed us the depths that hide and hold some of our strongest urges. His later works consolidated the idea that culturally upheld goals and norms arise from the common search for identity. Kakar's mentor, Erikson, had interpreted identity to mean a self-image that offers a consoling continuity in an ever-changing world.

Among the basic features of the social world that surrounds us as individuals is an authority figure — someone capable of keeping things in order by resolving conflicts. Kakar discovered that authority figures shape relations in the family, schools and workplaces. His ideas have implications for education, but they are complex and quite often paradoxical. Both he and Erikson were psychoanalysts with considerable interest in making sense of politics. In two completely different settings, i.e. India and the United States (US), they brought about systemic clarity — among teachers, their trainers and concerned parents — about adolescence. The turmoil we all face during adolescence is about identity and belonging. If the struggle to locate a sense of one's real self is sorted out, post-adolescence life acquires a sense of purpose. All one's energies get focused on it. The struggle to find one's self is tough because external forces do all they can to influence the young mind, often in directions that later prove false and unsatisfying.

All schools are passionate about shaping young minds. Popular ideas — including the ones marketed by vested interests — and ideologies actively use schools to intellectually sculpt young minds. Catch them early, goes the adage, promising perpetuation of a chosen ideal. Education sounds like a nice and normal social activity, but it is remarkably vulnerable to political influence. In every phase of history, but especially in our times, the State uses its authority to control and design the architecture of young minds. Schools serve as venues for this exercise, and teachers as labourers. They use tools like the curriculum and textbooks to achieve what the State wants. Some real learning does take place in the process, but it is more often tainted by the distant goals of the State than by the aims of education.

The latest example of a mighty State using education to ensure ideological indoctrination of the young comes from China. Its residential schools for Tibetan children are run for a familiar purpose. History offers us numerous examples of the temptation to separate children from their families in the hope that cultural continuity can be disrupted. China has had problems with the Tibetans, especially with the Dalai Lama's influence on them, both inside Tibet and elsewhere. No pejorative has been spared to malign him, but his stature as a leader has not suffered. He has used his spiritual leadership to compensate for his people's sense of loss and dejection. The possibility of wearing

the young generation of Tibetans away from the Dalai Lama's benign influence is what China wants to pursue. It wants to integrate young Tibetans into a monolithic national ideal. For this purpose, China is emulating many historical and present-day experiments.

The greatest experiment was colonial education across the southern hemisphere. Its outcomes were paradoxical and diverse: No single frame can help us grasp its long-term effects. Then, there are more focused experiments carried out among the marginalised, native communities of the US, Canada and Australia. The recent findings brought to light in Canada show the suppression of the natives, their language and their rights. The instrument was the model of residential schools, where native children were kept in total isolation from their families. Less dramatic instances can be found in our own country, in the residential schools run for tribal communities. Little deep research has been done on such schools. The types of acculturation they aim at differ, but they reflect a consensus that tribal identity is not consistent with middle-class normalcy. It is not easy for scholars to enter and observe what goes on in certain residential schools for tribal children, including the more efficient — and arguably effective — ones in parts of the Northeast, Odisha and Chhattisgarh.

The case of China's residential schools in Tibet presents a vaster and far more efficient use of education for political ends. We normally think of education as a liberating force. The fact is that it can also be used to capture the mind — at an age when it is highly impressionable. Marginalised communities and minority groups are the usual targets of ideologically inspired education, but institutions and nations representing religious majorities also target children and adolescents. Israel is a prime example of such a pursuit. Religious revivalism finds an echo in numerous educational ventures across the world. Two decades ago, a committee chaired by eminent political scientists Gopal Guru and Zoya Hasan had given ample instances of indoctrination in the textual material used in schools run by radical Hindu and Muslim groups.

In the case of residential schools in Tibet, we don't know what kind of textual material is mandated by the Chinese authorities. Separating children from their parents has obvious implications for language. Indeed, the child's home language is usually the first casualty in any residential set-up that aims to re-socialise. The trouble is that a State like China simply denies any wrongdoing. Perhaps the authorities there don't appreciate the lesson that history teaches about education — that it doesn't always work. Aims imposed on it sometimes clash with the aims that knowledge — and learning, even under adverse conditions — kindle in the cavernous human mind. Sudhir Kakar's books will remind us for a long time that the workings of the mind are not fully tractable.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of NCERT and the author of the forthcoming volume, *Thank You, Gandhi*. The views expressed are personal



Krishna Kumar

{ JENS STOLTENBERG } NATO SECRETARY-GENERAL

Xi Jinping has tried to create the impression that he is taking a back seat in the Ukraine war to keep trade flowing. But the reality is that China is fuelling the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II

# India must engage closely with global legal systems

The last few months have witnessed the momentous involvement of international law in international relations. The most noteworthy development has been South Africa suing Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), alleging that the latter is committing genocide in Gaza. Although ICJ is yet to decide this case, it has held that, *prima facie*, South Africa's claims may fall within the Genocide Convention, and that it is plausible that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza. ICJ has issued several provisional measures in this regard, with the latest one being ordering Israel to immediately stop its military offensive in Rafah while it decides the case. This is not the only case that ICJ is currently hearing on the alleged commission of genocide. Ukraine, which has made international law a centre-piece of its war against Russia, has a case before ICJ regarding the violation of the Genocide Convention.

Parallel to the ICJ proceedings against Israel, another development that caused a considerable stir in the international community is the request of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue arrest warrants against Israeli leaders — prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and defence minister Yoav Gallant — and Hamas leaders. The arrest warrants are sought on the charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity over the October 7 attack on Israel and the war in Gaza.

International law is also being employed to fight the climate crisis. The Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS), consisting of countries such as Antigua & Barbuda and Tuvalu, requested an advisory opinion from the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). Last month, ITLOS delivered a historic verdict addressing the obligations of countries under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to combat marine environment pollution. At the initiative of Vanuatu, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has sought ICJ's advisory opinion on the international law obligations of countries towards the climate crisis. Chile and Colombia have invoked the advisory jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the issue of the climate crisis.

The international community has reacted differently to these significant developments. Several countries have actively taken part in these cases by submitting intervening appli-

cations. For example, as many as 32 countries submitted intervening applications in Ukraine's case against Russia before ICJ. Likewise, several countries have rallied behind South Africa in its case against Israel, boosting its credentials to lead the Third World. Countries have taken different stands on the ICC prosecutor's request for the arrest warrant. While United States President Joe Biden has called it "outrageous", the European Union appears split on this issue. South Africa and several other countries have welcomed it.

One is tempted to ask what India's stand has been on these developments. India has unwaveringly advocated for peace in Gaza and for a peaceful resolution between Ukraine and Russia through dialogue and diplomacy. It has supported calls for ceasefire and respect for international law at multilateral forums. For instance, India backed Egypt's resolution at UNGA for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. Likewise, India recently signed the BRICS statement that decries Israel's "blatant disregard of international law" in Gaza. However, unlike several other countries, India hasn't quite taken a clear stand on any of the ICJ cases involving Israel and Russia. For instance, what is India's stand on the ICJ's three provisional measures decision against Israel? It is imperative to mention that the BRICS statement India backed refers to the ICJ's decision. Or, does India support or oppose the ICC prosecutor's arrest warrant request against Israeli leaders? India's silence could be strategic because of the diplomatic tightrope walking that New Delhi must do on this issue.

India has engaged more directly with the climate crisis: India is one of the 88 countries that submitted a written application in ICJ's advisory opinion case on the matter. Likewise, India submitted a written statement in the ITLOS case arguing that the tribunal lacked jurisdiction to hear COSIS's case. Some lawyers call India's statement a "lost opportunity"; India could have led developing countries' voices on the marine environment issue.

As a nation that seeks to shape international affairs, India should engage closely with specific international law developments based on its national interests, by strengthening the State's capacity for international law.



Prabhash Ranjan

Prabhash Ranjan is a Humboldt Fellow and professor at Jindal Global Law School. The views expressed are personal



OUR VIEW



# Cold War II: Do not let it spark off a nuclear race

A SIPRI report warns of a rising number of nuclear warheads deployed. The world must reverse this. An arsenal only needs a few nukes to achieve minimum credible deterrence

The deadly stockpiles of nuclear weapons built by Cold War adversaries Russia and the US gave the ‘MAD’ doctrine of ‘Mutually Assured Destruction’ a literal ring. With thousands of nukes each, both had enough to destroy the planet many times over. Could today’s geopolitical divide between a China-led bloc and the US-led West imperil the world with another arms race being pushed beyond the limits of reason by its force of rivalry? According to the latest report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a think-tank, all nine nuclear-armed countries—the US, Russia, UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel—modernized their arsenals in 2023, while some deployed new weapon systems. By SIPRI’s 2024 estimates, of the world’s 12,121 warheads in existence this January, about 9,585 are held in military arsenals, with some 3,904 of these mounted on delivery vehicles. Worryingly, this tally of ‘deployed’ nukes is 60 more than it was last January. Russia is thought to have upped its deployment by 36 to 1,710, just 60 short of the US’s latest figure. But the year’s expansion story has been China’s. Its count of warheads jumped to 500 from 410 at the start of 2023. Moreover, as many as 24 of its nukes are now thought to be deployed, although no other Asian country has any deployment in SIPRI’s analysis.

Why is China expanding its nuclear arsenal so fast? The size of its stockpile was already more than double that of India’s, its big regional rival. Analysts view Beijing’s moves in the context of its push for long-range hypersonic missiles and the ability to project force across the Western hemisphere as well. Alarm over China’s alliance with Moscow has been rising. Over the week-

end, Nato’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that Nato allies could for the first time face a nuclear threat on two fronts, Russia and China, which may require increasing its deployable warheads to act as a deterrent. In this formulation, the “no limits” partnership of Moscow and Beijing justifies weighing their joint capacity for nuclear annihilation against their own. Stoltenberg’s statement drew criticism from the Kremlin, whose spokesman Dmitry Peskov called it “escalation of tension.” Given that arms-control talks of the West with Moscow remain in limbo, with Cold War-calming pacts having lapsed in recent years, none of this is reassuring.

What’s particularly disturbing is the stockpile versus stockpile dynamic in evidence, as if a nuclear shield demands a balance of explosive power between adversaries ranged against each other. By SIPRI’s data, Pakistan has 170 warheads to India’s 172. This also seems to fit into the same framework. Yet, given how easily the game of ‘strategic parity’ can slip into an expensive race for more, all nuclear-armed states need to exercise self-restraint. All that’s really required is minimum credible deterrence (MCD), which can be achieved even with a small arsenal backed by sharp delivery devices. As Cold War II worsens, this fact needs to be borne in mind globally. Nuclear proliferation was absurd back in the days of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and it still is. The global imperative right now is to make the world a less dangerous place. To that end, a no-first-use treaty signed by all nuclear states would be worth the pursuit. If this does not work out—say, if countries with weaker conventional defences insist they see value in rattling nuclear sabres—then at least we should all agree to cap our arsenals at MCD levels. A nuclear race makes no sense.

MY VIEW | ON THE OTHER HAND

# Tax freebie or tax reform? That could depend on who one asks

India needs a fair taxation system. Special interests shouldn’t get to decide what’s a handout or not



VIVEK KAUL is the author of ‘Bad Money’.

With the central government’s budget due to be presented in July, the phrase ‘economic reforms’ is in the air, especially among those in the business of managing other people’s money (OPM) and those in the business of managing the so-called system for corporates.

But the phrase ‘economic reforms,’ like many such terms, doesn’t really have a clearly defined meaning. Indeed, it might be safe to say that what might seem like a ‘reform’ to one person might seem like a *revdi* or handout to another. Allow me to explain.

My first job in journalism required me to write on personal finance. I realized very quickly that a decent understanding of India’s complex and convoluted Income Tax Act, 1961, could be a regular source of stories. And within months of this realization, there was another—that India’s income tax system was built for the rich, particularly the non-salaried rich.

Let me share two examples. For many years, mutual funds (MFs) would launch fixed maturity plans (FMPs) just before a financial year (FY) came to an end. FMPs were debt MFs which came closest to operating like fixed deposits (FDs). They had a fixed maturity period. When that period ended, the initial investment along with the returns earned would be handed back to the investor, like with an FD.

Now, these FMPs would be launched towards the end of one FY and would mature in a little over a year’s time. Let’s say the last date for investing in an FMP was 29 March 2007. This scheme would then mature on 2 April 2008. On the face of it, the maturity period was just a little over a year; nonetheless, it needs to be pointed out that such an FMP launched in FY 2006-07 remained in existence through 2007-08 and matured just at the start of 2008-09.

And this is where a legal tax dodge came in. The moment an investment in a debt MF was held for more than a year, indexation, or accounting for inflation while calculating capital gains, came into the picture. Here, the investment started in one FY, was held during the next FY and matured in the third, so double indexation came into play.

Let’s say an investor invested ₹1 lakh and earned a return of 10%, resulting in a maturity amount of ₹1.1 lakh. If inflation averaged 5% per year, then the cost price for the investor could be claimed at more than ₹1.1 lakh. Hence, for tax purposes, the investor would actually make a capital loss, implying that no tax had to be paid on real capital gains. The irony of this device was that even though the maturity period was just over one year, for tax purposes, inflation for two years could be taken into account. The MFs raised thousands of crores every year through this dodge.

Let’s take one more example. For many years, interest of up to ₹1.5 lakh a year paid on a home loan on a self-occupied home could be deducted while calculating taxable income. But the moment one took on a second, third or nth home loan, the entire interest paid on that home loan could be deducted while calculating taxable income, as long as a notional rent was taken into account. This became a great tax dodge for the rich because the annual rental yield in the country was around 2%, whereas interest rates were 9-10%.

Thankfully, both these tax dodges are no longer possible, but while they were

on, one did not hear of a single OPM *wallah* talk about them, or of corporate lobbies complaining about how one of these dodges encouraged real estate speculation, making things doubly difficult for those who wanted to buy homes to live in.

Indeed, when the favourable tax treatment of debt MFs was done away with, there was a hue and cry from those who benefitted from it. A similar outcry arose after long-term capital gains on equity and equity MFs became taxable.

In all these years of writing on personal finance and economics, I have neither seen OPM *wallahs* nor corporate representatives talk about the loss of tax collections for the government due to the availability of such dodges. But they all lined up to welcome India’s cut in the corporate income tax rate in September 2019, as if that did not lead to lower tax revenues.

When the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Food Security Act, especially the latter, became the order of the day, many comments were made, including by yours truly, on the dangers of fiscal profligacy. Clearly, whether it’s a *revdi* or a reform depends on who you ask. If a so-called reform helps push corporate profits or encourages more investors to invest money with OPM *wallahs*, that’s taken by these interest groups as reform, irrespective of whether it leads to lower taxes. But if the government decides to spend some more money on helping the poor, that’s called fiscal profligacy, as if the sole aim of the government should be to drive up stock market indices.

To conclude, the coming budget is a good time for the finance ministry to do away with some pointless distinctions that still exist in the taxation of different kinds of income. There is no reason why income from the buying and selling of stocks and real estate should be taxed in a different way than salaried income or income from FDs or what is earned by the self-employed.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

The nuclear arms race is like two people sitting in a pool of gasoline spending all their time making matches.

JOHN DENVER

THEIR VIEW

# EU elections: Far-right parties have gained influence

ATANU BISWAS



is professor of statistics at Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

Many of us didn’t notice that the world’s biggest and second-biggest democratic exercises took place back to back, as our Lok Sabha election was followed by the just-concluded European Union (EU) elections during 6-9 June, with an electorate of nearly 400 million people.

Indeed, 2024 is an electorally significant year, marked by the scheduled participation of about half of the world’s eligible voters across 60 different countries.

Voters in the EU’s 27 member states cast their ballots to choose 720 representatives to the European Parliament in Brussels. The exercise served as a political litmus test for various parties in participating nations. The results were seen as a political earthquake, the epicentre of which appears to be in France; however, tremors were felt across the EU and beyond.

A spectre of far-right neo-fascist ideology has haunted Europe for some time now. Nonetheless, ‘the centre is holding’ in the EU overall, although centrist parties suf-

fered a serious blow. Timothy Garton Ash stated in *The Guardian* that “a Europe that just celebrated on the beaches of Normandy the 80-year-old D-day beginning of its liberation from war, nationalism and fascism now again faces fascism, nationalism and war.”

The impact of the extreme right’s victories was felt more strongly in Paris and Berlin than in Brussels. The most dramatic outcome was in France, where Marine Le Pen’s National Rally handed Emmanuel Macron’s Renaissance party huge defeats, and pushed the French president to take a big gamble by holding snap elections to France’s legislative body. Macron’s bet is that centrist parties will unite to take on Le Pen’s party, but this could pave the way for extreme-right governance in France. Who knows? In neighbouring Germany, the extreme-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) came in second with slightly less than 16% of the vote, more than any of the three parties in the country’s governing coalition, including Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s Social Democrats, though the centre-right CDU-CSU was the clear winner.

Meanwhile, Giorgia Meloni, Italy’s prime minister, achieved kingmaker status in Europe. Her rightist party, Fratelli d’Italia, came out on top, scoring 28%. As long predicted, FPÖ finished first in Austria with

26%. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders’s Party for Freedom, often accused of open Islamophobia, performed only slightly less well than the centre-left.

What implications does the rise of the far right in the EU have? Eurosceptic sentiment has been brewing throughout the continent ever since the UK broke away from the EU. Still, none of these anti-EU groups may be so naive as to try Frexit, Dexit, or Nexit. However, by taking an even tougher stance on immigration, resolutely opposing the green policies that are desperately required to address climate change, reducing support for Ukraine, and clamping back national control from Brussels, they will probably continue to push the EU to the right from within.

The rise of rightist parties in the European Parliament may have repercussions for Europe and other regions. What about nations like China and India? The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) secured 69 seats in the newly elected Parlia-

ment, and far-right parties like Identity and Democracy (ID) secured 49 seats. While the ID takes a softer approach, the ECR maintains a staunch anti-Chinese position. As a result of such fragmentation, member states will find it more difficult to come to a consensus, which could make it harder for Chinese companies and other global firms operating in China to work out how to operate in the European market.

While Italy recently withdrew from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and at least eight member states, including France, have restricted the deployment of Chinese technology in their 5G networks, many European chief executives anticipate a worsening of relations between Europe and China over the next three years, with the EU’s de-risking strategy and Beijing’s close ties with Moscow being identified as the main points of friction.

Can India strengthen its commercial ties with the EU? With 10.8% of India’s overall trade being with the EU in 2021, the EU is the

country’s third-largest trading partner. From India’s viewpoint, both the worsening of EU-China relations and progress on the India-Middle East-European Economic Corridor would be significant.

Another plausible event is a potential change in leadership in the UK after its general election due on 4 July, just three days before the second round of France’s snap elections. Following 14 years of Conservative Party control in the UK under five prime ministers, Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour Party has been outperforming the Rishi Sunak-led Conservatives by about 20 percentage points in most poll predictions. Starmer, however, has reiterated that there is no case for rejoining the EU. All things considered, Labour’s leader Starmer might emerge as Britain’s prime minister at a pivotal moment, coinciding with the rise of right-wing—or more precisely, ultra-right—ideas throughout mainland Europe. Will he be able to push for a balance, especially now that the UK has left the EU?

Shifts in European politics are no less significant for a far-off country like ours. And if the Republican candidate Donald Trump makes a comeback in the US presidential election this November, what then? Will we plan ‘Namaste Trump, Season 2’?

Eurosceptics are on the march but issues of identity will be impacted more than the EU’s common market







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

— Ramnath Goenka

## HEAT-RELATED INSURANCE, MORE TREE COVER, WATER HARVESTING PLANS A MUST

WHEN T S Eliot wrote “April is the cruellest month”, he could still see lilacs breeding in balmy England. But for Indians living under a pitiless sky, there has hardly been a reprieve from an unrelenting heat-wave between April and now. Matters got worse this past week in northern and northwestern India as minimum temperatures hovered 5-6°C above normal. This does not allow surfaces to cool before the next day’s sun, exacerbating the heat index and the possibility of related ailments.

The National Centre for Disease Control claims that, between March and May, more than 7 lakh people were admitted to emergency wards across the country on heat-related ailments; 24,849 of the cases were counted as heatstrokes, resulting in 56 deaths. Herein lies a problem. Heatstroke numbers are put out by reluctant state governments only when asked, are not regularly collated, and are often disputed. Climate emergencies are declared when crops are lost and compensation has to be fixed, not when there is no clear economic cost computed on human losses. Even temperature counts are uncertain. When the nation gasped at Delhi’s Mungeshpur recording an unprecedented 52.9°C on May 29, the weather office blamed it on a faulty sensor.

Related numbers reveal the misery to an extent. The national capital’s peak power demand surpassed 8 GW for the first time ever on May 22 and has crossed the threshold eight times since, with a new record of 8.6 GW clocked on Tuesday. Rising water demand in the region has led to inter-state bickering and litigation.

Some fruits of wisdom are low-hanging. Being honest about heatstroke numbers and our cities’ tree covers would be a start. Sapling planting drives can be made an annual exercise in cities. The Delhi Metro this year promised to extend rainwater harvesting across its network; if such a scheme is made mandatory for all government properties, it will make a massive difference. In a novel effort worth emulating, about 50,000 women in three states were paid a part of their daily wages for May when they missed work because of the heat. In March, the Supreme Court followed evolving global jurisprudence when it ruled in the *M K Ranjitsinh* case that citizens had “the right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change”. The central and state governments should deliver on the right before being forced.

## A BIG STRIDE TOWARDS LA28 AMERICAN DREAM

THE first group stage of the Men’s T20 World Cup is over. While there are still two more weeks to go, the first half of the tournament painted a picture about cricket’s baby steps towards fulfilling an American dream. But it has not been easy. For the better part of the last fortnight, the conversations have been around the pitches in New York, the \$30-m modular venue, early morning starts with the purpose of catering to the Indian television audience and the weather in Florida. In their pursuit to make the game global, especially with the inclusion of cricket at the 2028 LA Olympics, the ICC perhaps had their hearts in the right place. However, the execution can improve a lot. There were teething issues like teams commuting long distances for matches, playing on drop-in pitches that seemed undercooked. Though vagaries of nature cannot be controlled, Florida matches were affected by rain, which was predictable to an extent.

Then come the questions of having marquee matches in the morning (US time) and the high pricing of tickets. Which makes one wonder how much of the local audience did the tournament attract. Thankfully, the co-hosts stepped up. While the US kicked off the tournament in style with a win over Canada, it was only when they beat Pakistan that all eyeballs turned. In their very first T20 World Cup, the US has advanced to the Super 8s, making a mark at the global stage. The rise of Scotland, who almost eliminated defending champions England, is as important as Afghanistan establishing themselves as semifinal contenders, outperforming New Zealand. The gap between full-members and associate nations in this particular format is diminishing at a good pace.

This World Cup is an excellent example for what teams can do with ample opportunities and conditions that make contests a level-playing field. The real challenge will be when the conditions do not offer similar help to bowlers. For teams with little resources, they need regular opportunities to play against stronger teams and more financial support, too. The first leg of the T20 WC, despite its share of issues, has set the path along which the sport should progress towards the 2028 Olympics. The onus now is on the ICC to ensure that it stays on course.

### QUICK TAKE

#### CLARIFICATION ON LIVING IN

THE Madras High Court has ruled that in a live-in relationship between a married man and an unmarried woman, a partner cannot seek inheritance from the other. In March, the Allahabad High Court held that a married person in a live-in relationship would contravene Hindu law. While the rulings justly upheld the rights that flow from marriage, they seemed to turn the clock back on the spirit of recent jurisprudence. The Supreme Court’s landmark rulings in 2010 and 2015 held that living together is legal, and that a live-in partner can inherit the other’s property. We need further clarification on the rulings.

JUNE 6 marked the 350th anniversary of the coronation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, a visionary king known for his valour, exceptional administrative abilities and insightful strategies. Sadly, during the British era, colonial rulers deliberately ignored the greatness of Shivaji—a source of great inspiration for numerous freedom fighters and, in a larger context, one who can be counted as one of the nation’s earliest freedom fighters. Post independence, too, the apathy towards the Chhatrapati’s legacy continued, partly for the sake of politics.

Besides the indisputable fact that Shivaji’s contribution is too great to be ignored, we must remember him for multiple reasons. He was an ideal leader known for his farsighted vision, emphasis on inclusiveness, sharpness of mind, as well as strategic thinking and diplomatic approach.

The historical impact of the struggle he faced was neither confined to Maharashtra alone, nor to just one century. Its influence persisted for centuries and will continue for many more ages to come. Generally, Chhatrapati Shivaji is remembered for his bravery and valour. But beyond these attributes, one must also take into account numerous transformations he shaped during his lifetime in 17th century society. Many historians describe him as a revolutionary leader who initiated five major revolutions that are truly worth understanding. These are the farm revolution, economic revolution, social revolution, military revolution and most important, a cultural revolution.

When Shivaji Maharaj and Rajmata Jijabai arrived in Pune, the region had faced severe devastation under the Adilshahi rule. When Rajmata arrived with the young Shivaji, she symbolically got the land around Pune ploughed with a golden plough. This was more than just a gesture. The duo symbolically extended the message to peasants and cultivators to cultivate their land without any fear or apprehensions. In a land considered cursed and in a society that had forgotten how to aspire, Shivaji’s golden plough removed a feeling of helplessness and revitalised the fertility of the land. With this, he conveyed to his own countrymen: “No need to worry now. I am here for you.” This singularly important act sowed the seeds of hope, confidence and resoluteness.

This was supremely important as under the Adilshahi rule, farmers had to pay 60 percent tax, causing great distress. Add to this the unspeakable tyranny of natural and man-made calamities, making it hard to dare cultivate one’s own lands. Histori-

Chhatrapati Shivaji is usually remembered for his valour. But his policies changed society across a substantial part of India by unleashing agricultural and cultural revolutions, too

## WHY A VISIONARY 17TH-C STRATEGIST IS RELEVANT TODAY

VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE

Senior BJP leader



SOURAV ROY

cal records indicate that only 30 to 40 percent of the land was under cultivation. To incentivise cultivators, Chhatrapati Shivaji’s administration started free ration, up to two measures (*khandi*) of grains to every cultivating farmer, besides free supply of seeds and farm equipment. He abolished tax for the first five years. Within five years, the situation improved so much that almost a 100 percent of cultivable land was brought under cultivation. Later, in the sixth year, he charged them 33 percent levy to be deposited in kind, in state granary. Thanks to his imaginative thinking and sensitive approach, farming became attractive and farmers, prosperous.

The prosperity of farmers had a cascading effect as it led to the economic well-being of all those previously known

as the ‘12 *balutedars*’, whom we now refer to as traditional artisans and craftsmen. With economic stability of farmers restored, their unending demand for tools, equipment and implements triggered rural manufacturing, which provided work for blacksmiths, carpenters and cobblers, among others. This was a kind of economic revolution as it opened up several livelihood opportunities for many.

This gave way to a kind of social revolution too. When society at large—otherwise fragmented in innumerable caste and community groups—realised they can very well depend upon the rule of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, aspire a better life and an assured law and order, it led to the restoration of popular confidence in administration. Over 18 different castes belonging to

## US TARIFF WAR ON CHINA SUBVERTS WTO RULES

THIS May, the Biden administration unilaterally increased tariffs on 14 Chinese products, including electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, semiconductors, solar cells, select medical products, minerals, steel and aluminium, valued at \$18 billion. These increases, between 50 and 100 percent, were introduced using Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974. The administration thus undermined its commitment to the World Trade Organization (WTO) to refrain from taking unilateral action against member nations. Most increases would take effect this year on August 1, while higher tariffs on semiconductors and lithium-ion batteries would be introduced from 2025 and 2026, respectively.

US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai argued the action was due to China’s “unfair technology transfer-related policies and practices that continue to burden US commerce and harm workers and businesses”. Two issues arise from this action, namely, the *raison d’être* for its action, and the larger implications for the rules-based multilateral system that prohibits WTO members from taking such actions.

The manner in which the Biden administration launched this offensive against the US’s largest trade partner reflects a steep escalation of conflicts of interests between the two superpowers. One of the main factors is China has stolen a march over the US in key areas of technology, especially in green energy and semiconductors, that would be the drivers of the global economy for the next several decades.

Over the past few years, China has been focusing on the use of advanced technologies, especially in the sectors the US administration has targeted by raising tariffs to extend its dominance as an industrial power. The import of this approach was underlined by President Xi Jinping in 2023, when he emphasised the need to integrate scientific and technological innovation that could lead to the “development of strategic emerging and future industries, and accelerate the formation of new-quality productive forces”.

In the recent plenary session of the National People’s Congress, the centre of attention was on “new productive forces” and the “new three” sectors, namely, electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar panels, sectors in which Chinese producers had unparalleled dominance. The Chinese leadership has chosen these sectors to bolster its post-Covid growth.



BISWAJIT DHAR

Former professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Vice President, Council for Social Development

The global domination of Chinese firms in the “new three” sectors has become a worrying sign for the US. Though it currently does not import electric vehicles from China, the emergence of China’s BYD as the world’s largest producer of electric vehicles in 2023, overtaking Tesla, should have rung alarm bells for the Biden administration. Besides, the US has had very high levels of dependence on imported solar panels, largely manufactured in China, but its imports of semiconductors from its ri-



AND

By increasing tariffs for 14 Chinese products including electric vehicles, the US has undermined its WTO commitment of refraining from unilateral actions against member nations. With such a precedent, other countries may feel encouraged to launch trade wars

val have been declining. The growing presence of China in these areas is a potential threat to the huge investments the Biden administration has supported to develop domestic industries in these sectors.

The administration claims its ‘Investing in America’ agenda has attracted “more than \$860 billion in business investments through smart, public incentives in industries of the future like electric vehicles, clean energy and semiconductors”. Backed by support from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, CHIPS and Science Act, and Inflation Reduction Act, the US expects investments in these sectors to create new jobs in manufacturing and clean energy. Notwithstanding its deep resentment against industrial policies in the past and its proac-

tive role to ensure government-backing for developing domestic industries became history the world over, the US has taken significant initiatives towards refurbishing its industrial base with huge state support. With its focus on increasing reliance on domestic production capacities, questions should be raised as to whether the US has taken a step back from globalisation.

Besides the ideological underpinnings of globalisation, which the US backed through what was popularly called the Washington Consensus, this process also had institutional support. The mandate of the WTO is to keep members committed to globalisation through strict adherence of rules, the basis of which is to ensure trade restrictions are not imposed unilaterally.

As mentioned at the outset, the US’s unilateral tariff increases were based on the provisions of Section 301 of its Trade Act, which authorises the USTR to investigate and take action against trade partners whose policies adversely affect American interests. This means the US Congress vested powers in the USTR to undertake trade retaliation based on its own investigation.

Action under Section 301 is a contravention of the WTO rules for dispute settlement. These rules stipulate no WTO member can take unilateral action against another in case the latter violates its commitments taken while joining the organisation. The dispute settlement body (DSB) of the WTO provides the institutional wherewithal to settle disputes and therefore, the US should have removed provisions like Section 301 from its statute book. However, the strongest economic power did not, despite losing a dispute brought against these provisions by the EU in 1999. Following this, the US gave an undertaking not to use Section 301 against any WTO member before the DSB determined if there was a violation. The US has now reneged on its undertaking through its latest action.

With the US setting this undesirable precedent, others may feel encouraged to take unilateral actions against trade partners. Does this set the stage for trade wars?

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

agro-based labour and craftsmanship felt empowered to attain prosperity and prestige. This led to the formation of the Mavalas (soldiers of Shivaji), a socially integrated army of committed soldiers. Without any formal recruitment, this ever-ready army was largely spontaneous and yet organised. Whenever a battle loomed, everyone would leave their work and answer to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj’s call with a sense of duty. This was unparalleled.

Chhatrapati Shivaji had to fight innumerable uneven battles. His army of few hundred brave soldiers always had to confront the might of several thousand soldiers of the Mughals. An insightful field-martial, Shivaji often resorted to the guerrilla tactics of warfare (known in Marathi as *ganimi kava*). An artful dodger, he didn’t mind retreating strategically for a while, only to be attacking the enemy more aggressively later. He fought several battles, but largely on his own terms and in his chosen territory. As demonstrated by him at his battle at Pratapgargh, choosing the place and time of the battle was one of his best war tactics.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj’s idea of Swaraj was not confined only to self-rule. It also encompassed the idea of Swa-Dharma (self consciousness about one’s duties) and Swa-Bhasha (mother tongue). These were the fundamental principles guiding him in his bid to decolonise popular thinking. In those days, many Persian and Arabic words were thrust on indigenous languages, including Marathi. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj must be credited for introducing new words coined during his regime providing substitute indigenous terms. In fact, creating a *Marathi Rajya Vyavahar Kosh*, a dictionary of Marathi terms, was one of his singularly important contributions. This was the cultural revolution shaped by him.

In the most unpredictable, unstable political milieu of those days, with every kind of risk at every threshold, he established values like justice, self respect, commitment, sacrifice, fraternity, equality and respect for women, and the rule of law through his unparalleled vision. Before the era of Chhatrapati Shivaji, invaders used to easily overpower us. As a society, we were accustomed to being trounced time and again. Silently swallowing the poison of disrespect, desecration and defeat had become our national habit. If there was anyone in the 17th century who stood up firmly and dared to challenge this defeatist mentality, it was none other than Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

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### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Soundly intrusive

Ref: *The intrusive Indian’s passion to connect* (Jun 18). In today’s dominant social media world, the minds of humans are heading towards pure personal self-interest. The fondness with which humans had interacted in the past may be erased. It is better to be soundly intrusive and keep the ball of conversations rolling for a responsive, satisfactory life in the end.

Aravind Gundhali, Raichur

#### Improving relationships

The author has rightly described the tight-lipped appearance of individuals today. In these days of falling values and failing relationships, it is the Indian way of intrusive passion that is likely to work wonders in elevating human relations. The broad smile of our PM improved human relations in India and abroad in the past decade.

Ramalingeswara Rao, email

#### Deter assault

Ref: *Protect journalists to boost democracy* (Jun 18). Journalists are crucial to democracy, and the government must enforce stringent laws to protect them from violence and intimidation. In response to incidents like the attack in Bengaluru, the government should establish rapid response teams and hotlines for journalists facing threats. Creating an independent commission to investigate such attacks on the press will deter future assaults.

Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur

#### Replicate success

In the wake of Jammu becoming a hotbed of infiltrated terrorists from Pakistan, Union Home Minister Amit Shah asked security agencies to replicate their success in tackling terror in the Kashmir Valley in the Jammu division as well. Pakistan is now resorting to more innovative means in cohorts with China to destabilise India.

K R Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

#### Safety measures

Ref: *Goods train rams express, kills 9* (Jun 18). This train accident is an example of human error. Such accidents have put the safety of the passengers on board at stake and shows the laxity of the railways. The onus lies on the government to take stringent safety measures.

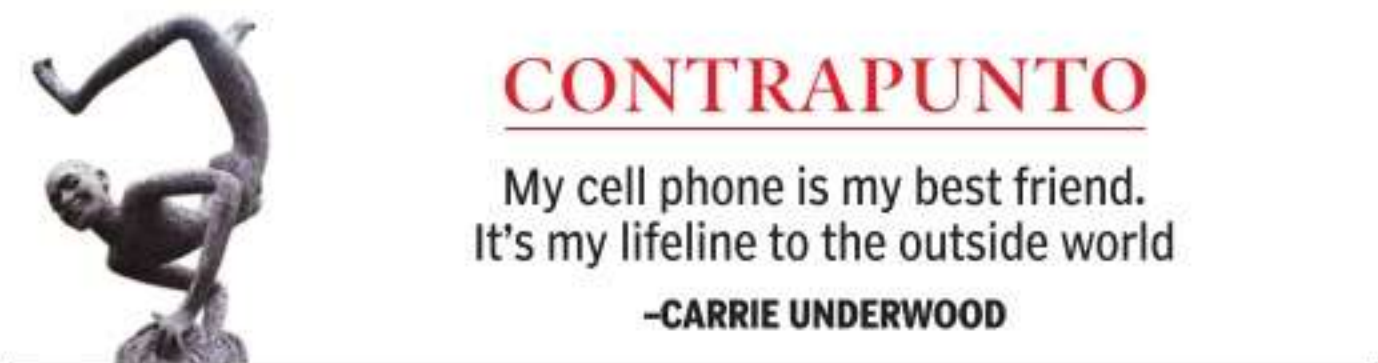
Abhilasha Gupta, email

#### Baseless allegations

Opposition parties keep blaming the Election Commission and EVMs for their loss. They claim the EC is biased and EVMs can be tampered with to ensure the BJP wins. If that was true, how did the Congress win 100 seats, and DMK sweep Tamil Nadu? This shows opposition allegations are baseless.

Jayamani A, Chennai





# NCERT AINTY

Yes, liberals also have political bias. But liberal approach to education is better than a right-wing one

NCERT keeps making news – mostly of the wrong kind. National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts NEET-UG, has blamed changes in NCERT textbooks for inflated marks of some examinees. NTA's logic is that some examinees had based their answers on earlier textbook versions. This doesn't absolve NTA of its mismanagement. But NCERT revisions are a cause for concern, in multiple ways. Revised NCERT Class 12 political science textbooks, which hit stores last week, have engendered yet another pedagogic dispute.

**Politics will be there** | Politics influencing social science textbooks isn't unique to India. Examples include the critical race theory controversy in US, and the debate over Chiang Kai-shek's legacy in Taiwanese history books. But NCERT textbooks are arguably crossing a line. This is NCERT's fourth round of textbook revision since 2014. Many are arguing these revisions are geared solely to pushing the political right-wing's ideological agenda, often by deleting or diluting topics like Gujarat riots and Babri Masjid demolition.

**Bias vs bias** | There's a case to be made that academia in India and other parts of the world has had a left-liberal bias. In the West, for example, East European studies are subsumed in Russian studies in many schools and universities – reflecting an old left-liberal bias for Soviet Union. But the

answer is not to replace this with even worse right-wing bias, as seems to be happening in NCERT textbooks. Education should provide students with multiple narratives and then let them make up their minds. But that can't happen if, for example, the contribution of Mughal dynasties in art, architecture and jurisprudence is diminished. Similarly, selectively presenting Supreme Court judgments to suit the governing party's narrative does not create intellectually supple minds.

**Aim higher** | Ultimately the goal of education is to equip students for the modern world where multiple narratives co-exist. A student can go on to favour any shade of political ideology. But that's not for educators to pre-judge. Their job is to provide a menu of perspectives, and provoke questioning. Towards that end, a liberal approach to education, which recognises multiple viewpoints, is by far a better option. NCERT's thinking needs a revision.

## Parents, Step Up

Govt warnings can't cure kids' social media addiction. That's a job for mums & dads

US surgeon general Vivek Murthy's call for a warning label on social media platforms – he said they are dangerous for the mental health of teenagers – is an idea that can spread globally. Murthy argues teenagers who spend more than three hours a day on social media are twice as much at risk of facing anxiety and depression symptoms. He wants the warning labels done along the lines of action against tobacco use in US decades ago. But can govts influence individual behaviour beyond a point?

**Mental health issues on rise** | Since 2010, rates of anxiety and depression have gone up sharply for teens in many countries. This is also the period that saw smartphones take centre stage in our lives. But, research on what too much social media use does to teens does not throw up definitive answers. Murthy argues that waiting for 'perfect information' could have serious consequences. EU has already taken steps to try and check the power of social media platforms.

**It would just be a start** | Yet, a warning label would only 'start the conversation'. Anti-tobacco labelling has been around for years. But in more than a few countries, smoking is down but far from out. At 26.5%, the Southeast Asian region has the highest percentage of population using tobacco; the more developed European region is not far behind at 25.3%. Perhaps, warnings will make social media platforms more careful when planning their marketing techniques. Ideally, they should also spend more resources insulating adolescents from toxic content. But they probably won't.

**Onus is on guardians** | Ultimately, ensuring warning labels are heeded is squarely the responsibility of parents and other responsible adults. Doing this job would require not just smartphone rules for teens but also difficult conversations. Psychologists and educators say teens must be made to cut down on screen time in general and engage more in unstructured play and offline activity. Since practice is the best form of preaching, it would help if parents begin by first limiting their own social media use, at least in children's presence.

## Coalition Carbar

The driver of a very complex vehicle must steer a very careful course to avoid any mishaps along the way

**Jug Suraiya**

A customer walks into the showroom of Coalition Carbar Company, where a red carpet has been laid out, and is greeted with a respectful namaste by the salesperson.

**Salesperson:** Here's our very latest Coalition Carbar, it's called Compromise III and is very special.

**Customer:** I don't know about very special. It certainly looks very strange. Why is it so narrow up front and so wide in the rear?

**Salesperson:** Because up front there's only one seat where the driver sits, and in the rear are several seats where all the backseat drivers – so sorry, co-passengers – sit.

**Customer:** Why does this Carbar have to have so many backseat dri... co-passengers?

**Salesperson:** Because the driver might want to take the Coalition Carbar from Point A to Point B. But the Backseat... um, co-passengers might want to take the Carbar from Point A to Point C, or Point J, or any other Point of the alphabetic compass. Indeed, the Backseat D... uff oh!, the co-passengers mightn't agree that never mind the *finishing* Point, even the *starting* Point needn't be A.

**Customer:** All this sounds very complex.

**Salesperson:** It is very complex. That's why the driver of the Coalition Carbar must get a special licence called Coalition Dharma to ensure that the Coalition Carbar doesn't become a Collision Carbar.

**Customer:** Collision Carbar? With what does it go into collision?

**Salesperson:** With itself. It's what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object. In physics it's called a paradox. In politics it's called President's Rule. To avoid this, it's best for a Coalition Carbar to start with an MCA, Minimum Common Agenda.

**Customer:** That sounds doable. The driver of the Carbar can have Minimum in Common with the Agenda of the Backseat – correction, co-passengers.

**Salesperson:** That's the problem. Too many of these Carbars start with MUAs, Maximum *Uncommon* Agendas. Here are the keys to your Carbar. Safe driving. And let's hope you don't make your Coalition into a Go-alition, with each one going their own way till they're all collectively asked to go...

**secondopinion**

**J Krishna**

Are you clear – as clear as in the knowledge a cobra is poisonous – that thought can never under any circumstances reach intelligence? People are using thought to create a machine that can think, a super-computer, and artificial intelligence. They are working to create a brain that will be like ours, which will be mechanical. They are using their tremendous knowledge of the brain to produce an artificial brain which is based on thought.

Do you see this as a fact? To see it as a fact is to see that thought under no

# Not-To-Do List for Rahul, Priyanka

Rae Bareli, Wayanad calls taken, and pumped up by LS results, Gandhi siblings mustn't think their charisma & one national strategy are enough. 2024 results offer a more subtle message

Asim Ali

Congress has asked BJP to heed the message of the 2024 verdict. It has a point. But Congress itself is likely to misread the verdict. From Haryana to UP to Maharashtra, Congress's swelling tally was built largely on heightened anti-incumbency against BJP. The results don't primarily reflect an expanded voter base for Congress or renewed leadership charisma of the Gandhis. If Congress leadership lulls itself into committing past mistakes, 2024 would mark yet another false dawn.

The principal task before newly charged Congress is to convert its rising momentum into an expanded core voter base. To consolidate its gains, the party needs to avoid two strategic mistakes.

First, an over-reliance on leadership charisma and neglect of organisational structures. The resurgence of the Gandhis – Rahul potentially as leader of opposition and Priyanka's likely entry into Parliament from Wayanad – represents a double-edged sword.

If the increased power of the emerging Gandhi duopoly is used merely to centralise decision-making structures and project an alternative national leadership, or to run Gandhi-centred campaigns in state elections, it might well turn into a handicap.

This is precisely the mistake Congress made after its impressive performance in the Hindi belt in 2009 national elections. Projecting Rahul as a 'prince-in-waiting', a heady Congress plunged into contesting almost all seats in subsequent elections in UP and Bihar, getting badly routed in both. In 2022, Priyanka's campaign in the state resulted in just two assembly seat wins. Congress lost deposits in all but a dozen seats.

The reinforced political capital of the Gandhi family would serve to boost the party if it is carefully deployed to streamline the organisation and push through its restructuring. These include, first, managing testy factional squabbles that threaten the stability of its govts in Telangana and Karnataka and which might thwart its rising prospects in Haryana and Kerala. Second, using their renewed authority within the party, to push forward the task of revamping the organisation, in line with the Udaipur pledges of inducting younger and diverse crop of leaders in all decision-making levels.

An encouraging precedent was the reconstitution of Congress Working Committee last year along these very lines, a few months after the Karnataka triumph. The party also needed to project a fresher leadership in Odisha, MP and Chhattisgarh, where an exhausted old guard has run it into the ground. The defeat of sons of Ashok Gehlot and Kamal Nath, and of Bhupesh Baghel himself, provides fortuitous opportunity to make a fresh start in these states, where Congress suffered heavy defeats last year under the leadership of these satraps.

The second mistake the party must avoid is following a nationally determined strategy rather than a state-

centred one. Congress must realise it can no longer reprise the era of Indira Gandhi, where charismatic leadership and nationalised campaigns would suffice to sweep aside structural problems of weak organisation and depleted social base. The nine seats the party has won in UP and Bihar is mainly down to the support it received from SP and RJD, respectively. The party must use this foothold as a bridge to build organisational strength and construct a core voter base over the long term.

BJP, for instance, from the mid-1990s onwards, followed a patient strategy of stable alliances and collegial leadership to grow in states like Bihar, Maharashtra



and Haryana. It realised that hard Hindutva and leadership charisma could only take it so far. From then on, it utilised alliances with regional parties to grow among traditionally weak constituencies such as backward castes, while building a core voter base among upper caste and middle class voters.

Congress would do well to follow a similar strategy in UP, Bihar and Maharashtra, where its alliance partners bring complementary social bases, while seeking to

cannibalise the space of declining parties with overlapping bases, such as BRS in Telangana, JDS in Karnataka, BJD in Odisha, and BSP in northern/central India.

In 2016, political scientists Sridharan and Farooqui wrote that Congress seemed fated to "disintegration and eventual demise by further splits and loss of social base" unless it could revive "as a broad, left-of-centre coalition of the disadvantaged...facing a broad, BJP-led, right of centre coalition".

These elections demonstrated Congress's potential to tap into precisely such a reinvigorated centre-left space, sweeping backward and rural regions: Vidarbha in Maharashtra, the Jat belt in Haryana, Kalyan division of Karnataka, eastern Rajasthan and southern Telangana. As CSDS-Lokniti post-poll data showed, the biggest gains made by the party happened in smaller towns, and among Dalit and peasant caste voters.

These diffuse constituencies, however, cannot be mobilised via a uniform national agenda. Congress's relative success this time was thanks to its fine-tuning of campaign issues on a state-by-state basis. This was a more astutely crafted campaign, compared to the overly centralised narrative built around Rafale and a uniform income guarantee (NYAY yojana) in 2019.

For instance, Congress did not emphasise caste census in Haryana, instead focused on unemployment and rural distress. This helped it mobilise both dominant Jats and marginalised backward castes and Dalit voters under a single platform. Similarly, in Maharashtra, Congress only emphasised caste census in Vidarbha, and not in Marathwada or western Maharashtra. Here, it followed the lead of its allies in appealing to specific reservation demands of Marathas.

In state elections Congress won last year (Karnataka and Telangana), the party maintained a similar balance to accommodate dominant caste interests (Vokkaligas and Reddys, for instance) alongside a pro-poor agenda, hitched to a state-specific bouquet of welfare guarantees.

These elections demonstrated the survival of a large Congress space (centre-left) in national polity. The challenge for the party over the next decade would be to expand such a centre-left space and include newer constituencies: middle income segments (roughly, half of the population squeezed between rich and poor), Adivasis, non-dominant backward castes and women voters.

Among these constituencies, Congress's performance continues to be extremely weak, squandering its potential to mobilise these segments around socio-economic concerns. The relatively young Gandhi siblings are well-placed to facilitate such an expansion of Congress space, provided they follow a long-term and state-specific roadmap, and stay away from impulsive and centralised short-term gambits.

The writer is a political researcher

## The Message From Our Train Wrecks

Monday's was another train collision that could have been prevented by relatively low cost, easy to implement measures. We needn't wait for full network coverage by a hi-tech system like Kavach

M Jamshed

As investigation gets underway into Monday's Kanchanjunga Express-cargo train accident near Jalpaiguri, the question that's asked after every rail tragedy is back: why do train accidents happen so frequently in India. Answer: because the railways isn't doing the basics right. Of course, Kavach, the indigenous hi-tech rail safety system, must be installed across the rail network. But there are interim measures the railways can take.

**Flush with funds** | Until 2015, Indian Railways (IR) was hostage to severe resource crunch, which diminished its ability to build capacity and renew assets. Adoption of tech advances was slow, and overuse resulted in increased equipment failure.

This changed from 2015, with capital expenditure (capex) increasing significantly. Over the last five years, allocation for capex has increased manifold. It's currently in the range of ₹2.5L cr annually. There's no dearth of financial resources, for augmenting capacity or safety.

**Safe to say...** | Rail, unlike road, has fixed infra and can exclusively ensure creation, maintenance and functioning of its assets. Safety is *not* an additionality, but a *feature* of operations.

Safety is neither outside of the system nor can be ensured by external input. It must count for as much as speed and expanse when assessing operational efficiency. The target for accidents must be zero. It would be heartless to talk up statistics on accidents and casualties. But then statistics also show us what's going wrong.

**Collision too many** | IR classifies accidents as 'consequential' and 'indicative'. 'Collisions' are consequential accidents. Those called SPAD (Signal Passing at Danger) are treated as only 'indicative'.

Last decade's safety statistics indicate a significant

reduction in the number of accidents. Further analysis, however, reveals that in 2022-23, the number of accidents increased to 48 from 35 in 2021-22, when fewer trains were operated due to Covid.

Importantly, the number of collisions that mostly resulted in high fatalities and injuries increased to six in 2022-23 from two in 2021-22. For 2023-24, figures aren't yet available, but reports indicate four major collisions have taken place this year.



**Automate safety** | Collisions are caused mostly on account of failure of staff, and sometimes failure of equipment. A running train collides with another "head-on" or "rear-on" when the preventive system of signalling fails or the crew ignores the same.

IR needs to provide additional intervention to the loco pilot. Such interventions, on sensing an obstruction or its likelihood, stop the train, whether or not the pilot takes that action.

Is this possible in India? Yes. All developed rail systems globally have this aid and have eliminated train collisions. This brings us to our indigenous anti-train collision system, what we call Kavach, currently being implemented on IR.

It isn't that Kavach type of tech wasn't considered

earlier. Mumbai suburban system, which carries almost half the number of IR passengers, has had an automatic train protection system for a couple of decades, with loco and trackside equipment. Projects called TCAS (train collision avoidance system), AWS (auxiliary warning system), AAS (audio alert system), and ETCS Level 2 were under trial before rail research body RDSO developed Kavach.

Kavach is estimated to cost ₹1.2cr per km of track length. Reports say ₹710cr was allocated for its implementation in 2023-24; ₹540cr for 2024-25. In the first phase, Kavach is supposed to be installed along 10,000 route km of the network. It has already been sanctioned for Delhi-Howrah and Delhi-Mumbai (3,000 route km). But we don't know the target date for completion. IR's initial plans on Kavach are to cover around 1,500 route km per year.

**Can't wait** | The collision at Rangapani is another reminder to IR why it's so important to redouble its efforts. IR can't afford major accidents with loss of lives and obviously can't wait for the installation of Kavach on its entire network. Interim measures that can be provided include:

- Intensive training of frontline staff, both maintenance and operations.
- Fitting all locomotives with improved versions of low-cost devices like VCDs (vigilance control devices) and what's called Dead Man's Handle (a safety lever that applies the brakes if a loco pilot is incapacitated).
- Bringing back SPAD as a subcategory of collisions – each one of these is a potential collision.
- Filling operational vacancies and rationalising train operations on all routes.
- We should have a rail safety regulatory authority, like other developed railway systems.

IR should remember: every life lost in a train accident overshadows its otherwise outstanding performance.

The writer is former Member Traffic, Railway Board. Views are personal

## Calvin & Hobbes



## Do Not Mistake Thought For Intelligence

J Krishnamurti

Are you clear – as clear as in the knowledge a cobra is poisonous – that thought can never under any circumstances reach intelligence? People are using thought to create a machine that can think, a super-computer, and artificial intelligence. They are working to create a brain that will be like ours, which will be mechanical. They are using their tremendous knowledge of the brain to produce an artificial brain which is based on thought.

Do you see this as a fact? To see it as a fact is to see that thought under no

circumstances can have the other: If thought is no longer the instrument of inquiry, then you have nothing else with which to inquire. You can't inquire. Then what is intelligence that is not based on inquiry?

I want to inquire into truth. I don't know anything about it. I don't want to depend on anyone to find out. So, I have to discard all of the past. I want to find out what supreme intelligence is. So, can I discard everything that I know? The only instrument I have is thought. I can think clearly because I have been

trained to think not sentimentally but objectively. Thinking which can produce so-called intelligence is then on the same level as thinking that has produced war. Therefore, it is not intelligence. So, under no circumstances will thinking have a perception of that. It must be absolutely clear. If I am not clear unconsciously, deeply, then thought is going to interfere.

Before anything else, I want to clear the board. Is that possible? I see that what they are doing won't get them there. They will create mechanical, artificial

intelligence, which is like human intelligence. That is capable of destroying the world. Thinking, and all the instruments thought has invented to investigate into that – meditation, various types of silence, various types of self-denial – are out. The technologies won't accept that, but true inquiry is that. And they haven't found it. They are anchored to thought, and they move through thought. They won't accept that thought can under no circumstances come to it. Then what have I left to see that thought, under any circumstances, cannot produce intelligence?

Courtesy: KFI

