



Heartland murmurs

Haryana may throw up surprises after the realignments

In Haryana, the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faces a strident challenge from the Congress, where campaigning for the Assembly election ends in a day. All 90 Assembly seats will go to the polls on October 5. Though the contest appears to be bipolar, between the BJP and the Congress on the surface, a few other formations and hundreds of independents could alter the familiar patterns of voter mobilisation. The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), a former partner of the BJP, is in an alliance with the Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram), and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) is with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Haryana Lokhit Party are also in the fray. After seat sharing negotiations with the Congress failed, the Aam Aadmi Party has fielded candidates across the State. The BJP has tried to defend its track record of 10 years in power and consolidate the OBC voters – one third of the total – through the campaign. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has been presented as a symbol of the party’s commitment to empowering the OBC. The BJP is also trying to get a share of the Dalit votes.

The Congress has been a favourite of the Dalits who make up 20% of the State’s voters. The alliances, of the JJP-ASP and the INLD-BSP, could influence the two major voting blocs in the State – the Jats and the Dalits. The Congress has managed to sustain its offensive posture though factionalism threatened to derail its campaign. The party has targeted the BJP on talking points such as a threat to the Constitution, the Agnipath scheme for military recruitment, unemployment and price rise. The BJP is also facing a problem of plenty in the State. Having induced many leaders from other parties, it is now faced with their competing claims. The BJP’s victories in Haryana in two consecutive Assembly elections were largely due to the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and good social engineering that mobilised the non-Jat communities of the State. Haryana will be a test for the party on both counts this time. An absence from power for 10 years has cut the Congress some slack in the eyes of voters. Rahul Gandhi’s new role as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha will also face a test in the State. While the BJP’s regional leadership is relatively less formidable than the Congress’s, their respective impact on the outcome can be unpredictable. The Congress also has a history of undermining its own prospects with excessive intrigues.

Changes at the top

Ministers must infuse confidence in the people they serve

The much-awaited shuffle of the Tamil Nadu Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, was on expected lines, even if not wholly appropriate. There was no major surgery nor any infusion of talent. Three Ministers were dropped, four Ministers, including an old face, were inducted and the portfolios of seven Ministers were changed. The exercise saw representation based on region and caste, a notable inclusion being Govi Chezhiaan, three-time legislator from Thiruvudaimaruthur in the State’s central region and belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC). He has been allocated the Higher Education portfolio that was held by DMK heavyweight K. Ponnudiy. After the practice, from 2006, to have separate Ministers to handle school and higher education, this is the first time that an SC legislator has been given a key portfolio, perhaps to counter criticism that the Dravidian majors, the DMK and the AIADMK, do not allocate important portfolios to SCs. The shuffle also met two objectives – elevating Youth Welfare and Sports Development Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin as Deputy Chief Minister and re-inducting V. Senthilbalaji, who was released on bail by the Supreme Court days earlier.

Mr. Udhayanidhi, who was ranked tenth in the Cabinet hierarchy, now moves to the third spot, with Water Resources Minister Durai Murugan, who became an MLA in 1971, retaining second spot. It reflects a similar arrangement in 2009 when Mr. Stalin became Deputy Chief Minister during the chief ministership of M. Karunanidhi. Then Finance Minister and the DMK’s long-standing General Secretary, K. Anbazhagan, retained the second slot. Ever since Mr. Udhayanidhi’s induction as a Minister in December 2022, he has risen in the party and is a “man in demand”. But his elevation now raises questions given his political inexperience. As in much of south Asia, dynastic politics has become a norm, which is at variance with democratic principles and social justice. It is also about whether “dynasts” can fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the people they represent. Mr. Udhayanidhi could emerge a leader in his own right if he is able to handle this and stays away from sycophants. A disturbing feature of the Cabinet rejig is the re-entry of Mr. Senthilbalaji as Minister for Electricity, Prohibition and Excise, considered to be ‘cash cow portfolios’, that he held prior to his imprisonment in June 2023 in a money laundering case filed by the Enforcement Directorate in 2021. The main allegation against the Minister concerns the collection of bribes from job aspirants by his associates when he was Transport Minister (2011-15) during the AIADMK regime. As we have already pointed out, the cause of justice for the victims of the job scandal and a fair trial for the accused would be served well if Mr. Senthilbalaji is kept out of the Cabinet until he is cleared of the charges.

Our fundamental rights are enshrined in the Constitution, Part III, where, according to Article 26, every religious denomination has the right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion, acquiring, owning and administering property. Also, as in Article 13(2), the state is forbidden to make any law which takes away or abridges the rights conferred by this Part, declaring that any law made in contravention of this clause shall be void.

A case of dilutions

The Waqf Bill 2024 suffers from infringements. The Uttar Pradesh Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983 provides that no non-Hindu is eligible to be a member of its management at any level. It adds that where any of the four specified Secretaries of the Uttar Pradesh government, Cultural Director and Varanasi’s Collector and Commissioner is not Hindu, the person who is available next in the hierarchy shall be a member of the Board. Similar provisions exist in the laws in some other States.

Even the Religious Endowments Act, 1863 says that the ‘members of the said committee shall be appointed from among persons professing the religion for the purposes of which the mosque, temple or other religious establishment was founded or is now maintained....’ The management of Sikh and Christian properties is done fully by the communities concerned without any state interference.

However, through the Waqf Bill 2024, it has been proposed by the Minority Affairs Ministry to reserve for ‘non-Muslims’, two member seats each in the Central Waqf Council and all the State Waqf Boards. And, the statutory requirement of being Muslim is proposed to be removed for a majority of the seats in all these bodies governing waqf properties.

One can recall that the earlier JPC Waqf (1996-2006) had worked for close to a decade, having sought information through advertisements inserted in a number of newspapers published across India in all the scheduled languages. The Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee had also done its homework for 18 months. Both had travelled across India separately to listen to and receive representations from the multiplicity of stakeholders and people in general. The data collected were later collated by professional consultants. Such a huge exercise was the basis of drafting the Bill that was enacted as the Waqf (Amendment) Act 2013, strengthening the hitherto existing Waqf law with robust improvements.

Now, through the Waqf Bill 2024, the Ministry is attempting to omit these and many other



Syed Zafar Mahmood

former OSD, Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee

The Bill suffers from procedural irregularities and has retrograde steps and irrationalities

existing provisions that strengthen the waqf administration in India.

Unlike the Justice Sachar Committee and the earlier decade-long Waqf JPC, it did not carry out a similar exercise – of reaching out to people especially stakeholders such as the Central Waqf Council (CWC), the State Waqf Boards, the *mutawallis* (managers of waqfs) and the well-known national-level Muslim socio-religious organisations and institutions. Even their starting point should not have been the Waqf Bill 2024. Rather, it should have been 2014 since when the Waqf (Amendment) Act 2013 had to be implemented.

Such work, of reaching out to the stakeholders across India and people in general, and collecting information should have been done by the apex body of waqf management, i.e., the CWC, whose statutory membership the Ministry has, ironically, kept vacant for the last couple of years. The council has to have 20 members, all of whom are mandated to be Muslim. Even the secretary has to be Muslim. But, for two years, there was only the chairman (the Minister himself). There has been no full-time Muslim secretary of the council. For the last two years, the Ministry has given additional charge of Secretary, CWC to an officer of the ministry who is not Muslim and whose hands are full with his original charge.

So, the provisions of the existing waqf law (Section 9) stand violated. And, the 2024 Bill has been drafted, presented and piloted by the Ministry by largely leaving out the Muslim community whose say in the matter could have at least been made possible through the CWC. Incidentally, it is interesting that the internal management of the CWC is financed from income of the waqfs linked to the mandatory 1% annual income contributed by the State Waqf Boards.

Reconstitute the CWC

Now, in keeping with universally acclaimed democratic and legislative traditions, the Ministry would do well to quickly reconstitute the CWC in accordance with existing waqf law. And, such a reconstituted council should steer and supervise the process of collecting facts, data and views in association with all the state Waqf Boards, the *mutawallis* and national-level Muslim non-government organisations and institutions.

For two years, even the council’s normal statutory works (monitoring the works done by the State Waqf Boards, including financial performance, surveys, revenue records, maintenance of waqf deeds, removing encroachments of waqf properties and audit) have been affected.

On the other hand, as against the existing

In France, a summit for diplomacy, tech and diversity



Thierry Mathou

the Ambassador of France to India

France will host over 100 Heads of states and government and high-ranking officials for the 19th Francophonie Summit on October 4-5, 2024. The summit will take place in Paris and in Villers-Cotterêts, a city where, in 1539, King François I declared French as the country’s official language. It will deal with a number of key international questions that also matter to many non-French-speaking countries, and especially to India. These include the renewal of multilateralism; and major digital issues linked to the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as well as the need to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

As the famous Senegalese President and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor said, “Francophonie is the integral Humanism.” One of the key messages of the summit will be that: far from being barriers or creating divides, multilingualism and cultural diversity foster mutually beneficial exchanges and collective thinking, and, as such, should be cherished. I have every reason to believe that this spirit, shared by 321 million French speakers across the world, including Puducherry (India), also resonates with India’s own priorities.

Reducing the divide

Founded in 1970, the l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (the International Organization of La Francophonie) is an institution organising relations between countries that use the French language. Prominent statesmen such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Habib Bourguiba (Tunisia), Hamani Diori (Niger) and Norodom Sihanouk (Cambodia) were among its founding fathers.

The aim of the organisation is to promote the French language and cooperation between its 88 Member States and Governments (54 full-fledged members, seven associate members and 27 observer members). This aim is enshrined in the Charter of La Francophonie, adopted in 1997 at the Hanoi Summit. From the outset, the organisation has been a forum of discussions and projects between countries boasting diverse

cultures, economic and geographic situations as well as different political orientations. Francophonie has been promoting democracy, peace, prosperity with the idea of reducing any so-called “North/South divide” as well as bolstering cultural and linguistic diversity. Today, La Francophonie also provides a cooperation framework for key global issues such as digital technology, gender equality, and economic matters, under the leadership of Secretary General Louise Mushikiwabo, former Rwandan Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Renewing multilateralism

In the face of a fragmented world, the Summit, which takes place every two years under the leadership of a rotating host country, is meeting to decide on the main orientations of the organisation. For the first time in 33 years, the summit will be hosted by France. Upholding “Create, Innovate and do Business in French”, the theme, a new method of discussion will be followed during the Summit. Civil society stakeholders will be able to exchange more directly with summit officials to promote solutions and explore new avenues for cooperation.

Heads of states and high-ranking officials will deliberate in Paris on how to renew multilateralism. As France’s President Emmanuel Macron has stated in his speech at the 79th United Nations General Assembly, the renewal of multilateralism implies that we must change the governance composition of our main institutions. This is the reason why France supports the bid by India and other G-4 nations for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. We need to make our international institutions more efficient, which also means making them more representative. Beyond that, we need to work on a common financial agenda and to thoroughly reform the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

As President Macron has pointed out: “These institutions were conceived, designed and

mandate of 100% statutory Muslim membership in the CWC as well as in the State Waqf Boards, the 2024 Bill proposes to reduce it to less than 50%. Also proposed is dropping the requirement of the CWC Secretary and CEOs of all State Waqf boards being Muslim. It is difficult to fathom why the Ministry wants this, contrary to Articles 15, 25, 26, 29. When the management of endowments of all faiths by people of the faith concerned is statutorily guaranteed, why should not the waqfs be managed fully by the Muslim community?

There is some confusion regarding the proposal in the Waqf Bill to have at least two women in the CWC and in the State Waqf Boards. This was already done through the Waqf Amendment Act 2013 and notified in the gazette on September 23 of that year. The Ministry needs to re-examine this proposal and issue a clarification. The Bill proposes to remove the expert on Muslim law from the Waqf tribunal’s bench, wishes to do away with the finality of the tribunal’s orders and waters down the level of punishment in violations of the law by encroachers and other offenders. It withdraws the discretion of State Waqf boards to identify derelictions and proceed against encroachers. It proposes derecognising all ‘waqfs-by-user’ and enjoins upon the central government to create and control a new portal wherein every existing waqf has to re-register itself supported by the original waqf deed even though it is centuries old. If this is not done, even normal legal rights will be denied to such waqfs.

The Bill proposes to discontinue the mandatory implementation of the donor’s will (*Mansha-e-Waqfi*) and withdraws the existing benefit to Waqf law from the application of the limitation Act even though it remains available to similar properties of other faiths. Such infringements run through various proposals of the Bill.

Thus, the Bill deserves to be returned to the Ministry on account of procedural irregularities, infringements, retrograde steps, irrationalities, non-justifications and preconceived notions.

Number of waqf properties

There is also confusion about the number of waqf properties in India. It is important to note that there is only one authentic figure – 4,90,021 – available for public access in the Report of the Justice Sachar Committee (p 220). This figure is based on written communications received from the State Waqf Boards. The recent exercise of GPS/GIS mapping of waqf properties counts ‘manageable units’, which may be many in every waqf property.

calibrated at a time when the challenges were not the same, when the world economy was not the same size, when demographics had nothing to do with it. We need to give these institutions the capacity to act to finance the projects that the countries of the South need. This reform is imperative for our collective credibility.” As we need to build an agenda that allows us to tackle climate change, biodiversity preservation, global health issues, as well as reduce inequalities, France believes that La Francophonie can make an important contribution in this regard.

A focus on digital technology

The summit will also have a major focus on digital technology at a time when AI is proliferating in our societies. AI tools have raised new questions about the protection of creation and the promotion of diversity. Platforms must be able to enforce citizens’ rights in their own language, while AI can also become a tremendous asset for French and all other languages, by facilitating translation. As it is one of the civilizational challenges of our century, France will follow up on these deliberations by hosting the AI Action Summit in February 2025.

On the margins of this summit, the first FrancoTech Fair, a major event that will bring together more than 150 exhibitors from various nations to discuss pressing challenges of our times, will be held. Topics will include opportunities and challenges in developing AI; energy transition; education, and, more broadly, human capital development. For young Indian innovators with international ambitions, this event will offer opportunities with Francophone actors from around the globe.

Multilateralism, innovation, AI, cultural and linguistic diversity. I believe that all these La Francophonie topics are of shared interest and importance for France and India. The Paris AI Action Summit in 2025 as well as the India-France Year of Innovation that will be launched in 2026 will be important moments to push forward new collective solutions in these fields.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Court’s view

The Supreme Court of India’s words to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, asking Mr. Naidu to “Keep gods away from politics”, (October 1), is advice that should be heeded by all. Religion and matters religious arouse sentiments often at the extremes. That said, it is all the more unbecoming of constitutional functionaries

to drag in religious matters to gain political mileage. Almost all politicians and political parties are guilty of abusing the sentiments of people, religious or otherwise. One hopes that maturity prevails and those concerned engage in constructive dialogue and action.

Jose Abraham,
Vaikom, Kottayam, Kerala

We should compliment the

people of Andhra Pradesh and devotees in general who have understood the motives of the Chief Minister who has been elected to govern and work better than the previous regime. Every political leader and political parties across the spectrum should take serious note of the Court’s message – keep the gods away from politics.

N. Nagarajan,
Secunderabad

The wanton war

Israel is on a frenzied killing spree, without let or hindrance, in Gaza, West Bank and Lebanon. Even as Israel is widening its military campaign in West Asia, resulting in needless pain, the world looks the other way. Israel’s determination to pursue war contrasts with the international community’s lack of determination to force it to end the war. The world

seems to have lost its sense of justice.

G. David Milton,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

The Israel-Hamas conflict is also a human rights issue with distressing casualties. An immediate ceasefire, rehabilitation of displaced civilians, and a discussion between the parties involved cannot be put off.

Abirami S.,
Chennai

Second Test

The audacious display of stroke-making by India in their first innings caught the Bangladeshi team off-guard and set the stage for a thrilling win in the second Test. Full credit must be given to the Indian players for their skill and aggression and also to the Indian think-tank (‘Sport’ page, October 1).

Laigudi Muralidharan,
Laigudi, Tamil Nadu

It is time to fix the UPSC selection process

The image of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) has taken a serious beating ever since the Puja Khedkar episode came to light. Ms. Khedkar has unwittingly exposed the chinks or rather the gaping holes in the system. When seen along with the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (NEET) fiasco, it becomes clear that India has a huge task at hand in restoring the image of the civil services, institutions of higher learning, as well as the organisations responsible for these national-level selections.

Gaping holes
While the NEET controversy was a one-time mismanagement of an exam paper, the UPSC case has serious long-term implications for not only the creamy layer concept in Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation, but also for reservations for economically weaker sections (EWS), which were started a few years ago. For both these categories, people need to submit income certificates issued by the Tehsildar. This process has come under severe criticism in this case.

While there have also been complaints of candidates fraudulently posing as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe members, these can be verified on the ground. However, this is not the case with the EWS or the OBC quota system, as well as the disability category, which can all be gamed.

On the income issue, there is still no clarity on whether the candidate's income or the candidate's father's income is to be considered. Also, let us say a man gets into the Indian Revenue Service under the OBC/EWS category and later reapplies for the UPSC exam because he wants to get into the IAS. His income has crossed the threshold in the interim period. What happens then? If income is dynamic, how can a one-time snapshot of a



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S.S. Mantha
Former Chairman, All India Council for Technical Education

India has a huge task at hand in restoring the image of the civil services

person's economic status be accepted indefinitely? In our experience, once the status of a person is established by a certificate, it is neither reported differently by the applicant nor is it verified by the authorities concerned. In many cases, we have seen candidates failing to clear the exam the first time and then clearing it with an EWS certificate. To make matters worse, the Tehsildar who is charged with the responsibility of issuing the income certificate has no wherewithal or credentials to actually do so. They only issue it because, as some may argue, "this is how it has always been done." If a candidate's OBC father is rich and owns companies' worth of money but does not pay personal income tax, there is no way the Tehsildar can get to him.

Despite all these questions and problems, there have been no attempts to update the rules on income and disability. Neither has there been any scrutiny of the cases. The rules and procedures do not have legs to stand on, but no one challenges them for fear of opening a can of worms. They invariably look the other way and, in some cases, even make hay while the sun shines. We both spent several years in the Ministry, but we did not have a single case referred to us by institutions seeking clarifications. Nor were any seemingly dubious cases brought to our notice. What we see today is therefore just the tip of the iceberg. It will not be surprising if many such cases tumble out not only from the civil services closet, but also from India's premier higher education institutions. Unfortunately, India does not have a proactive system of scrutiny. There is scrutiny only when someone registers a complaint. Add to this the rampant sifarish (request) culture and we have a 'fair is foul, foul is fair' syndrome, a nightmare even for the best of our administrators.

The way forward
Could more transparency at every

stage using technology be the antidote? Had this been done in Ms. Khedkar's case, she would not have managed to sit for the UPSC exam 12 times. However, it is a fact that even a secure system such as the Aadhaar can be gamed. In 2018, for instance, fake biometric data were used to generate Aadhaar numbers to fraudulently claim subsidies on LPG and other welfare schemes.

What then is the solution? To begin with, the government needs to issue clear instructions on both income and disability, which are applicable throughout the country irrespective of State, Ministry, or sector. If need be, bodies could be set up with eminent persons or institutions to help the government reach a consensus on these issues. We need a robust system of verification. We need to adopt practices which are forward-looking and compatible with the times, especially in the disability category, and we need to use advanced technology to combat fraud.

We also need some honest thinking on several scores. The Department of Personnel and Technology must explain the rationale for allowing mental disability within the disability quota for civil services, which require serious and consistent application of mind. It is also unclear why the examination has no aptitude test unlike the Defence Services.

We need to impose serious penalties on officers and doctors who certify people wrongly without doing due diligence. The courts play an important role here. When one wrong person is selected for the services, another deserving candidate is denied their rightful place in the government. The civil services are no place for self-seekers who have no interest in serving the nation and who only clear the exam to enjoy the perks that come with the services, such as a chauffeur-driven car. It is high time we made changes at the procedural and structural levels.

Turning Odisha orange

While the BJP has implemented major promises, it is also rebranding old schemes

STATE OF PLAY

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The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a majority of the seats in Odisha during the Assembly elections in June and selected Mohan Charan Majhi, a four-time MLA from the Keonjhar Assembly constituency, to lead the government. While the new government has kept many of its promises, it also faces criticism on some fronts as well as the problem of factionalism.

On September 17, on the Prime Minister's birthday, the Odisha government launched the Subhadra scheme. Targeted at women voters, the scheme promises ₹50,000 to eligible women between the ages of 21 and 60 in 10 installments over the next five years. Before the polls, the BJP had promised to provide every single woman, without any eligibility criteria, of ₹50,000 in cash vouchers. This amount to a single woman covers almost 30% of the expenditure of rural Odisha households, according to Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, 2022-23. Implementation is now slightly different from the promise.

Under another scheme, the social assistance amount for older people and the different-abled has also been increased, but with certain conditions: the hike is applicable only for those above 80 years and for people who have more than 80% disability. The promised benefits for other sections, such as widows, have not been implemented.

The Odisha government has cleared the promised paddy MSP and initiated a scholarship scheme for Adivasi stu-

dents dropping out of high school. It has also managed to handle the high-profile Jagannath Puri temple and Ratna Bhandar issue, which seriously impacted the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) government during the elections. The BJP Sankalpa Patra (manifesto) had 21 "top promises". Of these, five or six were concrete and have been carried out.

However, the new government has also been renaming and rebranding many of the housing and social assistance schemes of the previous government. The KALIA scheme was renamed CM-Kisan, and the Biju Swastya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY), a healthcare scheme, was repackaged as Gopabandhu Jan Arogya Yojana. Many beneficiaries of the BSKY health card claim that hospitals no longer accept the 'Biju card'. The BJD has alleged that close to 40 such schemes have been rebranded by the State BJP government.

While the government was able to make these changes without much scrutiny or controversy, it faced a lot of criticism when it decided to change the name of the Biju Patnaik Sports Award. Realising that the move had backfired, it hastened to retain the original name. The BJP was unsuccessful in its efforts because former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik is seen as an irreplaceable cultural icon.

In some cases, such as the LAccMI bus scheme, the government has not only altered

the name of the scheme but also the bus colours from green to orange to make it seem as if the buses have been newly provided by the BJP. Communication documents, information brochures, and pamphlets related to schemes have all been branded in orange.

Apart from these issues, the BJP is also busy fighting factionalism. There are purportedly at least three factions in the State camp, with the leader of each nursing chief ministerial aspirations. The party high command has stepped in to address these issues.

Meanwhile, since the election, the Congress is going through a churn and has initiated a leadership change. After dissolving the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee, the All-India Congress Committee has constituted a socially equitable 14-member steering committee.

The BJD is also trying to build its base again. After its electoral debacle, while V.K. Pandian, the bureaucrat-turned-politician and a close aide of former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has stopped making public appearances, older leaders in the BJD, such as Arun Kumar Sahoo, Debi Prasad Mishra, and Sarada Nayak, have made a comeback. A reinvigorated Mr. Patnaik has been meeting with local leaders from the State, which will greatly help the party organisation. He has formed a 15-member committee to coordinate party activities and amplify critical issues. He has also formed a 'shadow cabinet' to monitor and raise issues in the public about each government portfolio. However, internal discord in the BJD continues to escalate.

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Torching Dalit homes is a recurring crime in Bihar

Increasingly fewer crimes against Dalits are investigated in Bihar. A small number of them end up in courts and only a fraction among them ends in conviction

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

A fortnight ago, an alleged land mafia in Nawada district attacked and set fire to a Dalit hamlet and more than 30 houses in Bihar. All the houses that were set on fire belonged to people from Scheduled Castes (SC). Cases have been filed under various sections of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and other relevant laws.

According to police investigation, 21 houses were completely burnt. They belonged to SCs from the Manjhi and Ravadas communities. Reports also said that the fire destroyed the utensils, clothes, cots, grains and, in some cases, farm animals of the majority of the households. The government has provided food and temporary shelter for the victims.

Data show that incidents of setting fire to Dalit households are not rare in Bihar. In the six years between 2017 and 2022, more than 35% of all the arson cases across India in which SCs were victims occurred in Bihar, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh, each of which recorded around 10% of the cases. **Map 1** shows the State-wise number of SC victims in arson cases in the 2017-2022 period.

Bihar recorded the highest number of arson cases in which SCs were victims in 2022, 2021, 2019, and 2018, surpassing the State with the second-highest number by a considerable margin each time. The burning of properties belonging to Dalits is thus a recurring crime in the State.

If we take a comprehensive view of all the crimes committed against Dalits in Bihar, it presents a worrying picture. Data show that the number of recorded cases of crimes against SCs that are being

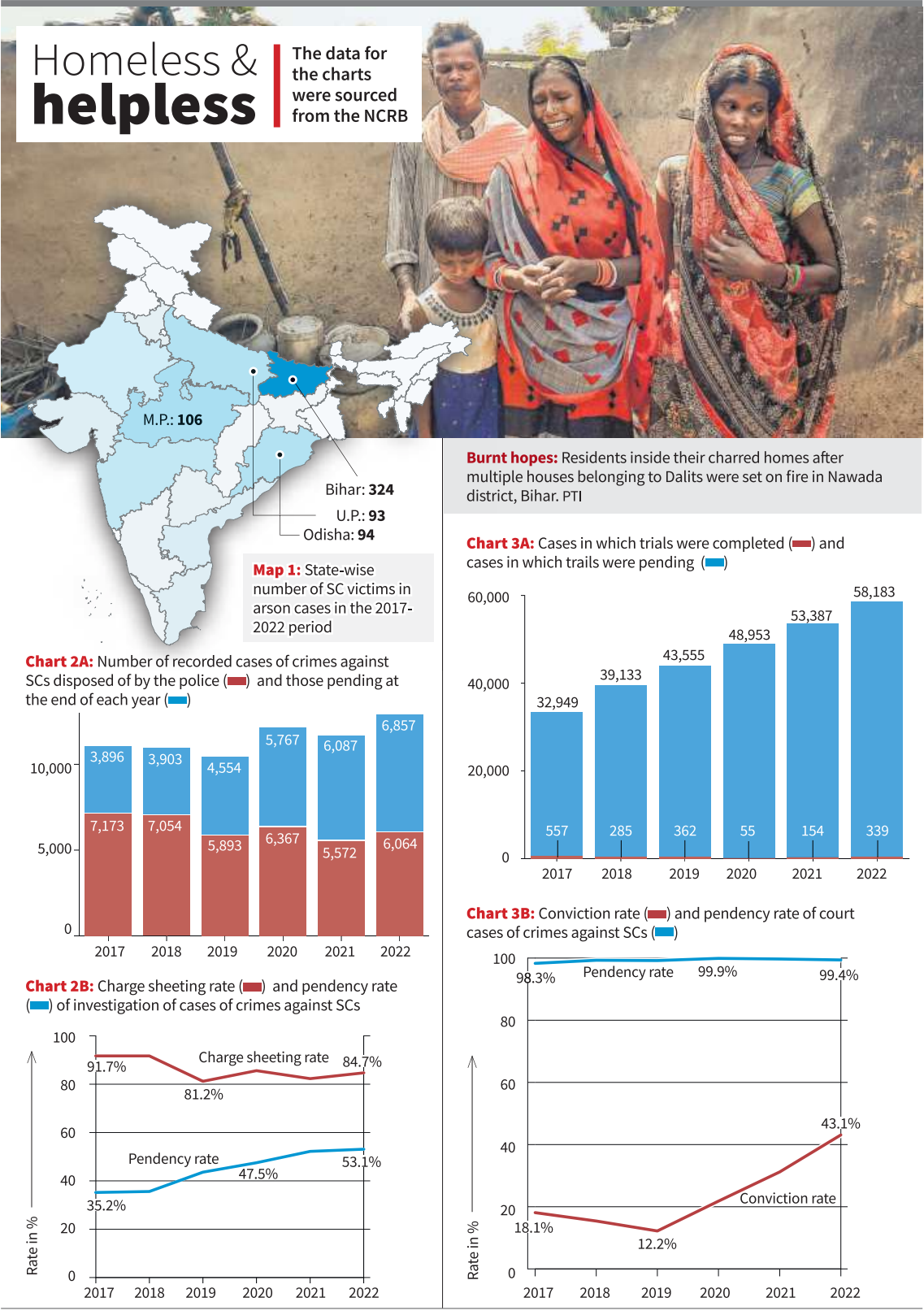
investigated by the police is increasing every year in the State, while the number of cases disposed of by the police is decreasing, leading to increased pendency of cases. The number of police cases pending investigation increased from around 3,900 in 2017 to 6,900 in 2022. Disposal of cases include cases transferred to other agencies, cases that resulted in a final report from the police (not sent for trial), and cases that were charge sheeted (sent for trial).

Chart 2A shows the number of recorded cases of crimes against SCs disposed of by the police and those pending at the end of each year. The sum of both forms the total number of cases that were up for investigation at the start of that year.

More worryingly, not only is the number of cases disposed of by the police reducing, but also the share of cases charge sheeted is declining. In other words, an increasing share of cases disposed of by the police do not end up in court. **Chart 2B** shows the charge sheeting rate and pendency rate of investigation of cases of crimes against SCs.

Even among the increasingly fewer cases that end up in court, over 99% are pending at the end of the year; only 1% of trials are completed. The number of cases of crimes against Dalits that were pending trial increased from about 33,000 in 2017 to more than 58,000 in 2022. **Chart 3A** shows the cases in which trials were completed and cases in which trials were pending. The sum of these forms the total number of cases that were up for trial at the start of that year.

Notably, among the cases for which trials were completed each year, an increasing share of them are resulting in convictions, as shown in **Chart 3B**. However, given that only a fraction of the crimes against SCs actually sees a logical conclusion in court, the absolute number of accused getting convicted is a minuscule minority.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 2, 1974

China builds ICBM base in Tibet

Tokyo, Oct. 1: China has practically completed construction of a giant nuclear base in the recesses of Tibet from where it is expected to carry out launchings of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) as well as tests for developing nuclear warheads for the ICBMs. The construction of this large base not far from the borders of India can be expected to have an important bearing on the military situation in the sub-continent.

The new Chinese nuclear base is believed to be larger than the one now in existence at Lop Nor in north-west China and is stated to be comparable in scale to a similar American nuclear base in Nevada, according to American and British military experts in India quoted by the Asahi Shimbun here in a report from its New Delhi correspondent. According to the report, the new Chinese base in Tibet, including underground installations and roads, has already been completed, while guiding devices and tracking stations have also been established. Training of personnel to operate the base is now said to be under way shrouded in secrecy during nights.

China is keeping the construction of this nuclear base as such a top secret that even Tibetans engaged in road building and transportation of equipment are not allowed in the vicinity of the base. All work near the base is being done only by Chinese soldiers and scientists. The base is out of bounds even to high-ranking Government and military officials and no one is admitted to the base area without special permission from the topmost military leaders.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 2, 1924

Wheat seed from an Egyptian tomb

Tacoma (Washington), Oct. 1: A farmer near Morton harvested a bumper crop of wheat, the original seed of which was obtained from an Egyptian tomb 4 years ago and it is so prolific that sufficient is available for the present year to plant fifteen acres yielding forty-eight and a half bushels per acre. The grain is white and very hard.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of people who died due to Hurricane Helene

130 With hundreds still unaccounted for across several U.S. States and the death toll still climbing, President Joe Biden announced he would travel to North Carolina, the most severely affected State, to monitor rescue efforts. AFP

The amount Google is to invest in Thailand to build digital infra

1 in \$ billion. Google has announced that it plans to invest \$1 billion to build digital infrastructure in Thailand, including a new data centre. The new hubs are intended to help meet growing demand for cloud computing in southeast Asia. AFP

Number of Ukranian civilians killed by Russian strikes

7 The strike happened in the southern Ukraine city of Kherson on Tuesday, as shoppers made their way between stalls at the city centre market, according to regional Governor Oleksandr Prokudin. The city had not been a war hotspot in recent times. AFP

Amount needed to help the displaced people of Lebanon

426 in \$ million. Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said they were launching an appeal to mobilise resources for people affected by Israel's offensive. AFP

Number of children hospitalised in Thane after mid-day meal

38 The affected children complained of giddiness, nausea, headache, and pain in the abdomen. Food samples have been collected for testing. Civil officials and local police are investigating the incident. PTI

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Why every party is mobilising Dalit support

What are the various alliances that have formed in the Haryana electoral race? How did the Jannayak Janta Party lose most of its core support base? Have the farmers and wrestlers' protests become key electoral issues? Do the BSP and AAP have influence in the region?

ANALYSIS

Vignesh Karthik K.R.
Sarthak Bagchi
Anand Mehra
Navya Singh

The story so far:

The Haryana Assembly elections for a 90-member House are slated for October 5, and as the campaign intensifies, the State's political dynamic is undergoing significant changes.

Are smaller parties stitching up alliances?

A party like the Jannayak Janta Party, a regional party, which traditionally relies on Jat support, has this time made an alliance with Chandrashekhar Azad's Azad Samaj Party (ASP), which is a new entrant in Haryana politics. In the wake of declining Jat support, the JJP is compelled to look for other communities to draw support from, in order to maintain its political relevance in Haryana.

Because of his charisma, Chandrashekhar Azad, a first time MP from Nagina, is definitely gaining popularity among sections of Dalit voters, particularly among young voters who are attracted to his personality and good oratory skills. However, his appeal among Dalits is not similar across all sections of the community, and the deprived or marginalised sections among the Dalits still seem to be looking towards national parties like the Congress and the BJP. During Dushyant Chautala's door to door campaign in a village in Uchana Kalan, we found that he enthusiastically laid out his extensive campaign schedule with Chandrashekhar Azad as if to engage his Dalit supporters.

Is Mayawati's BSP a factor?

The direct outcome of increasing popularity and a possible increase in electoral support for Chandrashekhar Azad seems to be at the cost of support to Mayawati and her Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which is in alliance with the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). The BSP has always enjoyed some portion of the Dalit votes in Haryana but never reached any electoral significance in the State; and now, with the ascendance of the ASP, even that portion of the Dalit vote is up for grabs.

The Jat-Dalit coalition is projected by regional alliances such as the JJP-ASP and INLD-BSP in a more amplified manner than the kind of coalitions being harboured by the Congress or the BJP. An overt reliance on the Jat community, visible in the Congress campaign led by Bhoopinder Hooda, hinders the Jat-Dalit alliance that the Congress is trying to project. On the other hand, the BJP's support for the recent verdict on sub-categorisation among the Dalits by the Supreme Court has also disenchanted some of the dominant Dalit communities away from the party, while retaining the deprived sections among the Dalits.

What explains the decline of regional players like the INLD and JJP?

The decline of regional parties such as the INLD and JJP can be attributed to strategic missteps and shifting voter perceptions.

The INLD's decline stems from complex coalition decisions that failed to deliver anticipated political gains. Internal leadership struggles and an inability to adapt to changing political landscapes have weakened the party's influence. With a highly centralised leadership confined to a single family, the internal feuds within family members have meant



Close contest: BJP supporters cheer during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public meeting for the Haryana Assembly elections, in Palwal on October 1. ANI

that the core of the party has been weakened from within, leading to the peripheries becoming rudderless. This decay in the organisation has cost the party dearly in a field which has been dominated by well organised parties like the BJP and to some extent a rejuvenated Congress. While the INLD may secure a few seats due to its alliance with the BSP, which attracts Scheduled Caste (SC) votes shifting from the Congress, its overall impact remains limited.

As for the JJP, it initially gained traction by consolidating Jat votes and positioning itself against the BJP. However, its decision to ally with the BJP in the last election alienated a significant portion of its Jat voter base, with many supporters feeling betrayed by the alliance. In a candid conversation, during the course of his door-to-door campaign in a village in Uchana Kalan, Dushyant called these defectors "migratory Russian birds, who come only in good weather, and fly away when the heat increases."

In summary, the decline of regional parties like the INLD and JJP is due to strategic alliances that alienated core supporters, leadership issues, and a failure to address key voter concerns.

What about AAP?

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s presence in Haryana is minimal and not a significant factor across most constituencies. In approximately 80 out of 90 seats, AAP lacks substantial influence. Where the party shows some promise, it is largely due to individual candidates with strong personal followings rather than organisational strength or widespread

support for AAP itself. For instance, in the Kalayat constituency, Anurag Dhanda, the State vice-president of AAP, is expected to perform well. Then in the Jagadhri constituency, there is Adarsh Pal, a former BSP candidate with a substantial personal voter base, who has joined AAP after being denied tickets by other parties. These examples highlight that AAP's impact is dependent on individuals rather than a robust party presence.

How have social movements influenced voter perceptions?

Significant social movements such as the farmers' protest and the wrestlers' protest have profoundly influenced voter perceptions of political parties in Haryana. The farmers' protest, in particular, was a pivotal event in Haryana, with many constituents expecting strong advocacy from their representatives. The JJP's alliance with the BJP, against whom much of the protest was directed, put the party in a difficult spot. Its reluctance to actively support the farmers was seen as a betrayal by its core rural and Jat voter base. After much hesitation, Dushyant Chautala, JJP chief, apologised publicly. However, it may have been a tad too late. Similarly, the wrestlers' protest, which centred around allegations of misconduct within a sports federation, garnered national attention. The failure of the JJP to take a stand during this protest further contributed to perceptions of detachment from critical social issues. These movements highlighted the importance of a responsive and empathetic leadership. The JJP's failure to align with the sentiments of its constituents during these significant events has led to disillusionment among voters, contributing to the party's declining fortunes. Furthermore, the deft articulation of many of the voters we encountered in our fieldwork indicate a concerted approach towards voting and the importance of aggregational support to parties and candidates that can unseat the incumbent government.

What lies ahead?

Haryana's upcoming Assembly elections are characterised by fluid political alignments and the pivotal role of caste

dynamics, internal party cohesion, and responsiveness to social movements. The rural-urban divide underscores differing political priorities, with urban areas favouring national parties over regional ones. The battle for OBC support is intensifying as both the Congress and the BJP offer competing promises to this crucial demographic. The Congress faces the challenge of uniting Jat and Dalit voters amid internal discord and incidents that strain relationships with these key voter groups. The decline of regional parties like the INLD and JJP, coupled with the emergence of figures like Chandrashekhar Azad, suggests a realignment of the political landscape which could be the beginning of a new churning in State politics. Social movements have demonstrated the electorate's expectation for parties to actively engage with pressing issues.

The party that successfully navigates these complexities – addressing internal challenges, engaging with social movements, and resonating with a diverse electorate – is likely to emerge victorious. These changing dynamics in State politics once again reaffirm the centrality of voters in Indian elections and puts the voters in the driving seat forcing political parties to renew their social positions, whether that is seen in the multiple apologies offered by BJP leaders in their mishandling of the farmers' protests or in the multiple readjustments done within the Congress leadership to ensure a cohesive Jat-Dalit coalition or a former deputy chief minister promising his young supporters to bring a charismatic Dalit alliance partner on his campaign tour next time. In that view, it won't be wrong to say that the upcoming Assembly elections in Haryana is going to be another example of the deepening of democracy in India.

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THE GIST

A party like the Jannayak Janta Party, a regional party, which traditionally relies on Jat support, has this time made an alliance with Chandrashekhar Azad's Azad Samaj Party (ASP), which is a new entrant in Haryana politics.

The direct outcome of the increasing popularity of Chandrashekhar Azad seems to be at the cost of support to Mayawati and her Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which is in alliance with the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD).

Significant social movements such as the farmers' protest and the wrestlers' protest have profoundly influenced voter perceptions of political parties in Haryana.

PULSE-CHECK



GETTY IMAGES

Breast Cancer Awareness Month: the public health case for BRCA testing

Breast cancer is considered a public health priority because of its prevalence. Identifying, preventing, and treating hereditary cancer is crucial for public health. Hereditary cancer occurs when an individual inherits a mutation in one of the many cancer-causing genes

Anup Rawool
Vid Karmarkar

Angelina Jolie’s case is one of the most recognised in genomic medicine. With a strong family history of cancer, she was found to carry a mutation in the BRCA1, significantly elevating her risk for Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer (HBOC). In 2013, she opted for a preventive mastectomy and in 2015 for a salpingo-oophorectomy to reduce her risk of cancer.

Early detection allows patients and at-risk family members to access preventive or early detection methods, potentially lowering their risk to that of the general population. Individuals at risk also have options like regular mammograms, chemoprevention, lifestyle changes, and contraceptive and reproductive choices, including prenatal or pre-implantation genetic diagnosis.

Hereditary cancer occurs when an individual inherits a mutation in one of the many cancer-causing genes. These germline mutations increase susceptibility to many cancers of multiple organs. Among more than 300 different inherited cancer syndromes, HBOC is one of the most studied. Most HBOC cases are due to germline mutations in the BRCA1 and the BRCA2 genes (or just BRCA), but several other genes also contribute to the risk.

Inherited mutations cause individuals to be one step closer to cancer. Unlike sporadic cancers, which are responsible

for 90% of cases with an average onset age of 60 years, HBOC cancers are relatively rare (accounting for less than 10% of cancer cases) but tend to develop earlier in life. This said, with one in nine Indians at risk of developing cancer in their lifetime and a population of 1.4 billion, a large number of individuals will carry hereditary mutations that increase their predisposition to cancer. Thus, hereditary cancers are an important public health problem in India.

Importance of BRCA testing

Women with BRCA mutations face a 69-72% risk of breast cancer and a 17-44% risk of ovarian cancer by age 80, compared to the general population’s lifetime risks of 12% for breast cancer and 1% for ovarian cancer. Preventive interventions such as a prophylactic mastectomy can reduce breast cancer incidence by 90-100% and breast cancer-related deaths by 81-100%. Similarly, prophylactic oophorectomy reduces ovarian cancer risk by 69-100%.

Importantly, researchers have associated germline BRCA mutations with the risk of seven types of cancer – breast, ovarian, prostate, pancreatic, biliary tract, esophageal, and gastric cancers. Their research thus indicates a broader clinical relevance for BRCA genetic testing.

In India, breast cancer incidence is on the rise. It accounts for 27% of all cancer cases, making it the most prevalent cancer among women. BRCA pathogenic

variants also cause about 26% of breast cancers and 21-25% of ovarian cancers in the country. In populations with a family history of cancer, BRCA mutations are found in 55% of ovarian cancer cases and 45-65% of hereditary breast cancer cases. Thus, the greatest potential of BRCA testing lies in cancer prevention in addition to its current common use for therapy of advanced cancers.

Thus the key question for equitable breast cancer care is: why wait for cancer to develop when BRCA carriers and their at-risk family members can be identified early to prevent it?

Inequities in BRCA testing

Traditionally, BRCA testing has been offered to individuals based on their family history of cancer. This method misses about half of all actionable cases. Identifying someone with a hereditary mutation only after they develop cancer is a failure of cancer prevention. Following these traditional guidelines perpetuates health inequalities as fewer women at risk of breast cancer are identified.

With advances in next-generation DNA sequencing, genomics, and bioinformatics, large-scale population testing is now technologically feasible and has been implemented in some countries. Transitioning to population testing in India could be a complex but progressive step in preventing breast cancer, increasing BRCA testing uptake, and addressing the limitations of traditional testing models.

Two critical enablers for this approach are public education on the benefits of hereditary cancer risk and the cost of BRCA testing. The latter ranges from ₹15,000 to ₹30,000 in India. This price point may be affordable for higher-income individuals but isn’t so for population-level screening. In high-income countries, population-based BRCA screening has proved useful in reducing breast and ovarian cancer incidence and is also considered cost-effective. But in India, despite the decreasing cost of DNA sequencing, the price of BRCA testing remains a barrier, which will exacerbate health inequities in breast cancer care. For any intervention to be sustainable, it must be both cost-effective and affordable.

Breast cancer is considered a public health priority because of its prevalence but also thanks to the availability of effective clinical interventions. Identifying, preventing, and treating hereditary cancer is crucial for public health. Still, the decisions following a positive BRCA result come with significant financial and emotional costs, rendering proper genetic counselling and consultation with a clinical geneticist essential.

Anup Rawool is a clinical and cancer geneticist and the founder of Sahaj Genetics Clinic, Comprehensive Medical Genetics & Counseling Center. Vid Karmarkar is the founder and CEO of Canseva Foundation, which is on a mission to reduce financial toxicity in cancer care.

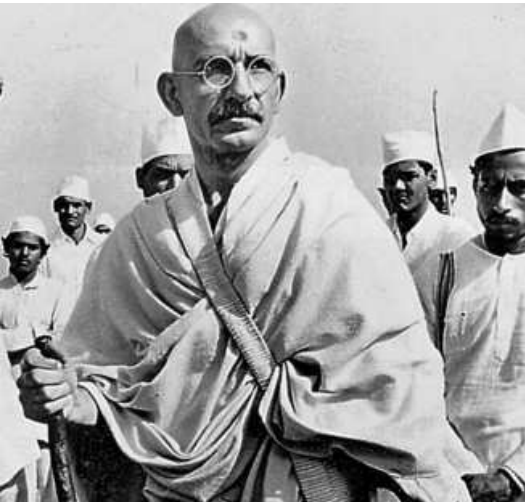
THE DAILY QUIZ

Gandhi Jayanti is observed every year on October 2, to mark the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Here is a quiz on some of the lesser-known facts about Gandhi

Sindhu Nagaraj

- QUESTION 1**
Let’s start with an easy one. In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly declared October 2 as what day?
- QUESTION 2**
The honorific ‘Mahatma’ was first applied to Gandhi in which country?
- QUESTION 3**
In his autobiography, Gandhi said, “It haunted me and I must have acted _____ to myself times without number.” This was said in reference to which mythological character?
- QUESTION 4**
This person was expelled from the London Vegetarian Society because of his views on birth control. Gandhi, who was studying law in Britain at the time and was also a member

- of the Vegetarian Society, spoke in favour of the said person’s right to support contraception, despite being opposed to it. Who was the person?
- QUESTION 5**
In 1893, Gandhi went to South Africa to work as a lawyer. He stayed in the country for 21 years. During this time, Gandhi briefly returned to India in 1902. Why?
- QUESTION 6**
Considered Gandhi’s first major achievement, this was an agitation in 1917 which pitted the local peasantry against largely Anglo-Indian plantation owners who were backed by the local administration. What was it?
- QUESTION 7**
Gandhi edited several newspapers. One of them was established when Gandhi was in South Africa. What was it called?



Visual question:
In this image, identify the actor who played the role of Gandhi in the film titled *Gandhi*. The actor also won the Academy Award for Best Actor for the role.

- Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:** 1. In 1932, an Olympic team for the Olympics held in this country was financed using coffee. **Ans: Los Angeles**
2. This coffee-growing region is known for its unique “washed” processing method. **Ans: Ethiopia**
3. The world’s first webcam was invented as a way to keep an eye on a coffee pot at a university. It was famously called the _____ room coffee machine. **Ans: Trojan**
4. Coffee was banned in Sweden in the 18th century because it was thought to be a threat to public health. **Ans: This statement is true**
5. The Guinness World Record for the largest cup of coffee is held by a Mexico based company. These many kgs of coffee were used during the record attempt. **Ans: 300 kg**
- Visual: This country is the world’s largest coffee producer. **Ans: Brazil**
- Early Birds:** Sonali Das| Devendra Singh Chaudhary| Varghese Joseph| M. Suresh| K.N. Viswanathan



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
Upendran

“Did you see the match between Graf and Novotna?”
“I did. It was a humdinger, wasn’t it?”
“A what?”
“A humdinger. It’s an informal word meaning an excellent or marvellous person or thing. For example, I can say, Sunil Verma’s latest film is a humdinger.”
“I don’t know if everyone will agree with that.”
“Do you think people would agree if I said that the heroine of the film was a real humdinger?”
“They’d agree with you 100 per cent. The heroine was a real hum ... hum ...”
“Humdinger. The first syllable ‘hum’ rhymes with ‘sum’ and ‘dinger’ rhymes with ‘ringer’ and ‘singer.’ The stress is on the first syllable “
“So it’s pronounced humdinger.”
“That’s right.”
“You know, even before the match between Graf and Novotna had started, I told my grandfather that Graf would win.”
“I see.”
“And I also predicted that”
“Would you please stop tooting your own horn?”
“What?”
“I said would you please stop tooting your own horn?”
“What does it mean?”
“It means stop praising yourself. It is very common these days for politicians to toot their own horn.”
“They’ve always tooted their own horn, haven’t they?”
“You’re right. Anyway, instead of saying ‘toot one’s own horn,’ we can also say ‘blow one’s own horn.’”
“So ‘toot’ means ‘blow,’ does it?”
“When you toot, you blow into a horn and produce a sound.”
“That’s interesting. ‘Toot your own horn’ reminds me of another idiomatic expression.”
“What’s it?”
“I can’t recall. But the meaning of this idiomatic expression is to praise one’s own abilities’.”
“Ah, I think I know the expression you’re thinking of.”
“Oh please don’t tell me. Let me try and remember. Why don’t you give me a clue?”
“All right. In the expression ‘toot your own horn’, replace ‘toot’ by the word ‘blow.’”
“Blow your own horn. Blow ... Blow your... I’ve got it! It’s ‘blow your own trumpet’.”
“Very good.”
“Our Principal is well-known for blowing his own trumpet.”
“He is like you, isn’t he?”
“I certainly do not blow my own trumpet.”
“No, you merely toot your own horn. Ha! Ha!”
“That’s not funny.”
“Sorry.”
Published in *The Hindu* on July 20, 1993.

Word of the day

- Druthers:**
the right or chance to choose
- Synonym:** preference
- Usage:** Given my druthers, I would eat cake.
- Pronunciation:** newsth.live/drutherspro
- International Phonetic Alphabet:** /dɹʌðəz/

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

Right option

Curbs on equity derivatives welcome

Stock market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), has finally bitten the bullet and begun implementing far-reaching changes in the equity index derivative segment. These changes had become exigent because speculative activity had increased manifold in this segment since the pandemic, with retail investors participating in a big way. There is also an unhealthy concentration of trading activity, with almost 98 per cent of equity futures and options trading on the NSE limited to just Nifty50, BankNifty and FinNifty options.



Besides, most trading is observed in weekly option contracts expiring on a particular day, due to the lower option premiums on the expiry day. The regulator had to act fast given that individual investors were getting increasingly lured into F&O trading. A recent study done by SEBI revealed that 93 per cent of individual investors made losses while trading in equity futures and options between FY22 and FY24 and total loss incurred by them stood at ₹1.8 lakh crore in this period. With average loss incurred by each of these traders at ₹2 lakh over the three years, this activity is clearly resulting in a loss of capital for a large section of society. The study also pointed out foreign portfolio investors and brokers trading on their proprietary books raked in profits, as they have the deep pockets and skills to use sophisticated algorithmic trading tools. With a similar study conducted by SEBI in January 2023 indicating the same, the regulator was quite sure that trading in the F&O segment was hurting individual traders. Meanwhile, exchanges are stoking this frenzied activity with multiple weekly option contracts. Brokers lure gullible individuals with promises of quick riches.

It is well that SEBI has accepted most of the recommendations of the working group, headed by G Padmanabhan, which has done a detailed analysis of the activity in the F&O segment and given practical suggestions to curb it. The increase in contract sizes from the current ₹5- 10 lakh to ₹15- ₹20 lakh will help cut some of the speculative positions. Similarly, the move to collect upfront margins from option buyers will remove the leverage currently available for doing intraday trading. This coupled with intraday monitoring of position limits will ensure that brokers do not allow their clients to trade excessively during the session. Increase in extreme loss margin around the expiry day will help curb the tendency to trade on that day. The move to reduce weekly derivative contracts to a single benchmark index of an exchange is especially useful as it will reduce the avenues available for speculation. There is likely to be strong opposition to these changes since exchanges as well as brokers stand to lose a significant portion of their business once they are implemented. But the regulator needs to go ahead with the changes for sustainable growth of the market, and for protecting individual investors.

POCKET RAVIKANTH



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

One key takeaway from the strike at Samsung's Perumbudur factory is that manufacturers who follow the law and pay taxes expect a stable environment without unnecessary disruptions. The government needs to establish a clear framework to prevent industrial unrest and strikes, which have led to factory closures and job losses for decades. Since the 1970s, India has experienced hundreds of labour strikes across key sectors like textiles, engineering, automobiles, and electronics in major industrial regions such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, West Bengal, Kanpur, and Punjab. While strikes address issues like low wages, poor working conditions, and fears of job losses from modernisation, they have sometimes hurt the very workers they aim to protect. For example, during the textile strikes and mill closures in Kanpur in the 1970s and 1980s, many workers were forced to take on jobs like rickshaw pulling or construction work. At that time, India's textile industry was on a par with China's, but while India declined, China quickly became the global leader. China does not worry about strikes as it has only one trade union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). It works closely with the government to manage worker grievances and avoid unrest. So, strikes, when they happen, are under control. In contrast, India's trade unions are often tied to political parties, with strikes sometimes driven by political motives.

MAJOR STRIKES It's important to remember major labour strikes that severely affected key industries and regions. In Maharashtra, the Bombay Textile strike of 1982-1983, led by union leader Datta Samant, lasted 18 months and crippled the city's textile industry, leading to mass unemployment as mills shut down. This strike marked the collapse of Mumbai's once-flourishing textile sector. A decade later, in 1993, the Hindustan Lever strike in Sewri lasted four years. Workers protested modernisation plans that they feared would lead to job cuts, highlighting ongoing tensions between industrial progress and employment security. In Haryana, the Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union strike at the Manesar plant during 2011-12 drew national attention due to its violent nature, including the death of a manager. This strike lasted several weeks and halted production, demonstrating the fragile



BIJOY GHOSH

Resolve industrial unrest through clear laws

LABOUR PANGS. Apart from laws that ensure written contracts, severance pay and regulated working hours, mediation and arbitration systems too can end disputes quickly

nature of labour relations in India's critical auto industry. In Kerala, known for its strong labour movements, the 1984 FACT employees strike, lasting several weeks, disrupted fertilizer production over job security and wage issues. Similarly, the Hindustan Newsprint Ltd strike in 1994 halted production at the Velloor factory, affecting the local publishing industry. These strikes underscored the economic challenges facing traditional sectors in the State as they grappled with modernisation. In Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, once called Manchester of the East, a series of major strikes contributed to the decline of the city's once-booming textile, leather, and defence industries. The 1977-78 Textile Mill strikes, lasting several months, led to large-scale unemployment and the beginning of Kanpur's industrial decline. Later strikes, such as the 1981 Elgin Mill strike and the 1992 Swadeshi Cotton Mill strike, culminated in the collapse of Kanpur's manufacturing sector. West Bengal, another State with a strong history of labour activism, saw the 1977 Jute Mill strikes in Kolkata, which accelerated the decline of the city's once-dominant jute industry. The 2008 Tata Motors Singur protest, which opposed land acquisition for a proposed

Collaboration between Central and State governments is necessary to proactively address labour disputes in large firms

Tata Nano plant, ultimately forced the company to relocate to Gujarat. In Tamil Nadu, strikes in the 1980s and 1990s in Coimbatore and Tiruppur disrupted textile production. More recently, strikes at Hyundai in 2007-08, Foxconn in 2009, and the ongoing Samsung strike have halted car and electronics manufacturing, highlighting the continued impact of labour disputes on the state's industrial sector. Gujarat, with its diverse industrial base, has also faced significant strikes. The 1974 Textile Workers' Strike in Ahmedabad led to mass lay-offs and the closure of several mills, while the 2008 General Motors strike in Halol halted car production for weeks. More recently, in 2015, strikes by Maruti-Suzuki suppliers disrupted the automaker's supply chain, reflecting the continued influence of labour unions in Gujarat's industrial sectors. Punjab's textile and bicycle manufacturing industries have been similarly affected. Strikes in Ludhiana's textile sector in the 1980s and bicycle manufacturing strikes at Hero Cycles and Avon Cycles in 1998 and 2010 disrupted production and highlighted the adverse impact of labour disputes on employment and modernisation efforts.

STRATEGY TO REDUCE STRIKES It's essential to prioritise the protection of workers' rights and improve working conditions while ensuring stability. Key steps include enforcing labour laws that ensure written contracts, severance pay, and regulated working hours. It is also critical to establish mediation and arbitration systems to resolve disputes

quickly before they escalate. The state can involve unions in discussions on wages and worker welfare, but unions should not interfere with individual company operations. It is essential to have a clear legal framework outlining manufacturers' obligations regarding labour law compliance and worker welfare. If companies comply with these laws and pay taxes, the state must resolve any labour issues. If the government believes unions should be part of management or formally recognised by factories, it should pass laws to ensure transparency for future investors. Collaboration between Central and State governments is necessary to proactively address labour disputes in large firms. Industrial espionage and disruption are routine global operations. Intelligence units should be set up to detect disruptions caused by external actors. Finally, bipartisan support from all political parties is crucial, as significant trade unions are often affiliated with political parties. Governments hesitate to reform labour laws out of fear of losing votes, even though these laws only impact 10 per cent of workers in the organised sector. Meanwhile, unions and the government do little to improve conditions for 90 per cent of workers in the unorganised sector. Despite the challenges, factory workers are still better off than those in unorganised jobs.

The writer is founder, Global Trade Research Initiative

Weaving a 'Digital Khadi' for Bharat

Digital villages providing community services are governed by digital public infrastructure. Can they revive the Khadi spirit?

Rahul Kulkarni

Mahatma Gandhi's vision for ideal Indian villages emphasised active participation in community governance and development. He viewed 'Khadi' as a symbol of unity, economic freedom, and equality, advocating decentralised production and distribution of essential goods. Today, as we approach a technological revolution, it is essential to reflect on the relevance of these ideas. In our technology-driven era, millions of digital villages exist as information networks governed by opensource digital public infrastructure. Can these digital communities become as recognisable, simple, and unifying as Khadi? As these digital (tech) communities create digital products today, their efforts rest on three key pillars: Standards, Discovery, and Governance. The spirit of Khadi is embodied in the Khadi mark as a standard. Similarly, open standards in technology — publicly available technical specifications, protocols or formats — serve a vital role. A key example of standards in action is the digital vaccine certificate system. This success stems from DIVOC (Digital Infrastructure for Verifiable Open Credentialing), which is an open source Digital Public Good, built on open-source standards and aligned with

Digital Public Good Alliance specifications, guided by the UNSG Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. This is a collaborative effort among various Indian organizations and international bodies like the WHO; consider these as digital villages coming together for the global good. The same spirit of collaborative creation and adoption of standards by various digital villages is what powers Universal Payment Interface (UPI) for payments. In healthcare, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission (ABDM) uses the Unified Health Interface (UHI) standard for seamless information exchange between health providers. In education, the National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR) provides a blueprint for implementing technology in education. **Discovery:** So how do members and organisations in these digital villages come together to build Digital Public Goods and Infrastructure? As in a village republic, every member of the community contributes unique skills to enrich the community; digital (tech) communities comprise diverse talents like product managers, developers, and UX researchers. Identifying and sourcing these skills from the right spaces is essential for curating a community that serves the greater good. A key challenge is enabling the discovery of the right contributors with



KHADI. Digital moves K ARTHIKEYAN G

the right skills and relevant problem statements (or in tech parlance, issues) when weaving digital Khadi. Digital villages like the Code for GovTech Community get created to solve for this. The community identifies 'good first issues' from thousands of GitHub repositories of Digital Public Good builders such as MeitY, National Health Authority, EkStep, eGov and SamagraX among others. This focus on 'good first issues' helps new contributors easily start their 'digital charkha.' Discovery across assets is facilitated by standard protocols like Beckn. For instance, ONEST (Open Network for Education and Skillng Transformations) uses Beckn to help users find educational content, teachers, financial support, and job opportunities. ONDC (Open Network for Digital

Commerce) enables product discovery among various sellers through Beckn. **Governance:** Using the analogy of panchayat raj, today's tech requires governance mechanisms — decision-making frameworks, transparent processes and codes of conduct that promote community goals. The Foundation for Interoperability in the Digital Economy (FIDE) governs the Beckn protocol, fostering innovation and co-creation among ecosystem participants by building interoperable open protocol specifications for various applications. Each digital village, like FIDE, develops its own charter, contributor base, and funding sources to sustain its operations. Constructs such as Digital Cooperatives and Data Fiduciaries are yet to evolve in the digital fabric of Bharat, which will also feed into the weaving of the digital Khadi. It's remarkable to see digital villages form organically, connect through protocols, build on standards, and collaborate via governance principles and common charters. Preserving the autonomy of these communities while enhancing interoperability and discoverability is crucial. As we embark on this journey, let's honour the spirit of Khadi harmony in our digital revolution.

The writer is Chief Technologist at Samagra, a mission-driven governance consulting firm

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

Spurious drugs menace The Editorial 'Dangerous ailment', (October 1), clearly points to the importance of 'zero tolerance' approach in quality of medicines. The statistics and percentage ratios on NSQs through the immediate past decade is no matter of comfort. The deterioration in the quality is appalling. Quality and standardisation should be upheld by the pharmaceutical industry, checked and certified by appropriate regulatory authorities, stringent — rule based — punitive measures enforced upon errant entities, for

the industry to serve its purpose and mandate. **Jose Abraham** Vaikom (Kerala) **Act fast and prudently too** This refers to 'More action needed against substandard, spurious drugs' (October 1). It was disturbing to learn that the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) recently put out a list of over 50 medicines that were either found to be spurious or 'not of standard quality'. While industry bodies should take

the lead to protect the image of double digit growing sector but it also CDSCO's responsibility to nip this evil in bud. It also goes without saying that Ministry of Health & Family Welfare's much needed 'Action taken Report' (ATR) following the CDSCO's revelation of some such disturbing facts, ought to be put in the public domain. Licenses of the units found producing and marketing such spurious or sub-standard medicines, must be 'cancelled' forthwith. Nothing can be more precious than

saving the innocent/unsuspecting human lives across the nation. **Kumar Gupt** Panchkula (Haryana) **Mithun's achievement** Apropos to 'Mithun Chakraborty to get Dadasaheb Phalke Lifetime award for 2022'. Miithun Da was born in Barisal, Bangladesh. He has had his share of struggle when he had to sleep on Bombay pavements with a hungry stomach in his early life. He is the only actor to be awarded a National award for his debut film and later he won two

more national awards. Today it is common for actors to flaunt their six or eight packs but it was Mithun Chakraborty who started this trend. His super hit film *Disco Dancer* not only became a hit movie in India but has a cult following in the former USSR, Eastern Europe, Africa and Middle East. A Limca book of records in his name, 19 movies released in 1989, is still unbroken. His rise to the top is indeed a testament that one can fulfill all his dreams with perseverance. **Bai Govind** Noida

IRMS, on the wrong track

The unification move has failed to deliver

Sudhanshu Mani

The officers of the Indian Railway (IR) have long held a deep sense of pride in their organisation, which seems to fading.

A recent news report said that four years after the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS) was introduced — intended as a merger of eight railway services into a single civil service to eliminate departmentalism — the initiative's ill-effects were becoming evident, and the government was now reconsidering the policy for recruiting executives.

Back in 2017-18, during various workshops and discussions with the then Railway Minister, this writer and some other senior officers argued for a unified cadre at the top level, despite opposition from many of our colleagues. The introduction of IRMS was heralded with much fanfare, which soon gave way to inaction. Then came a sudden push from the highest levels, leading to a series of announcements and rollbacks. And the current version of IRMS emerged — a misstep that has undermined the very goals it set out to achieve.

The key issue is that while the top management continues to enjoy their departmental silos, new executives are now inducted through a unified service via the Civil Services examination. However, career progression still remains largely confined to respective cadres until Level 17 (Board Member), while Level 16 (General Manager) positions were already open to all departments. The hastily implemented unification, without proper thought given to integrating trainee officers into active service, has not only fallen way short of breaking departmental silos in top positions; it would also entrench departmentalism.

OTHER KEY PROBLEMS
Non-engineers in technical roles: It is hard to imagine non-engineers managing technical departments at the ground level in the Railways. But that is the new reality. However, if there is an attempt to exclude them, the whole point of unification is lost.

Confusing oversight for new recruits: Since they do not belong to any discipline, would General Managers oversee their postings and transfers? This makes no sense in practice.

Absurdly short tenures: Some officers are posted in Level 16



RAILWAYS. Recruitment worries
SANDEEP SAXENA

positions for ludicrously short periods, in some cases just a single day. The way appointments are handled reeks of favouritism. Officers are being appointed as GMs without any cross-departmental experience, like working as a Divisional Railway Manager.

Loss of prestige: The biggest casualty has been the loss of prestige and pride, both for engineers and non-engineers. IRMS is now among the least popular services in the All India and Central Services. The engineering service used to be a top choice, but now it's no longer available. Out of 150 intended candidates, only 90 joined, a majority of whom are on leave, hoping to attempt the exam again. This leaves only a disillusioned few to carry forward the vision for IR.

The reform has also led to a crippling shortage of officers at the lower level, exacerbated by the lack of recruitment over the past three years.

Forty probationers from the first IRMS batch have raised concerns in representations to the Railway Board, fearing a government backtrack that could split IRMS back into technical and non-technical streams. They argue that such a move would undo the vision of a unified service capable of meeting the aspirations of a 21st-century India. While one must sympathise with the probationers caught in this uncertain situation, separating technical and non-technical wings might still be a better solution, even if less than ideal, than the current IRMS structure.

Rumours abound that the Ministry is considering scrapping IRMS.

The powers-that-be should recognise that there's no shame in backtracking if the so-called solution turns out to be worse than the original problem.

The writer is Retd. GM/IR and Independent Consultant; Leader of Vande Bharat project



AMIT MITRA

As temperatures soar and monsoons intensify, South Asia stands at the centre of a brewing climate disaster. Recent floods in West Bengal, where rivers breached embankments and displaced thousands, have submerged vast lands.

In 2023, rainfall surged over 40 per cent above normal across South and North-Eastern India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, displacing millions. Bangladesh alone saw over seven million people affected, while South-Eastern India was battered by cyclones. Myanmar faced landslides, cutting off entire regions from aid. This relentless destruction is no longer an anomaly — it is the region's new reality.

Scientists predict that extreme weather events will rise dramatically. Temperatures in the subcontinent are projected to increase by 1°C by 2030, alongside erratic rainfall. Bangladesh's low-lying coastlines, threatened by rising seas, could lose 17 per cent of its land by 2050 due to climate-induced flooding.

Cities like Chattogram and Kolkata face growing risks of inundation, while fragile ecosystems in Myanmar and North-Eastern India will crumble under recurring floods. The future for this region is increasingly hostile to human habitation.

LIVELIHOOD IMPACT
These climate shifts carry severe consequences for livelihoods, particularly in rural areas where agriculture is the economic backbone. Extreme heatwaves are already reducing crop yields, with wheat and rice production projected to drop by up to 30 per cent by 2050.

In Bangladesh, saltwater intrusion from rising seas is turning once-fertile land barren, while irregular monsoons in India's eastern regions disrupt planting cycles. As land-based livelihoods collapse, poverty will deepen, accelerating the crisis and creating a growing tide of landless families with nowhere to turn.

This climate crisis sets the stage for one of the largest waves of climate-induced migration in history. Coastal erosion is swallowing villages in



REUTERS

Is South Asia staring at a climate migration crisis?

SHIFTING POPULATIONS. India as a major regional power needs to brace up to the reality of climate refugees

Bangladesh, and floods are devastating Myanmar, making mass migrations inevitable. Projections show that by 2050, over 20 million Bangladeshis could be displaced due to rising sea levels.

Within India, internal migration is already surging, with the World Bank estimating that 216 million people will move within their countries by 2050 due to climate impacts.

In India alone, millions could be displaced if climate targets remain unmet. As coastal populations move inland, cities already straining under overpopulation will face a monumental challenge in resettling climate refugees.

Migration will bring severe socio-political challenges, especially in India's politically sensitive north-eastern States. The ongoing Assamese protests against illegal immigration highlight the fragility of the

India must prepare for a future where climate refugees become a geopolitical issue. Managing this requires deft diplomacy with Bangladesh, Myanmar

region's social fabric. A mass influx of migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar will only exacerbate unrest, as local populations struggle to preserve their resources and identities.

Political instability in Myanmar and economic desperation in Bangladesh create a volatile situation. The demographic pressures on India's north-eastern borders could soon lead to an untenable security crisis.

SECURITY ISSUE
Migration is not just a humanitarian issue — it poses a threat to India's national security. According to NCRB data, in 2020, 7,686 foreign nationals were found violating Indian laws.

Combined with declining agricultural productivity and worsening food security, socio-economic disparities will fuel internal unrest.

Internationally, India must prepare for a future where climate refugees become a central geopolitical issue. Managing this crisis requires deft diplomacy with Bangladesh and Myanmar while ensuring that migration policies remain humane and secure. Striking the right balance between border control and humanitarian responsibility will be crucial.

Policymakers must act swiftly. Comprehensive disaster preparedness systems are essential for coastal areas prone to cyclones and floods. Strengthening early warning systems and refining evacuation protocols can save lives.

India and Bangladesh should collaborate on cross-border water management, particularly for rivers like the Brahmaputra, to mitigate flooding caused by glacial melts. In agriculture, investing in resilient practices, such as drought-resistant crops and updated irrigation systems, will help buffer against erratic rainfall patterns.

Finally, migration policies need an overhaul. Instead of perceiving migrants as a threat, India could integrate displaced populations by focusing on skill development and offering economic opportunities in underpopulated regions.

India, as the region's largest power, must lead with foresight and empathy. Failing to act will not only accelerate environmental degradation but may destabilise the entire subcontinent, with consequences going beyond South Asia.

The writer is with NCAER in New Delhi. Views expressed are personal

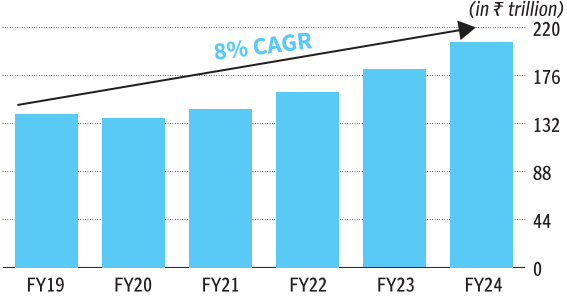
STATISTALK.

Compiled **Arun K Shanmugam** | Graphic **Visveswaran V**

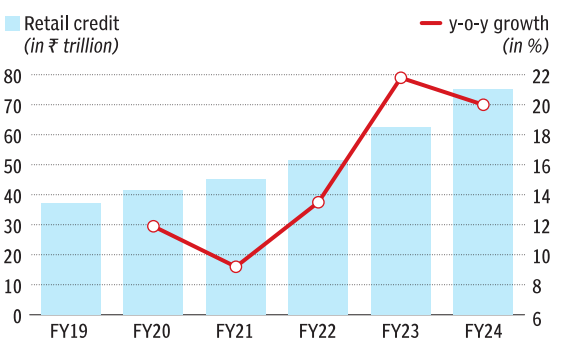
How the retail segment is pushing systematic credit growth faster

Systematic credit has been growing at 8 per cent CAGR since FY19 and at a much faster 12.5 per cent CAGR since FY21. The share of retail within systematic credit is also increasing Y-o-Y from 30 per cent in FY19 to 37 per cent in FY24. Retail credit, on the other hand, witnessed solid Y-o-Y growth at low teens since FY23 and the share of personal loan and gold loan have increased while that of housing and auto loan has decreased. However, moderation in retail credit growth is expected on account of RBI's increase in risk weight mandate for riskier loans.

Consistent growth in systematic credit since FY20

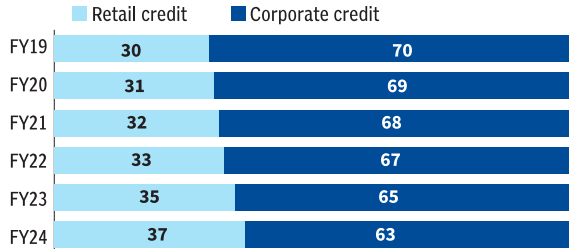


Retail credit growth on strong footing

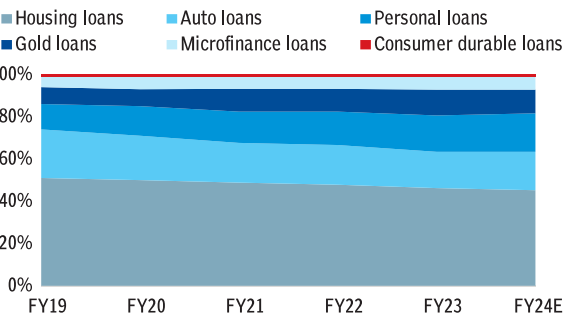


Source: Crisil MI&A; Manba Finance Limited

Share of retail in the overall systematic credit pie rising y-o-y



Share of Personal loans and Gold loans increasing faster relative to Housing loans



thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 2, 2004

CAS implementation in Govt's hands: TRAI

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India has suggested three alternative models to introduce addressability in the cable television system whereby consumers would pay for the channel they wish to view. In its recommendation submitted to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, the regulator has said that an acceptable model is to be found in each area.

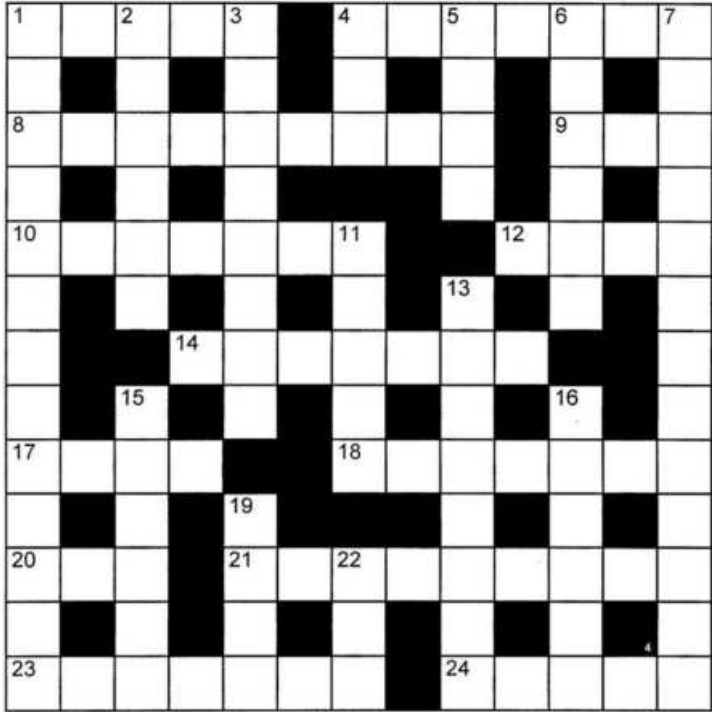
Import duty on polymers cut

The Finance Ministry on Thursday lowered the customs duty on the host of polymer feedstocks, intermediates and finished goods as part of its overall attempt to reduce inflation. A senior Finance Ministry maintained that the revenue loss to the exchequer from the duty cuts "would not be very significant" as the imports of polymers into the country are not very large.

IDBI eyes second largest bank slot in the short term

IDBI Ltd in its new avatar beginning today, is expected to become the second largest commercial bank in the country in the short term, and inch closer to the Number One in the medium term, according to Mr M Damodaran, Chairman, IDBI.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2538



EASY

ACROSS

- Month (5)
- Royal castle (7)
- Advise as being suitable (9)
- Top of tube, etc (3)
- Malady (7)
- Dam across a river (4)
- Deer meat (7)
- Word used in hailing (4)
- Parachute straps (7)
- Little devil (3)
- American edentate (9)
- Express; ceaseless (3-4)
- Telephones (5)

DOWN

- Chagrin, humiliation (13)
- Bring back to mind (6)
- Trounced, criticised severely (8)
- Small (Scot) (3)
- Knot, lump, swelling (4)
- Envelope of shampoo, perfume bag (6)
- Blows occurring in consequence (13)
- Smart, stylish (5)
- Passage with doors leading off (8)
- Billet, check, voucher (6)
- Old four-wheeled covered carriage (6)
- Throw, fling (4)
- Chart (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Move in step with the border (5)
- Royal house may be in the soup (7)
- CD more men make and introduce as suitable (9)
- In a toy pistol it will do something better (3)
- Sells in error when struck down by it? (7)
- River dam constructed of wire (4)
- No vines can produce meat (7)
- Word to hail one sailing a large one-deck boat (4)
- The North shares out the walking-reins (7)
- Naughty child introduces one to redcoat (3)
- Kipling never saw one dillioing in his armour (9)
- Ceaseless way to be on points when one has left (3-4)
- Jewellery items counted by dendrochronologist (5)

DOWN

- Humiliation of actor in it I'm responsible for (13)
- Remember what one may do on the telephone (6)
- Stopped one trading, and got nailed? (8)
- A small Scottish dock that wasn't finished (3)
- Lump turns up on side, half being lost (4)
- Cheats when about to get shampoo out of it (6)
- They are the consequence of having drum section in reserve (13)
- Smart sound trailing dress may make (5)
- Passageway for work behind the scenes (8)
- Successful stratagem on getting the voucher (6)
- Wall came down here for four-wheeled carriage (6)
- List of players to form in bronze (4)
- Ground plan giving politician a heart (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2537

ACROSS 2. Plumb 5. Dusk 7. Draw 8. Filigree 9. Depleted 11. Felt 12. Floating voter 15. Edge 17. Philtres 19. Corvette 21. Girl 22. Dean 23. Sisal

DOWN 1. Bar-bell 2. Pew 3. Unfit 4. Bulldog 5. Dig 6. Spell 10. Leave 11. Float 13. Impetus 14. Eyebrow 16. Drone 18. Ideas 20. Van 21. Gel

Flexibility to markets

Sebi's new measures help both investors and issuers

The board of the market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), on Monday announced a range of changes to regulations. The regulator has been under pressure with accusations of a toxic work culture and allegations of conflict of interest against the chairperson. Neither subject was reportedly on the agenda. However, the regulator surprised market watchers by leaving the framework for futures and options (F&Os) unchanged at its board meeting but issued a circular on Tuesday, raising the entry barrier and making it costly to trade in equity derivatives.

The board introduced several changes such as the framework for the new proposed asset class for mutual funds and easier "lite" norms for funds running passive schemes. The focus seemed to be on facilitating the ease of doing business, a term that was used several times in the statement from the regulator. Many of the measures adopted had been discussed earlier in consultation papers. The board also agreed on fewer disclosures, much faster processes for rights issues, expanding the T+0 settlement, and an optional mechanism for block deals made under the T+0 settlement cycle. It increased the scope for prohibiting insider-trading regulations. Retail investors will be allowed to use a Unified Payments Interface block mechanism similar to the application supported by blocked amount (Asba) for primary issues.

Sebi's F&O measures, announced on Tuesday and effective November 20, will ensure investor protection in an asset class where, according to the regulator's recent research, retail investors have lost ₹1.8 trillion in three years to March 2024, with just over 7 per cent individual investors making a profit.

The new asset class "investment strategy", for example, is being placed under the exact framework discussed earlier with the intention of bridging the gap between conventional mutual funds and portfolio management services. By setting a minimum threshold of ₹10 lakh, it will ensure that only investors with relative deep pockets and risk appetite can participate. It should help force unregistered schemes out of the market.

The MF Lite framework has also been discussed. It reduces net worth, track record, and profitability requirements for sponsors, making it easier for new players to start passively managed funds. Trustees will face fewer compliance burdens, and the approval process for launching passive schemes will be streamlined. This should boost competition and investment options for investors.

The period of processing a rights issue is being reduced to a maximum of 23 working days from the current average of 317. This will accelerate raising additional funds for listed concerns. Apart from easing several disclosure norms for listed entities, the detailed advertisement of results in media becomes optional. Sebi has also introduced a single filing system for listed entities to file relevant reports, documents, etc. on one exchange, which will be automatically disseminated at the other exchanges.

The time to release the outcomes of board meetings has been extended to three hours, instead of 30 minutes, if the meeting concludes after trading hours. An additional time of 72 hours, instead of 24 hours, will be given for disclosing litigation or disputes involving claims against the listed entity subject to maintaining such information in a structured digital database. Both these are pragmatic changes.

The definition of "connected person" has been expanded, which would increase the scope for regulations on prohibiting insider trading. It would bring within its ambit many more persons (such as a person sharing household or residence with a "connected person", a firm or its partner or its employee in which a "connected person" is also a partner, etc), who are indirectly associated with the securities market through intermediaries, fiduciaries or being distant relatives of persons working in listed companies. It remains to be seen how this works since it may be too broad in scope.

Big, but not enough

China's stimulus package may not be effective

The government of China has finally admitted that there are structural problems holding back the world's second-largest economy. The process of "rebalancing" economic activity away from being investment-led to being consumption-led has been underway for a while. But there are significant issues, particularly the state of China's oversized real estate market and the linked issue of local-government indebtedness, which must be addressed as well. The country's top decision-making group, the Politburo, ended its recent meeting with a call to meet growth targets and a promise to support the beleaguered property sector, saying it would not fall any further. This is due to be backed up by greater spending from Beijing. The exact size of this stimulus is unclear. But reports examining plans for new borrowing suggest it could be about a quarter of a trillion dollars or so. This is not a small amount by any standards. But compared to the size of the hole China is in, it may not be sufficient. Most large financial institutions have revaluated their forecasts for Chinese growth this year to below the central government's target of "about 5 per cent".

Vehicles financing local governments in China are a major driver of both urbanisation and the bond markets. Because the state has control of land, unlike India, the usual driver for property development and infrastructure building is the capture of that land value by local governments and their enterprises or special purpose vehicles. The amount of debt that these have taken on is estimated at \$12-13 trillion at the moment. This has vast systemic implications. About a fifth of formal bank lending is to such vehicles, and they are almost half the corporate bond market. Ensuring that local governments can manage this debt is therefore of paramount importance. To that end, the People's Bank of China cut interest rates from 1.7 per cent to 1.5 per cent on Friday, alongside lowering the applicable reserve ratio. The central bank also pledged to support the purchase by financial institutions of struggling real estate companies' land banks. The monetary loosening had an immediate impact on the markets. Chinese stocks did remarkably well on Monday, posting their best single-day numbers in 16 years. The benchmark index went up 8.5 per cent before close.

China's policymakers continue to address the symptoms and not the disease. The only way to cure the economy's overdependence on high-investment real estate is by speeding up the process of rebalancing towards household demand, and ensuring that household income is a larger proportion of gross domestic product. Raising wages, opening up the domestic consumer market to foreign goods, and enhancing the social welfare net are the usual recommendations of economists. Freeing up internal movement so that prosperity can be spread to rural households and those in smaller towns is also important. Meanwhile, some local governments must of course take a haircut on their unprofitable investment. But all these actions require political adjustment and seem to be a step too far for the Chinese Communist Party. China's economy will certainly chug on with a little more dynamism following this stimulus package. But its basic problems will not be addressed until Beijing is willing to spend more political capital on fundamental reform.

GST: Good enough vs the ideal

We must steadily reduce complexity in GST, but incremental reform may be as good as any rapid pursuit of a theoretical ideal

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



The work of reform is never finished. Last month, economist M Govinda Rao made an eloquent case in a column published in this newspaper for reforming the Goods and Services Tax (GST), both in terms of its direction and timing. He argues that the time for big reform is now, as the economy seems to be doing fine despite global headwinds. Never mind that in democracies, deep reform is undertaken only during a crisis. He also believes that our current GST structure is "sub-optimal" and must be moved in the direction of global "best practices", "lower and less differentiated taxes, and a simple and transparent structure", among other things.

Nobody can quarrel with this, for it is what most economists would want. Those who are more concerned with redistributive justice may not quite agree, but we will come to that later.

Soon after Dr Rao's column appeared, we saw a practical demonstration of the GST scheme's complexity from a Coimbatore-based hotelier, D Srinivasan, who highlighted the idiosyncratic rate structure in his business. At an event where Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was the key invitee, Mr Srinivasan pointed out that GST on sweets was 5 per cent, 12 per cent on savouries, and 18 per cent on cream-filled buns, but buns themselves were GST-free.

This statement drew a lot of outrage politically, not least because a local Bharatiya Janata Party functionary leaked a video showing the hotelier apologising to the Finance Minister for embarrassing her in public, but this is not about who may have offended whom. It highlights a standard classification problem under the harmonised system of nomenclature (HSN) codes, where bureaucrats have to decide which item to put under which classifica-

tion, especially when there are multiple rates.

The hotelier should be thanked for drawing attention to this problem, but it would be foolish to assume that imperfect classifications can be remedied by a few tweaks to GST rules and laws. The underlying problem relates not to economics, but to the fact that an exempt item can have many uses, and when human judgement is added to the mix, there will be an attempt to privilege

or protect one group of producers and customers over others who can afford to pay more. After all, there are plain buns priced at ₹5 and others costing 10 times as much. It burns up some social justice warriors if both pay no GST.

This brings me to the core of what I want to highlight. Economists (some of them at least) may want simplicity and efficiency to drive tax policies, but in a political economy there are those who want these policies to aim for redistributive justice too. Simplicity and fairness work in opposite direc-

tions. Put simply, every policy has two components, one which seeks to comply with the laws of economics, and another which has an ideological imperative. Most societies settle for compromises.

Before we address that elephant in the room, let me also point out that complexity can be handled very well by good quality software and technology. If buns attract zero GST and cream-filled buns 18 per cent, it will make no difference to Mr Srinivasan's life if compliance complexity can be handled by good technology. As for the end-customer, it is the final price that matters, not the details of the tax component in the price. This is one reason why the very high share of central and state taxes on petroleum products makes no difference to demand, even



BEYOND IDEOLOGY

R JAGANNATHAN

Time for policy inflection

Most investors believe emerging market central banks must follow the Fed. If they don't, interest rate differentials can lead to significant capital flows and currency fluctuations.

Indeed, the Fed's pivot to easing in September has opened the policy floodgates. In Asia, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas cut the policy rate by 25 basis points (bps), and the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) by 250 bps. Bank Indonesia surprised with a 25-bp rate cut, and the People's Bank of China cut the RRR by 50 bps, and the seven-day open market operation reverse repo rate by 20 bps. Is the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) next?

There's no doubt a lower Fed rate hurdle helps, but, unlike other central banks, the RBI's large foreign exchange reserves give it more leeway to focus on domestic considerations. In our view, it is the shift in the domestic growth-inflation balance since the August policy meeting that calls for a policy recalibration.

A more favourable inflation outlook

The outlook for food inflation looks more promising. A good kharif harvest and favourable rabi prospects bode well for the output and prices of rice, wheat, and pulses. High-frequency data shows a sequential fall in most food prices in August and September, although a surprising wedge has opened up between food prices as reported in the consumer price index (CPI) and those reported by the Department of Consumer Affairs, which appears to be a statistical anomaly.

Vegetable prices face inflationary pressures due to rains, but this is no longer a broad-based risk for food. Importantly, despite repeated food price shocks over the past year, this has not resulted in any second-round effects, as was the worry for policymakers. This means that, even though vegetable prices are a risk, they are more noise than signal from a policy perspective.



SONAL VARMA

This view is also supported by other indicators. The CPI, excluding vegetables, which constitutes 94 per cent of the CPI basket, showed an inflation rate of only 3.1 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) in August. The level of household inflation expectations (one-year ahead) is consistent with CPI inflation of 4-4.5 per cent. Our diffusion indices show that of the 290 items in the CPI basket, 67 per cent had an inflation rate of 4.2 per cent or lower in August 2024. To us, this suggests inflation is aligned to the 4 per cent target. When vegetable prices fall, headline inflation will not be at 4 per cent, but rather significantly undershoot 4 per cent.

Overall, September CPI inflation is likely to rise on account of an unfavourable base, but we expect CPI inflation to undershoot the RBI's projection by 0.2 percentage points (pps) in Q2FY25 and 0.3 pps in Q3, with CPI inflation likely to average 4.4 per cent y-o-y in FY25 and 3.9 per cent in FY26.

Softer growth signals

Since August, growth signals have been weaker than expected. Q1 FY25 gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 6.7 per cent y-o-y was 0.4 pps below the RBI's projections. High-frequency data so far in Q2 also suggests weaker-than-expected

demand, with slower growth rates across passenger vehicle and medium/heavy commercial vehicle sales, diesel consumption, exports, GST collections, cement and steel, to name a few. Our nowcast suggests sequential growth momentum is weak, with GDP growth likely to remain below 7 per cent y-o-y, even in Q2.

This moderation is partly due to transitory factors such as slower government spending and rains, but not entirely. Incremental credit growth is also moderating due to regulatory tightening. In the fiscal year to September 8, credit is up 3.7 per cent, compared to a normal run rate of 5 -5.5 per cent during similar periods. Some argue that financial conditions are easy, but this has not translated into a broad-

though more and more people are becoming aware of the high tax component.

While many countries opt for a simplified tax structure, the world's most dynamic economy, the US, not only has a multiplicity of income and product taxes at federal, state, and county levels but also stringent compliance regimes that make the Indian GST system seem like a picnic.

In a GST Council populated by states run by different political parties, incrementalism will be the norm. Also, there is the counter-argument: If it ain't broke, why fix it? As things stand, GST has been delivering both good revenue growth and economic efficiency gains (consider the faster turnaround times for inter-state goods movement after the demolition of octroi and other barriers, for example). Warts and all, most businesses have made peace with GST. Any new move to radically change things would — at least temporarily — disrupt a system that is working. Whatever has to be done has to be done with great care and circumspection. What if, after moving towards fewer rates and limited exceptions, we find more disruption than revenue growth?

Simplicity and efficiency need not be the only goals worth aiming for. If that were the case, we should be asking for flat income tax rates instead of the current multiplicity of rates and exemptions, though the new tax regime takes significant strides towards simplification.

If we want progressive taxes on income but regressive (single-rate) ones for indirect taxes, what really are we trying to achieve? We need to work towards a regime that works in our culture, and not one that is driven by ideology or theory. If progressive (but simpler) GST rates deliver decent revenues, then so be it. One should not abandon it merely because theory suggests that one is best served by a single GST rate.

A progressive GST is the only thing we have that is close to an expenditure tax. It is also the only tax the rich farmer pays to the exchequer despite receiving many freebies.

Incrementalism is not a problem, provided the rate of improvement is faster than the rate of accumulating problems. We must reform GST steadily, one product group at a time, and we should not worry about a progressive rate of GST just because theory says that it must be more efficient. If people are willing to pay more indirect taxes on luxury goods, why should they not be made to do so? What do we gain by making luxury products cheaper in a country with so much inequality?

Our guiding principle in taxation should be driven by the principle of what works, not what is theoretically the best idea. The good enough should not be made the enemy of the ideal.

The author is a senior journalist

based private capex revival or a sustained strength in urban discretionary demand.

Early reports suggest softer consumer demand at the beginning of the festive season, with discounts and incentives offered by automakers and online platforms to boost sales and clear inventory. Hence, while a pickup in government spending and better monsoon are positives for H2FY25, the combination of policy-induced tighter credit, fading pent-up demand and softer global demand impulses are an offset. We expect GDP growth of 6.7 per cent y-o-y in FY25, with some of the softer growth impulses at risk of spilling over into FY26. An above-7 per cent GDP growth print is now looking less likely.

Tying it all together

Overall, food prices are cooling, and while vegetable prices are a risk, spillovers are less likely, with inflation ex-vegetables now in the 3-handle. Growth has been weaker than expected in Q1, and Q2 is looking soft as well. Brent crude oil prices have moderated closer to \$70 per barrel, from \$80 per barrel in August, and the Fed's rate cutting cycle has started.

What this means for policy

Monetary policy is about balancing tradeoffs. In early 2022, when headline inflation was on the rise and policy rates were ultra-accommodative, the balance of risk called for a withdrawal of accommodation. Today, inflation is aligned to target, growth signals have started softening, and it is not clear if the latter is transient.

With softer signals from core inflation and growth, our takeaway is that there is economic slack, and the one-year forward real policy rate of 2.5 pps is above neutral. When there is space for policy recalibration, a visible shift in the growth-inflation balance and since monetary policy works with long lags, why wait?

Fed rate cuts may be the trigger, but there are domestic reasons for a recalibration of policy rates.

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The evolution of India's economic laws



BOOK REVIEW

V KUMARASWAMY

For an economy to function optimally, participants must be certain of the outcomes — that the counterparty will perform its part, the wealth that one generates will remain with the creator, and that legal systems will ensure these. These attributes are a *sine qua non* for economic progress. Yet, as far back as 1793, Governor General Cornwallis rued that the "growing backlog of suits struck at the very root of the prosperity of the country".

Law and the Economy in India traces the rationale, expedience and compulsions behind the evolution of key regulations that govern economic activity in the country. Part 1, covering

the colonial period, is mostly on the development of laws relating to factors of production — land and property rights, labour and enterprises.

Land laws dominate the first part. With five major schools of Hindu Law, 34 compilations of these laws and a cobweb of practices specific to regions or religious sectors, it is a wonder that India has a common set of laws. The book skillfully walks us through the issues on land ownership, transfer rights, tenancy, occupancy rights, tax collection, registration, wills, joint property matters, and so on. It is interesting to learn, for instance, that the societal restraints on widow remarriage had more to do with the question of property right inheritance rather than any religious rule.

Labour laws have been more about protection and securing labour for European companies and less about workers' rights. For instance, contract laws emerged from the need to ensure timely supplies of indigo leaves for the dye factories of European converters. The Companies Act was the result of

flawed fusion between Western notions of enterprise and the prevailing rainbow of indigenous institutions. Although the book focuses on the economic rationale behind the evolution of laws, it highlights many ironies that foreshadow the mess that is India's legal system. It turns out that inadequate staffing, delays and pendency are not a post-colonial Indian innovation. To illustrate:

■ As far back as 1773, there were just 250 judicial staffers for a population of 20 million in Bengal, a far worse ratio than today.

■ It took 18 years to decide a payment of one year's rental by a tenant to an *inamdar* (a feudal landholder) for keeping his tenancy rights (in the Madras Presidency).

■ The Indian Succession Act that was introduced in 1865 was applicable to all properties other than those owned by Hindus and Muslims — a great illustration of vacuous law making.

■ The law abolishing slavery was originally mooted in 1807, discussed in 1833 when the East India Company charter was renewed, passed in 1843 but became a

punishable offence only in 1860.

■ By one account in 1872, 63 to 71 per cent of decrees became infructuous by the time they were even pronounced at mofussil courts.

Modern-day victims stuck in the law courts would be interested to know that laws are not often (perhaps never) about justice. They are an expedient, delicate balance between what is saleable and fear of political and social backlash, even by the British who had no vote banks in India.

The second part of the book covers laws enacted post-Independence, ranging from wildlife protection to patents, the Emergency to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and from triple talaq to insolvency. The run-up to most regulations should be familiar to the readers. If colonisation and extraction was the theme before Independence, it was self-administration till 1990 and globalisation after that. Law-making has been more about the might of the state being downsized from its colonial

overreach and integrating with global context. Even so, anomalies abound. Land rights are yet to find a balance between growth and owners' rights, tribal protection and collective rights over forests. It is ironic that the Reserve Bank of India's expert committee on rural credit in the 1930s decided that moneylenders were the bane and

LAW AND THE ECONOMY IN INDIA: Before Independence and After

Author: Tirthankar Roy & Anand V Swamy
Publisher: HarperCollins
Pages: 584
Price: ₹799

institutional credit through credit co-operatives and banking outreach were the remedy. But in 2015, the crime records bureau shows that out of 3,097 debt-related farmer

suicides, 80 per cent were customers of institutional credit and just 302 (10 per cent) had taken loans from "rapacious" moneylenders.

The authors' contention that corporate and contract law are by-products of judicial activism is probably more applicable to environmental laws of recent origin. It is good to see labour laws move away from ensuring supplies of indigo for colonial factories to ensuring

livelihoods through such legislation as MGNREGA and for street vendors.

The book rightly expresses reservations over diminishing concerns over equity after the 1970s, rising costs, the overreach of judicial and civil society outfits, and how they overwhelmingly sideline the victims' right to timely justice over the wrongdoers' infinite rubber band of fundamental rights.

Overall, the depth of discussion on the economic linkages and laws are not examined in as much detail to justify the use of the noun "Economy" in the title. But the depth of research and engaging prose make the book accessible to readers with a non-legal background. It is certainly enlightening about the origins of some of India's more inscrutable laws and the even more intriguing implementation of them. At any rate, the book should be made a compulsory read for all journalists, not least because common knowledge of facts and basic laws and their evolution may reduce the acrimony in our rather obnoxious public debates.

The reviewer is author of Making Growth Happen in India

{ OUR TAKE }

Hidden in the monsoon story

Regional variations point to changing patterns in rainfall. Accurate forecasts and adaptation are the need of the hour

It has been a bountiful monsoon if we go by the total quantum of rain recorded — around 108% of the long-period average (LPA), calculated for the period between 1971 to 2020. In fact, it has been the highest quantum of monsoon rainfall since 2020 when 109% of LPA was recorded. But the big picture masks the increasingly awry patterns that the monsoon is making, which if it becomes the trend, will pose a challenge to governments. This year, for instance, unprecedented, extreme rainfall that could not be forecast accurately overwhelmed Delhi, Mumbai, some cities in Gujarat, and several other parts of the country, crippling infrastructure and showering misery on people. In Delhi, on the night of June 27, a cloud cluster formed just ahead of the arrival of the monsoon in the city. Weather models could not predict the unprecedented amount of rain that would lash the city though the India Meteorological Department had issued a nowcast warning that predicted intense rain. Hours later, the city woke up to the highest rain it had recorded in a day since 1936. Residents from Delhi neighbourhoods had to pump out water from their homes and yards for days. In Kerala’s Wayanad, over 250 people were killed in multiple landslides in July. Yet, Kerala is witnessing a 13% rain deficiency, with Wayanad reporting 30% shortfall. Similarly, the East and northeast recorded 14% deficiency. The paddy-growing states such as Bihar have recorded a 19% deficiency, while states in the northeast are all reporting a deficit. On the other end, Gujarat and Rajasthan, considered arid states, have received rainfall that 48% and 56% over the LPA respectively. Climate scientists have flagged this shift in monsoon distribution. But are these states prepared to deal with the economic impact of the new pattern?

Another trend also calls for careful planning. Monsoon months have seen record heat this year. It was the warmest June for northwest India since record-keeping began in 1901. India recorded its second warmest July since 1901 in terms of mean temperatures and the warmest July when it came to night-time temperatures. It was also the warmest August in terms of night-time or minimum temperatures.

The interplay of rising temperatures, humidity levels, and glacial melt being recorded globally is likely to throw the monsoon out of gear. According to the agriculture ministry, 51% of India’s farmed area is rain-fed, making monsoon rains critical. With 47% of the country’s population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, a bountiful monsoon has a direct correlation with a healthy rural economy. Accurate forecasts and adaptation are the need of the hour.

Many cinema lives of Mithun Chakraborty

Mithun Chakraborty’s career as an actor was launched in 1976 by Mrinal Sen in *Mrigayaa*, an art-house film that won him the National Film Award for best actor. In the next decade and after, he carved out his unique space in mainstream cinema in Hindi and Bengali. The Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the highest State honour in Indian cinema, recognises the distance he has travelled, between art-house and popular films and across cinema cultures.

Years after *Mrigayaa*, dressed in a dazzling metallic silver jumpsuit, Mithun arrived on the stage of *Disco Dancer* (1982) with guts and glory. It was an explosive package of entertainment with dancing, singing, drama, and disco and Mithun — essaying the role of Anil/ Jimmy, who rises from rags to riches — carried this with fervour. He redefined the male dancing body of mainstream cinema and ushered in a different charm — his pelvic thrusts in the song, “I am a Disco Dancer”, and passionate acting reimagined flamboyance and machismo for the Bollywood hero. Towards the 1990s, the actor’s visibility in Bollywood marked a cultural shift after many of his box office releases tanked. But there was a subversion of the popular aesthetic that Mithun spearheaded with releases like *Loha* (1997) and *Gunda* (1998). Amidst all this action, song and dance, he won a second National Film Award for best actor with Buddhadeb Dasgupta’s *Tahader Katha (Their Story)*, in 1993 and six years later, a National Film Award for best supporting actor for playing Ramakrishna Paramahansa in GV Iyer’s biopic, *Swami Vivekananda*.

While one may or may not take to his assertive screen presence, there is no denying that Mithun marked a cultural moment in Indian cinema, which is what the award acknowledges.

From sanitation to cleanliness as culture

As the Swachh Bharat Mission completes 10 years, *sampoorna swachhata* is what India must strive to achieve

This Gandhi Jayanti, the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) completes a decade of action. Sanitation in India has a deep-rooted history, tracing back to the Indus Valley civilisation, where scientific methods for toilet construction and waste management were practised. Despite this rich legacy, India’s journey towards comprehensive sanitation coverage has been fraught with challenges. By the time of the 1981 Census, a mere 1% of rural households had access to toilets. This paved the way for the launch of sanitation programmes by the Union government — the Central Rural Sanitation Programme, the Total Sanitation Campaign, and the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan. These initiatives pushed the rural sanitation coverage to 39%. India still accounted for almost 60% of the world’s open defecation load.

It was against this backdrop that SBM was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, with the goal to make rural India Open Defecation Free (ODF) in five years. Bharat achieved this milestone on October 2, 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. In five momentous years, rural sanitation coverage rose to 100%.

Under the mission, more than 11.7 crore toilets have been constructed since 2014 with a public investment of over ₹1.4 lakh crore. This was not merely an asset creation exercise; it was a nationwide movement, blend-

ing infrastructure development with a robust behavioural change revolution. Children, women, men, community leaders, civil society and government machinery worked in unison. Messages on sanitation reached people through every channel. Village-level volunteers (*swachhagrahis*) became the champions of change on the ground.

Following the success of the SBM Phase I, Phase II was launched. This phase aims to sustain the ODF achievements while addressing the broader aspects of solid and liquid waste management, visual cleanliness, and overall rural sanitation.

By 2024-25, the goal is to transform all villages into ODF Plus Model, characterised by sustainable practices and enhanced cleanliness. The mission’s next goal is *Sampoorna Swachhata* — complete cleanliness — that will require continued dedication from every citizen, community, and institution in India.

Sanitation is a fundamental public health intervention. A World Health Organization (WHO) study in 2012 estimated that for every dollar invested in sanitation, there was a return of \$5.5 in lower health costs, more productivity and fewer premature deaths.

A recent study published in *Nature* underscores the profound impact of SBM on public health, particularly in reducing infant mortality rates (IMR). The study — *Toilet construction under the Swachh Bharat Mission and infant mortality in India* — analysed data from 35 Indian states and 640 districts over a 10-year time frame (2011-20) on trends in IMR and under-five mortality rates (U5MR). The authors document a strong asso-

ciation between increasing toilet access and declining child mortality. Results from the study imply that for every 10 percentage point increase in district level access to toilets following SBM corresponded to a reduction in district level IMR by 0.9 points and U5MR by 1.1 points on the average. There is further evidence of a threshold effect wherein the district-level toilet coverage of 30% (and above) corresponded to a reduction of 5.3 points in the IMR and 6.8 points in the U5MR per 1,000 live births. The authors estimate that toilet access at scale due to SBM contributed toward averting 60,000–70,000 infant deaths annually.

However, it must be pointed out that this is not the only impact study which sheds light on the transformative role played by SBM. According to WHO (2018), SBM averted over 300,000 diarrhoeal deaths between 2014 and 2019. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2017) reported that there were 37% lower cases of wasting among children in ODF areas compared to non-ODF villages, validating how sanitation positively impacts childhood nutrition. The incidence of diarrhoea in children was lower by almost one-third in the ODF villages. In a 2017 study, UNICEF estimated that 93% of women felt safer after having a toilet at home, reflecting the role of SBM in enhancing the safety and dignity of women. Additionally, economic analyses in the study showed that each household in ODF villages saved approximately ₹50,000 annually on reduced health care costs plus economic value of saved lives and time savings.

Given the link between sanitation and health, public health gains from



Vinod K Paul



The Swachh Bharat Mission is an exemplar of what can be achieved through dedication, collaboration, planning, brilliant execution, and relentless *jan andolan* (people’s movement)

SBM are inevitable. What we have from the recent study is a robust quantification of child survival improvements attributable to toilet access. Sanitation transformation on a national scale will surely have an impact in reducing waterborne infections among adults as well, as also possibly on reducing the burden of antimicrobial resistance. Sustained effects on childhood stunting and development are also assumed. The Indian Council of Medical Research and academia should undertake objective studies on these dimensions of SBM.

The SBM is an exemplar of what can be achieved through dedication, collaboration, planning, brilliant execution, and relentless *jan andolan* (people’s movement). The 4P mantra of SBM — political will, public finance, partnerships, and public participation — along with persuasion, has been instrumental in the programme’s success and outreach. This is a template for other social

transformation missions in the country and beyond.

As we strive for Viksit Bharat by 2047, it is imperative for us to emerge as global leaders in sanitation and cleanliness. Our commitment to sustaining behavioural change, ensuring continued use of the constructed toilets and integrating advanced waste management solutions should remain unwavering. Cleanliness must become a shared value, one that is owned and practised by us all.

A decade of SBM has yielded unprecedented gains — clean environment, women’s dignity and safety, ease of living, household savings and a culture of hygiene aligned with our tradition. Mahatma Gandhi had said, “cleanliness is next to godliness”. The success of SBM is a worthy tribute to the Father of the Nation.

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The views expressed are personal

Quad’s maritime vision short on strategic intent

When United States (US) President Joe Biden welcomed the Prime Ministers (PM) of India, Australia, and Japan to his hometown of Wilmington for the fourth in-person Quad Leaders’ Summit last week, the mood was one of high optimism. The summit marked a farewell for both Biden and Japan’s PM Fumio Kishida, and President Biden seemed eager to make it count. Two years after Quad’s formalisation, the commitment to regional cooperation was unmistakable, and Biden was determined to build on the momentum.

The gathering hit all the right notes on Indo-Pacific security, with leaders voicing concerns about the “militarisation” of contested territories and “coercive and intimidating manoeuvres” in the South China Sea. Though China wasn’t mentioned by name, the references were clear.

The summit’s declaration was detailed and comprehensive, listing a wide range of cooperation initiatives, including a cancer moonshot, the maritime training initiative in the Indo-Pacific, the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, a Quad Indo-Pacific logistics network, an expanded infrastructure initiative, and the Quad Bio-Explore project. It gave the impression of a united grouping moving in strategic unison.

Yet, if one were looking for clarity on Quad’s specific trajectory and tangible outcomes from its initiatives, one is likely to be disappointed. Despite the rhetoric, much of Quad’s military objectives remain vague. Take the Quad Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative. While it has found some success in the Pacific, practical achievements, especially in the Indian Ocean, have been minimal. Countries in the region, particularly in South Asia, remain hesitant to share sensitive information, largely due to concerns over foreign commercial satellite services, which they fear may infringe on their national sovereignty. Differing legal frameworks, limited technological infrastructure, and the absence of clear protocols for accessing satellite data continue to hinder practical cooperation.

While Quad did subtly criticise Chinese violations of international law and unilateral actions in the East and South China Seas, it failed to address the larger issue of US distraction. With the US deeply involved in Ukraine, it has limited resources left to confront China. Though Washington acknowledges Beijing as a threat to Taiwan and a growing concern in both the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, it is far from prepared to challenge China, especially in the latter region, where no clear US maritime strategy exists.

Increasingly, Quad’s declarations seem out of touch with operational realities. Many of its security initiatives appear more politically driven than designed for practical execution. The need for Quad to project unity in countering China is understandable, but it frequently overshadows the development of concrete, actionable plans. A case in point is the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission. Coastguards, primarily tasked with law enforcement and

humanitarian missions within their exclusive economic zones (EEZ), require less integration than naval forces, where cooperation is more combat-oriented. Though coastguard collaboration is valuable in addressing maritime crime, such cooperation is already well-established. It’s unlikely, for example, that an Indian ship-rider aboard a US Coast Guard vessel would gain new insights into addressing crime in Indian waters, and vice versa.

This is not to downplay the relevance of coastguard collaboration but rather to underscore the absence of a clear strategic direction in Quad’s security initiatives. It’s worth pointing out that existing mechanisms like the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) already facilitate information sharing, making the need for additional measures like the ship-observer mission difficult to justify.

Similarly, Quad’s cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and the “logistics network” remains vague. Though Quad navies are already collaborating in these areas, significant challenges persist.

The main issue is the lack of a unified command or coordination framework. With each country operating under its own disaster response protocols, coordinating efforts on a multilateral level is complex, especially in the absence of a dedicated structure for decision-making and resource allocation. Without clear coordination mechanisms, response protocols, or timelines, it’s hard to see how this new network will improve upon existing frameworks like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response.

Interoperability issues further highlight the disconnect between intent and execution. While interoperability is crucial for naval forces, it is far less pressing for coastguards, who primarily handle law enforcement and search and rescue (SAR) missions within their respective waters. The emphasis on shared intent without the mechanisms to operationalise it raises doubts about the long-term effectiveness of these Quad proposals.

This is not to imply that Quad serves no useful military purpose. Its initiatives, even if underdeveloped, serve a purpose beyond immediate practicality. They act as significant political signals of commitment and unity in the face of external pressures, particularly China’s growing maritime ambitions. Some initiatives may lack clear modalities now but could develop over time as discussions and multilateral mechanisms evolve.

Yet, maritime analysts would be wise not to get caught up in the hype surrounding these initiatives, recognising the gap between political signalling and practical implementation. While Quad’s intent is clear, the path forward remains more uncertain than many imagine.



Abhijit Singh

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The views expressed are personal

{ NAJIB MAKATI } PRIME MINISTER OF LEBANON

Lebanon is facing one of the most dangerous phases in its history. Around one million people have been displaced across Lebanon since Israeli air strikes began. We urgently call for more aid

Gandhi’s symbols provide clues to his political truth

Mahatma Gandhi was a communicator par excellence. The precision, clarity and simplicity with which he connected with his audience was remarkable. What is all the more striking was the way he made effective and impactful use of both symbols and symbolic language in his communication with the masses.

Gandhi understood the uniqueness of a symbol that gives access to deeper layers of reality otherwise inaccessible or invisible. Using symbols as conveyors of feelings and meaning, he leveraged them to put across his radical and transformative ideas for mass action. Relevant, regenerative and visionary, such messages served as focal and rallying points for his social, political and spiritual goals.

Charkha, the spinning wheel, for example, was adopted to emphasise the need for a moral economy based on the idea of self-reliance. It was used as a device to fulfil three aims — to dismiss British textiles in favour of locally spun *khadi*, to ensure economic emancipation of every citizen, and to conceive, through it, a method of non-violent protest. Indeed, it emerged as a powerful symbol of the *swadeshi* movement.

Khadi was adopted as a key part of this movement. As a symbol of the crusade against imperialism, it turned out as a rallying point for everyone, whether rich or poor, to spend time each day spinning *khadi*. The country-wide initiative helped foster unity through shared labour. Adopting the insightful strategy, Gandhi was very clear that it would help lift India out of poverty by creating industry and jobs. Be it the *charkha* or *khadi*, the symbols have remained so strong that even now when we espouse *Aatmanirbhar Bharat*, (self-reliant India), they ignite our mind with a sense of mission and pride.

A watch, for Gandhi, was an instrument that regulated his life. The little piece of nickel hanging by his waist, helped him to utilise every minute of his time purpose-



Ram Krishna Sinha

fully. A fistful of salt that he picked up was to drive home the point that the British were working against the interests of the people of India.

Cleaning latrines was a gesture that conveyed to the nation not only his penchant for hygiene, sanitation and cleanliness but also his resolve to abolish the vice of untouchability in our society. In recent times, Gandhi’s work and message — “cleanliness is next to godliness” — inspired the entire nation into action when the Swachh Bharat Mission was launched.

The revolutionary decision of Gandhi to embrace the new attire — *dhoti* and shawl — helped remind the nation of a common man’s poverty and plight. His efforts to identify with a peasant’s image was genuine, honest and credible. Creating this image, he also sent a message that a consumption-oriented market and need-based lifestyle are neither sustainable nor desirable.

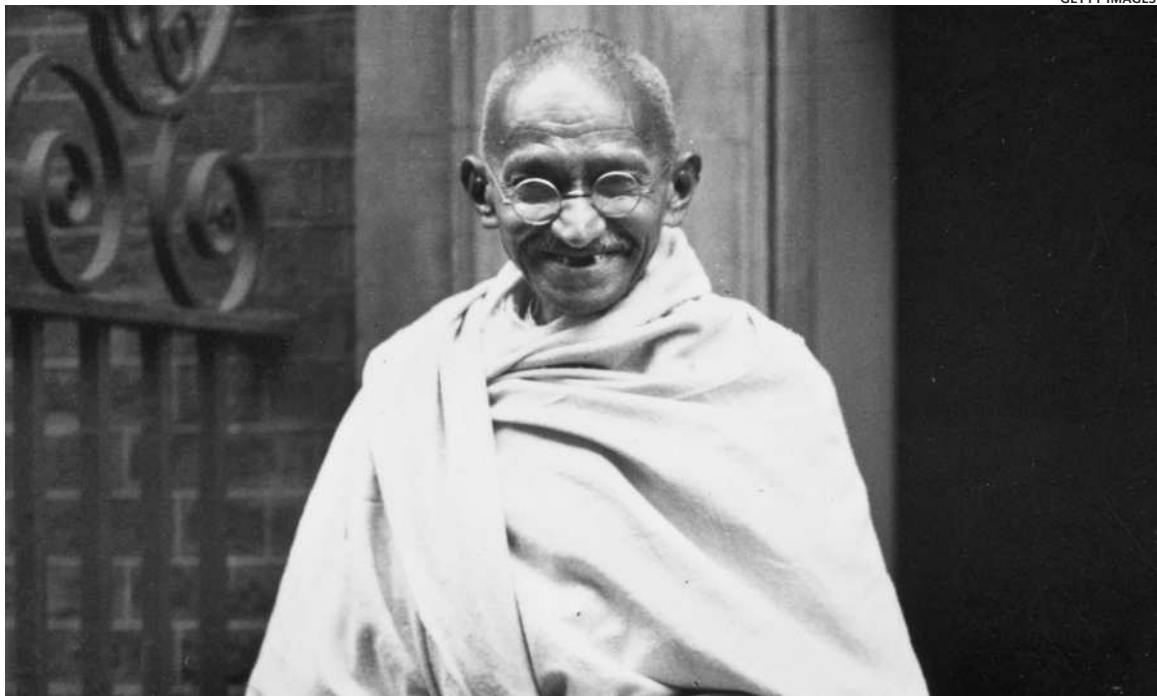
In this context, it was quite natural for him to give sage advice, a talisman, to the policymakers that, whenever in doubt, they must recall the face of the poorest and the weakest, and ask, if the step they contemplate is going to be of any use to them.

Again, through his favourite *bhajan*, *vaishnava jana to*, he propagated the powerful message of interfaith harmony and peace. He chose the *bhajan* as it encapsulated the values that form the fundamental basis of most of the religious scriptures.

Clearly, the enormous impact of the symbols and symbolic messages were not fortuitous. The underlying substance in the messages in terms of worthiness of cause, purity of purpose, courage of conviction, and actionable insights was so palpable and valuable that they not only stirred the peoples’ imagination but also moved them into action for achieving worthy goals.

Ram Krishna Sinha is a former bank executive and is presently on the boards of public entities.
The views expressed are personal

OUR VIEW



Empower people for a clean-up of the country

Mahatma Gandhi's legacy is wide and enriching. Ten years since the Swachh Bharat Mission spotlight his emphasis on cleanliness, it's amply clear that upliftment hinges on human agency

Today, 2 October 2024, marks the 155th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, who left us an awe-inspiring legacy. As a leader, he mobilized millions of Indians for passive resistance to colonial rule. As a social reformer, he strove, through personal example, to rid manual labour—especially in the context of sanitary work—of a stigma attached by tradition. As a soldier for peace, he laid his life on the line to oppose communal hatred and strife. Recent public discourse and iconography—his spectacles, most visibly—however, has focused on his efforts in the sphere of sanitation and cleanliness. The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) was launched ten years ago with the stated aim of ridding India of open defecation by his 150th birth anniversary in 2019. Millions of toilets were built. The benefits of toilet use were lauded by leaders and publicity material, latrines were dubbed abodes of dignity and public defecation was publicly shamed—with some offenders punished—in the race to that target. The country was duly declared open-defecation free (ODF). To the satisfaction of those behind the SBM, studies since then have spied a correlation between its success and a decline in India's infant mortality rate. When the incumbent administration took up the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, launched in 2012 to end open defecation by 2022, and converted it into the SBM, it involved more than a change in nomenclature. It was transformed from a ministry scheme into a high-profile programme, spearheaded by India's top leadership and equipped with a well-resourced mission-control unit. Mahatma Gandhi's iconic glasses adorned all SBM

messages and signboards, which, together with some of his quotations on the subject, helped lend this mission the character of a popular movement. Yet, the 2019-21 National Family Health Survey found that 19% of all Indians—including 26% of the rural population—still do not have access to toilets and defecate in the open. And the heart-warming link between progress in toilet building and decline in infant mortality seems overblown. About 70% of all infant deaths in India are neonatal losses, which would vary little by toilet hygiene. And the other variable tested in the study was toilet availability, rather than use—which is significantly lower. Notably, the national mission to assure every home piped water is still underway. Where water must be fetched from a distance in pails and pots, people often hesitate to pour large volumes down a toilet drain. There are sewage constraints too. Typically, what collects in the two-pit toilets built under SBM needs to be cleaned out every three years. This brings questions of purity/pollution right home to people who may not yet be culturally prepared for that interrogation. Such factors discourage toilet use. Meanwhile, high levels of malnutrition persist with a clear role played by enteric parasites, which, in turn, attests to an ODF India that's still in the future. While educational and behaviour-change efforts were made, what the SBM and other such upliftment schemes often tend to overlook is this: People need to be subjects, rather than passive objects, of development. This draws into focus the nation's emphasis on human agency, dignity and entitlement. It is no wonder that what Mahatma Gandhi sought, above all, was to empower everyone.

GUEST VIEW

Social media influencers have received a wake-up call

MANISHA KAPOOR



is chief executive officer and secretary general of Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).

In recent years, social media influencers have emerged as powerful voices in the marketplace, capable of shaping consumer opinions and driving trends. However, a recent court ruling serves as a crucial reminder that being a social media influencer is not a licence to operate without accountability or responsibility. The case in question revolves around the increasingly popular trend of de-influencing, where influencers advise their followers against purchasing certain products. The de-influencing movement encourages consumers to reconsider their purchases, pushing back against over-commercialization and promoting thoughtful consumption. On the surface, this seems like a positive development, allowing influencers to foster authenticity and transparency. However, the line between genuine critique and sensationalism can be thin. De-influencing can easily slip into the latter and become a vehicle for unsubstantiated claims or personal biases, risking the very trust it

seeks to cultivate among online audiences. Recent trends in de-influencing have drawn particular attention to food brands, which find themselves at the receiving end of aggressive critiques. Some influencers have taken to social media to mock these brands, labelling their products as "sugar-bombs" or "cancerous." When such statements are made without scientific evidence or without appropriate expertise, they can lead to unnecessary fear-mongering among consumers. In today's digital landscape, where misinformation can spread like wildfire, the risks of unchecked opinions are significant. The algorithms that govern social media often favour sensationalist content, amplifying messages that may lack authenticity or accuracy. This creates an environment where consumers are bombarded with conflicting information, making it challenging for them to discern what is factual. The court ruling: A legal case against a prominent social media influencer brought these issues to the forefront. The influencer, who made disparaging claims about a well-established health product, faced legal repercussions for questioning its efficacy without the necessary qualifications or evidence to back his statements. The Delhi high

court underscored that the product had operated in compliance with Indian regulations for several decades and the influencer's unfounded assertions could jeopardize trust in the regulatory framework. In its ruling, the court emphasized that social media influencers cannot have a free run without accountability. The court stated that "a social media influencer like the defendant cannot express and/or advocate his ideas/opinions freely without any substantive basis and/or backing and is expected to be sensible, prudent, careful, cautious, and pragmatic instead of being unwise and reckless, especially in today's age when media is a powerful tool having an influence over all humanity." Freedom of speech and its limits: While the Indian Constitution grants individuals the right to express their opinions freely, this freedom is not absolute. The court highlighted that "while the constitution permits anyone to freely convey/share/opine about anybody and/or anything, it must be done

without being slanderous, defamatory, or libellous, amounting to criticism and/or character assassination." In this context, the influencer's claims about the health product were deemed harmful, particularly because they could mislead consumers and undermine trust in regulatory bodies responsible for ensuring product safety. They were considered defamatory on account of the tone that was deployed. The court placed particular emphasis on the importance of responsible conduct in the context of the defendant's role as an influencer. It held that the language and tone used by the defendant in the video suggested that he was ridiculing the brand rather than engaging in a constructive or informed critique. The court found that the defendant's behaviour was unbecoming of someone who claims to be a social media influencer, as his actions were not in line with the standards of professionalism, care and responsibility expected from individuals who have such a wide-reaching platform.

The judiciary has ruled that they cannot have a free run. Accountability will push them into better roles

De-influencing 2.0—A new approach: De-influencing could serve a very valuable purpose if it keeps brands authentic and truthful. But there is a pressing need for a more responsible approach—one that could be termed 'De-influencing 2.0.' As envisioned, this new version of online activism would prioritize fact-based, scientific discourse over sensationalism and unsubstantiated attacks on products and brands. By focusing on credible information and well-researched opinions, influencers can help cultivate a better informed consumer base. Influencers who genuinely wish to make a positive impact can engage in constructive critiques and open dialogues with consumers and the companies that market these brands. There is another opportunity to consider. This new version of de-influencing could also work with regulatory bodies. As consumer concerns evolve, it is essential for laws and guidelines to reflect these changes, ensuring that Indian industry remains accountable. By working alongside stakeholders to address emerging issues, influencers can play a pivotal role in shaping a marketplace that prioritizes truth and integrity, and requires everyone—including influencers—to meet these standards.

MY VIEW | ON THE OTHER HAND

Sebi should use cautionary tales to rein in risky derivative trading

The regulator could learn from India's anti-tobacco campaign to warn F&O traders of loss dangers

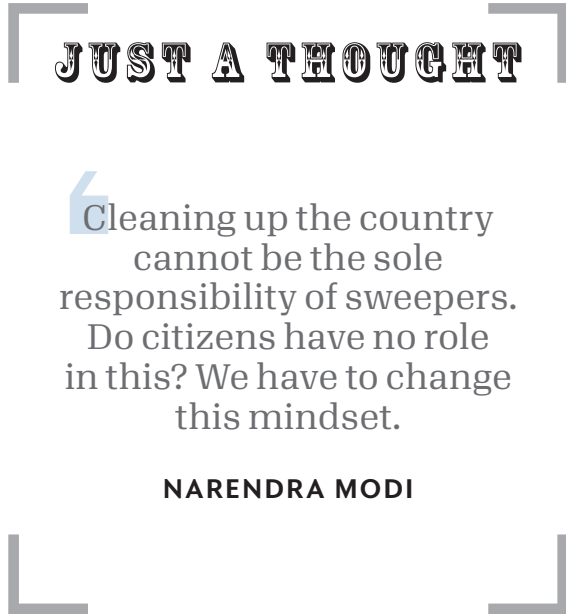


VIVEK KAUL is the author of 'Bad Money'.

On 23 September, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) published a study in which it said that 76.3% of loss-making traders continued trading in equity futures and options (F&O) despite incurring losses for two consecutive years. Out of the 2.44 million investors who faced losses in both 2021-22 and 2022-23, 1.86 million continued trading in 2023-24. However, only 8.3% managed to turn a profit. Why do loss-making traders continue trading? At an individual trader's level, an escalation of commitment—throwing good money after bad, i.e., in the hope of making up for previous losses—seems to be at work. But there's more to it. In May 2023, Sebi required stock brokers to prominently display risk disclosures when investors logged into their trading accounts. They had to disclose that nine out of ten individual traders in the equity F&O segment experienced losses and that loss-making traders recorded an average net trading loss of ₹50,000. But these disclosures didn't seem to have had much of an impact on the F&O mania. According to Sebi's study, 91.1% of individuals incurred net losses in F&O trading in 2023-24, compared to 91.5% in 2022-23 and 90.2% in 2021-22. At an aggregate level, individuals incurred losses of about ₹75,000 crore in 2023-24. This indicates that Sebi's mandate requiring stock brokers

to display risk disclosures didn't work. Further, the Sebi study found that the top 3.5% of loss-makers, approximately 400,000 traders, faced an average loss of ₹28 lakh per person. So, why didn't Sebi's mandate for risk disclosures work? Now, just because there is data out there doesn't mean people will pay attention to it, especially if it appeared each time one logged on to a trading account. First, most people trade on smartphones, which have small screens. On these compact displays, the caution typically appears at the bottom, making it difficult to read. Second, data appearing recurrently tends to become a blind spot over time. There was another factor at work. As Morgan Housel writes in *Same As Ever*: "There is too much information in the world for everyone to calmly sift through the data, looking for the most rational, most correct answer." People want stories, not data. Or as Housel writes: "People are busy and emotional, and a good story is always more powerful and persuasive than ice-cold statistics." As for those investing in F&O, they were led to believe that making money in this market was easy. This storytelling was carried out by financial influencers, those appearing as experts on TV and also by fund managers, stock brokers and many others in the financial services business. The story of easy money from F&O trades was lapped up by individuals. Or as Amanda Montell writes in *The Age of Magical Overthinking*, though in a very different context, "They wanted a relatable populist who spoke their language, and whom they could access for free on their phones." Financial influencers and others became these relatable populists who sold stories and not data, encouraging individual traders to trade more, even after losing money. So, this leaves us with the question of what Sebi can do to control the F&O mania. An essay titled 'The Life You Save May Be Your Own,' written by economist Thomas Schelling, might be

of help here. Schelling offers the example of a six-year-old girl needing thousands of dollars for a life-saving operation. When people come to know of it, they will flood her with donations to save her. However, if you mention that without sales tax, deteriorating hospital facilities could lead to more preventable deaths, then only a few will offer help. Using this contrast, Schelling explains the concept of an identified life and a statistical life. People who would die because of a hospital not having adequate facilities are statistical lives, while the girl who needs money is an identified life. The world cares about identified lives and not statistical lives. As Schelling writes in the essay, thousands of "unidentified" people die due to missing mosquito nets, vaccines or clean water. Sebi needs to differentiate between statistical lives and an identified life. Whenever it puts out aggregate data on how individuals are losing money on trading F&O, it's talking about statistical lives. But the world cares about identified lives. And this is where Sebi can really do something. It already has data on investors who have made big losses trading F&O. It needs to approach them and encourage them to talk about their loss experience. Perhaps financial incentives can be offered to get them to talk. These stories then need to be cut into small reels for social media. Longer videos could also be put out. The regulator could learn from the story of Mukesh Harane. Addicted to *gutka*, Harane died of oral cancer in October 2009. His story became the centrepiece of an anti-tobacco campaign, with an audio-visual message that was widely broadcast. The campaign's graphic visuals were far more impactful in highlighting the dangers of *gutka* consumption than statistics because people pay far closer attention to humans telling stories than just data. Indeed, to issue effective warnings, Sebi needs to find its Mukesh Harane.





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Preparing for the next pandemic: what NITI Aayog report says

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, OCTOBER 1

FOUR YEARS after the outbreak of Covid, an expert group constituted by NITI Aayog has recommended setting up a comprehensive framework to effectively manage future public health emergencies or pandemics.

The Pandemic Preparedness and Emergency Response (PPER) framework has called for a new Public Health Emergency Management Act (PHEMA), and the implementation of other measures to ensure a swift and effective response within the first 100 days of the outbreak.

The expert group, which was formed in June 2023, based its recommendations on the learnings and challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and other public health crises. A government statement noted that Covid-19 was “undoubtedly not the last pandemic”, and “given the unpredictably changing planetary ecology, climate and human-animal-plant

dynamics, new potentially, large-scale infectious threats to human health are inevitable”.

Here are some of the key recommendations made by the expert group in its report, *Future Pandemic Preparedness and Emergency Response: A Framework for Action*, which was published on September 11.

Enactment of PHEMA

Public health emergencies require governments to exercise special powers such as mandatory screening of people and putting restrictions on free movement. During the Covid-19 pandemic, provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act (EDA), 1897, and the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA), 2005, were invoked.

But these laws were not entirely satisfactory, the report said. “The EDA 1897 does not define “dangerous”, “infectious”, or “contagious diseases”, or “epidemic”. It contains no provisions for the processes required for dissemination of drugs/ vaccines, and the quarantine measures and other preventive steps

that need to be taken,” it said.

The NDMA was likewise not designed to cater to health emergencies. “It does not specifically define public health emergencies or epidemics. It focuses on managing several types of disasters, including natural disasters,” the report said.

These gaps can be filled by enacting PHEMA, the report said. The new law can empower central and state governments to effectively respond to not just pandemics, but also other kinds of health emergencies arising from non-communicable diseases, disasters or bioterrorism.

Renu Swarup, head of the expert group and former Secretary of the Department of Biotechnology, told *The Indian Express*, “This special provision Act would empower public health agencies to take urgent action. It would create public health cadres at national and state levels who would be trained and fully prepared to be the first responder.”

Empowered panel of Secys

The report proposed creating an Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) — a committee of officials which will be headed by Cabinet Secretary to prepare for public health emergencies and monitor preparedness during peace times. It will “guide on governance, finance, R&D, surveillance, partnerships and collaborations, and other necessary functions that can be ramped up for immediate response” in case of an emergency.

EGoS will develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for pandemics, and establish sub-committees for aforementioned functions, the report said.

Strengthen surveillance

The report made several recommendations for strengthening the disease surveillance network.

It noted that several epidemics and pandemics, including Covid-19, in the past 50

years were caused by viruses linked to various bat species. Therefore, constant monitoring of the human-bat interfaces was crucial.

The report proposed the creation of a national biosecurity and biosafety network, involving leading research institutions, biosafety containment facilities (labs that use specific safety equipment, practices, and building design to protect people and the environment from biological hazards), and genome sequencing centres.

Swarup said, “All components of this system should be strengthened and connected to work in a harmonised, autopilot mode that gets ignited as soon as the first warning sign is received.”

The report also recommended setting up an emergency vaccine bank, which would source vaccines from within or outside the country.

Network for early warning

The report proposed building an epidemiology forecasting and modelling net-

work that can predict transmission dynamics of infectious diseases, and monitor the effectiveness of countermeasures, including vaccination, in different scenarios.

A network of centres of excellence (CoE) for research on priority pathogens is also required. Diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines for such priority pathogens, identified from the list maintained by the World Health Organisation, can be developed in advance, the report said.

Independent drug regulator

India needs a well-developed clinical trial network accepted by international regulatory authorities to ensure speedy access to innovative products to tackle public health emergencies. The Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO), which is responsible for regulating the import, sale, manufacture and distribution of drugs, needs to be independent, and needs to have special powers, the report said. The CDSCO is currently under the Ministry of Health.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

Nearby river contributes to the rise of Mount Everest, says new study

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 1

MOUNT EVEREST, currently 8,849 metres tall, has over the past 89,000 years, grown about 15 to 50 m higher than expected because a nearby river is eroding rock and soil at its base, helping push it upwards, according to a new study.

The loss of landmass in the Arun River basin, which spreads across Nepal and Tibet and is 75 km away from Everest, is causing the world's tallest peak to rise by up to 2 mm a year, the study said.

The study, ‘Recent uplift of Chomolungma enhanced by river drainage piracy’, was published in the journal *Nature Geoscience* on Monday.

While Everest and the rest of the Himalayas have been slowly rising due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates for around 50 million years, the change in the Arun river network is a contributing factor to the mountains’ continued rise.

‘Isostatic rebound’

Everest has been experiencing an additional boost to its height due to a geological process called isostatic rebound. It involves the rise of land masses on the Earth's crust when the weight of the surface diminishes. The crust, Earth's outermost layer, essentially floats atop a mantle layer of hot, semi-liquid rock.

In the case of Everest and its neighbouring mountains, the surface weight started to reduce after the Arun River merged with the Kosi River around 89,000 years ago. This resulted in accelerated erosion that carried off huge amounts of rock and soil, reducing the weight of the region near Everest.

“Isostatic rebound can be likened to a floating object adjusting its position when weight is removed,” geoscientist Jin-Gen Dai of China University of Geosciences in Beijing, one of the authors of the study, told *Reuters*.

“When a heavy load, such as ice or



Mount Everest is currently 8,849 metres tall. *Reuters*

eroded rock, is removed from the Earth's crust, the land beneath slowly rises in response, much like a boat rising in water when cargo is unloaded,” Jin-Gen Dai said.

The main gorge of the merged river system is located approximately 45 km east of Everest.

The researchers, who used numerical models to simulate the evolution of the river system, estimated that isostatic rebound accounts for about 10% of Everest's annual uplift rate.

Everest's neighbouring peaks including Lhotse, the world's fourth highest, and Makalu, the fifth highest, also get a boost from the same process.

More research required

Some experts, however, are not convinced by the new study's findings. They have argued that the timing of the merger of the rivers is uncertain, and that the researchers have relied on assumptions.

Geologist Mike Searle, who was not involved in the research, told *The Washington Post* that “dating river deposits or incision rates is very difficult”.

“The main arguments are geographical,” Searle, a professor at Oxford, said. “River incision, in my opinion, has little to do with mountain uplift.”

(WITH INPUTS FROM REUTERS)

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 1

AS THE Supreme Court hears petitions seeking a court-monitored probe into the alleged adulteration of the *ghee* in Lord Venkateswara's *laddu prasadam*, Hindu organisations have revived their demand to free temples from government control.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has announced a nationwide campaign, and Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has called for a “Sanatana Dharma Rakshana Board” to look into all issues relating to temples.

How are religious places run in India?

Muslims and Christians manage their places of worship and religious institutions through boards or trusts run by the community. In the case of many Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist places of worship, however, the government exercises considerable control. Hindu temples form the majority of the around 30 lakh places of worship in India (2011 census).

Temples in Tamil Nadu are managed by the state's Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department. The AP government controls and appoints the head of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which runs the Tirupati Temple.

States use a part of the income from offerings and donations at large temples for the administration and upkeep of those and smaller temples, and for welfare activities that may or may not be connected to the temple — such as running hospitals, orphanages, or schools/colleges that provide secular education.

Several states — including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan — have enacted laws that give the government the power to administer temples, their incomes and expenditures.

The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir enacted The Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1988, to manage, specifically, the Vaishno Devi Mata Shrine in Katra, Jammu.

States draw their power to enact such legislation from Article 25(2) of the Constitution, under which a government can make laws “regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice”, and “providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus”.

Religious endowments and institutions are in List III (Concurrent List) of the Seventh Schedule, which means both the Centre and states can legislate on the subject.



The head of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, which runs the Venkateswara Temple in Tirupati, is appointed by the Andhra Pradesh government. *Express Archive*

How did Hindu temples come under government control?

The historical evidence for the construction of monumental temples dates back to the Mauryan period (321-185 BCE). Throughout Indian history, kings and nobles have donated land and riches to temples, which emerged as centres of culture and economy. The larger temples often promoted agriculture and irrigation, and were significant economic drivers.

In the medieval period, invaders repeatedly attacked and pillaged India's fabulously wealthy temples. The colonial rulers sought to control them — and between 1810 and 1817, the East India Company enacted a series of laws in the presidencies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, giving themselves the right to interfere in the administration of temples, purportedly to prevent the misappropriation of their income and endowments.

In 1863, the British enacted the Religious Endowments Act, which handed over control of temples to committees set up under the Act. However, the government retained considerable influence through judicial jurisdiction, the extension of the Civil Procedure Code and Official Trustees Act to temples, and the Charitable and Religious Trusts Act, 1920. In 1925, the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act empowered provincial governments to legislate on matters of endowments — over the years, this law gave enormous powers of oversight to a board of commissioners, which could even take over the management of a temple.

After Independence, the 1925 Act became the blueprint for various states to enact their own laws to administer temples. The first such Act was the Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, passed by the State of Madras in 1951, which paved the way for the supervision of temples by the HR&CE department, and provided for

the appointment of an Executive Officer.

Around the same time, a similar law was passed in Bihar. The Madras law was struck down in court, but a new one was enacted in 1959 with a few modifications.

Today, most states in South India follow similar legal structures to control temples. It has been argued that government intervention is necessary to ensure that all castes are allowed entry into Hindu places of worship.

How old is the demand for freeing temples from government control?

■ The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) passed the first resolution in 1959.

The Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), the top decision-making meeting of the RSS, urged the Uttar Pradesh government “to take steps to return this (Kashi Vishwanath) temple to the Hindus”. The resolution noted that the “tendency of the government to establish its control and monopoly, directly or indirectly, over the various spheres of life is becoming more and more pronounced over the last few years”.

■ In 1988, the Akhil Bharatiya Karyakari Mandal (ABKM) of the RSS called upon the “various state governments to respond to the legitimate demand of the Hindu society and hand over the temples to the right representatives of Hindu devotees”. The ABKM resolution said government control over temples was “unfair, unjust and discriminatory”, and alleged that “governments are taking over temples with an eye on their enormous funds”.

■ Religious leaders in South India have from time to time sought control over temples. The VHP, which has been raising the issue since the early 1970s, passed a resolution at its meeting in Faridabad in 2021 demanding a central law to free temples from government control.

■ Over the past 10 years, the BJP has often echoed the RSS. At an election rally in

Telangana last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Tamil Nadu government of taking over Hindu temples, an allegation that TN Chief Minister M K Stalin refuted strongly.

■ Former BJP MP Satyapal Singh introduced private member's bills to free temples from government control in Parliament in 2017 and 2019.

■ In December 2019, Trivendra Singh Rawat's government in Uttarakhand enacted the Uttarakhand Char Dham Devasthanam Management Act to establish a board to manage the Char Dham temples and 49 other temples. After protests by priests, local residents, and politicians, the Pushkar Singh Dhami government withdrew the Act in 2021 and abolished the board.

■ In 2023, Shivraj Singh Chouhan's BJP government in Madhya Pradesh loosened state control over temples in the state. Similar steps were announced by Basavaraj Bommai's government in Karnataka, but they could not be implemented before the chief minister demitted office.

What is the legal position on this issue?

There have been arguments in favour of freeing temples from government control, but courts have been mostly reluctant to interfere.

■ In the 1954 *Shirur Mutt* case, the Supreme Court held that a law that takes away the right to administration of the religious denomination and vests it in another authority would be violative of the right guaranteed under Article 26(d) (“...Every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right...to administer...property in accordance with law.”). However, the state has a general right to regulate the right to administration of a religious or charitable institution or endowment, it held.

■ In *Ratilal Panachand Gandhi vs. The State of Bombay* (1954), the Supreme Court said that in matters of religion, the right of management given to a religious body is a fundamental right that no law can take away; however, the state can regulate the administration of trust properties by means of valid laws.

■ In *Pannalal Bansilal Pitti vs State Of Andhra Pradesh* (1996), the SC upheld the validity of a law that abolished the hereditary right over chairmanship of a trust administering a Hindu religious institution or endowment, and also rejected the contention that the law must uniformly apply to all religions.

■ In 2022, lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay filed a writ petition in the SC to free temples from government control. The SC, however, said that under the present arrangement, temples have “catered to the larger needs of society and not only their temple”, and reversing this would “turn the clock back” to the days when “all these temples...these centres of religion, had become places of wealth”. Upadhyay withdrew his petition.

10 years of Swachh Bharat Mission: Its aims and status on key targets

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 1

SWACHH BHARAT Mission, one of the first programmes announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi after he took office in 2014, completes 10 years on October 2. While announcing the “Clean India campaign”, the PM had said: “A clean India would be the best tribute India could pay to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary in 2019.”

The mission was divided into SBM-Gramin for villages, and SBM-Urban for cities, executed by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs respectively.

SBM's focus areas were building individual toilets, community toilets, solid

waste management, and leading awareness campaigns aimed at behavioural changes.

Targets of SBM

The PM announced that the SBM's main goal was to make India “Open defecation-free” (ODF) by October 2, 2019, for which crores of household and community toilets had to be constructed. The definition of ODF under the mission is as follows: “A city/ward can be notified/declared as an ODF city/ODF ward if, at any point of the day, not a single person is found defecating in the open.”

The aim was to equip all households with individual toilets, ensure communities have cluster toilets, and that school and *anganwadi* toilets have waste management systems. Solid waste includes organic and inorganic materials (kitchen waste, plastics,

metals, etc.), while liquid waste management deals with wastewater that is no longer fit for human consumption.

To achieve this, the government's assistance was increased from Rs 10,000 per toilet (under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan of the previous UPA government) to Rs 12,000 under SBM. When the mission completed five years in 2021, the government launched SBM 2.0, with a focus on garbage-free cities, faecal sludge, plastic waste, and greywater management.

Achievements so far

■ With over 10 crore toilets constructed, PM Modi declared 6 lakh villages open defecation-free on October 2, 2019. Urban India,

except for cities in West Bengal, was announced as ODF in December 2019 by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry.

■ 66 lakh individual toilets were constructed against the target of 59 lakh, the Ministry said. The Centre also said it released Rs 57,469.22 crore to states and UTs for SBM-G between 2014-2015 and 2018-2019. The Budget for SBM-U was Rs 62,009 crore.

■ 5.54 lakh villages and 3,913 cities have been declared as ODF+ under the second iterations of SBM-G and SBM-U from 2020-21. ODF+ means that besides being ODF, these villages have arrangements for liquid waste management as well.

■ For SBM-G 2.0, the Cabinet had cleared spending of Rs 1.40 lakh crore from 2020-21

to 2024-2025, of which Rs 52,497 crore was from the Drinking Water and Sanitation Department. SBM-U 2.0 was approved in 2021, with allocation of Rs 1.41 lakh crore.

■ All 2,400 legacy landfills in cities were to be cleared by 2025-2026. So far, only 30% of the target has been achieved in terms of the area to be cleared, while 41% of the waste remediation goal has been met. The SBM-U dashboard shows 97% of municipal wards have door-to-door collection of waste and 90% of them have 100% segregation at source.

Impact of the mission

In 2018, the World Health Organisation estimated that 3 lakh deaths due to diarrhoea and protein-energy malnutrition would be averted due to the SBM-G from 2014 to October 2019. “Unsafe sanitation

caused an estimated 199 million cases of diarrhoea annually before the start of the SBM in 2014. These have been gradually reducing, and will almost be eliminated when universal use of safe sanitation facilities is achieved by October 2019,” the WHO said.

A recent study has found a link between reduction in infant deaths and SBM. The report, published in *Nature* on September 2, said the mission may have led to 60,000 to 70,000 fewer infant deaths annually from 2014 to 2020. The study noted that there had been a decline in infant mortality from 2003 to 2020, but the decrease was more after 2015.

According to the 2011 Census, 53.1% of households, both rural and urban, lacked any kind of latrines. How much this number has changed remains to be seen — Census 2021 has been delayed.



I LIKE THE EPHEMERAL THING ABOUT THEATRE, EVERY PERFORMANCE IS LIKE A GHOST — IT’S THERE AND THEN IT’S GONE. — MARGARET SMITH

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CHINA SHOCK 2.0

As countries worry over surge in exports, India must focus on boosting manufacturing, improving competitiveness

THE EARLY 2000S marked the beginning of the China Shock — a period that saw a massive surge in Chinese exports to global markets. While consumers benefited from the exports of lower priced products, the labour market consequences were not favourable. For instance, a study has estimated that the China shock was responsible for “59.3 per cent of all US manufacturing job losses between 2001 and 2019”. Much of these jobs were in the labour intensive segments that employed less skilled workers. The trade shock led to decline in labour force participation and wages in the affected regions. As per the study, those who lost their jobs “converted nearly one for one into long-term unemployment”. There are now fears of another China Shock coming. With the Chinese economy slowing down, owing in part to weakness in the real estate sector, and low consumer demand, there are worries that the country is exporting its excess capacity, in the attempt to power its economy. The concerns are that this could lead to a China Shock 2.0 — as economists at the IMF have also articulated — and that the “surge in exports would displace workers and hurt industrial activity elsewhere”. Countries have responded by imposing tariff and non-tariff barriers. For instance, earlier this month, the Joe Biden administration finalised tariff hikes on Chinese products. According to the US Trade Representative’s office, a tariff rate of up to 100 per cent duty on electric vehicles, 50 per cent on solar cells, and 25 per cent on steel, aluminum, EV batteries and some minerals would now be levied. As per a report in this paper, India and some other countries have imposed anti-subsidy measures — this year alone the country has imposed more than 30 anti-dumping investigations against China. Such fears over another trade shock are gaining traction at a time when the US presidential election is drawing closer with the Republican nominee, Donald Trump, doubling down on the tariff issue. Trump has proposed to levy a 60 per cent tariff on all goods from China and 10-20 per cent tariff on other countries. In India’s case, imports from China have surged, despite the imposition of restrictions. In 2023-24, imports from China exceeded \$100 billion, up from \$60 billion in 2014-15. Considering how China is inextricably linked to the global supply chains, it will be difficult for India to wean itself away. As per a report from Global Trade Research Initiative, over the last decade-and-a-half, China’s share in imports of industrial goods has increased from 21 per cent to 30 per cent. The reliance on imports is across product categories such as electronics, machinery and textiles. Governments in India have over the years attempted to boost the country’s manufacturing capabilities, attempting to reduce import dependence. However, the sector’s share in the economy has remained almost stagnant. While recent policies such as the production linked incentive scheme have seen some success, more needs to be done. Policies should be guided by the objective of boosting domestic manufacturing, improving competitiveness and addressing the long-standing structural impediments to the sector’s growth.

ATUL GOES TO IIT

It took the Supreme Court to ensure that a Dalit student, who had cleared the entrance test, was admitted

FOR EQUALITY OF opportunity to be meaningful, a person from a marginalised caste and a poor family must be able to move beyond his or her circumstances, and rise. Atul Kumar did just that, in no small part due to the arduous sacrifices of his family. The Dalit aspirant cleared the entrance exam for IIT-Dhanbad. But it took the Supreme Court of India’s intervention to ensure he could get a seat in the prestigious college. His father, a daily wage labourer from Titora village in western Uttar Pradesh, who had studied till class 9, had to move the apex court after Atul was denied admission because he was a few minutes late in depositing the Rs 17,500 fee on the university’s online portal. While instructing IIT-Dhanbad to provide Atul a seat, the Chief Justice of India said, “... as judges of the SC, we should ensure that no child loses admission because they don’t have Rs 17,500.” The bench is right, of course. But the Court’s comment raises a more fundamental question about the hurdles of bureaucracy in an unequal society. Rules and regulations are essential in an education system where demand far outstrips supply. However, they inevitably become, for many, another hurdle in a system that is already difficult to navigate. There are many like Atul, who overcome huge odds to make it to India’s premier educational institutions. And to be fair, many universities, including the IITs, have put in place systems to assist them in their time at the university. Atul Kumar’s case highlights the need to make compassion a part not just of the teaching process and campus life — it must begin at the beginning, with the admissions system. Were it not for the intervention by the Court, Atul Kumar’s story could have been a tragedy. A superficial and simplistic idea of “merit” permeates many spaces. Atul’s father told this newspaper how he sold property, how he stretches Rs 11,000/month to make sure his children have the best education. To start so far behind many others and make it as far as Atul has, shows a depth of “merit” that must be encouraged and nurtured. There are many Atuls in this country. It is for governments — from the states to the Centre — to ensure that India does not become a country of high inequality and low mobility, where aspiration is, more often than not, a statistical fairytale.

MILLENNIAL SUPERSTAR

In a storied career of over seven decades, Dame Maggie Smith had one of the best third acts of all time

IN THE EARLY aughts, Dame Maggie Smith, who died at 89 last week, accomplished the rare feat of becoming a millennial superstar in her late 60s. She had been a towering institution of cinema and theatre, revered as much for her talent as her acerbic wit, for almost four decades by then, having more than held her own against such giants of the stage and screen as Laurence Olivier and Richard Burton. After playing Professor Minerva McGonagall in the wildly-popular *Harry Potter* films from 2001 onwards and the acid-tongued Dowager Countess of Grantham on the smash-hit TV show *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), Smith complained of finding fame of the kind that, for the first time in her storied career, no longer allowed her to shop at her local grocer. At a time when descriptors such as “icon”, “legend” and “GOAT” are applied equally to actors, athletes and unsuspecting stars of viral memes, Smith stood apart, as she had through her 70 years as a performer. Her career followed the familiar stage-to-screen trajectory, but the acclaim that punctuated her journey right from the start, including two Oscars, a Tony, five Baftas, and three Golden Globes, was testament to a rare talent. Smith sparkled in comedy and shone in tragedy and melodrama, her deeply intelligent and empathetic performances often stealing the show from her co-stars — Burton, famously, accused her of committing “grand larceny”.

One only needs to watch a scene from any of her performances, whether it’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1969), *Travels With My Aunt* (1972) or *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2012), to understand the truth of this. Arguably, for her younger audiences, Smith was a bigger star than any of her *Downton Abbey* or *Harry Potter* colleagues (except perhaps Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson) at the time of her death. For someone who once said “When you’re into the granny era, you’re lucky to get anything,” Smith managed to have one of the best third acts of all time.

How the laddoo crumbles



K K KAILASH

Tirupati prasadam fracas frames the issue as a threat to religious tradition. It has a history, and of course, politics

THE LADDOO IS certainly not at the top of the must-eat-before-you-die food list. It is among the many sweet dishes jostling for space in the crowded Indian sweet basket. The laddoo also makes no claims of an exotic status. So, how and why did the humble laddoo become an object of political fracas? Last fortnight, the Tirupati laddoo — offered as food to the deity at the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, considered to be among the richest religious bodies in the world — stole the limelight. The scuffle began when the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP)-led government in Andhra Pradesh raised doubts about the “purity” of the ingredients used in the Tirupati laddoo. The government established a special investigative team to examine the claim that the ghee was contaminated. The TDP blamed the previous Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP)-led government for the mess. The YSRCP dismissed the allegations and claimed they were “diversionary” as there were adequate protocols in place to ensure these things did not happen. The deputy chief minister and Jan Sena party chief announced that he would do 11 days of personal atonement rituals to make good the so-called desecration. For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it was the opening it was probably looking for. First, it gave the BJP ammunition to consolidate its monopoly as the saviour of Hindu sentiments. Second, it helped further the party’s demand that Hindu religious places be freed from state control. The issue acquired additional gravitas when the central health minister asked for a report. Besides political parties, social media gave space to those who felt that faith was under attack. #TirupatiLaddoo trended for a couple of days on X. Priests, as well as personalities who claim to be speaking for Hindus, called for the protection of the sanctity of holy sites. The Tirupati temple conducted “purification” rituals to appease people. Temples in other parts of the country also wanted their prasadam and offerings to be tested. Film personalities weighed in as if to show

Nationalists may, therefore, break traditions and support social change if it aids the pursuit of common goals. Conservatives may adapt to survive but will strive to preserve a particular order of life. More importantly, conservatives may not see other ways of life as a threat as long as each tradition is left to itself. For nationalists, differences are a threat to the project of sameness. It follows that conservatives need not be nationalists. However, (Hindu) conservatives could ally with (Hindu) nationalists when they feel that the (Hindu) religious tradition and identities are under threat.

solidarity with the deputy chief minister, who is from the film fraternity. Economists crumbled the laddoo to discuss the economics of the ingredients and why adulteration was likely to happen. Food technologists spoke of adulteration and testing mechanisms. Producers of the “culprit” ingredient claimed that these allegations were damaging their business. Police complaints were filed by other producers (but not suppliers) of the ingredient that misinformation was being spread about their company on social media. The laddoo had arrived. To answer the question of why the laddoo acquired bragging rights, I make a distinction between Hindu conservatives and Hindu nationalists. These two are often conflated to be the same. Conservatives, on the one hand, are concerned about maintaining and preserving Hindu practices and traditions. They believe these have supposedly been beneficial or give meaning to a particular way of religious life. Nationalists, on the other, are not necessarily anxious about preserving tradition. They are only concerned with tradition or order as long as it serves the pursuit of oneness or sameness. Research says that while conservatism may be a political ideology, it is also a psychological trait. Nationalism is primarily a political project. Nationalists may, therefore, break traditions and support social change if it aids the pursuit of common goals. Conservatives may adapt to survive but will strive to preserve a particular order of life. More importantly, conservatives may not see other ways of life as a threat as long as each tradition is left to itself. For nationalists, differences are a threat to the project of sameness. It follows that conservatives need not be nationalists. However, Hindu conservatives could ally with Hindu nationalists when they feel that their religious tradition and identities are under threat. Why is this distinction important? Hindu nationalists have traditionally been strong in the northern and western parts of the country. It is more recently that the party espousing this cause has found space in other parts too. Despite or maybe because of the progressive social movements, Hindu conservatism has

more space in parts of the South. This is not to say that conservatives are not found in other parts of the country. This space and tendencies for conservatism have been exploited and are axes of mobilisation for parties in some southern states. There is a familiar pattern here, when we examine the reactions of political parties after the Supreme Court verdict in 2018 when Sabarimala Temple was open to all genders irrespective of age. The Kerala unit of Congress pushed the conservative line underlining the verdict’s potential to undermine traditional order. The Left Democratic Front-led government’s actions to implement the court verdict were seen as threatening the sanctity of the temple and its order. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the lines are pretty straightforward, though one might not be able to demarcate differences sharply in the other states. Parties could exploit conservative tendencies and frame issues in such a way as to highlight a threat to traditional belief patterns. In Andhra, the YSRCP had made a mark for itself as a welfare benefactor. For the TDP to stand out, it had to do something different. Exploiting the laddoo makes abundant political sense. When the Hindu conservative is concerned about issues like purity and pollution, sin and penance, among others, defilement of sacred food strikes a chord with devotees. While there are differences between conservatives and nationalists, it is not difficult for the lines to be breached. Nationalists are likely to be more adept at framing this issue as a threat to the traditional order and thereby reap the benefits of this mobilisation. There is also a history. The common thread in the narratives on the Babri Masjid dispute shows that Rajiv Gandhi’s opening of the locks of the Mosque in Ayodhya in 1986 created space for the temple movement to take off. The rest, as they say, is history; the Congress ceased to be a player in Uttar Pradesh politics. The TDP should know that the laddoo can be eaten by someone else.

The writer is with the Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad. Views are personal

IF CITIZENS TAKE OWNERSHIP

It can ensure that benefits of Swachh Bharat Mission are sustainable



NAINA LAL KIDWAI

A SINGLE BROKEN window can crack the foundation of a neighbourhood, so goes the “broken windows” theory. Introduced in the early 1980s by social scientists James Q Wilson and George L Kelling, the theory suggests that visible signs of disorder and neglect, such as broken windows, graffiti or litter, can encourage further crime and anti-social behaviour in a community. The basic idea is that if small problems like vandalism and littering are ignored, they lead to a general decline in the quality of life. Such is the power that our environment has on human consciousness. There is far less cognitive dissonance in throwing an empty bag of chips on a littered street. A behaviour we would never dare consider in one setting becomes acceptable in another. There are countless social experiments that prove that our surroundings can influence our behaviour. These may include physical stimuli, symbols, formal and informal communications, behavioural recommendations and social demonstrations of acceptable behaviour. This is why the “Swachh Bharat Mission” (SBM), has been laying a great deal of emphasis on “visible cleanliness” along with construction of toilets, and management of solid and liquid waste. By ensuring visible cleanliness, we create a conducive environment for people to stop littering. For example, under the SBM, Karaikal Municipal Corporation, Puducherry, tapped into the traditional art of making Kolams to transform garbage vulnerable points (GVPs). There are several such success stories of re-

The most well-executed government initiatives fizzle out if an inherent component of operations and maintenance is not incorporated in programme design. When compounded with the challenges of long-term behaviour transformation requiring communities to change conventional habits of managing waste, the problem becomes grimmer. What works is the collective action approach that shifts the onus of keeping our villages and mohallas clean, from the government to the citizens.

claiming GVPs and turning them into beautiful public spaces. This leads us to the question of sustainability. A GVP once cleaned, will not remain clean. Sooner or later someone will dump their garbage on the street, and others will follow suit. The most well-executed government initiatives fizzle out if an inherent component of operations and maintenance is not incorporated in programme design. When compounded with the challenges of long-term behaviour transformation, the problem becomes grimmer. What works is the collective action approach that shifts the onus of keeping our villages and mohallas clean, from the government to the citizens. The collective-action approach was successfully demonstrated in the Light House Initiative (LHI), a public-private partnership programme that is supporting the Swachh Bharat Mission. Led by the India Sanitation Coalition, at the behest of the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Drinking Water and Sanitation, the programme leveraged the techno-managerial strength of corporates to design a programme that focused on O&M (operation and management) using community action. Communities were involved in the entire waste cycle from the first step: Identifying the pain points; coordinating waste collection routes and schedules with Gram Panchayat officials; deciding on the user waste collection fee to be charged from each household; waste segregation at the household level; further waste-to-wealth initiatives that could be

taken up by organisations including SHGs. It has become critical to look at O&M funding to ensure the running and maintenance of community assets like public toilets and FSTPs. Otherwise, infrastructure falls to disuse. Beautiful community toilets stay locked as there is no budget or incentive to keep them clean. We need to provide O&M budgets as part of every such built structure. We can create jobs for maintaining these assets, help in skilling these operators and create entrepreneurs who can run these for a profit by charging for services. The last decade has seen a huge change in the way our airports and malls, even petrol stations, maintain their toilets. The huge success of SBM needs us to go this last mile to ensure access to all citizens. Community collective action works because it harnesses the power of collaboration, shared responsibility, and social capital to address common challenges and improve overall well-being. Being part of a group generates social pressure for individuals to contribute to the community’s efforts. Peer influence and the need for social acceptance can drive individuals to engage in positive behaviours such as reduce, reuse and recycle, segregate, and zero tolerance for littering. When these behaviours become social norms, then we have a hundred per cent likelihood of ensuring that the benefits of the Swachh Bharat Mission are sustainable in both the short and long run.

The writer is Chair, India Sanitation coalition

OCTOBER 2, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

TEMPLE STORMED AGAIN

WITHIN 48 HOURS of the withdrawal, the security forces stormed the Golden Temple Complex to flush out a large crowd listening to and responding to pro-Bhindranwale and pro-Khalistan slogans raised from the Akal Takht buildings by about 300 youths who had earlier forced their way into the Temple.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

THE GOVERNMENT HAS instructed the Punjab authorities to deal severely and sternly with any anti-national activity in the Golden Temple Complex. The police will not hesitate

to enter the premises again if these activities are continued, warned authorities sources. According to sources, the government had information that extremists would try to occupy the place again and the officers talking to the priests and SGPC leaders had warned them.

J&K COUNCIL CHAOS

WHILE THE DEPUTY Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Council Attallah Suhrawardi was barred from entering the House, M K Tickoo, law minister in the late Sheikh Abdullah’s cabinet, was elected chairman amid slogan shouting, fist-fighting and unprecedented pandemonium. As

Suhrawardi approached the entrance preceded by the marshal, the plainclothes man did not allow them to go in.

OPPOSITION MERGER

THE LOK DAL national executive authorised its president Charan Singh to take all necessary steps for the consolidation, unification and merger of all like-minded parties and alliance and adjustment of seats with other opposition parties. In its resolution on opposition unity, the national executive reaffirmed the party’s commitment to prevent the split of opposition votes in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.



A regime change fantasy

Netanyahu's effort to build new order in Middle East is unlikely to succeed, even as the old one is breaking down. Unintended consequences of his Iran gambit are likely to roil the region



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

THE IDEA OF “a war to end all wars” has a long provenance in the history of conflict. That idea that wars can be initiated to produce “perpetual peace” has had a powerful grip on risk-taking leaders who want to change their geopolitical conditions. The outcomes have rarely met the expectations of those who launch total wars.

We seem to be at that fateful moment in the Middle East amid Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's calls for a regime change in Iran and promises that ousting clerical rule in Tehran will herald a new era of peace and prosperity in the Middle East.

Despite the worldwide anger against Israel's use of extreme force against Hamas and Hezbollah, Netanyahu has now lent a broader and breathtaking political objective to his costly military campaign — regime change in Iran. He is saying that the war against Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis — Iran's regional allies — is not enough to ensure Israel's security. And that the war must necessarily culminate in the elimination of the very source of the problem, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In a short — a few seconds less than three minutes — but bold address, Netanyahu told the Iranian people that Israel “stands with them” against their rulers. He is appealing to the Iranians not to “let a small group of fanatic theocrats crush your hopes and your dreams. You deserve better. Your children deserve better”.

In his speech delivered in English with Farsi subtitles, Netanyahu reminded Iranians of their older and enduring Persian identity. “When Iran is finally free — and that moment will come a lot sooner than people think — everything will be different,” Netanyahu promises. “Our two ancient peoples, the Jewish people and the Persian people, will finally be at peace.”

The idea of regional peace and prosperity after the regime change is a key element of Netanyahu's address: “When that day comes, the terror network that the regime built in five continents will be bankrupt, dismantled. Iran will thrive as never before. Global investment. Massive tourism. Brilliant technological innovation based on the tremendous talents that exist inside Iran. Doesn't that sound better than endless poverty, repression and war?”

The idea of regional cooperation was previewed a few days earlier at Netanyahu's speech to the UN, where he pointed to the competing regional visions of Iran and Israel. He views Iran's influence over Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon as the “curse” that is destroying the region. The alternative, according to Netanyahu, lies in the “blessing” of the planned trans-regional economic cooperation between India, Arabia and Europe that will restore the Middle East's status as a global hub for the exchange of goods, technologies and ideas.

This is not the first time an ambition for a



C R Sasikumar

connected and prosperous Middle East at peace with itself and the world has been articulated. Israeli leader Shimon Peres outlined precisely such a vision — “A New Middle East” — in 1994 as hopes for peace rose between Israel and Arabs and a settlement of the Palestinian question. It did not take long for those hopes to be dashed.

What has changed since then? One is the rise of Iran which recovered from the debilitating decade-long war with Iraq in the 1980s and began to project power across the region through a network of militant groups like Hamas, Houthis and Hezbollah. The other is the normalisation of relations between Israel and several Arab states despite the lack of progress in the creation of a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu's strategy for a new Middle East rests on triggering a regime change in Iran and deepening ties with the Arab neighbours.

Regime change has got a bad name thanks to the messy US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. That does not mean regime changes do not happen — we recently had one in Bangladesh. Political change over time is part of national life. It occurs incrementally and peacefully in democracies; it tends to be disruptive and violent in authoritarian societies.

There are two ways in which regime change occurs — either through mass revolt or the maturing of contradictions within the ruling elite. The two trends often reinforce each other. What then are the prospects for political change in Iran?

The Iranian people do not need Israel's prompting to challenge their autocratic rulers. Throughout the history of the Islamic Republic, established in 1979, there have been frequent popular protests against the regime — most recently to demand the expansion of women's rights in 2022. But every one of the protests has been crushed with massive force by the clerics. Could it be any different next time? Unlike in Dhaka, Tehran's clerical regime is a hard-boiled one with much stronger instruments of repression and greater political determination to survive.

Could intra-elite tensions bring the

In tempting the region with the idea of peace and prosperity, Netanyahu is offering no concessions at all on Palestine. In fact, the maps that he displayed at the United Nations don't even show the existence of Gaza and the West Bank. Can the moderate Arab states acquiesce in the continuing marginalisation of Palestine as Israel mounts an offensive against their political nemesis, Iran?

regime down? Until now, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has managed them very well. It remains to be seen if the ageing Ayatollah, now 85, has the capacity to cope with the sharpening internal squabbles amid mounting external pressures.

Khamenei's inability to retaliate effectively against Israel's war against Hamas and Hezbollah has probably convinced Netanyahu that the clerical regime is weaker than ever before. The deep penetration of the Iranian establishment by Israel's security services is seen as offering the capacity to stir up trouble within Tehran's ruling elite.

Netanyahu is rolling the dice on regime change in Iran, despite the calls for restraint from the US. Netanyahu has defied the Biden Administration with impunity and is acutely conscious that Washington has no choice but to back him in whatever he does. He is also aware there is strong support among the Republicans for changing the regime in Iran.

What about the Arabs? Netanyahu's bet on regime change is rooted in an appreciation of the profound contradiction between Iran and moderate Arab states. This factor has driven the two sides towards greater economic and security cooperation, despite the major differences over Palestinian statehood.

In tempting the region with the idea of peace and prosperity, Netanyahu is offering no concessions at all on Palestine. In fact, the maps that he displayed at the United Nations don't even show the existence of Gaza and the West Bank. Can the moderate Arab states acquiesce in the continuing marginalisation of Palestine as Israel mounts an offensive against their political nemesis, Iran?

There is no shortage of factors that could derail Netanyahu's ambition to bring down the Islamic Republic of Iran. His effort to build a new order in the Middle East is unlikely to succeed, but the old one is surely breaking down. The unintended consequences of Netanyahu's push for regime change in Iran are likely to produce many significant changes in the Middle East.

The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“In 2020 this board made the strongest case it could against the re-election of Mr Trump... his first term was a warning and... a second Trump term would be much more damaging and divisive than the first.”

— THE NEW YORK TIMES

Some material questions

Centralisation of power, crony capital have created gap between citizens and development. Viksit Bharat should respond to people's needs better



MILIND SOHONI

OUR PRIME MINISTER has given us a dream — a Viksit Bharat by 2047. Let us assume that this is not only about the GDP but also about the provision of basic amenities and decent jobs for people. The GDP part has seen a lot of attention, the people part not so much.

So, how do we prepare on that front?

One way is to construct a coherent model, perhaps even a caricature, of the political reality and through it, funnel some basic material questions (BMQs) faced by common people. This will tell us how well we currently fare and what difficulties lie ahead.

Let us begin with some BMQs. A citizen may ask: Why is my bus late? Or a farmer may ask: Where is my groundwater? The small businessman's lament would be: Where are my customers? These are questions faced by a majority of India's people. There are, of course, basic social or cultural questions too: Why is my road unsafe? But the BMQs will suffice to illustrate the point.

Our political structure formally, even constitutionally, is layered with a national superstructure and largely subservient state structures. There is a concentration of political power at the Centre in Delhi, and within that, the PM's office. This power is operated by the IAS and supported by a constellation of elite institutions such as the IITs and scientific agencies such as the IMD. These regulate most scientific standards and processes — from food safety to forest fires. States have limited autonomy to generate useful knowledge and typically, an even smaller capacity to utilise it.

The legitimacy of executive power flows from the high esteem generally accorded to this bureaucracy. Nationwide competitive exams on “national curricula” are a part of this legitimisation. And yet, there is little formal accountability of the executive to the legislature. If any, it is to the Supreme Court or the media. This is evident from the great shortage of facts — from railway accidents to Covid-19 mortality rates.

The above structure is replicated at the state level, where it is the Chief Minister's office which is the power centre. However, it must project power through the centrally operated IAS above, and the Governor. Hence, the importance of the double-engine. Here again, other than the high court, people must mobilise on the streets or operate the local media for attention. The scientific and political culture, freedom of expression and the presence of independent media change from state to state. This explains, to a large extent, the divergence in development outcomes.

Coming to the economy, there is a national economy and various subsidiary regional economies. There is immense concentration of wealth in the hands of about 100 pan-national business families. These business

houses have flourished, generally, at the cost of regional businesses and industries. At the household level, the top 20 per cent have 80 per cent of the wealth. The rest constitutes the informal sector and much of it serves the top 20 per cent in low-paying jobs.

But what about the people? Any democracy requires them to ask material questions as citizens and then make choices. And yet, come election time, what the media offers us is an echo chamber of emotive issues and personality politics. Our people too seem happy to receive dole than demand better public services. The youth fare worse. High school students cannot measure time or length and graduates cannot write a first-person account or operate a spreadsheet. The intellectual aspirations of our youth are culminating in sitting for competitive exams. Thus, what we are seeing is a veritable collapse of the intellectual capacities of the people.

Let us now trace the BMQs through the above structure. Buses are late because roads are bad, and bus maintenance is poor. Road testing standards are promulgated by the Centre and are complex and expensive. They are rarely carried out. At the bus depot, there is little capacity to analyse traffic and delay data or funds to hire a local consultant.

What about groundwater? Again, it is the Central Ground Water Board which must formulate rules for groundwater use. Neither it, nor the state agencies, have the scientific heft or the empirical data to do this. As a result, rich farmers draw much more water than their fields recharge, to irrigate cash crops. Poor farmers depend on PM Kisan Yojana to make both ends meet.

What about small businesses? A walk through any district market will show that pan-national brands have replaced them in the marketplace. Moreover, customers remain oblivious to how their consumption patterns are changing jobs and wealth distribution (and causing more pollution and demanding more infrastructure).

Indeed, the last two decades have shown us that excessive centralisation and old social arrangements are at the root of many problems. India is just too complex and diverse to be ruled from Delhi. The central bureaucracy and our scientists and professors are not equal to the task. Crony capital has provided neither jobs nor dignity nor has it brought efficiency and global competitiveness. In fact, it is now exacerbating regional disparities.

What is to be done? If we really want a Viksit Bharat by 2047, much of the political structure needs an overhaul. Above all, we must connect our problems with useful knowledge creation and eventually, new jobs and professions. We must bring the youth to the forefront of this process and create opportunities for them to engage with society. Our scientists and professors must develop a theory of change and a science of comprehension and participation. Finally, our bureaucracy must become more local, more responsive and accountable. In other words, we need an *adhunik* (modern) Bharat sooner than 2047.

The writer teaches at IIT Bombay. Views are personal



BAN KI-MOON

MAHATMA GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY, vision, and strategy of non-violence have influenced many global leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. They have also inspired me deeply.

In modern times, Gandhi remains the greatest teacher and practitioner of non-violence. He demonstrated the efficacy of this philosophy through his resolute leadership of India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule. His leadership inspired, and still inspires, countless movements for change all across the world.

I started work as the UN Secretary General on January 1, 2007. Five months later, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to observe the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi as the “International Day of Non-Violence”. This important resolution called upon the global community to commemorate this day annually to “disseminate the message of non-violence, including through education and public awareness.” Gandhi embodied and lived the principles of the UN Charter well before our organisation was founded.

I first visited Raj Ghat in 1972 as a young diplomat in the embassy of the Republic of Korea in New Delhi. And in 2015, when I visited Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat as the UN Secretary-General, I was greatly moved by its ascetic simplicity and pervasive purity.

In my speech on the occasion, I said: “... Gandhi's compassion embraces all people... I myself have been putting in my best efforts and asking all leaders, far and wide, to live by his teachings”.

Compassion that embraced all

Gandhi embodied principles of UN Charter well before they were framed

Gandhi lived by the conviction that only peaceful tactics could usher in a peaceful future. For him, means and ends were one. Non-violence confounds those who face it — and that is why it works. I recall the example of King Ashoka who renounced violence, embraced Buddhism and devoted his life to peace. Gandhi carried on this great Indian practice.

What are the major challenges and problems that we, as humanity, are currently facing in the 21st century? What are the main lessons we can learn from the past, and what are the main opportunities in the present which can help us overcome those challenges so we can create a brighter world for our future generations?

I would like to share my reflections on three key challenges in the 21st century.

First, the most pressing challenge — the climate crisis. If the world fails to reach the targets and timelines of the historic Paris Climate Change Agreement, the consequences will be simply devastating for the health and well-being of all of humanity, as well as our planet.

Climate change is also a threat multiplier that can disrupt ecosystems and economies alike, causing environmental displacement on an uncontrollable scale. It can also trigger tensions — related to food, water, resources, and more — both within and between countries. Governments, civil society organisations, and businesses around the world have recognised the inherent dangers of climate change and the great urgency of coming together in cooperation and part-

nership to holistically address it.

When India deposited its instrument of ratification to the Paris Climate Change Agreement with the UN on the auspicious day of October 2, 2016, I said then, “What better way to commemorate Mahatma Gandhi and his legacy for people and planet.” I call on the Indian government to demonstrate its elevated climate leadership by making further efforts to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050.

The second challenge I would like to highlight is closely interlinked to the imperative of protecting the planet and its people through sustainable development. During my time as the UN Secretary-General, the UN General Assembly adopted the historic Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

SDGs guide us as we strive to end hunger, empower women, reduce wealth disparities within and between nations, increase access to education, and build effective institutions that serve the people. These goals apply to all countries — even the richest have not fully achieved all the goals for all of their citizens. It is a matter of deep concern that the world is still far away from meeting the fast-approaching deadline of 2030 to achieve the SDGs. Today, some 1 billion people still live in extreme poverty in different parts of the world, and more than 800 million people endure hunger and malnutrition.

There were countries in Asia that not long ago were struggling with poverty and hunger. They have made remarkable progress in lifting countless people out of abject poverty. India has also made consider-

able progress. I take this opportunity to commend India for its notable efforts. Our task in this regard will become easier if we are guided by Gandhi's wise mantra: “Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed.”

Third, the 21st century has witnessed unprecedented progress in scientific and technological knowledge that promotes material prosperity. Yet, I often wonder, with sadness and anxiety, why we have become poorer in spiritual knowledge, which is a requisite for peace, harmony, and happiness in our neighbourhoods, communities, countries, and world.

Indeed, there is great strength in diversity, and countries that celebrate diversity, defend democracy, ensure freedom of faith, and embrace every individual are the ones that can guide the construction of a better future for all. This is perhaps the most fundamental lesson that we all should learn from Mahatma Gandhi's exemplary life.

Everyone has a moral responsibility to act wherever they may be and a part to play in addressing the biggest challenges we face now. Let's expand our collective efforts to advance peace, sustainability, prosperity, and dignity.

The writer was Secretary General of the United Nations between 2007 and 2016. This article is based on his speech at an international seminar in Bengaluru in August to mark the 75th anniversary of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WITH GRATITUDE

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The Aruna Vasudev I Knew’ (IE, September 25) and ‘Asian cinema's most vociferous champion’ (IE, September 6). I am sure that, like me, many other Delhi journalists and denizens of the Press Club of the decades-long past will want to say thanks to Rajeev Lochan and Shubra Gupta for so fondly remembering Aruna Vasudev and, even if only in the passing, her sister Uma. There was a time when no film and music event in Delhi was considered complete without the two of them being present.

B N Uniyal, via email

FAMILY POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Sonrise and sunset,’ (IE, October 1). The induction of Udayanidhi Stalin is aimed at projecting a young leadership for the 2025 electoral battle. It is also a signal by DMK supremo M K Stalin that the line of succession in the party has been chalked out. Udayanidhi's meteoric rise in a matter is in sharp contrast to Stalin's gradual elevation in the party. Most regional parties in India are family-run and the DMK, despite its aim of egalitarianism and shunning casteism, has to fall back on family. The same goes for the Samajwadi Party, NCP, TDP, RJD, National Conference, etc. Congress, of course, stands as the biggest example. This is against the very principle of democracy but it has served politics well in India.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

FIRST DANCING STAR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘People's star’ (IE, October 1). Mithun Chakraborty has been declared the next recipient of the Dadasaheb Phalke award — and rightfully so. He was the first dancing star to emerge in the video era that the audience loved. Nobody took dancing to the street as a way of expressing joy and celebration like Mithun da. Even today, he is an icon in Russia where *Disco Dancer* (1983) is an inter-generational hit. In Tokyo too, there's a shrine in his name. Over 45 years, the actor widened his range, with stunning performances in all genres of films. He has also been at the forefront of social causes. In politics too, he has tried different shades. This is an honour well-deserved.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

A MAN OF IDEAS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Last flicker of a great tradition,’ (IE, October 1). The article did well to remember Kishen Pattanayak and recognise the shrinking of political ideology and the decline of collective resolve to address challenges. In this era of global interconnectedness, we need to rise above local issues and concerns and work for the greater good. It is indeed a collective responsibility to learn the optimal use of dwindling resources. Unfortunately, Pattanayak didn't get the attention he deserved. But his ideas will remain alive and relevant for a long time.

Rajinder Popli, New Delhi

Timely regulation

Sebi has done well to restrain speculative trading in index derivatives segment to protect retail investors

GIVEN THE HUGE losses that retail investors are making in futures and options (F&O) trades and the frequent warnings by the regulator that household savings are being used to speculate, a tighter set of rules for derivatives was called for. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Tuesday took several steps to discourage smaller punters. It has raised the floor trading amount to ₹15 lakh from ₹5 lakh and mandated the upfront collections of options premiums. An additional 2% margin will be charged for short options contracts on the day they expire. In fact, an exchange can offer derivatives contracts for only one of its benchmark indices with a weekly expiry. Also because of the big volumes on the expiry day vis-à-vis future expiry days and the higher risks that this entails, the regulator has done away with the benefit of offsetting positions across different expiries, on the day of expiry for contracts. The measures should help as a recent study revealed that 93% of the over 10 million F&O traders made losses of about ₹1.8 lakh each during FY22-24.

Among other measures, the regulator's board has introduced a broader definition of a "connected person" and an "immediate relative", making it harder for individuals to trade in the markets on the basis of unpublished sensitive information. Some believe the market regulator may have gone too far by including the person's spouse, parents, in-laws, siblings, and siblings of the spouse, children and their spouses within the definition of immediate relative. But traders have ingenious ways to cover their tracks. In fact, Sebi's move to tighten the rules by including a firm, its partner, or employee as a person deemed to be a connected person and also a person sharing a residence with a "connected person" is needed, if the regulator is to come to grips with the menace. We have had some instances of employees at asset management companies (AMCs) misusing privileged information. Starting November, employees of fund houses will be covered by insider trading norms with the AMCs responsible for making sure the institutional mechanism is effective.

Promoters will be pleased they can now renounce their rights entitlements in favour of any specific investor or set of investors, allowing them to control the ownership; in fact, the company can allot the under-subscribed portion to any investor provided they make adequate disclosures. Moreover, reducing the timeline for rights issues to just 23 days from the current 317 days is helpful. However, since this is only just a slightly shorter process than the one for completing a preferential allotment — 40 days — companies are unlikely to be deterred. Less paperwork and no merchant banker can be a blessing.

MF Lite, the new light-touch regulatory framework for mutual funds that offer only passively managed schemes, will enable the entry of more funds. The thresholds relating to the net worth, profitability, and so on would be lowered, and it's a good idea to allow existing AMCs to hive off the passive schemes to an entity with a common sponsor. Sebi's attempt to come up with a product for those who want to invest about ₹20 lakh with a direct exposure to equities will be a good option for those with some risk-taking ability. Access to a regulated investment product should protect them from becoming prey to finfluencers and unauthorised investment schemes.

GREEN FINANCING

PRIVATE SECTOR SHOULD STEP IN; DEVELOPING NATIONS HAVE TO FIND THEIR OWN RESOURCES

Gaps in adaptation finance

AS THE NEXT session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) draws near, the discussions on financial transfers (or the lack of it) from developed to developing nations is gathering momentum. There has been no breakthrough on the issue (entirely expected) despite discussions in several meetings of COP in the last decade and a half. The next edition (COP29) will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, around mid-November. Everyone wants to be seen as doing something, irrespective of the outcome, and the host nation for COP29 is no exception. Azerbaijan has announced a new fund to tackle climate change to aid developing nations. The fund is expected to be of the order of \$1 billion and the proposal is to seek contributions from fossil fuel-producing countries and companies, which will be completely voluntary. There is speculation that Azerbaijan will be the first country to contribute to this fund.

We now have an ironical situation where a couple of funds are in place, especially designed for battling climate change, but the coffers of each is almost empty in comparison to what is required (\$1 trillion-\$6 trillion). First, we have the 15-year-old, back-of-the-envelope estimate of \$100 billion in aid a year, which, of course, never materialised. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development may claim that they reached almost \$100 billion in 2020, but these figures are contested by developing countries who accuse the developed nations of statistical jugglery. Incidentally, the figure of \$100 billion has been rechristened as the new collective quantified goal. Second, we have the loss and damage fund, mooted during COP27 (2022) in Egypt. Only about \$800 million has been committed till now. The nuts and bolts of this fund are yet to be finalised and one is not sure which countries are going to be the

SOMIT DASGUPTA

Senior visiting fellow, ICRIER



donors and who the recipients. There is a lot of clamour that the oil-rich countries and China should also contribute to the fund. Luckily, India has not yet been cited as one of the potential donors, but who know what will happen next? Finally, the third fund has now been announced by Azerbaijan, which would be discussed at the COP29.

One thing is crystal clear — or at least it should be — that there won't be any

In such circumstances, what should the developing world do? Can they wait endlessly for the desired sum of money to be made available while in the meantime they are swamped by the adverse effects of climate change? It is the developing world and especially the small island states which are most affected, be it in terms of lives and livelihood or healthcare. Time is clearly running out with 2023

The private sector lacks access to data and there is information asymmetry. It is clueless about where to invest

being designated as the hottest year ever with several cases of flooding, cyclones, heatwaves among other calamities. India, by the way, is no exception. It is time for the developing countries to look for resources domestically. Just for the record, according to the government, about 5.7% of India's GDP (2021-22), mostly indigenous, is used for adaptation related activities.

The solution lies in seeking funds from the private sector. If one were to see the quantum of funds invested by the public and private sectors for climate change (inclusive of mitigation and adaptation) one finds them neck and neck, about \$333 billion each (Climate Policy Initiative, 2022). The problem is that most of the funds go into mitigation simply because there is an income stream for such projects which can take care of debt servicing. Only 7.5% of the total climate funds are going into adaptation and the share of the private sec-

tor in this is a mere 1.6%.

There are several reasons for this poor contribution. First, the private sector lacks access to data and there is information asymmetry. It is clueless about where to invest. Second, there are institutional and regulatory issues which prevent private sector participation in adaptation measures. Not having an adaptation plan itself is an example of an institutional barrier. It would be interesting to note that less than 60 countries (out of 198 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) have prepared an adaptation plan and India is not one of them. India's adaptation plan is a work in progress and will be ready towards the latter half of 2025. Third, there are peculiarities when it comes to investment in adaptation. There is no defined income stream, upfront costs are usually huge, and the time horizon for adaptation projects to bear fruit are long whereas the private sector wants quick returns, etc.

A part of the solution lies in co-financing. The government should step in and invest along side in order to reduce the risk of the adaptation project. This, of course, requires resources and some portion can be filled in by multilateral development banks/multilateral climate funds. Incidentally, India has received or got commitment of a little over \$1 billion from various climate funds. Additional resources can be raised through the imposition of carbon tax or by issuing green bonds. Incentives can be given in the form of tax breaks. In addition, there are some innovative finance options which have already been tried out in some countries. Examples are debt for climate swaps, climate derivatives, and the adaptation benefit mechanism. The lesson to be learnt is that when it comes to climate funds, developing nations have to find their own resources.

Views are personal

Bridging the blocs

With global investment flows fragmenting along geopolitical lines, India must be source-agnostic in order to meet its annual FDI target of \$100 billion



N CHANDRA MOHAN

The writer is an economics and business commentator based in New Delhi

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC Alliance (NDA) regime has reiterated its objective of attracting \$100 billion in foreign direct investments (FDI) annually as its flagship "Make in India" programme completes 10 years. This aspirational target has, in fact, been a hardy perennial of the last five years, typically mentioned in the context of the government's agenda in the first 100 days or first year of its second or third five-year terms. The government is optimistic as India is currently the world's fastest-growing large economy with unmatched market growth opportunities in sunrise sectors such as semiconductors, electric vehicles, clean energy, electronics, and consumer goods where penetration levels in the country's population are far lower than the global average.

The major challenge, however, is that investment and trade flows in the world economy are beginning to fragment along geopolitical lines, broadly into US-centric and Sino-centric blocs. According to a recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) study by Gita Gopinath, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, Andrea Presbitero, and Petia Topalova, investments and trade flows between these two distinct blocs have declined more than those within the blocs, especially since the onset of the war in Ukraine. How India leverages the opportunities thrown up by global fragmentation has a major bearing on its higher levels of ambition on FDI, especially from China. India's policy choices in this regard are no doubt complicated by the continuing face-off on the Sino-

Indian border since April 2020.

The \$100 billion target must be seen in the context of the annual average of \$77 billion in gross inflows during the previous five years to FY24. In fact, they were marginally lower by 0.6% in FY24, following a sharp decline of 16% to \$71 billion in FY23 for the first time in nine years. The ground for concern is the factor that accounts for the fall in gross inflows, notably the record level of repatriation and disinvestments. Taking these into account, direct investments into the country plunged sharply by 37% to \$26.5 billion in FY24 as repatriation and disinvestments burgeoned by 51.5% over FY23. However, during Q1 of FY25, gross inflows were up by 26% while repatriations and disinvestments rose by 15%, leading to higher direct investments.

All of this suggests a different narrative from optimistic official statements that India still remains a leading destination for FDI. Repatriations and disinvestments are not good news as they indicate waning foreign investor interest, that they are reducing their exposure, and even exiting the market.

monetary policy which impacts repo rate, inflation control, and overall economic trajectory, they must be selected carefully. The new members may be selected before the term ends for the sitting members so that they have time to settle in. Stakeholders can then know about the new members and their credibility to represent the MPC. Any further delay in nominating the external members is totally unwarranted. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Pfizer, Sanofi, and GSK, who trimmed their manpower and operations. In autos, the offerings of US majors did not find favour among consumers. In other sectors, intense competition, rising costs, and concerns about the regulatory environment were important.

Of late, the good news is that some of these MNCs have sought to re-enter, like Ford. It now wants to use its plant in Tamil Nadu for exports. Harley Davidson has returned, tying up with Hero MotoCorp to assemble bikes in India. Carrefour had concerns regarding the conditions for FDI in multi-brand retail but now has a franchise partnership with Dubai's Apparel Group. Shein's app was banned in 2020 at the height of the India-China border stand-off, but it has re-entered through a licensing partnership with Reliance Retail. However, as there are no plans to amend Press Note 3, which mandates official approval for investments from countries with land borders with us such as China, the challenge of dealing with FDI from the dragon remains.

With the global economy fragmenting, India needs to take a call as a few emerging economies like Vietnam, Mexico, and Singapore are inserting themselves between these two blocs. These so-called connector countries

are "rapidly gaining importance and serving as a bridge", according to the IMF study. The dragon's flows of investment and trade in such countries have increased dramatically since the US, Europe, and others began erecting trade barriers. The advantages for China are that its exports rerouted through these jurisdictions, which are members of mega free trade agreements, substitute for the declining share of its imports by the US and Europe. The mainland's investments abroad in new projects amounted to \$160 billion last year.

The upshot is that India must be agnostic about the sources of investments, as achieving the \$100 billion target only through investments from the US-centric bloc is unlikely. US investments amounted to \$5 billion in FY24 and were lower by 17% from the flows in FY23. Improvements in its FDI regime and ease of doing business are imperative. While the NDA regime liberalised FDI in its first term, progress has slowed. Of late, there are plans to further ease norms and set up an oversight mechanism for investments flowing in. Barriers exist in almost 40 industries and easing those, "barring a few ultra-sensitive sectors, would inject investor confidence", argued Richard Rossow, chair of US-India policy studies at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, quoted in the *Financial Times*.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Avoidable delay

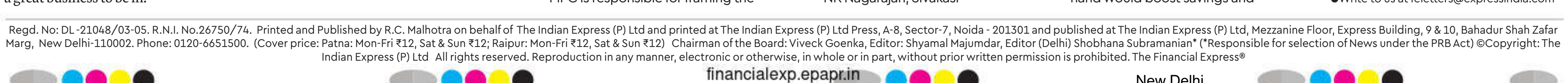
Apropos of "Appointment suspense" (FE, October 1), the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has six members, three internal and nominated by the Reserve Bank of India and three external members nominated by the Centre. With the term expiring for three external members, the onus is on the selection committee to nominate new members. Since the MPC is responsible for framing the

Census and timely data

It appears from media reports that the government could be carrying out the national census, overdue since 2021, this year. Perhaps the issues pertaining to the much-debated caste census clouded the larger purpose. Our favourable demographics augur well for the production of goods and services on the one hand; a declining child dependency ratio on the other hand would boost savings and

investment. There are challenges such as lack of employment, the educational and health status of the population, and most importantly skill development of the labour force. We need to fashion the right economic policies without delay and with the use of fresh data as such favourable equations can get offset by an ageing population. —R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

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IOA MESS THREATENS TO DERAIL INDIA’S BID FOR OLYMPICS 2036

The Indian Olympic Association is in an utter mess. The infighting has turned pungent—allegations and counter-allegations are flying thick between the IOA president and its executive committee (EC). The two sides upped the ante after the Paris Olympics. As a result, the IOA has come to a standstill. What is even more disturbing is that player-centric proposals are getting affected now. Over what? The CEO’s appointment, which EC members have been opposing since January. The EC meeting last week ended in acrimony, without any resolution. All of this took place in front of Jerome Poivey, head of institutional relations and governance at the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It was a big embarrassment for the entire IOA including president P T Usha.

The fight has stalled the functioning of the IOA. The CEO, who has been working since January 15, is yet to be paid because the EC is still not on board. The EC, including the IOA chief, need to find a solution now because the bid process for the 2036 Games is stuck, among other things. The IOC told this newspaper that they have not yet been informed of the ‘select region’ where the Games are proposed. There is no bid committee to liaise between the IOA, IOC and other stakeholders like host city representatives. If the IOA president is to be believed, even the Olympic medal winners are yet to be felicitated more than one-and-a-half-months after Paris.

A dozen of the 15 EC members have chosen to go against the IOA president. The EC had cast aspersions on the entire process of electing the IOA chief and some top EC members. Usha, on the other hand, had sent showcause notices to five EC members who, according to an unknown complainant, are in violation of the sports code. There have been allegations of financial mismanagement on the EC, too. The IOC asked them to sort out the matters soon. But as of now, there is no solution in sight. Perhaps it’s time the Supreme Court took note of the situation in the larger interest of sports in the country. The SC had said in 2022 that any objection to the IOA’s constitution and election would have to be referred to the top court. Maybe it’s time to make that call.

PROBE KERALA POLICE’S GOLD SMUGGLING NEXUS

WHAT lies at the centre of the confrontation between Left MLA P V Anvar and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is gold. When Anvar unleashed an unprecedented broadside on Pinarayi Vijayan last Thursday, of all the things he said on political and personal fronts, his claims on gold smuggling deserve serious scrutiny. The rest may be passed off as utterances of a frustrated politician who was repeatedly snubbed by the CPI(M) and the CM. Anvar alleged the involvement of some police officers in a gold smuggling-and-seizure racket and that they enjoyed the blessings of a few in the CPI(M)’s power circle. Since the home department is handled by the CM himself, the charge was indirectly laid at Vijayan’s door.

There has indeed been a significant increase in the seizure of smuggled gold by the state’s police, though technically it’s the customs department’s job to deal with cases of international smuggling. The official figures show that nearly 146 kg of gold was seized and 185 cases of smuggling registered by the police since 2022. In comparison, in two years before that, the police had seized only about a kg of gold in three cases. The charge is that there is an arrangement worked out with some customs personnel who let smuggled gold pass through airport checks, but then tip off cops. Police teams swoop down on the carriers once they are out of the airport and seize the gold; the allegation is also that only a small portion of the haul makes it to official records. If this is indeed what has been happening, the amount of gold pocketed by the racket could be significant.

Gold smuggling is not just about tax evasion—it’s also about feeding the parallel economy; it’s closely linked to informal money transfer systems such as hawala and other forms of money laundering. Official figures show a difference of about 300 tonnes between the domestic consumption of gold in India and its imports. This difference is made up through smuggling and, according to officials, Kerala contributes a big chunk. The charge is serious and a case fit for urgent intervention by central agencies. There must be a thorough investigation to bring out the truth, punish the culprits, and put an end to the practice that is undermining the country’s economy.

QUICK TAKE

ON POLLUTION WATCH AGAIN

DELHI’S Commission for Air Quality Management has promised to deploy ‘flying squads’ from the Central Pollution Control Board to spot and prevent stubble-burning in Punjab and Haryana during October and November. The worry about pollution choking the national capital during the festive season is graver this year because Diwali coincides with *parali*, the end of the kharif harvest season. To begin, we should use satellite imagery to make the effort more efficient. What we have also learnt from years of trying to curb the practice is that a combination of carrots and sticks is needed. Also needed is representation of the region’s farmers’ organisations while the commission plans its actions.

WHENEVER people ask me about Mahatma Gandhi, I would remember conversations with my father. For him, Gandhi was even more unique than Albert Einstein. He told me the problems and issues that Gandhi raised were perennial. No one else could raise the spelling of the word better to such a classic level. It becomes the Plimsoll line for a kindergarten ethics. In that sense, Gandhi’s questions were always contemporary.

He was not a Luddite. People forget that the kind of charkha he introduced was a more efficient reinvention made by the Polish theosophist and engineer Maurice Frydman. Frydman, who went on to have over a 100 engineering patents, was intrigued by Gandhi.

One must also add that the loudspeaker as a political instrument in India was introduced at one of Gandhi’s rallies. I recollect an even more iconic story about a Gandhi rally. He was addressing a group of workers in Manchester after a swadeshi boycott. He looked at the state of the plant and said, “No wonder the Japanese are beating you.”

For my father, Gandhi was someone you learnt from. I remember we were travelling in a local train from Jamshedpur to Kharagpur, where my father occasionally taught. He was sitting at the door when one of his chappals fell off. He was not upset—instead, to our surprise, he immediately took the other one off. He said, “One lost shoe is a crisis and a pair is a gift [to someone else].” A message of solidarity. Gandhi, for him, represented future solidarities.

What made Gandhi’s philosophy perennial was his use of the body as a model and metaphor. For Gandhi, the human body was perpetually contemporary and vulnerable. It became an index of a civilisation’s sense of violence. The body was also a site for experiments. Who else would boldly call the body a source of experiments? The body as a perennial metaphor received the everyday questions of ethics.

One can understand why scientists like Jagdish Chandra Bose and others treated him as a contemporary. In many senses, Gandhi thought like a scientist. He was aware of the question why the Sermon on the Mount had the status Pythagorean theorems had in geometry. He even dreamt of teaching maths through the charkha.

Gandhi was more concerned with innovation than with the dullness of professions. He wanted to revitalise the

Gandhi proposed new ways of thinking about spirituality, technology and innovation at his ashram. It is for contemporary Gandhians to revitalise his ideas with new explorations

REMEMBERING THE MANY SIDES OF THE MAHATMA

SHIV VISVANATHAN

Social scientist associated with the Compost Heap, a group researching alternative imaginations



MANDAR PARDIKAR

modern entity called the city and create a different organicity around it. This is why he said the only thing we many need from the West was a good sewage system, as the ones created by English social reformer Edwin Chadwick. As Gandhi used his ashram as a perpetual site for innovation, Gandhians like Satish Chandra Mukerjee experimented on the flush tank, which they saw at the heart of modern technologies.

What made Gandhi classic and contemporary at the same time was his childlike sense of humour. He could be like Alice in the Wonderland. Once industrialist Jammalal Bajaj gifted Gandhi’s ashram a Ford car. It worked for a few weeks and then collapsed. Gandhi had it pulled by two bullocks. When visitors came, he in-

troduced the contraption as “Meet my ox-Ford.” We need to bring back the sense of play to the political to encounter differences of perspectives. Use of humour does not have to be any less serious.

I remember another of his encounters with a scientist. Once, C V Raman had to leave his wife with Gandhi as he went for a meeting. When Raman hurried back, he asked how she was. Gandhi wickedly said, “Her science is better than yours was before you left.”

His humour gave him a sense of perspective. When Mussolini asked him to review his troops, Gandhi was surprised but he agreed. All he said was, “All of you look very healthy to me.”

Yet, Gandhi had a deep understanding of innocence—not just the physical

BEYOND THE GREAT FLUSH: MORE OF SWACHH BHARAT

AKSHAY ROUT

Former Director General, Swachh Bharat Mission

ment. Used water has acquired higher attention. Sampoorn Swachhata is the goal of the new phase that commenced soon after all states declared themselves as ODF in 2019. India’s 4,800 cities should become garbage free at the earliest, with remediation of about 2,400 mountains of dumpsites on the periphery of several cities, and with no new waste dumps allowed to come up.



As the Clean India Mission completes a decade, its priority has moved from constructing toilets to the bigger task of waste management. Today, four times more urban waste gets processed than was done in 2014. But questions remain on other cleanliness goals

Amidst competing priorities in the life of a nation, the SBM retains the strength of adequacy of resources. Both rural and urban components of the mission have been supported by over ₹1.40 lakh crore each in the second phase. The programme is further boosted by a 60 percent commitment to water and sanitation services out of the sizeable devolution to local bodies made by the 15th Finance Commission.

It is reassuring that the SBM is bouncing back, alive to its critical linkage with the larger environment and climate, and its role in India’s circular economy. About 40 percent of the staggering 22 crore tonnes of legacy dumps have been neutralised. Close to 80 percent of massive urban waste now gets processed compared to a mere 16 percent in 2014. Door to door collection of waste

at the ward level that started from nothing is about to saturate. Material recovery and waste processing facilities are multiplying, though the need is significantly more. Waste to energy plants and recycling startups are on the ground backed by technology and evolving policy support. Private entrepreneurs are looking at the waste management sector as a profitable industry.

More technology and enterprise does not take away the community from the mission. Citizen engagement remains at its core. A quick example is the individual and community responsibility for source segregation of waste. If the 3Rs (Reduce, Re-use, and Recycle) are seen as the long-term answer to waste eradication and a sustainable environment, the required restraint and civic habits must be ingrained in families and the neighbourhood. In the words of PM Modi, founder and chief advocate of the SBM, the task must carry on ‘generation after generation, with alertness, continually without being tired or stopping’.

It is significant, hence, that millions of Indians have descended on public spaces this fortnight for *shramadaan* in a high display of collective action. By specifically taking up over 8 lakh locations of rigid filth called cleanliness target units, the Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) campaign this year conveys business and determination. About 270 million citizens have already joined the efforts, and the number is growing. In recognition and solidarity with its true guardians, over one and a half lakh special camps for health and welfare of sanitation workers are planned by the side. The mission has systematically placed *safai mitras* on the pedestal they deserve.

This countrywide schedule marks a reiteration that *swachhata* is everyone’s business. The purpose is to give over ownership to the larger community and integrate cleanliness into daily habits. The past 10 years have created a heritage on which the future of sustainable and comprehensive sanitation can be built. The SHS 2024 that culminates on Gandhiji’s birth anniversary, also called Swachh Bharat Diwas, is a renewal of the promise.

(Views are personal)

brutality of violence. He understood and classified varieties of violence from obsolescence to triage to genocide. It was Gandhi’s idea of iatrogeny as doctor-induced illness that made him argue for a greater responsibility from patients. Only a Gandhi could understand a patient getting a Nobel prize for understanding the language of suffering. The body periodically returns to reiterate its importance.

It was the Scottish biologist and town planner Patrick Geddes who noted that while German science was troubling with jackboots, India was creating a post-Germanic science. He talked with Gandhi how Bose had created some of those post-Germanic domains. In fact, Bose, Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore were planning Shantiniketan as a place for a new agricultural science. One wishes the national movement world rework itself in terms of these key activities.

Gandhi also integrated the idea of responsibility. He was clear of the necessity of accountability. But he went on to add trusteeship, sacrifice and caring at a different level. This is why Gandhi’s experimentation with ethics is so critical.

One has to note that his language was always ordinary. Even his theorising was transparent. That is why Gandhi remains more democratic than many others. He realised democracy demanded an ethical vulnerability of a different kind.

For Gandhi, India needed to operate its traditional institutions. He wanted the ashram to revitalise the city and create new, innovative means for both technology and spirituality. In a way, this representation of Gandhian life is relevant even today as we look for models beyond the Anthropocene. A new way of thinking about spirituality, technology and innovation. One wishes that, instead of falling into orthodoxy, the ashram had created a new hermeneutics for India.

One must add that Gandhi’s idea of childhood was imaginative. Indian nationalism was not just about the nation-state, but about rethinking the idea of childhood and its future. What one needs is an update of these facets to understand the time people spent on thinking about childhood. This creativity was the gateway to the creativity of the future.

One mistake several in the current generation make is to think that Gandhi is outdated. It is Gandhians who need to come up with new experiments, new books, new explorations—to renew the idea of India as a plural civilisation.

(Views are personal)
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MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Men’s upbringing

Ref: *Overhaul must to make Odisha safer for women* (Oct 1). Recent rape and murder cases in Odisha have raised questions about the safety of women in the state. Such heinous acts force women to reel under fear. Nothing can be brought under control until society starts paying heed to the upbringing of men. **Abhilasha Gupta, email**

Legalise euthanasia

Ref: *Draft bill on euthanasia: Mercy of dignified death* (Oct 1). This well-researched article needs to be noted by policy makers. Active euthanasia and assisted suicide have been legalised in several countries. Why can’t it be legalised in a nation that boasts of a growth-oriented economy that will soon occupy a coveted place in the developed world? **J Bhagyalakshmi, email**

Jain practice

The article was informative. A week ago, my friend’s mother attained *samadhi* (a traditional practice among Jains to leave life through fasting) in a village in Tamil Nadu. A Jain scholar said the traditional practice was yet to get clearance from our legal system. Five years ago, the police threatened the organisers of a Jain murti in Thirumalai with legal consequences when an 88-year-old underwent the process. **MT Saju, email**

Dignified death

Dignified death is a right of every citizen. Presently, a declaration is being obtained from the patient’s relatives before conducting any surgery. On the same lines, the patient may be asked to give consent for dignified death unless he doesn’t have consciousness. **Jaikishan N, Kengeri**

Ungodly politics

Ref: *SC lambasts Naidu for laddu politics* (Oct 1). It is essential to maintain a clear separation between god and politics, as leaders frequently overlook the sentiments of devotees. To ensure transparency and impartiality in this sensitive matter, an independent investigation committee should be established. **Sujal Sharma, Delhi**

Saving Siddu

Ref: *Siddu buys peace as wife offers to return all land* (Oct 1). The decision of Kartanaka CM Siddaramaiah’s wife to return all 14 sites allotted to her after the Enforcement Directorate registered a case against the CM is rather meaningless. Had she taken this action much earlier, it could have saved the CM from this precarious situation. **KS Aswathanarayana, Bengaluru**

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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More Bucks for Bang For HNI Investors

Sebi reacts to unregulated PMS offerings

Sebi has moved ahead with its idea of allowing mutual funds to offer higher-risk products to a wider body of investors. Fancy investment products on offer by portfolio management services (PMS) and AIFs will be available at a reasonably low cut-off of ₹10 lakh. This should improve access among the investing community to quicker ways to increase wealth that have till now been restricted by the net worth criterion. Sebi's move is also in reaction to the phenomenon of unregulated PMS offerings, and is an acceptance of the demand for a more regulated structure for an emerging investment segment. The regulator conservatively chose to go ahead with MFs to offer the new investment product going by the track record of the industry in mopping up household savings for deployment in the capital market. Systematic investment plans — the overwhelmingly popular method by which retail investors



are funnelling money into equities — will have to be offered by MFs offering the new investment products. They will, thus, have to tweak their risk management mechanism for such products keeping this in mind. Sebi has chosen to offer a bottom-up approach to new investment products by plumping for MFs instead of PMS and AIF providers. The MF industry has the widest access to the investing community so the fancy investment products can be popularised faster than if they were offered by PMS and AIF providers. Also, it faces a higher degree of settled regulatory scrutiny while disclosure is evolving for the PMS and AIF segments. Oversight of these segments should improve as competition emerges from the MF industry for market share. It also helps to squeeze risks into the top of the investment cone while limiting its spillover through professional management in the broad lower layer where losses can influence investment behaviour more significantly.

Fancy MF offerings can draw more savings to the equities market. The impact of improving financial risk management to lower the cost of capital should be positive for the real economy.

With Iran's Attack, Escalation Must Stop

Former Israeli PM Shimon Peres had said, 'If you have a hammer in your hand, you think that every problem is a nail. You don't solve problems with hammers. It's much more varied and sophisticated.' Tuesday's missile attacks by Iran on Israel are a result of Benjamin Netanyahu wielding a hammer. Retaliation is a mug's game, something both Tehran and Tel Aviv must realise. For Netanyahu now to reply to Iran's latest attack — an act he may have wanted to, butress his image as an avenging strongman — will not help Israel.

The conflict has moved well beyond Hamas and Gaza to the north with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and now Iran. Last night's Iranian attack may seem like justification for Israel's to 'take out' Tehran. But Netanyahu and Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei should know better. Nature abhors a vacuum; a new leadership will emerge. Worse, both sides will spawn a new generation of haters with 'unintended consequences'. It will also reactivate inter-terror group coordination, endangering exactly what Israel has gone out to fortify: its security. The long war is making actualising the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) difficult, undermining the critical venture. This helps China, leaving the field open for its ventures such as the currently spluttering BRI. As the war morphs into a shadow conflict between Israel and Iran, the troika of China-Russia-Iran gets tighter, with consequences for the Indo-Pacific and Europe, and impacting democracies beyond that include India.

Iran's latest travesty provides Netanyahu more reason — apart from his own legal and political problems — to scale up the war. But in doing so, he is endangering the safety and security of Israel. A political solution is now more needed than ever.



JUST IN JEST

Remember, too much loyalty to your company can get you undervalued

The Cautionary Tale Of Ram Bilas Sharma

Ram Bilas Sharma may be the epitome of the loyal party soldier. But in today's day and age, the ex-Haryana BJP chief is what we in the business call a 'done-overed'. Despite being denied an election ticket for Haryana's assembly polls scheduled for later this week, Sharma — after breaking into tears for being 'done over' by his party — stated that he bears no grudges, and will do everything for his party to come up tops again in these elections. Hanuman-level devotion? Or underselling himself so much that he has taken himself out of the market?

You would think a 5-time MLA, 3-time state minister and all-time party animal who helped BJP dig its decadal heels into government, one would have thought the man would have been given some function more than cheerleading from the sides by the lords in Delhi. Most would pack up their desk, update their LinkedIn profile, and start 'networking'. In the free market of current Indian politics, that would mean moving to another 'company' for a good compensation package. But not our Ram. Frankly, it's a move that would have HR managers laughing their way to the talent bank and make any career coach cringe. In a world where professionals are encouraged to know their worth and seek opportunities that value their contributions, here's a cautionary tale of unwavering loyalty. We wish Mr Sharma all the best.

CURSOR India must pivot to a new set of economic & trade policies that values human beings

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?



T K Arun

The budget speech promised an economic policy framework for the next generation of reforms. That is a sensible move.

India has compelling reasons to move away from a textbook framework of open economy macroeconomics. It strives for strategic autonomy in a geopolitically riven world, in which one superpower sits astride the northern border; has built supercharged industrial muscle that can smother Indian industry, and casts a covetous eye on Indian territory.

India can find ready support, vis-à-vis China, in the US. However, if the US finds that India is reliant solely on American support, it would have it where China has Pakistan — by the scruff of the neck. India would have to give up all dreams of strategic autonomy.

If India wants to counter-veil China's ambition to dominate the Indo-Pacific, it must be able to draw strategic support from the US, Europe, Russia and Japan, based on its own strength in terms of overall economic heft, technology and military-industrial capability. Fiscal action, trade policy, industrial policy, education — in terms of structure, quantity and pedagogy — must dovetail into building the wherewithal of strategic autonomy.

Rising yields around the world have persuaded many that global savings are drying up. This is premature. Rates are responding to inflation-targeting monetary policy, not cramped supply. Retirement savings of the rich world and its largish elderly population still scour the world in search of high returns. India can, and should, safely target

to draw in external savings to the tune of 2-2.5% of GDP — that is, it should aim for that level of annual current account deficit.

Indians, apart from a tiny elite, are relatively poor. India cannot afford to squeeze consumption to generate the savings needed to keep investment high, the way China did, undervaluing its currency and exporting savings.

That means two things: one, inflation must be kept moderate — not so high as to erode consumption, and not so low so as to choke growth; two, the share of wages in national income must rise — the propensity to consume of profit-earners would be lower than that of wage-earners. That means that trade unions must be recognised as friends of growth, rather than enemies of production.

Unions bridge the gap between rationality at the micro-level, which sees wages as a cost to be kept down, and the macro-level rationality of boosting aggregate demand, for which wages have to rise, along with the leisure time within which people consume movies, TV, cricket, books, music, art, gaming, eating out and travel, all vital parts of the economy. And that means ever-rising productivity.

Productivity comes not by flogging workers till they drop dead, but by making capital investments that boost productivity

including in training. Indian producers must compete with the global best. Import duties must be low and uniform across the board, so as to give equal effective protection to all value added. Producing steel bars deserves neither more nor less protection than producing wire, nail or coat-

How does this square with boosting strategic sectors? A carefully chosen set of sectors — advanced silicon, rocket and aircraft engines, quantum computing, for example — should be walled off from mainstream trade policy, given



A gateway to another India

subsidy and protection from imports.

The world sells off certain items from the normal rules of trade, by controlling them by the likes of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar Arrangement for dual-use goods, and Australia Group on chemical weapons and their precursor chemicals. India should formulate a list of items of strategic interest for preferential treatment — call it Strategic Autonomy List (SAL), and tell the world we are open for business for the rest.

India must build formidable capacity to determine, at speed, if certain import prices are the result of unfair practices that warrant countervailing tariffs. Such capacity, along with SAL, should take care of the China problem, while providing Indian producers with inputs at globally competitive prices and a positive, minimal level of protection.

AI would make very many labour-intensive sectors — from cutting fabric to polishing diamo-

India should formulate a Strategic Autonomy List (SAL) for preferential treatment and tell the world we're open for business for the rest



Bell Curves ■ R Prasad



'Kaizen' ke aage 'karoshi' hai!

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

On October 2,

we all sigh,

As dry day again

passes by.

But birthday boy Lal

Bahadur, we bet,

Wouldn't have minded

if we all met,

And toasted and

clinked away the night!

...

Counting Robots

Annual installations of robots in the world's factories exceeded half a million for the third straight year, pushing the total to 4.3 million at the end of 2023, according to the World Robotics Report. About 70% of the newly deployed robots were in Asia, 17% in Europe and 10% in the Americas, mostly in the US. Installations of industrial robots in India increased by 59% to a record 8,510 units last year, led by demand from the automotive industry. A snapshot...

Industrial robots, '000s of units

	Operational stock	Annual installations
2013	1,332	178
2014	1,472	221
2015	1,632	254
2016	1,838	304
2017	2,125	400
2018	2,441	423
2019	2,737	387
2020	3,027	390
2021	3,479	526
2022	3,904	553
2023	4,282	541

Source: International Federation of Robotics, Bloomberg

Largest markets in 2023, '000s of units

China	276.3
Japan	46.1
US	37.6
S Korea	31.4
Germany	28.4
Italy	10.4
India	8.5
France	6.4
Mexico	5.8
Spain	5.1
Türkiye	4.4
Taiwan	4.4
Canada	4.3
UK	3.8
Thailand	3.6

SANJEEV RAJ JAIN

Policy Needs Diversity



Rounak Sil, Rajendra N Paramanik, Abhishek Gorsi & Ajith K Suresh

GoI, in collaboration with RBI, is working on appointing the next set of external members in MPC. The challenge lies in balancing priorities of taming elevated food inflation against imperatives set forth by the US Fed rate cuts.

India has made a significant shift from a governor-centric decision-making model to a more collaborative approach via MPC, mirroring global trends since the late 1990s. Based on Ujit Patel committee's recommendation, MPC was formed in 2016. It has three internal members from RBI and three external members from academia. This collegial structure, while intended to foster balanced decision-making, has revealed an interesting dynamic: discord among committee members.

As seen, external MPC members often vary from the majority's stand on policy rates, raising questions about the efficacy of this governance model. Studies in policy communications of central banks, however, have often emphasised the need to preserve and nurture an environment conducive to such frictions in a committee-based deliberative decision-making framework.

In the backdrop of MPC's imminent reconstitution, the question that has triggered discussions and debates is whether a more diverse committee, with all its internal frictions and disagreements, would be able to deliver better policy decisions. This question warrants a definitive answer now, more than ever.

To explore the issue further, we conducted an experimental study that attempts to understand the linkage between the committee's composition and the quality of decision-making by experts through a classroom experiment that mimics monetary policymaking. Using an experimental setup, graduate economics students, donning the role of profession-

al forecasters, were asked to provide inflation and growth forecasts.

Additionally, we also assessed whether the revelation of the identity of committee members can improve forecast accuracy. Participants were divided into three groups and provided different inputs based on the group they were assigned to: some received minutes of internal members of MPC, others from external members sans their identity, while a third group had access to internal and external members' perspectives along with their identities.

To aid participants, they were provided with information sets that contained minutes from previous RBI meetings and visual data representations, outlining the recent growth and inflation dynamics of India. Participants were instructed that the closer their prediction was to the actual inflation level, the higher their respective payoffs would be. The results provided policy-relevant insights:

► Participants who had access to information from both internal and external members, including their identities, achieved the most accurate forecasts.

► Participants' forecast errors were low even when they received detailed insights into both internal and external members' perspectives.

► Identity of committee members is a crucial factor in refining policy com-



Smell the monetary coffee

munications.

► Revealing member identities fostered greater divergence in how participants prioritised different economic shocks when making their forecast decisions. This result echoes the findings of some contemporary scholars whose studies support the idea that external members provide alternative perspectives that can challenge conventional wisdom often upheld by internal members.

► The need for a heterogeneous MPC structure that can significantly enhance forecast accuracy, and policy effectiveness is underscored. The optimal mix of internal and external members, coupled with the transparency of member identities, not only augments decision-making but also builds credibility in monetary policy.

Committees composed of members from diverse social and educational backgrounds also enhance public acceptance, credibility and long-term independence compared to decisions made by a single policymaker. To a forecaster, an information set that contains details on the identity of the member of MPC appears to be a more credible and reliable source, which would have a positive bearing on the forecast decisions of forecasters.

As India continues to navigate complex economic challenges, the establishment of a robust and diverse MPC will be critical in aligning macroeconomic outcomes with national priorities, ultimately fostering a resilient economic environment.

By embracing a committee structure that prioritises diversity and openness, India will be better equipped to meet the demands of its evolving economic landscape. The new appointments present a pivotal opportunity to ensure that India's monetary policy is not only resilient but also responsive to global economic challenges.

Sil is executive, KPMG Bengaluru, Paramanik is faculty member, IIT Patna, Gorsi is research scholar, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai, and Suresh is research scholar, IIT Patna



THE SPEAKING TREE

Capitalism & Trusteeship

CHETAN SAVLA

Capitalism has yielded significant benefits over the last century. It has driven economies and businesses towards high growth powered by competition, productivity and innovation. This growth has been accompanied by unprecedented job creation, growth in per-capita incomes and standard of living, urban infrastructure and development, free trade, and the creation of market-driven economy. It can also be argued that capitalism has been a driving force for poverty reduction. Capitalism has also created adverse side effects in the form of deeper inequalities, excessive consumption and the resultant impact on the planet and environment.

MK Gandhi had propagated the principle of trusteeship, in which the wealthy would use their resources for the benefit of society after keeping a reasonable portion for themselves. Capitalism and trusteeship are actually two sides of the same coin. While the former provides the framework of creating wealth, the latter provides a framework of putting that wealth to use.

Fortunately, for India, trusteeship has not gone anywhere and is thriving. Social service organisations, funded by donations and CSR, are redistributing that wealth. Multiple government schemes for the masses are redistributing wealth through taxes. Many wealthy families are creating philanthropies. Whether his terminology of trusteeship is used or not, the idea conceived by Gandhi is vibrantly alive in our country.

Chat Room

Reskilling and the Art of Levitation

Apropos 'There Is No Generation Gap' by M Muneer and Tumpa Dey (Oct 1), the primary reason that inhibits intergenerational cohesion in an organisation is career progression concern. In a pyramidal structure, the existence of different age groups is inevitable. But people get stuck in the middle of the career ladder due to lack of opportunities since all of them cannot climb due to limited scope in the hierarchy. They not only become frustrated but also become stumbling blocks to the people below them, resulting in their stagnation as well. This can be solved by growing companies through lateral and vertical shifts of people by upgrading skills. These symptoms should be identified in advance for remedial action to prevent people from becoming disgruntled.

RAJARAO KUMAR
Bengaluru

Humble Farmer or Fumble Farmer?

'Rich Farmers Gotta Pay Tax' by Rajesh Shukla (Oct 1) did ignore the fact that agriculture is essentially not a business but 'a way of life'. The writer talks of contribution to GDP. Farmers are paying indirect taxes and strengthening the banking system with their savings. In a way by subjecting the interest earned to taxation, the farmer is ensuring 'horizontal equity'.


One solution is to restrict select subsidies such as Rythu Bharosa, implemented in Telangana, or PM Kisan Samman Nidhi to the marginalised farming community. The writer also ignores 'loss from agriculture', where losses in one year can disturb a farmer's finances for a decade. Comparing Indian and American farmers is not justified at this stage. Let's preserve the precious species called 'annadata' and not tax him.

DENDUKURI ZITENDRA RAO
Hyderabad

The writer rightly justifies the need to bring rich farmers within the I-T net. But, sadly, despite loads of logic and arguments in its favour, there is a lack of political will and moral courage required to bring in this reform. What is good for the country is unfortunately not good for the ruling class in India. Governments may come and go, but the vested interests remain entrenched to suck the economy. The salaried taxpayers are paying the price for this long-delayed reform.

NAVIN BHATIA
Jaipur

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CONTRAPUNTO

Nobody ever defended anything successfully, there is only attack and attack and attack some more

-GEORGE S PATTON

J&K's Big Message

That militant groups have chosen to participate in elections is a victory for democracy

J&K successfully completed its three-phase voting to the newly delimited 90-member legislature, with good turnout and without incident. Supreme Court's firm prod to complete the assembly election saw the wheels turn – and they spun well. Held after a decade, this has been a wholly new election in very many ways. It's the first since J&K was made a UT, its special status removed. Delimitation saw Jammu's seats increase to 43, and Kashmir's by 1 to 47, and 9 reserved for STs.

It's a measure of the far-reaching changes in J&K that fundamentalist outfit Jamaat-e-Islami that had boycotted polls for decades and since been outlawed, returned to the electoral battleground. Its candidates contested as Independents on 33 Kashmir seats and on 1 Jammu seat. UAPA accused Baramulla MP Engineer Rashid's Lok Sabha win gave his party a boost. Their collective presence has made it an altogether new battlefield for all established political parties – NC, PDP, BJP, Congress. A truly multipolar election.

Among the keenest battles was Kulgam's, where 4-time consecutive MLA, CPM veteran Tarigami got a run for his money from Jamaat-backed Sayar Ahmed Reshi, whose campaign included the promise of a library in every village. Some PDP votes are apparently moving to Jamaat nominees. But regardless of outcome, it is a nod to India's electoral integrity that in the altered reality of J&K, extremist groups have joined democratic processes to make their mark. If Rashid's party, or Jamaat nominees, win seats, or mark their presence in significant vote shares, it will once again prove the power and appeal of constitutional democracy in regions that witnessed conflict and insurgencies.

This won't be unique. If Northern Ireland's Sinn Fein simultaneously ran armed and electoral battles for over a decade, closer home, Nepal integrated the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN) into the electoral fold – it even emerged as Nepal's single dominant party. Former Mizoram CM Zoramthanga is an ex-guerilla. Nicaraguan Sandinistas transited from bullet to ballot. Armed groups did the same in El Salvador, Mozambique, Uganda, to name a few. Elections can bring stability post conflict, also create new nations, as in Namibia. Not everyone makes it – there's always a Hamas that would fail the people who elected them, and stick to violence. A 'militant group electoral participation' study in 2016 found that at least 100 militant and ex-militant groups opted to fight elections. It's never too soon to drop the gun.

Terms Of War

Dehumanising conflict jargon seeps into language, normalising and justifying horrors

In its assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Israeli air force reportedly dropped 80 bombs – including US-made 2,000-pound bunker busters – that flattened at least four multi-storey apartment buildings in Beirut. Lebanese authorities have said that those buildings were full of civilians. Israel shrugs that fact off as *collateral damage*. War's dehumanising quality seeps into everyday vocabulary. It diminishes the target – actual human beings – by taking recourse to technical jargon or crass metaphors. These then slide into common parlance, eroding our collective humanity.

Israel's military-security tactics in Gaza have long been referred to as *mowing the grass*. The phrase essentially compares Palestinians to weeds, as in they need to be cut down from time to time. This in turn feeds Israeli extremists' rhetoric about Palestinians being barbaric and non-human. Another innocuous sounding Israeli phrase that works in exactly the same way is, *coercive maintenance*.

Post 9/11, CIA created an extensive programme of *extraordinary rendition*. This was America playing bully, kidnapping people it deemed as threats from across the world and illegally transferring them for interrogation. It undermined basic human rights and led to torture of detainees at secret black sites. Further back, during the Korean and Vietnam wars, US marines used to refer to East Asians as *gooks*, licensing a racist mindset. This slang continues to be a term of abuse in US today.

Vilification of the 'enemy' accompanies wars. Russians refer to Ukrainians as *khokhols*, a derogatory hair reference. But the increasing use of new tech like drones has also accentuated dehumanising tendencies. There's nothing precise about *precision strikes*. Yet, the term is used as moral veneer for *targeted killings*. For a drone operator thousands of miles away, targets are impersonal blips on a screen. But not to worry. Press a button, kill, and pick your choice of the terms of war.

State of the notion

There are many pros and cons in the One Nation, One Vote ongoing debate

Jug Suraiya

The govt has once again proposed bundling the general election and assembly elections into a single package and concluding the exercise in one fell swoop. Advocates of ONOV argue that frequent elections are expensive (the last general election cost upward of ₹55,000cr, the highest in the world), that staggered hustings put govt in the Centre and in the states in perpetual campaign mode which sidelines long-term planning, and that they constrain voters to make frequent, often-inconvenient, trips to the ballot box.

Such repetitive polling exercises might well induce sceptics to compare Indian elections to Chinese meals: no sooner have you had one than you are ready for another.

Opponents of the plan contend that, considering the vast size and span of the electorate, a simultaneous poll is undoable, that it would conflate local and central issues which often are very different, and that it goes against the constitutional tenet of federalism.

The very fact that there are marked differences shows that our is a nation based not on homogeneity or sameness, but on heterogeneity or a diversity of views.

When the Indian nation was born, its ill-wishers predicted it would last mere months, if not weeks, before inevitable disintegration. But India has confounded doomsayers by stubbornly refusing to fulfil their prophecies.

The Indian Union predates the European Union by decades and, if Brexit is an indication of the way the wind is blowing, might well outlive it.

Like EU, India is made up of what were many nations joined together. Unlike EU, which has a commonality in being largely Christian and Caucasian, India is home to diverse creeds and genetic strains.

What links the many nations that are India is a notion, a gestalt in which the sum is greater than its individual parts. It is in this notion of a unifying multiplicity that the nation finds its identity. This underlying notion is the idea of India.

One Nation, One Vote? Perhaps. Or perhaps Several Nations, Several Votes, SNSV.



secondopinion

MAHATMA'S THREE FACES

● 'Govt' Gandhi is being replaced by parties with new official figures ● 'Weak' Gandhi is criticised in popular discourse ● 'Political' Gandhi is a powerful force for grassroots people's movements

Hilal Ahmed

Gandhi is introduced to us by some commentary as an old, weak, and impractical man – supposedly an awkward compulsion that has no place in the extremely professional, aggressively competitive, and essentially tricky world of politics.

This image of Gandhi is not evoked by his opponents alone to make him politically irrelevant. It is a dominant section of our political class that finds Gandhi's ideas practically unfeasible. This strange neutrality of Gandhi's self-claimed sympathisers creates a highly misleading conception that Gandhi does not have any political significance in the present context.

In celebrating another Gandhi Jayanti today, the question is, does Gandhi really matter, politically? To answer this question, one must understand the nature of Gandhi's representation in post-colonial India. There are at least three forms in which Gandhi comes to us.

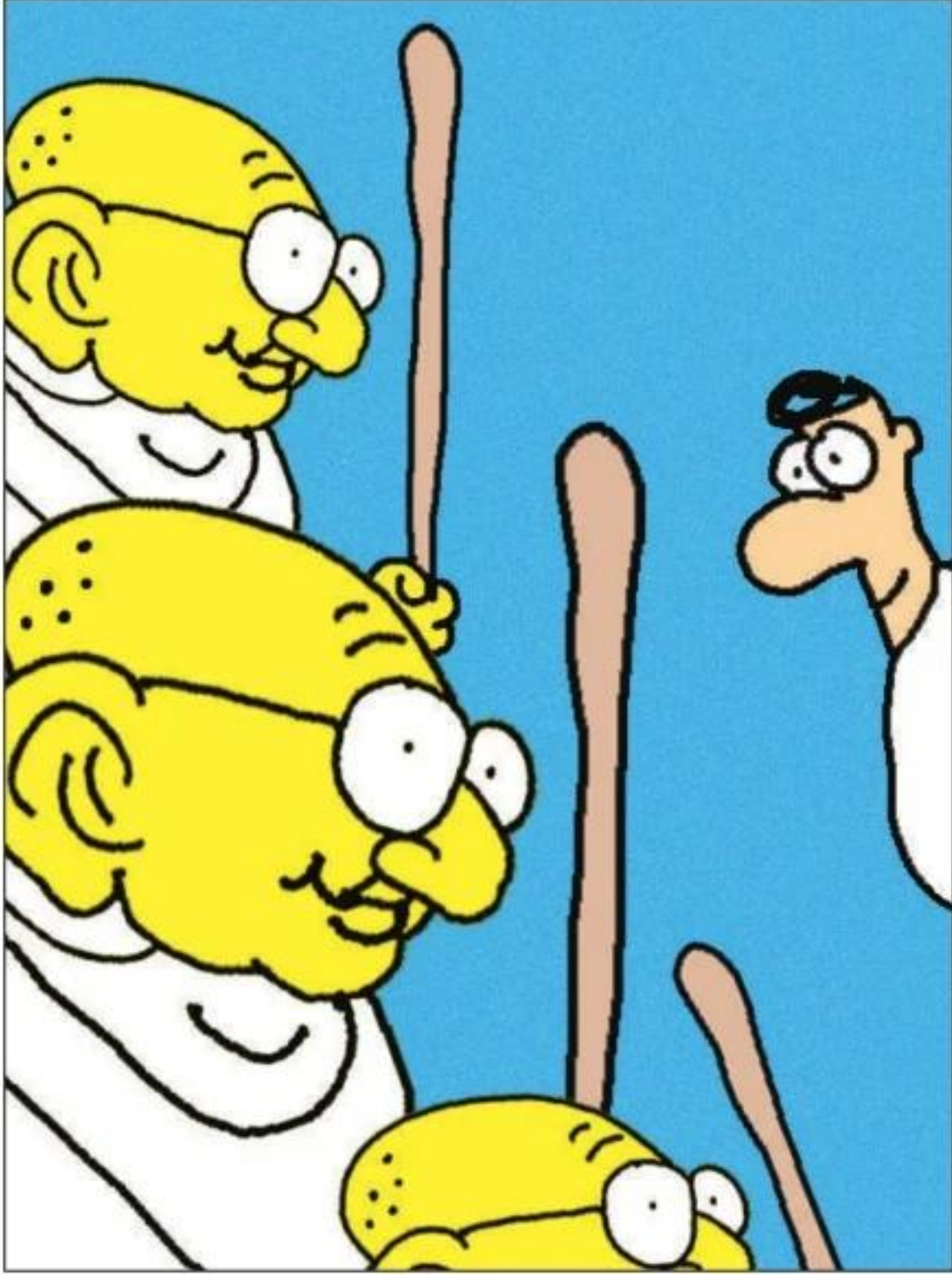
● First of all, there is a 'Sarkari' Gandhi, who is commemorated officially by state agencies in a variety of ways. His smiling image on our currency notes, his official description as Father of the Nation and the celebration of his birth day on Oct 2 every year as Gandhi Jayanti signify that the figure of Gandhi is inextricably linked to the official self-representation of the Indian state. Although this formal appropriation of Gandhi began immediately after Independence, different govt have invented their own versions of 'Sarkari' Gandhi over the years.

This official appropriation of Gandhi, it seems, has reached a saturation point. While the political class has not given up Gandhi officially, new official figures are being used to erase the 'Sarkari' status of Gandhi slowly and gradually.

BJP's aggressive portrayal of VD Savarkar as a new national hero and AAP's deliberate attempts to give prominence to BR Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh show that the reliability of India's political class on Gandhi is diminishing. That may be the reason there is an anxiety to know the official status of the title Father of the Nation.

● There is another Gandhi in popular discourse, whom we might call 'Majboor' Gandhi. The popular Hindi saying – 'Majboori ka naam Mahatma Gandhi' – is often used to describe a situation where one feels

helpless, abandoned, and discarded. Gandhi's failure to convince his fellow leaders and even his self-claimed followers that non-violence is a decisive tool to protect humanity is seen as his ultimate weakness. He is criticised for not doing enough to protect the life of Bhagat Singh; he is held responsible



for the partition of the country; and he is condemned for appeasing Muslims. Gandhi's adversaries call him an indecisive and hesitant man, while his adherents treat him as a defenceless figure.

Even the Hindi film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, which makes a great effort to reinvent Gandhi in our own context, failed to recognise the deeper meanings of Gandhian techniques. There is a comic scene in this

film where the famous saying 'whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also' is mocked to create the impression that non-violence and love for the enemy are two different things.

● The third image of Gandhi is often ignored in public life. I call it 'Siyasi' Gandhi. Unlike the organised and professional political parties, the people's struggles and grassroots movements find Gandhi as a source of inspiration. These movements envisage Gandhi as a political resource to articulate their quest for equality and democratic rights. Gandhi is not treated as an official figure representing the might of the Indian state. Instead, his ideas are recontextualised to invent arguments, strategies, and methods of social mobilisation.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan led by Medha Patkar for the rights of indigenous communities, the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, a trade union movement that rediscovered the idea of struggle and reconstruction ('Sangharsh aur Nirman') in the most backward areas of Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh) are very relevant examples in this regard. Gandhi was also evoked as a powerful symbol during the recent agitations against the farm laws and the Citizenship Amendment Act.

This 'Siyasi' Gandhi is very different from other two versions. In this case, Gandhi is detached from his official image as Father of the Nation. He is seen as a fellow traveller, who is equally dedicated to protecting civil liberties and democratic rights. This is also the reason why Gandhi's other image, the 'Majboor' Gandhi, becomes almost irrelevant here. He is not regarded as a helpless old man by the participants of grassroots movements. On the contrary, Gandhi emerges as a decisive force, a powerful icon, who might also be commemorated as a committed activist.

This lively and energetic image of Gandhi is also relevant to make sense of another and almost neglected aspect of Indian democracy. Active participation of voters in elections is a functional requirement of democratic polity. It, however, does not ensure the effective democratisation of society at large.

Gandhi was aware of this fact, and precisely for this reason, he was deeply invested in the idea of ethical politics. This unfinished project of democratic liberation is still unfolding in the realm of grassroots politics. And that makes Gandhi our contemporary.

The writer is Associate Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

For West Asia, It's Future Tense

Iran's missile attack at Israel dramatically escalates the West Asian conflict, especially since IDF is now engaged in a ground operation in Lebanon. Operations of this kind can easily lose their original form

Attila Somfalvi

Iran yesterday launched around 200 missiles targeting different parts of Israel in what Tehran said was retaliation for the killing of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh and an IRGC commander. But the barrage caused little damage with Israeli air defence again doing its job. Just like in April, this time too Tehran

had telegraphed its attack well in advance. The Iranian assault also comes on the heels of the Israel Defence Forces officially crossing the border with Lebanon to carry out a limited ground operation. Official announcements refer to this as an operation aimed at clearing terrorist infra near the Israeli border. This aligns with the Netanyahu govt decision to return Israeli residents to their homes in northern communities, which Hezbollah rocket fire has made unsafe.

But operations of this kind, even if strictly defined in advance, can lose their original form and direction, potentially expanding or becoming more complicated. Even if Israel has no interest in getting bogged down in the Lebanese quagmire, a term that became entrenched during the First Lebanon War in the early 1980s. The current round of fighting has seen the elimination of the greatest terrorist of our time, Hezbollah's Nasrallah. From the perspective of a year since the war between Israel and Hamas-Hezbollah-Iran-Houthis-and-others began, it is clear that, at this moment, both in terms of perception and operationally, Israel has restored the honour it lost on Oct 7.

On the one hand, anyone seeking comfort for the horrific events that claimed the lives of 1,500 Israelis will not find it in any assassination. There is no revenge for a small child who was butchered by the worst of the worst. It does not exist. On the other hand, in the chaotic neighbourhood that is West Asia, achieving deterrence is no small feat. Diplomacy has been tried here too many

times – and has repeatedly run aground. This does not mean that Israel should not strive for political arrangements with moderate nations. But recognising the brutal reality of enemies planning to kill Jews simply because they are Jews wanting to live their lives in their homeland, well, this is a necessity that can no longer be ignored.

Wars, murders, assassinations – West Asia is likely the most brutal place on earth. The most murderous terrorist organisations have risen and operate here. Extreme nationalism, fuelled by religious hatred, thrives here, burying the living alongside the dead.

Though peace has not arrived, and there is no real chance of it arriving, the disappearance of Nasrallah from the lives of millions who have suffered because of him and his organisation over the years, might open the door to new thinking about what needs to happen in West Asia.

After a year of fighting on multiple fronts, the information that the terrorist who had been hiding in a bunker for nearly 20 years was no longer with us has instilled a great deal of self-confidence into the veins of the Israeli public. This is a public that had been shocked on Oct 7 when they discovered that their most solid mental



fortress, the Israeli security system, had fallen into a trap of hubris and strategic intelligence blindness.

Now, in contrast, the sequence of operational successes, along with outstanding intelligence gathered by Israeli intelligence services, has moved Israel and Israelis beyond the threshold of anxiety and fear of a direct confrontation with Hezbollah. They feel on top again. And so, it is no longer clear whether Netanyahu still faces dilemmas regarding the ground incursion into Lebanon. The army, encouraged by its successes, feels it has regained the public's trust in its capabilities. It feels emboldened.

The implication: full speed ahead. In Israel, there's a saying that it's better to have a galloping horse than a lazy one. IDF seems to be galloping horse with regard to Lebanon, pushing for expanded offensive operations against Hezbollah, to push the terrorist organisation away from the border and return tens of thousands of displaced Israelis to their homes in the north.

The sober assessment is that even at this moment, despite all the talk of IDF's successes, Israel is not interested in another long war in the north. This doesn't mean it won't be dragged into one. Iran's intense involvement in what's happening in Lebanon could ignite the entire region. It remains to be seen if Iran's latest missile attack on Israel will lead to a real region-wide escalation.


The coming days will be critical. Anything could happen, especially as Israel has no intention of easing the pressure on the battered Hezbollah. Israel is likely to respond to the Iranian attack. Meanwhile, IDF chief Herzi Halevi is pushing the political leadership to approve more and more operations based on remarkable intelligence, and to continue targeting Hezbollah members everywhere.

The goal: to create a sense of insecurity. This campaign could continue for days or weeks or perhaps even months – in the air, at sea, and on land. Factually, all the cards are truly on the table. We can only hope the table itself doesn't catch fire.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy, lust not after any man's possession.

Isha Upanishad

Gandhi's Concept Of Trusteeship Promotes Equity

Ashok Vohra

M K Gandhi regarded the notion of trusteeship as 'India's greatest gift to the world.' The underlying principle of trusteeship is the belief that everything in the world is a creation of God and belongs to Him. Therefore, it belongs equally to all His creations. It does not belong to a particular person to the exclusion of others. Trusteeship can be described as a principle, in which, a person voluntarily, after meeting his 'legitimate needs' renounces the surplus of his wealth for the welfare and uplift of the poor sections of society. He becomes a trustee, a custodian of the excess portion. According to Gandhiji, the notion of trusteeship is based on the needs of an individual and not on his greed. It is not based on the principle of charity, as charity cannot be a permanent solution to remove the financial inequality of

the oppressed and help the poor become self-reliant. Gandhiji advocated the principle of trusteeship to remove prevalent economic disparity in society. Explaining the concept of equality, Gandhiji said: "Economic equality of my conception does not mean that everyone will literally have the same amount. It simply means that everybody should have enough for his needs...The real meaning of economic equality is 'To each according to his need.'" Gandhi's notion of trusteeship promotes the spirit of entrepreneurship. The modern business and industrial activities can be divided into two categories: extractive and generative. An extractive business involves 'different activities that lead to the extraction of raw materials from the earth.' Generative business, on the other hand, consistently



THE SPEAKING TREE

creates opportunities for itself, its members, its stakeholders, and its community. The principle of trusteeship applies to both types. The entrepreneur engaged in extractive business is a custodian of the natural resources and his motive is to conserve and preserve them for future generations. He extracts from nature only as much as is needed for progress and growth and simultaneously explores the ways to replenish them. He continuously searches for alternate renewable resources. Maximising profit for personal use is not the goal of a trustee entrepreneur. The idea of trusteeship is not a new discovery or invention. Its roots are found in the first shloka of the Ishavasya Upanishad. The shloka says: 'Do not covet the wealth of anyone; and enjoy the world with zest through renunciation.' In the Bhagwad Gita, Krishna reitera-

tes the import of this shloka thus: Whatever has been given to you by God – Ishvara, whatever you have received from Him, with that be happy and contented. But again, you have only the right of enjoyment, not of ownership. For, everything is His and it cannot belong to anyone else. You are therefore only a trustee of God's wealth. To promote the idea of trusteeship among all, Jains included the principle of trusteeship as one of the mahavratas – great vows, namely aparigraha – non-possession. In the Western tradition, St Thomas Aquinas also upholds that 'God alone had absolute dominion over material nature. Humans had only relative dominion, and that too was limited to the use of material things. No one was entitled to manage the world's resources merely for himself; he must do so in the interest of all so that he is ready to share them with others in case of necessity.'

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Wary of Wangchuk

Centre must address Ladakh's concerns

WHO is afraid of Ladakhi activist Sonam Wangchuk? His 'Dilli Chalo Padyatra', which began from Leh a month ago, was stalled at the Singhu border on Monday night. Wangchuk and his supporters, who are demanding Sixth Schedule status for India's youngest UT, were detained by the Delhi Police. The ostensible reason was a six-day ban on protests and the gathering of five or more persons in the central and border areas of the national capital. However, the grounds on which the ban has been imposed — 'heavy movement of VVIPs' on Gandhi Jayanti as well as the J&K and Haryana Assembly elections — are unconvincing. The restrictions appear to be a pre-emptive move to deter Wangchuk and his fellow protesters from gaining nationwide traction for their pressing issues.

Wangchuk deserves to be present at Raj Ghat today as he has grittily internalised the Mahatma's spirit of *satyagraha*. He made a big statement in March when he observed a 21-day fast to highlight two key demands: statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Constitution's Sixth Schedule to help protect the ecologically fragile region from an industrial onslaught. Wangchuk had fittingly chosen the pious occasion of Gandhi Jayanti to conclude his march, but it was abruptly and ruthlessly cut short by the powers that be.

The Centre has chosen to confine this tireless crusader to Delhi's borders, like all those farmers who stayed put for a year in protest against the farm laws. The creation of new districts is not enough to address the grievances of the Ladakhi people. Their bitter disillusionment with the BJP was evident in its embarrassing loss in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the first after Ladakh became a UT. The saffron party had won the seat in 2014 and 2019, but an Independent, Mohmad Haneefa, triumphed this time. Haneefa has urged the Centre to resume talks with the agitating groups. The onus is on the government to hear out the residents of this long-neglected region, starting with Wangchuk.

Bidding for power

Auctions for sarpanch's post threaten democracy

THE auctioning of the post of sarpanch in Gurdaspur's Hardowal Kalan village is a blatant violation of democratic principles, turning a public election into a financial transaction. A bid of Rs 2 crore for the position undermines the democratic process, where leadership should be determined by merit and the will of the people, not by wealth. This disturbing practice is not isolated. Auctions have also been reported in Muktsar, where bids for the post of sarpanch reached Rs 35.5 lakh, and candidates pledged to fund village development from their pockets.

While these pledges may seem noble, they represent a dangerous trend in which governance is bought, reducing public office to a commodity. The auctioning of leadership posts violates the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which mandates free and fair elections for panchayat representatives, and the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act, which explicitly requires voting, not financial bidding.

Atma Singh, the highest bidder in Gurdaspur, defended the auction as transparent compared to bribing politicians. This reflects a deeper disillusionment with a system that has failed to deliver development in many rural areas. However, selling public offices is no solution — it only exacerbates the problem by opening the door to corruption and the misuse of power by those seeking to recoup their 'investment'. Such auctions have been condemned across the political spectrum, with leaders like Partap Singh Bajwa and Harpal Singh Cheema calling for a probe, labelling this practice a 'murder of democracy'. Similar calls have been made in Muktsar, where videos of auctions have gone viral, sparking public outrage. These auctions, if left unchecked, will erode the very foundation of democracy. Legal action is urgently needed to uphold the rule of law and to stop such practices from taking root in Punjab's governance system.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1924

A forgotten page of Indian history

POLITICAL India is so deeply occupied with the question of making England fulfil her solemn pledge of conceding to India her birthright of a full responsible government that she is apt to forget that there was a time when that pledge itself was not there. And yet it is not only good but essential for her now and then to bear this fact in mind, because knowledge of the circumstances under which she obtained the pledge is clearly bound to be of some help to her in obtaining its fulfilment. It is good in another and an equally important sense. It is being constantly dinned into her ear by some of those who are anxious to perpetuate her political subjection that things must necessarily move slowly in India. It is obviously both necessary and desirable for those among us to whom this plea for a policy of procrastination may appear plausible to reflect on how rapidly authority in India has been forced by the logic of events and the pressure of public opinion to move during the last few years. From this point of view, no less than from the point of view of the general reader, there is enough in the "Essays and Adventures of a Labour MP" which most of us have read or have been reading during the last month and a half that is of fascinating interest. Of the several chapters of this eminently readable volume that are devoted to India, the most important and revealing is the one headed 'Indian Home Rule'. Indian Home rule, indeed, is yet to be achieved, but what has happened during the last eight years, as our author tells us, is the writing of history on a large scale.

Centralised setup weighing down MEA

Ministry's work is so vast and complex that it requires several secretary-level officers to supervise it



VIVEK KATJU
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

THE BJP's bench strength in the realm of foreign affairs has been boosted by the entry of Bhaswati Mukherjee, who joined the party three weeks ago. Mukherjee specialised in European affairs and multilateral diplomacy during her distinguished diplomatic career. Two other leading former diplomats, Hardeep Puri and S Jaishankar, are Cabinet ministers. Jaishankar has been Prime Minister Narendra Modi's choice as External Affairs Minister (EAM) since 2019.

Clearly, Modi has great confidence in Jaishankar's diplomatic abilities for he chose him as the Foreign Secretary (FS) when he was only a few days away from retirement in 2015. That led to the premature end of then FS Sujatha Singh's term. She adopted the honourable course of retiring and refused to accept any office. Puri's considerable talents and experience of multilateral and commercial diplomacy, including extraordinary expertise in World Trade Organisation matters, have not been consistently used, though he served for a while as the Minister of State in the Commerce Ministry. As a Cabinet minister, he has managed the portfolios of Urban Affairs and Petroleum; now, only the latter. Puri, Mukherjee and Jaishankar belong to the 1974, 1976 and 1977 batches, respectively, of the Indian Foreign Service.

Modi now has two persons in the party, apart from Jaishankar, with substantial diplomatic experience to take soundings on any foreign policy matter, should he



HANDPICKED: S Jaishankar has been PM Modi's choice as External Affairs Minister since 2019. PTI

want to do so. Many leaders look for fresh ideas and consult other knowledgeable persons in the government as well as the party on critical issues. This does not detract from the authority of the ministers concerned. Also, it is entirely Modi's prerogative as the Prime Minister to choose the Cabinet members and allot portfolios to ministers. As he is now heading a government in which the BJP does not enjoy a majority on its own, this, at least, applies completely to his own party.

For almost a decade, Jaishankar has had a substantial influence on India's foreign policy. Over the same period, he has had a decisive say in the complexion of the policymaking framework in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). In both areas, Jaishankar has followed Modi's instincts.

Two points would serve as illustrations. Modi places great emphasis on the value of personal rapport between leaders. In May 2015, while addressing the Indian community in Shanghai, he had referred to his relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Modi had said: "The

Jaishankar was not among those who took time to understand the significance of the 'plus one' factor in bilateral relations.

heads of two states sharing such affinity, such closeness, such brotherhood! This is 'plus one' to what is traditionally discussed in world relations. And many will need time to understand this. I believe that India and China have a special responsibility towards the welfare of the humanity. Both India and China, in order to fulfil this responsibility, will need to prepare their own people and work hand in hand with each other."

Jaishankar was not among those who took time to understand the significance of this 'plus one' factor in inter-state relations. While delivering the IISS (International Institute of

Strategic Studies) Fullerton lecture in Singapore two months after Modi's China visit, Jaishankar, then the FS, dwelt on India-China ties as well. He said, "That the two neighbours, whose parallel, if differential, rise offers a somewhat unique situation in world history, agreed on a constructive model of relationship is no small thing. Past precedents in global history have been largely otherwise. This is not just a conceptual proposition. Those of you who would have watched the Modi-Xi interaction in Xian would have noted that this approach was reflected in their demeanour. The mood today allows for frank and direct conversations between the leaderships. Their shared appearances — including the 'world's most powerful selfie' — and utterances would have been difficult to envisage a year ago."

Jaishankar's imprint on the foreign policymaking setup in the MEA has a background. The ministry's work is so vast that it requires a number of secretary-level officers to supervise it. These MEA secretaries were traditionally by the FS as the 'first among

equals'. The FS had always been the MEA's administrative head and also coordinated work, where required, but all secretaries were independent in terms of the work allotted to them. They reported and also directly advised the political leadership in matters relating to their charge. This balance was disturbed after Jaishankar became the FS.

It was often seen that he was present at the PM's meetings with foreign leaders, especially abroad, even if the leader belonged to a nation where another secretary was responsible for the bilateral engagement. In the past, only the secretary concerned was present to assist the PM during his interactions with such leaders. With Jaishankar as the FS being there too, the importance of the dealing secretary diminished in the eyes of the foreign interlocutors, both within the MEA and in other sections of the Indian bureaucracy.

With Jaishankar acting as a 'funnel' of information and the assessments on foreign policy issues being directly brought to Modi's attention, a greater element of 'centralisation' occurred in the MEA. This was contrary to what was needed because the work of the MEA — as in the Finance Ministry — is too complex to be handled by one secretary. Besides, it is the secretary handling an issue or a bilateral relationship continuously who has far greater knowledge of it than the FS. This process of undermining the role of other secretaries has continued even after Jaishankar became the EAM. This led to some of them preferring to accept the kind of ambassadorial assignments which, in the past, no secretary-level officer would have done.

Jaishankar, both as the FS and the EAM, has had a unique opportunity to decentralise and strengthen the functioning of the ministry. But that has not happened so far, and it is doubtful if it would happen in the future.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Domestic policy can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us. —John F Kennedy

Grandpa's little girl in the park

MAJ GEN RAJ MEHTA (RETD)

OUT of the chiaroscuro unfolding at dawn — the pink light amid the park's dappled foliage — emerges a delightful duo that makes my day. I stand under a gulmohar tree, leaning on the green wrought-iron boundary railings as I observe the unusual pair. He is a white-bearded grandpa with kind, smiling eyes, dressed in shorts and tees. On his shoulders sits his angelic grandchild, a beautiful cherub with big, bright eyes and lovingly chubby cheeks. She sits snugly, her little legs astride his broad shoulders. Sometimes, she tugs at his beard with her little fingers to remind him to walk on and not dawdle while exchanging 'good morning' greetings.

'She weighs nine kilos,' says her proud grandpa. 'She will be nine months old soon,' he adds. 'She loves her dadi too, but lords it over her dadu with her baba-baba prattle for her daily kathi ride. She speaks in her own language, but we understand her when she whispers sweetly. She is our life, our bundle of joy, a gift from rabb (God). We are truly blessed, sir.'

'When she smiles,' he continues without a pause, 'phul khirde ne' (flowers bloom)', reminding me of Shiv Kumar Batalvi's poetry. 'The heavens open up to greet us when she wakes up, tugging at dadu and dadi, between whom she sleeps in a baby blanket. She points to the sun's first rays as they slip past the chinks in the drawn curtains to wake her up. She does not cry, sir,' says her doting grandpa.

He tells me that the child smiles when her dadi dresses her in bright embroidered smocking frocks. She is ready in no time. Sporting a slender silver kada and little silver payals, she finishes her meal to be hoisted on dadu's broad shoulders for her morning trip to the park. There, she surveys her delightful pastel world from a commanding position.

'Can I get her a bar of chocolate or a Barbie doll just like her?' I ask her grandfather each time our paths cross. Our occasional meetings keep me in touch with grandpa and his little princess. His eyes twinkle: 'There will be time for that, sir; let her grow her milk teeth first. This is her dadi's order, and you know that a woman's writ is ironclad.' I smile like a loser. The princess blesses me with her smile — the first-ever for another grandpa. I am instantly transported to a sepia-tinted world I had forgotten all about.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mending India-Canada relations

The recent developments in India-Canada talks are a welcome step towards resolving the diplomatic tensions between the two nations. Both countries share a long history of cultural and economic ties, and it is crucial that they prioritise dialogue to address recent challenges. The escalation of diplomatic issues has affected not only bilateral relations but also the vast diaspora that connects the two nations. By engaging in productive and transparent discussions, India and Canada can work towards rebuilding trust and fostering cooperation. It is in the best interest of the two countries to strengthen their partnership on global issues such as trade, security and climate change. A swift and amicable resolution will reinforce their global standing.

ANISHA GUPTA, BY MAIL

Need to take strict action

Apropos of the news report 'Over 40 more pollution points found along Buddha Nullah'; this alarming revelation highlights the environmental crisis in the region. This waterway has been neglected for a long time, leading to contamination. Immediate and decisive action is required from both the authorities and the people. We need stricter enforcement of environmental regulations, improved waste management practices and public awareness campaigns to address the issue effectively. Protecting the environment should be a collective priority. It is imperative that everyone works together to restore the health of Buddha Nullah.

BHUMIKA SHARMA, DELHI

Justice remains elusive

With reference to 'Systemic change, not a quick fix, can tackle gender violence'; women are subjected to violence almost everywhere, but only a few incidents come to light. Most of the time, these cases go unnoticed as victims and their families are afraid to report the incident to the police. With each passing day, getting justice is becoming a cumbersome and expensive process for the poor. Stringent laws have been introduced after the Nirbhaya and Abhaya cases, but victims and their families still find it hard to get justice. On the other hand, perpetrators eas-

ily get bail due to loopholes in the system. It is high time that we changed the mindset of this patriarchal society. We must prepare our daughters and sisters to become tougher and stand up against injustice.

ARAV PATEL, BY MAIL

Don't ignore Kashmiri Pandits' plight

Apropos of 'PM should put pressure on Israel to end 'bloodshed' in Palestine, Lebanon: Omar'; Omar Abdullah and several other leaders are showing concern over bloodshed in Arab countries but they have been mum about the plight of Kashmiri Pandits, who were herded out of their native land decades ago. Due to unprecedented terrorism, thousands of Pandits were either killed or forced to leave their homes and become refugees. These leaders never shed tears for them, even though Kashmiri Pandits have historically been an integral part of J&K.

KARNAIL SINGH, KHARAR

Modi pushes for peace in West Asia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked to his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, amid escalating tensions in West Asia following the assassination of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon. PM Modi said terrorism had no place in our world. It is crucial to prevent regional escalation and ensure the safe release of all hostages. India is committed to supporting efforts for the restoration of peace and stability. This shows that the government is eager to make its presence felt. The PM's approach augurs well for India and the world.

RUKMA SHARMA, JALANDHAR

Gandhi an apostle of peace

Mahatma Gandhi was an apostle of non-violence and peace who demonstrated the power of *satyagraha* to the world. The people of India are beneficiaries of the countless efforts made by him to free our motherland from the shackles of colonial rule. As we celebrate Gandhi Jayanti, the onus lies with the present and future generations to follow in his footsteps for the cause of nation-building, leading to equitable progress and development.

VASUDHA PANDE, PAONTA SAHIB

Why crop diversification has eluded Punjab



BALWINDER SINGH SIDHU
FORMER COMMISSIONER
AGRICULTURE, PUNJAB

A CURSE necessarily hangs over all partisan electoral politics: good intentions are repeated ad nauseam, turning clichés before becoming policy. Crop diversification is exactly that. Pragmatic economics demands it, and the state wants it, but the interests of a politically dominant landowning class lie elsewhere, and the Centre isn't helping. It's been on the table for more than 40 years, first appearing in the Johl Committee Report of 1986, and then in 2002, followed by 2013, 2018, and, now, the 2023 policy initiatives. Agriculture is one subject that brooks no delay when it comes to policy since factors involved include even God — otherwise spelt as rainfall, drought, heatwaves, cold spells, frost, snow, storms, floods, cyclones, pests, fungal/bacterial action and climate change. Still, our political leadership and bureaucracy have dilly-dallied on crop diversification files, often marked 'Urgent'. That urgency cannot be overemphasised as we have reached a 'do-or-die' situation.

Punjab sensed fairly early that an effective way to mitigate some negative outcomes of wheat-paddy monocultures was crop diversification. Monoculture was not an autonomous choice; India needed food security. The input-responsive dwarf varieties ushered the Green Revolution and Punjab rose to the occasion with the consolidation of landholdings; infrastructure like tubewells, link roads and mandis; and institutions for credit, inputs, marketing and research and development. Punjab's farmers worked hard. India's rice production, a mere 23.54 million tonnes (mt) in 1949-50, jumped to 64.15 mt by 1985-86, while the wheat output during the same period recorded a seven times increase from 6.39 mt. The country's total foodgrain production tripled, from 54.92 mt. By the early 1980s, we became self-reliant in food and even exported wheat for the first time in 1985. By this time, the FCI's procurement was declining, farm incomes had begun to slide as production costs kept rising. Consequent protests by farmers led to the constitution of a committee under Dr SS Johl to look into the foodgrain price and procurement policy. Its 1986 report recommended shifting 20% of the area under paddy/wheat to fruits, vegetables, pulses, oilseeds, green fodder for sustaining Punjab's resources. But in 1987, the monsoon in India failed. Rice production fell by 5.07 mt, wheat by 5.9 mt



URGENT: A political will to make bold decisions is needed as Punjab hits a do-or-die situation. FILE PHOTO

and total foodgrain production, expected at 154 mt, stopped at 138.97 mt. Foodgrain stocks, a reassuring 28.28 mt on July 1, 1986, had nosedived to 11.90 mt on July 1, 1988. That India had been able to feed its burgeoning population despite the drought ruining the kharif crop in 21 states was a matter of pride. But it also revived concerns about depleted stocks. Neither politicians nor policy formulators cared anymore for the Johl Committee's wisdom. Instead, Punjab focussed even more on paddy, again not an autonomous choice; India needed it. The neoliberal agricultural policy regime of the 1990s meant greater deregulation of input prices. Also, since PDS became a target scheme as part of larger structural adjustment reforms, buffer stocks of foodgrain affected procurement


Crop diversification can only come through the Centre by conceding the states' right to have a say in policy formulation.

levels. Add to it the near-freeze on the MSP for five years from 2000-01 to 2005-06 - Rs 610 to Rs 650 per quintal for wheat; Rs 540 to Rs 600 for paddy. We had a full-blown crisis on our hands. The high cost of production and the resultant squeeze in income led to farmers' indebtedness and the rise in farmer suicides. The only coping mechanism was the open-ended procurement of paddy and wheat at MSP. Politics responded with free power for agriculture in 1997, giving impetus to paddy cultivation. It was time for a new committee to look into the crisis. Dr SS Johl headed it again in 2002. Its report recommended shifting a million hectares under wheat and paddy to less water-guzzling, soil- and ecology-friendly crops like oilseeds and pulses. This involved cost. Farmers opting for diversification were

to be compensated Rs 12,500 per hectare. The 12th Finance Commission sanctioned Rs 96 crore for four years with a 'no direct cash compensation' rider. A pilot programme started for contract farming failed due to the supply of seeds of unsuitable varieties, poor yields and reluctance to procure produce at the promised prices. The pilot was never scaled up due to a lack of regulation and the Centre's apathy. We seemed to be working to a script: formulate policy, tweak it for failure, do not back it with resources, declare disaster, repeat. Yet another committee in 2013 under Dr GS Kalkat drafted the State Agricultural Policy recommending crop diversification. It prepared a Rs-8,700 crore Action Plan. In 2014, Punjab prepared a Crop Diversification Plan (CDP) for Green Revolution Areas which was approved under the RKVY as a special programme. Rs 500 crore was allocated to implement it, with Punjab's share at Rs 224 crore. But it was marred by a top-down approach and left little manoeuvring room for states to tweak as per the local needs. The CDP is continuing with meagre allocations. In 2017, the rechristened Punjab State Farmers' & Farm Workers' Commission, under Ajai Vir Jakkhar, drafted another policy. Its report suggested reducing area under paddy and some curbs on free power. A ministerial panel was tasked to study the report but free power was an issue too politically sensitive for action.

Currently, the air is again rife with talk of the Draft Agriculture Policy 2023. It proposes crop diversification, talks of comparing return patterns while fixing MSP for alternative crops and moots a legal guarantee for procurement at MSP. It proposes banning paddy cultivation in 15 dark blocks and subsequently in other over-exploited blocks. Concomitant recommendations include other water-saving technologies like alternate wetting and drying, direct seeding of rice, bed-planting and micro-irrigation. But this needs a political will to make bold decisions. It is science versus fear of electoral setbacks. Also, protein-rich diets are becoming popular, reducing the demand for rice and wheat. Other states are reporting better crop yields. The market and the Centre decide the cost of agricultural inputs and purchase prices for produce. Much of related policy formulation, including export/import, has shifted to the Centre's domain, including tariffs and duties and negotiations under the WTO. India wants productivity, including that of water, and farmers want better income. The answer lies in crop diversification. And it can only come through the Centre by conceding the states' right to have a say in policy formulation, giving them room to implement regionally suitable policies and providing resources by putting the money where your mouth is — literally.

Undue focus on profit led to Boeing's fall from the sky



ABHIJIT BHATTACHARYYA
LIFE MEMBER, AERONAUTICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

THE Seattle-born Boeing Aerospace has certainly fallen on bad days, thereby giving jitters to US defence, civil aviation and Wall Street investors. The iconic Boeing had been on a monopoly-like takeover spree of St Louis, Missouri headquartered McDonnell Douglas-MD (August 1997) since after the simultaneous demise of the USSR and First Cold War. Today, it faces an existential threat as it is afflicted by technology failure, quality and safety issues of product, high financial loss and, now, the unheard of labour trouble in the cradle of the world's capitalism. In fact, the latter arguably constitutes the gravest threat to the recovery of Boeing Company any time soon in the cut-throat competitive aviation market. History shows that in the perilous industry of aviation, even the best of flying machines have crashed and corrective measures initiated subsequently. When the brand

new Boeing 737-MAX crashed in 2018 and 2019 in quick succession, the bosses of the famed US manufacturer pooh-poohed it, trying to pass the blame for the fatal mishaps and the deaths of 346 persons aboard on to pilot error even before the accident inquiries had made their findings. The worst act was that many detected an unusual 'nexus' between the behemoth Boeing Company and US government officials of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). An eerie feeling grew that not all was well with Boeing and someone somewhere was shielding some unpardonable wrongdoings of the manufacturer for the sake of profitability, corporate greed and monstrous money-making Wall Street stock market investors. Nevertheless, when the failure and gross misdemeanour of the famed aeroplane-maker became too brazen to be hidden, Boeing capitulated owing to the sheer pressure of the enlightened American air transport passengers whose acquaintance with aviation is like the developing world's familiarity with the rickshaw and the rickety bus. Boeing had been caught red-handed and had to plead 'guilty of criminal fraud' charge. In July 2024, the US Department of Justice determined that the company had violated an agreement that had protected it from prosecution for more than three years. Boeing's luck has run out and now it is penance time. Serious acts of omission and commission are tumbling out of the cupboard. The latest is production stoppage owing to labour unrest on pay, perk, privilege and contract renewal terms. An additional salvo against Boeing was fired by the NTSB on September 27. It issued 'urgent safety recommendations' for some B-737, including the embattled MAX line, warning that critical 'flight controls could jam', especially when 'applied during landing, or rollout, causing loss of control or departure from runway.' The NTSB recommended that Boeing should urgently come up with an alternative solution and warn the pilots about it.



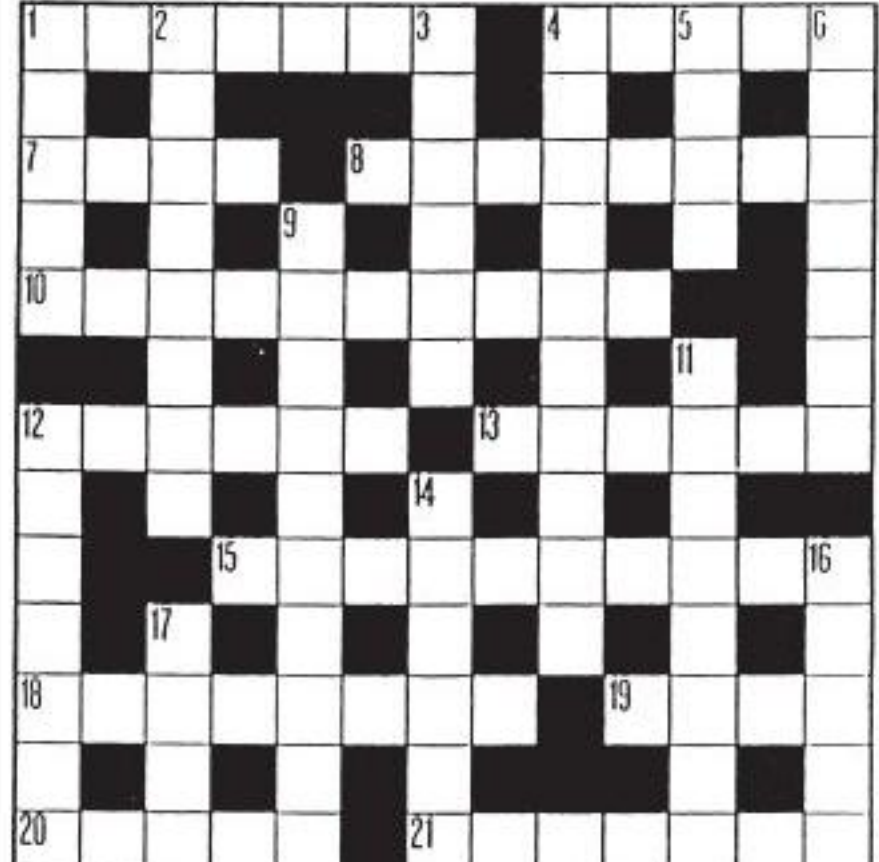
HARD TIMES: Boeing is afflicted by technology failure, quality and safety issues. REUTERS

Boeing must go back to its original job of aircraft manufacturing which made it the world leader. The marketing messiahs can never bring the company back to flight safety.

quality product automatically attracting customers in commercial aviation. Stonecipher, on other hand, was a high-profile marketing salesman passionate about maximising profit with an eye on the interests of Wall Street investors to pump up stock and multiplying money rather than maintaining machine quality on which depended hundreds of lives in air. It's a titanic contrast of cultures between a techie who is an integral part of the industry and that of a trader whose ethos and ethics banked on quick buying and selling to make billions of dollars. From 'courage, will, perseverance and skill' of the 'Boeing family' of the 'industrial house', the former MD boss tried to transform his new company to imbibe 'teamwork' of a 'trading house'. Angry old-timers quipped: 'When MD guys came in, they just went through them (old Boeing engineers) like a knife through butter' and appeared 'hunter killer assassins and Boeing Boy Scouts.' Newcomer Stonecipher soon became the de facto number one. He inducted a former General Motors executive to handle Boeing's finance to make it a 'shareholder-friendly company' despite the conscientious protesters' reasoning: 'Have you ever seen a bean-counter build an airplane?' Henceforth, Boeing aircraft had to follow 'return on net

assets' (RONA). The high-tech aircraft started turning into fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) in 1997. Twenty-seven years down the lane, the results are there for all to see. The FAA, NTSB and US Congress are all worried and use strong language owing to the meteoric descent of Boeing from its glorious flight path of 100-plus years. But the USA today is no longer the industrial powerhouse. It is a price-conscious, profiteering traders of glorious predecessors. No wonder the US aviation industry's downhill as chicken has come home to roost. The founder of the company, William E Boeing, is a forgotten hero. The man is known for perfection, accuracy, precision and intolerant of shoddy work in the workshop. The saying goes that the founder 'exclaimed at the sight of a frayed cable on one of his planes that he would close shop rather than send out work of this kind.' The successors of that great predecessor obviously cannot fit into his shoes as they are too big and broad for them. Hence, unless Boeing goes back to its original job of 'aircraft manufacturing', which made it the world leader, the marketing messiahs can never bring the company back to flight safety, tech quality and product durability to win the trust, faith and confidence of the users of the Great Boeing of yore. Views are personal

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Recover from being drunk (5,2)

4 Emotionally trying event (5)

7 Circus arena (4)

8 A disadvantage (8)

10 Enormous (10)

12 In abundance (6)

13 Regard with respect (6)

15 Following prescribed order (2,8)

18 Leaders of a movement (8)

19 Splendid display (4)

20 V-shaped indentation (5)

21 Salubrious (7)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Cross swords, 9 Founder, 10 Alibi, 11 Even, 12 Apposite, 14 Ensure, 16 Hidden, 18 Slapdash, 19 Abet, 22 Tithe, 23 Ransack, 24 Pretty penny.

Down: 2 Rouse, 3 Side, 4 Script, 5 Oratorio, 6 Deified, 7 Of necessity, 8 Give-and-take, 13 Gradient, 15 Shatter, 17 Osprey, 20 Brain, 21 Once

SU DO KU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

1	3	6	9	7	8	5	2	4
7	5	8	3	4	2	6	9	1
4	9	2	6	1	5	7	3	8
5	2	7	4	8	9	3	1	6
3	1	4	5	2	6	8	7	9
6	8	9	7	3	1	4	5	2
8	7	3	2	9	4	1	6	5
2	4	5	1	6	3	9	8	7
9	6	1	8	5	7	2	4	3

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 2, 2024, WEDNESDAY

■ Shaka Samvat 1946

■ Aashwin Shaka 10

■ Aashwin Purnim 17

■ Hijari 1446

■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 15, up to 12.19 am

■ Brahma Yoga up to 3.21 am

■ Ultraphalguni Nakshatra up to 12.23 pm

■ Moon in Virgo sign

■ Amavas, Shradh ended

■ Mahatma Gandhi Jyanti

HARD

FORECAST

SUNSET:	WEDNESDAY	18:06 HRS
SUNRISE:	THURSDAY	06:17 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	34	25
New Delhi	36	26
Amritsar	33	24
Bathinda	35	25
Jalandhar	33	24
Ludhiana	34	24
Bhiwani	35	25
Hisar	35	23
Sirsa	37	26
Dharamsala	28	14
Manali	24	12
Shimla	26	14
Srinagar	30	12
Jammu	33	22
Kargil	26	08
Leh	23	05
Dehradun	33	21
Mussoorie	24	15

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Saving Ladakh

Sonam Wangchuk’s foot march highlights the urgent need for ecological protection and local autonomy of Ladakh

Ladakh, a region known for its breathtaking landscapes and unique culture, is now under threat from an ecological disaster. Climate change and unchecked development are eroding its delicate environment, pushing it towards a tipping point. In the face of this growing crisis, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk has emerged as a key figure in the fight to protect Ladakh. Recently, he, along with over 100 supporters, embarked on a foot march from Leh to New Delhi to demand concrete steps for safeguarding Ladakh’s fragile ecosystem and securing the region’s autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. However, upon reaching Delhi’s Singhu border, Wangchuk and his supporters were detained by the police for violating prohibitory orders. Despite this setback, the march has already sparked widespread attention and support for his demands. Ladakh’s environment is one of the most sensitive in India. Nestled in the Himalayan range, the region is already witnessing alarming impacts of climate change. Melting glaciers, shrinking water sources, and unpredictable weather patterns are threatening not only the ecosystem but also the livelihoods of the local population.



The rapid melting of glaciers is particularly concerning as they are the primary source of water for the region. This has caused Ladakh to face a severe water crisis, with rivers and streams drying up at an unprecedented rate. Unchecked tourism and infrastructure development further exacerbate the issue. Waste management remains a significant challenge, and the increasing construction of roads and buildings has disrupted the natural landscape. Wangchuk, who is known for his innovative environmental solutions like the ‘Ice Stupa’ project, has been vocal about the need for sustainable development in Ladakh. His demands are not only about preserving the environment but also about giving the local people the power to manage their resources and protect their cultural identity. One of his primary demands is to include Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Sixth Schedule provides special protections and autonomy to certain tribal areas in India, allowing them to preserve their culture, manage their resources, and have law-making powers over local matters. Ladakh, with its predominantly tribal population and distinct cultural heritage, has been seeking similar protection. The people of Ladakh in general have expressed disappointment with the current governance structure, which is led by a Lieutenant Governor appointed by the central government. Right now the people of Ladakh have a limited say in decision making. Granting Ladakh Sixth Schedule status would empower its people to make decisions that are in line with their unique environmental and cultural needs. It would allow them to enact laws that protect their fragile ecosystem, manage resources more effectively, and ensure sustainable development. The people of Ladakh are making their voices heard. Now, it is up to the government and the rest of the nation to listen and take meaningful action.

PICTALK



A view of Humayun’s Tomb, a UNESCO world heritage site, in New Delhi

PTI

Remembering Gandhi: A journey of justice and simplicity

Gandhi’s transformative journey, which began with racial discrimination in South Africa, helped shape his lifelong pursuit of justice, equality and nonviolence

On September 11, 2024, Union Minister for Culture, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, inaugurated a restored railway coach at Gandhi Darshan, Rajghat, New Delhi. This coach, donated by the Ministry of Railways and painted in brown with a “III” marking for third class, represents Mahatma Gandhi’s simple lifestyle and his close relationship with the Indian railways. A life-size sculpture of Gandhi stepping off the train further emphasises his connection with the masses. Organised by the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, the exhibition offers an immersive experience of Gandhi’s rail journeys. Shekhawat, in his address, highlighted how Gandhi turned the freedom struggle into a mass movement, remarking that the coach will inspire future generations to uphold the values of justice, equality, and peace for which Gandhi stood. Gandhi’s association with the railways was deeply symbolic and formative in his transformation from an ordinary lawyer to the leader of India’s independence movement.



A key moment occurred on June 7, 1893, in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, when Gandhi, then a young barrister, was forcibly removed from a first-class train compartment despite having a valid ticket. This act of racial discrimination left a lasting impact on Gandhi and ignited his lifelong dedication to justice and nonviolent resistance. He often referred to this incident as the turning point that set him on the path toward becoming the Mahatma. Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Gandhi’s grandson, poignantly reflected on this moment. He wrote that when Gandhi was thrown off the train, an Indian fell, but when Gandhi rose, both India and South Africa rose with him. The experience transformed Gandhi, turning a personal

humiliation into a public cause. What began as a lawyer’s indignation became a revolutionary’s commitment to human justice. His later train journeys in South Africa, including those to Johannesburg and Pretoria, deepened his understanding of racial discrimination in the railway system. Gandhi confronted railway officials and managed to negotiate some concessions for Indian passengers, marking the beginning of his use of negotiation and protest as tools for change. Upon returning to India in 1914, Gandhi’s relationship with the railways grew stronger. He followed the advice of his mentor, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, by traveling in third-class compartments to stay connected with India’s impoverished masses. For

Gandhi, trains were a means to engage with ordinary people and understand their struggles firsthand. The challenging conditions he faced—overcrowded compartments, unsanitary surroundings—only strengthened his resolve to fight for social justice. His decision to travel third class symbolised his commitment to egalitarianism and helped transform the freedom struggle into a mass movement that resonated with the broader population. Gandhi traveled by train from Calcutta to Delhi and stayed at Birla House where he spent the last 144 days of his life. During this time, he tirelessly worked for peace amidst the communal violence of Partition. His assassination in January 1948 ended a life devoted to nonviolence and service to humanity. As we celebrate Gandhi Jayanti today as the International Day of Nonviolence, we are reminded of Gandhi’s self-sacrifice, dedication, and compassion. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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Walking through the woods in UK

Suspension of winter fuel allowances, Starmer’s push to reset relations with Europe, and the forgotten legacy of the Gorkhas are echoing in the woods of the UK

Hadlow Stair is a village in Tonbridge Kent, UK, with the Old Hadlow Road leading to it. Tonbridge is a poorer cousin of the historic Tunbridge Wells but a great place for a walking-talking vacation this September when the sun broke through the clouds permitting invigorating small walks. Hadlow Stair is the perfect escape from rain-spoilt London, just 40 minutes away by train to Charing Cross in Trafalgar Square. Ordinary Brits have been stunned by the new Labour, suspending Pound 200 winter fuel allowance to pensioners, ostensibly to fill the Pound 22 bn deficit left by the Tories though inflation is below 3 per cent. In the village, most read newspapers only on the weekend: the talk is about Ukraine, Gaza and Lebanon and Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his wife accepting gifts. Former civil servant Sue Gray who sort-ed out Boris Johnson for his indiscretions during the pandemic is now the chief advisor to Starmer with a pay package of Pounds 180,000, surpassing the wages the PM gets. Modernising Britain’s Continuous Sea Deterrence as well as upgrading its nuclear submarines from Vanguard to Dreadnought class is also underway. Peers in the House of Lords warned that 2.5 per cent on defence spending (at present 2.3 per cent) may not be enough to meet the challenges and fix the military. Here too, there is a Pound 10 bn hole which is proposed to be filled up by taxes. India’s spending is below 2 per cent with immeasurably bigger threats. But who cares! All this and more, John Lawson, my walking companion shares with me. Amongst all the walks the one in the undulating woods nearby is most enjoyable as John takes myriad routes and detours along the soggy earthy soil. You can do a dozen different trails here and not know they are in the same woods. Go south from Hadlow Road past the Scottish St Andrews Church across fields and through apple orchards with apples to eat and apples to cook. But there are no pickers due to Brexit, laments John.



The Chinese have invented an apple-picking machine which is yet to make its commercial debut. Here, in the fields too, John has manufactured several walking trails – the special one is along the Medway river to Tonbridge town which has everything from Marks and Spencers to Waitrose and Sainsburys to Kathmandu Valley and Dalchini restaurants to Humphrey and Bean Pub where we were privy to a brawl. There is also the Tonbridge Castle. My favourite walk though is through the Higham Woods. This I did every morning, meeting making friends with people walking their dogs. Every house here has a cat or a dog or even a horse! Almost every afternoon John and I did serious walking bringing the milometer to roughly 120 plus miles in 12 days. In his spare time, John moves auto parts and trucks in the UK and Europe where too, Brexit means cost and time overruns. At the Labour Party annual conference, Starmer said he wants to reset relations with European Union and make Brexit work with the EU reset. The biggest applause at the conference was reserved for the Home Secretary, who decried the recent racial riots. Migrants continue to sail



THE PLAN TO RAISE A THIRD BATTALION OF GORKHA RIFLES WAS ABANDONED THOUGH THREE GORKHA COMPANIES WERE RAISED FOR THE SPECIAL FORCES. ALDRERSHOT IS WHERE RETIRED GORKHAS ALLOWED RESIDENCY IN BRITAIN LIVE, WHILE THE BATTALION IS FURTHER SOUTH

across the Channel and since Rwanda is a closed issue, they will be settled in Britain. I’ve been travelling to the UK since the 1970s and can say this: Indian or Asian or coloured are no longer looked down upon even though many of the menial jobs are still being done by them. I was horrified to learn that there is a Gorkha Cleaning Company in Kent. The Gorkhas, the Brits once worshipped in battle are all but forgotten except by the likes of Joanna Lumley. This became more evident in London where along a side lane from Whitehall Avenue resides the life-sized stone statue of the eternal Gorkha soldier. The plan to raise a third battalion of Gorkha Rifles was abandoned though three Gorkha companies were raised for the Special Forces. Aldershot is where retired Gorkhas allowed residency in Britain live, while the battalion is further south. The other battalion is in Brunei for which the Sultan pays. Sadly, very few recognise the badges of the Gorkha Regiment any more. Why blame the Brits when we have offered the poor choice of Agniveer to Nepali Gorkhas who stopped joining five years ago? The British Army is 70,000 (with a reserve of 30,000) soldiers and Infantry

less than the size of our Gorkha Brigade. The Navy and Air Force together make another 70,000 warriors but all field state-of-the-art equipment including conventional and strategic forces which are the best in Europe. The military component of the Indian High Commission in Aldwych has been downsized from three officers to just one with a Naval Commodore holding the fort instead of the Army Brigadier. Returning to my trudge on the tarmac along Whitehall Avenue, the old MoD has become Raffles Hotel, RUSI next door renovated and a few meters ahead are bronze statues of leaders who won fame in India: Field Marshals Slim, Auchinleck, and Allanbrooke. Another Indian famous is the Duke of Wellington honoured in Trafalgar Square and Wellington Corner. The Brits nurture the military and that’s one reason they are respected. Thoughts that wafted during the walk in the woods. We must learn. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff; The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WEST ASIA TURMOIL

Madam —Apropos, ‘West Asia on fire’ (September 30). Israel which had vowed ‘enough is enough’ in the aftermath of a brutal terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7 last year, has dealt a body blow to Hezbollah, the most powerful militant and political force in Lebanon, by eliminating its head Hassan Nasrallah, who had been a global figurehead of anti-Israel resistance for decades. He had been a prime target of Israel since the last Lebanon War of 2008. Now, Hezbollah, considered the vital part of the Axis of Resistance, is leaderless and thus rudderless. However, Nasrallah’s demise may only keep Hezbollah lying down for a while. It cannot be written off. Wounded but not destroyed, it may not be long before Hezbollah tries to avenge Nasrallah by raining a barrage of missiles on Israel to keep its people from returning to the northern region. Netanyahu stakes his political fortunes on this. Meanwhile, with thousands of its citizens fleeing northern Israel in wake of Hezbollah strikes, Israel’s main task remains unaccomplished. Its bombarding Lebanon may go on till Netanyahu gets war-weary and domestic pressures mount or until breakthrough on the hostage issue. It is an opportune time for the international community should it desire to prevail upon Tel Aviv to agree for ceasefire. But peace is unlikely to return to Gaza till Hamas frees hostages and a ceasefire is reached.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Washington

NON BJP STATES WITHDRAW CBI CONSENT

Madam — Karnataka has joined the long list of states that have withdrawn general consent to the CBI to conduct investigations relating to corruption, economic offences and crime or violence in that particular state. The Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946, under which the CBI was setup, has defined general consent and

Women education empowers India



Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar made insightful remarks on the significance of women’s education. He said that a developed India is incomplete without women’s empowerment, which is a powerful reminder of the crucial role they play in our society. Women constitute a substantial portion of our

population, and their active participation in all spheres of life is essential for holistic development. By investing in women’s education, we not only unlock their individual potential but also empower their families and communities. Educated women are more likely to make informed decisions regarding health, nutrition, and child-rearing, leading to healthier and more prosperous families. Moreover, women’s education is a catalyst for economic growth. When women have access to education and employment opportunities, they contribute to the workforce, boost GDP, and reduce poverty. Their participation in decision-making processes ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to more inclusive and equitable policies.

Fiza Fatima | Hyderabad

specific consent that can be accorded by the states to the CBI to function in their territories.

Only the Supreme Court and the High Courts can order a CBI investigation in any state without the state’s nod if consent is withdrawn. It has to be remembered that states that have refused permission for the CBI are non-BJP ruled thereby underscoring the political undertones in the issue.

The Supreme Court, in 2013, said the CBI was a ‘caged parrot’ following the orders of its ‘master’, the government. The federal system of governance in India has clearly demarcated powers between the Centre and the states. By the 1946 rule itself, the CBI is an agency that has no autonomous powers. The apex court has said that keeping in mind the federal structure of the country the CBI cannot infringe upon the states. By the same token, if the agency is accorded unbridled power without making it an autonomous body, its misuse may be the order of the day.

Ganapathi Bhat| Akola

POTHoles OF CORRUPTION

Madam —No matter which party is in power, the conditions of the roads all over the nation are pathetic. It requires no rocket science to understand why this is happening. Corruption is the root cause as inferior quality materials are used due to cuts taken by everybody from top to bottom in passing tenders and clearing bills. Therefore, it is hard to be enthused about the promise of pothole free roads by the CM of Delhi Atishi Marlena. Accidents caused by bad roads have come at a great cost including injury and sometimes fatality with no accountability fixed for the loss, what is worse, it is not just potholes but literally craters the vehicles are expected to navigate. Recently, there was a container truck that was completely swallowed by the road. This despite the vehicle owners being made to pay all kinds of taxes for permission to park their vehicles on such roads!

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

SLEEP, SPIRITUALITY AND THE MODERN MIND

Reclaiming quality sleep requires reconnecting with spiritual practices



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

In the famous poem “Childhood”, Ravindra Nath Tagore bemoans the loss of innocence as a child grows up. One thing we can all agree that to sleep like a child is a great asset. But as we grow up our minds begin to play havoc with our sleep. Before I go any further let us understand the basics of sleep. Sleep is one of the most important biological functions and inadequate sleep can cause many problems. Sleep is the time when the body rejuvenates itself. Sleep restores physical well-being and removes fatigue related to emotional activities.

Our brains are beehives of activities during sleep, including the time when one is dreaming. How much sleep is required? It depends on each individual according to age, type of activities, level of activities, etc. Lord Krishna has mentioned sleep as one of the four activities, which must be appropriate. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 6.17) We need sleep excellence. What does the modern man do? There are three types. One cuts on sleep and another cannot fall asleep and resorts to drinks and drugs.

The third sleeps too much wasting precious human life. Taking up the busy ones, they have no respect for rules made by God – the Creator of our bodies. They feel that they can do with less sleep and nothing adverse will happen. But they get harmed in many ways. The first causality is the energy level; it goes down. Physical health is affected in many ways, but it takes a long; one feels that he is fine until hit by some serious health problem. Performance declines; cognitive ability reduces; memory consolidation is affected as does mental health. You cannot copy someone else, because, as stated earlier, it is, person specific – a bodily necessity. The second group suffers no less, if anything substantially more in the long term. One thinks that he can order the body to sleep whenever one wants. Have you tried to postpone sleep? What happens? Circadian rhythms are 24-hour cycles that are part of the body’s internal clock. Its primary function is sleeping and waking.

We cannot take charge; it controls us. So what does the modern man do? He resorts to artificially induced sleep by taking drinks and drugs. We all know what drinks do to our liver. And drugs are similarly harmful to the brain. Both are habit forming. One is stuck once this is continued over some time. Why is one unable to fall asleep, when bodily and mentally tired? Because we have allowed our minds to take charge of our lives.

We have unlimited desires for a sense of enjoyment, power, fame, etc. We are being driven by emotions like lust, greed, anger, hate, etc. By the way, drinks and drugs do not stop bad and scary dreams from coming, which leave a very bad feeling upon waking up.

The third kind harms oneself in more ways than one by making sleep one’s shelter. Let us come to our senses. Shelter is available in God. There are simple spiritual practices, which connect one to God. He will help us curb our wrong tendencies, as only God can. But one has to first accept that one is wrong; one has to give up overblown ego.

It is quite strange that a small, ignorant and helpless soul has such a big ego. What is the conclusion? There is only one shelter, as instructed by Lord Krishna. You will get plenty of sleep and of good quality too sans bad dreams.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

Transforming lives of the Indian farmers



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

Through modern infrastructure, expanded credit support, and sustainable farming methods, PM Modi’s policies are revolutionising Indian agriculture

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s deep concern and sensitivity towards farmers is visible in the decisions, policies and plans taken for the farming community. Transforming the lives of our food providers (Annadatas) is the first and foremost goal of our Prime Minister. This is the reason why agriculture and farmers remained the top priorities in the first 100 days of the third term of the NDA government. Under his leadership, the government is making unprecedented efforts for the empowerment and upliftment of the agriculture sector. We are committed to increasing farmers’ income, which is reflected in schemes such as the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), and PM AASHA. Post-harvest losses in India are a major challenge, which threatens the production capacity of the agricultural sector and it also adversely impacts the hard work put in by lakhs of farmers. According to the latest estimates, about 16-18 per cent of the total food production is affected every year in India due to this.

These losses can be attributed to various stages of agriculture such as harvesting, threshing, storage, transportation and processing. Lack of proper storage, cold chain, inadequate processing units, and lack of efficient logistics contribute to these huge losses, as a result of which the overall food security of our country gets affected. Keeping all these factors in mind, the Modi government is working with renewed enthusiasm towards strengthening this. Under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government is making efforts to take the research of scientists from lab to land, due to which the cost of production has reduced considerably and profits have increased for farmers. The Prime Minister with a visionary approach launched the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) way back in July 2020 as a transformative initiative under the ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ initiative. Its objective is to increase the income of farmers and address post-harvest management issues through farm assets to reduce food wastage. These challenges have to be addressed by promoting new projects and new age technologies. Under AIF, banks provide interest subvention of 3 per cent per annum with an interest cap of 9 per cent and financial institutions will provide loans up to Rs 2 crore with credit guarantee coverage under CGTMSE (Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises) for loans. Through this initiative, the government aims to not only increase production to preserve quality and quantity, but also help farmers access markets more efficiently, and as a result, their income will also increase.

Due to the able leadership of the Prime Minister, the benefits of the scheme, till August 2024, the amount sanctioned under this scheme has crossed Rs 47,500 crore. Of this, more than Rs 30,000 crore has already been disbursed for various projects. Notably, 54 per cent of the projects that were sanctioned are linked to farmers, cooperative societies, agricultural production organisations and self-help groups (SHGs), which is in line with the Prime Minister’s vision. It reflects the strong participation of farmers in providing farm-gate level infrastructure. Prime Minister Modi is very committed towards strengthening farm gate infrastructure to solve the major problem post-harvest losses in agricultural produce. He prioritised the development of infrastructure in storage (dry and cold), transportation, etc., so that farmers could be protected from such crop loss. In terms of dry storage, in comparison to food grain production, India has an infrastructure in terms of 1,740 lakh metric tonnes of storage capacity, and at present, there is a shortage of 44 per cent in the storage capacity for the overall grain production in India, which is very concerning.

Similarly, for horticulture produce, about 441.9 lakh metric tonnes of cold storage is available in India, while the cold chain capacity is only 15.72 per cent of the production of fruits and vegetables in the country. AIF initiative has helped bridge the storage capacity gap by approximately 500 lakh metric tonnes. Contributing to saving about Rs 5,700 crore post-harvest losses for the nation. Furthermore, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the development of proper cold storage facilities has reduced the loss of horticulture products by 10 per cent, due to which 3.5 lakh metric tonnes of produce is being secured post harvest and about Rs 1,250 crore is being saved every year. This commitment of the Prime Minister towards the agriculture sector and farmers will not only ensure economic empowerment but also raise their standard of living. Under the guidance of the Prime Minister, the AIF is providing new impetus to the growth and development of agricultural infrastructure. As of August 2024, as many as 74,695 agriculture infrastructure-related initiatives across the country have been approved under AIF. These include 18,508 custom hiring centres, 16,238 primary processing centres, 13,702 warehouses, 3,095 sorting and grading units, 1,901 cold stores and cold chains, and 21,251 other types of infrastructure facilities. These 74,695 projects have attracted a total investment of Rs 78,702 crore in the agriculture sector since 2015, which marks significant progress in the sector. Prime Minister Modi has encouraged entrepreneurship among farmers, as approximately 50,000 new agricultural enterprises have been set up in the country. These efforts have helped create more than 8,00,000 employment opportunities, and this number will only increase in the future, even



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tually leading to the creation of 2.5 million jobs, directly or indirectly. The Prime Minister’s welfare policies have brought about positive changes in the working style of farmers. The creation of advanced infrastructure on farms has facilitated farmers to sell directly to a wider consumer base, thereby enhancing price realisation and increasing their overall income. Due to modern packaging and cold storage systems, farmers can time their market sales more strategically, resulting in better value realisation. On average, this infrastructure initiative has enabled farmers to get 11-14 per cent higher prices for their produce. Prime Minister Modi’s policies will not only encourage the development of agricultural infrastructure but also reduce credit risk. Through credit guarantee support and interest subvention, lending institutions can give loans with minimal risk, thereby helping their customers. This helps in expanding their base and portfolio diversification. Significantly, this fund is involved in the creation of agricultural infrastructure in collaboration with the refinancing facility of NABARD, reducing the effective interest rate for Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) to 1 per cent.

This has brought significant benefits to thousands of farmers associated with such PACS. Under AIF, 9,573 PACS projects have been approved with a loan amount of Rs 2,970 crore to date by NABARD. In an important step under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the central government has approved the progressive expansion of the ambitious Agriculture Infrastructure Fund scheme, making it more inclusive and substantially more influential. The make agriculture a profitable business we have come up with a six-point strategy to increase the income of farmers, such as increasing production, reducing the cost of farming, fair prices for production, providing the appropriate amount of relief during natural disasters, diversification of agriculture and natural farming.

At present, some promising projects for agricultural asset development, such as hydroponic farming, mushroom cultivation, vertical farming, aeroponic farming, polyhouse and greenhouse, are reserved for only farmer groups and collectives. Now by expanding the scheme coverage to include integrated processing projects, farmers will get better prices for their produce through the creation of integrated processing plants, which include both primary and secondary processing. In addition to this, component A of PM-KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha Evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan) Yojana provides the facility for the installation of solar power plants up to 2 MW on barren, fallow, cultivable, pasture or marshy lands, and it can be easily converged with the AIF scheme. This strategic convergence will help individual farmers and empower farmer groups, enhancing their role from being ‘Annadaata’ (food givers) to ‘Urjadata’ (energy providers). The dedicated credit guarantee cover window, which was exclusively kept for FPOs, i.e. NAB Sanrakshan Trustee Company Private Limited, will remain open for AIF beneficiaries as well, where they will be eligible for guarantee fee reimbursement. These changes will increase processing capabilities, diversify food production, and increase and improve the quality of the yields.

They will increase the shelf life of the produce, boost transport capacity and improve rural supply by linking it to the urban demand. Additionally, these changes will help in generating rural employment opportunities. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund is making a significant contribution towards the development of the agriculture sector and empowerment of Indian farmers, by providing a sustainable solution. Due to the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, even the minutest problems faced by farmers are being resolved, intense communication and combined efforts have brought a new dawn in the context of farmers’ welfare, and this will prove to be a key milestone to fulfil the dreams of a developed agriculture sector of a ‘Viksit Bharat’.

(The writer is the Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Rural Development; views are personal)

“THE PRIME MINISTER WITH A VISIONARY APPROACH LAUNCHED THE AGRICULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (AIF) WAY BACK IN JULY 2020 AS A TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVE UNDER THE ‘ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT’ INITIATIVE

Navigating manufacturing landscape: Bridging growth, disparities, and industrial ambitions

India stands as the world’s fifth-largest manufacturing powerhouse, generating nearly \$560 billion in goods annually

India is the world’s fifth largest manufacturing powerhouse producing nearly 560 Billion Dollars’ worth of goods per year but our share in global manufacturing output is below 3 per cent. And the share of manufacturing in India’s Gross Value Added (GVA) is stuck at just 17 per cent, not far ahead of the share of agriculture. It is often stated that India seems to be transitioning directly from a primary sector-dominant economy into one dominated by the service sector. The question often asked is whether manufacturing is going to play its part in India’s often paradoxical and counter-intuitive growth story. However, one element of India’s industrial landscape is quite predictable. The concepts



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of growth poles first propounded by the French Economist Perroux along with its accompanying concepts of the inevitability of unbalanced regional growth in industrial clusters, with an agglomeration effect that will accentuate regional diversity, seems pretty close to India’s development experience. Thus, even where India had set up new industrial townships in

places like Rourkela, Bokaro or even Jamshedpur in an earlier era, these do not appear to have led to broader regional development, with the nearby hinterland areas remaining under-developed for the most part. The broader issue of regional disparities that have emerged in India has been sought to be addressed institutionally by the various Finance Commission’s devolution formula which gives overwhelming weightage to per capita income and, therefore, ensures higher resource flows into backward areas. The market, on the other hand, has responded to these disparities by the movement of migrant labour to the faster growing parts of the country, with the migrant labour being

the unsung hero of the construction and manufacturing growth in these areas. The concepts of growth poles and growth centres are now being supplemented by the phenomena of port-led industrial growth with major ports, old and new, serving as growth centres in many countries. The National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP) takes on the challenges of accelerating India’s manufacturing growth, creating multiple industrial growth foci and linking industrialisation to transport nodes, head-on. The NICDP has focused on the development of industrial townships adjacent to 11 key transport corridors. Eight such townships had been approved till the current



year, four of which are shovel-ready with the industrial plots being allotted, and four others are being implemented with trunk infrastructure being set up. As against eight projects implemented or under implementation over the last 17 years, the Government has recently approved twelve such smart industrial cities in 10 States, at one go, with a big bang approach which is characteristic of PM Modi’s style which focuses on Speed and Scale.

All these sites have been validated using the geospatial data on the PM Gati Shakti National Platform to minimise disturbances to existing habitations and ecology, with prioritisation to availability of land parcels with the State Governments, covering land of relatively lesser agricultural value, with proximity to major transport modes for multi-model connectivity. A new aspect of using PM Gati Shakti to not only ensure the enhancement of transport infrastructure for improved connectivity but also to combine such network planning with an area planning approach by asking States to start filling social infrastructure gaps (schools, Anganwadis, ITIs, accommodation) concurrently with project implementation, has been initiated. This combination of transport network planning and area planning should lead to these green field industrial cities getting plug and play infrastructure and multi-model transport links ahead of demand for the private sector and particularly for foreign investors who wish to participate in India’s growth story. It may be recalled that India’s Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) ranking had improved from 143 in 2014 to 63 in 2020, in the last year that such rankings were published by the World Bank. While contract compliances and improvement are linked to the broader issue of judicial reform, the NICDP programme will substantially address, along with

parallel initiatives by the States, the issues of land availability and its transparent administration, for any investors seeking industrial sites in these cities. The NICDP Programme also de-risks the investor from one key compliance burden that new investors are concerned about, the issue of environmental clearances by ensuring that full environmental clearance for the entire township is already in place and is backed up by a full spectrum of utility services like power, sewage and waste treatment, roads etc., in a smart city with state-of-the-art infrastructure and digitized grievance redressal mechanisms. *(The writer is former Secretary, DPIIT and currently OSD, Ministry of Defence; views are personal)*