

## Not good signs of an orderly Parliament

After failing to get Mamata Banerjee on board on the candidature of its member K Suresh for the post of Speaker, Lok Sabha, the Congress party on Wednesday did well by not forcing a division. That would have only exposed chinks in the Opposition unity. As a result, the ruling NDA's candidate Om Birla was elected Speaker with a voice vote. Clearly, the TMC chief and West Bengal chief minister wasn't willing to play second fiddle to the Congress. She wasn't part of the INDIA bloc in her state, but had still expressed readiness to cooperate with the Congress party in opposing the government. However, she warned she couldn't be taken for granted. Despite the last-minute efforts to persuade her to vote with it in the election of the Speaker, she protested the unilateral decision to field Suresh without prior consultations. Realising that without the TMC members voting, the façade of Opposition unity would stand exposed, the Congress leadership accepted the inevitable. In short, the Opposition's maiden effort to present a united front floundered at the first available opportunity. Expect more such fissures in the coming days and weeks. The always tenuous Opposition unity under the INDIA alliance will be severely tested as the Narendra Modi government seeks to bolster its numbers in Parliament. Meanwhile, it was a good gesture that once Birla was declared elected, the newly-anointed Leader of the Opposition (LOP), Rahul Gandhi, had the good sense to join the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju in offering felicitations to the Speaker. Maintaining Parliamentary etiquette and offering cooperation where necessary in the larger national interest and opposing when called for would help Gandhi earn the trust of the people.

An idea about the shape of things in the House in coming days was available when the Congress benches indulged in noisy behaviour when the Speaker made reference to the Emergency on its 50th anniversary. On June 26, 1975, Indira Gandhi had overturned the democratic Constitution, imposed a draconian autocratic rule, and denuded the people of all their civic rights and freedoms. Instead of joining the Speaker in condemning the darkest chapter in free India's history, the Congress-led Opposition sought to drown out the voice of the Speaker as he reminded the younger generations about Indira Gandhi's blackest of black deeds. It was as if the Congress had problems distancing itself from the most egregious decision of Indira Gandhi because her family led by grandson Rahul had a vice-like grip on the party. On the other hand, Modi joined the Speaker in endorsing the *suo moto* statement of Birla in castigating the Emergency. In sum, the third day of the 18th Lok Sabha saw the wide chink in the Opposition unity and the wider chasm between the ruling party and the Congress Opposition. Omens for an orderly functioning of Parliament remain slim.

## Transparency warrior free

In the ever-present struggle between transparency and opaqueness in all democratic countries, Julian Assange, the Wikileaks founder, won a long and arduous victory, ending years of incarceration and mental agony on Tuesday. Backroom multi-nation efforts to rescue him from a certain prosecution in the US for publishing sensitive and highly embarrassing cornucopia of classified military documents in 2013 climaxed in a deal under which Assange would admit to violating the Espionage Act and would be awarded five years he had already served in a UK prison. The plea bargain would see him appear personally in a US territory, Saipan, in the US Mariana Northern Islands, and then fly off to freedom to Australia, his home country. Under the US law, Assange faced 175 years in prison for having leaked tens of thousands of classified military documents in collaboration with Chelsea Manning, a US military intelligence analyst. During his escape to the Ecuadorian embassy in London Assange also faced sexual assault charges in Sweden and was ordered by a UK court to be extradited. Those charges were dropped a few years later. But the US vehemently pursued the espionage charges and was determined to have him extradited until the welcome plea bargain deal this week. Meanwhile, his ordeal could inspire other transparency activists in democratic countries to try and pierce through the veil of secrecy governments maintain over their functioning. However, it also could deter some others not to ferret out military secrets for fear of facing Assange-like hardships.

*The Opposition's maiden effort to present a united front floundered at the first opportunity. Expect more such fissures*



Comment

A L CHOUGULE

Optimism about India's growth story tends to spike now and then. Over the past year or so, the Narendra Modi government's narrative on economy has been that India has "arrived". It wants us to believe that India's economic prospects are quite bright and the country is on the cusp of achieving high growth rate on a sustainable basis over the next two decades to make India a "developed" country by 2047. Such a claim about India's march towards economic prosperity was a good narrative to impress voters during the general election and the BJP's focus on 2047 was precisely aimed at burnishing Modi's image as a leader with great nation ambition. But it didn't work as the BJP expected. Nonetheless is this hype real?

Since the late 1990s, India has been through two cycles of economic upswing, leading many to speculate that the country's GDP growth may hit double digits. But each of the upswing did not last beyond a few years. Today, India once again appears to be at the start of an upswing, which has made many people in the government paint a rosy picture of stun-

ning economic growth in coming decades. Does existing data suggest a boom? There is no unanimity among economists inside and outside of the government and the debate about just how the economy is growing is argumentative. As the data is noisy and contradictory, the picture is mixed.

In the third quarter of FY 2023-24, GDP growth roared at 8.4%. But many questioned the aggregate numbers on a few counts, including the low consumption levels. In the fourth quarter, economy expanded at 7.8%, lifting the FY24 growth to 8.2%. The problem with India's growth story is that the government is too focused on aggregate numbers and not on granular details. The fixation with headline numbers and projection of high growth rate is more hype than reality because it ignores many structural problems that need to be fixed to meet the actual potential. "Believing the hype," as former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan recently said, "is something politicians want us to believe because they want us to believe that we have arrived. But it would be a serious mistake for India to succumb to that belief. We have got many more years of hard work to

do to ensure the hype is real."

Currently the world's fifth largest economy, India will obviously climb to the third position by the end of the decade. But the climb from the third position to the second is going to be a tall order because China with comparable population is miles ahead of India in terms of aggregate as well as per capita GDP. Both Japan and Germany are small nations in terms of population and even after leaving them behind in terms of overall size of the economy, India will still be far behind both nations in terms of per capita GDP. For India to become a developed country, its Human Development Index (HDI) status will have to climb from medium, past high to very high. Similarly, per capita incomes would have to increase sevenfold from lower-middle income status to reach the high-income bracket. This is a far, far harder task than increasing the overall size of the economy. Over the past three decades, the size of India's economy, both in absolute terms and relative to other countries, has increased but the country's current ranking for inequality-adjusted HDI is 108 out of 156, and 132 out of 190 in terms of

per capita income. This means, while most Indians have come out of extreme poverty, their income, education levels and life expectancies remain modest compared to the average person born into a developed country.

India's progress into broad-based prosperity is inevitable but cannot be taken for granted. To ensure broad-based prosperity, various underlying problems are needed to be addressed: education, skill development, health-care, and financial inclusion for those at the bottom of society to benefit from expanding welfare schemes. In a poor country like India, it is important for the government to provide some safety net to the most vulnerable sections within fiscal constraints.

Economic development in India is also complicated by the fact that the country has some of the largest internal regional disparities. For example, Goa has the highest per capita income in India, which is ten times that of Bihar. This disparity also corresponds with life expectancies in these two states — 73.3 years in Goa against almost a decade shorter in the case of Bihar.

Another major problem is that

India's most developed and high-income states are among its smallest. India has 36 states and union territories but the 12 largest states account for 80% of the 1.4 billion population. None of these states, including the best performing ones like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu have climbed above lower-middle income level and medium level of HDI.

Without improving the education and skills of the workforce, India will struggle to reap the benefits of its young population. More than half of the 1.4 billion population is below the age of 30. To reap the demographic dividend, India needs to firstly make the workforce employable and secondly create jobs for the workforce it has. According to the IMF, India needs to grow at the rate of 7.6% per annum over 25 years for it to become a developed nation by 2047. Whether India can do it with all the challenges is difficult to say.

*(Read full article at [freepressjournal.in/analysis](https://freepressjournal.in/analysis))*

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On My Mind

ABHAY VAIDYA

As India grapples with jobless growth and economic distress caused by unemployment, the promise of inclusive growth triggered by the development of satellite and rural townships needs to be examined closely by our policy makers.

Almost 20 years ago, the eminent scientist Prof MGK Menon had pointed out that satellite townships around megacities, empowered with ICT (Information and Communication Technology), will not only help decongest and ease the pressure on megacities but also help rural townships realise their promise and potential through economic growth and employment.

While addressing LEAD International's workshop on Megacities and Rural Community Development at Bangkok in September, 2003, Prof Menon had noted rather perceptively that ICT offers extraordinary possibilities in bridging the urban-rural divide as it deals with everyone equitably.

He noted that high-speed rail connectivity to satellite townships around megacities would help eliminate distances and the need to live in megacities.

Almost on similar lines, the former President of India, APJ

Abdul Kalam presented a powerful vision for inclusive growth and employment generation in 2011 through his PURA model- Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas. Dr Kalam presented this vision through his book Target 3 Billion, PURA: Innovative Solutions Towards Sustainable Development, co-authored with Srijan Pal Singh, his student at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIMA).

In that book, Dr Kalam pointed out that the world's poorest, who number around three billion (in 2011) and who primarily live in rural areas, could be empowered with inclusive growth by Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA). He stressed that if decent education, healthcare and employment; roads and markets were provided in rural areas, the people will stop flocking to the cities by the thousands.

His book cited the example of the Warana PURA in Kolhapur district which is centred on the cooperative sugar factory, dairy and poultry established by the late Tatyasaheb Kore.

Dr Kalam had envisaged that PURA would require four kinds of connectivity: Physical Connectivity through a network of good roads or waterways; Electronic Connectivity through broadband/ satellite/ wireless or leased lines; Knowl-

edge Connectivity through schools and hospitals; vocational training and agri-support services, and Economic Connectivity for employment generation and promotion of entrepreneurship.

He envisaged that the PURA clusters of 10 to 50 villages would generate power through renewable sources of energy such as the sun, wind and biofuels and municipal waste.

Given India's geographical and ecological diversity, the PURA model for inclusive growth has been developed for the plains, coastal areas, desert regions; the hilly districts and the Delta region of the lower Gangetic course in West Bengal.

Incidentally, the IT billionaire Sridhar Vembu (Zoho Corporation) has actually demonstrated that software and product development work can be done successfully from the rural towns and districts of Tamil Nadu.

In the late 1990s, N Chandrababu Naidu as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh created Hitech City — the IT-driven satellite township of Hyderabad — also known as Cyberabad. Inaugurated in 1998, all that the state government did was to create policies and provide attractive incentives and infrastructure. India's and the world's leading IT companies flocked to

Cyberabad to set up their India centres, given the availability of cheap Indian manpower and talent in plenty.

With the creation of the jobs came the real estate boom and the demand for all the support services that an emerging satellite city needs: domestic help, grocery and other supplies, medical facilities, transport facilities, educational facilities, food supply and a hundred other services to support a working population.

The Rajiv Gandhi International Airport at Hyderabad is one of the largest and best airports in the country and owes its success, undoubtedly, to the IT boom that was driven by Naidu.

We can see the same economic prosperity and employment generation in the IT suburbs of Gurgaon, Bengaluru, Pune and wherever else a city has expanded.

Satellite townships — and jobs — need the support of local economic activity and not necessarily the presence of IT. We see the growth of satellite townships around industrial hubs as in the case of Pimpri-Chinchwad industrial township which once had the richest municipal council in Asia because of the taxes from industries.

The US has many small university towns whose economy is dependent on the presence of thousands of

students on and off campus.

With his critical support to the Modi 3.0 government, Naidu has once again folded his sleeves and got down to building his dream city Amravati as the new capital for Andhra Pradesh. He is banking on full-fledged support from the Modi Government as his Telugu Desam Party is an important member of the coalition government.

Spread out over 217 km in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, capital investment upwards of Rs. 50,000 Cr has been proposed for infrastructure development and government complexes in Amravati. The previous phase of development suffered neglect once Naidu lost power in 2019. The project has now been revived with his return to power.

The progress of the Amravati project and its success in promoting employment and economic growth would be keenly watched. At the same time, the creation of satellite cities as sustainable extensions to the emerging megacities of India, and the pursuit of Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's PURA model, would go a long way in ensuring inclusive growth and employment for our youth.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### EVMs are unreliable

With reference to Elon Musk's remarks on Electronic Voting Machines (Jun 17), his castigation is not a sweeping generalisation but a reflection of

worldwide discontent.

Peter Castellino

There can be avenues for controlling these EVM machines

discreetly though It is not expected to subvert the machines en masse but just assume that it can be done selectively. Even if 1% voting machines turned out to be malicious then the whole

100% electoral exercise should be considered futile.

Parag Deshmukh

Electronic gadgets are vulnerable to manipulation. Such a vulnerable object being used in an important programme like the general election is definitely a matter to be reconsidered. The ruling dispensation should engage the Opposition and reputed persons in the electronics field on this issue without giving room for personal or political ego.

AG Rajmohan

Many countries, including Germany, England, Italy, the Netherlands and the USA, have stopped using EVMs. The German Constitutional Court has banned any kind of computing equipment from being used in elections. The ruling was, "In a republic, elections are a matter for the entire people and a joint concern of all citizens... Each citizen must be able to comprehend and verify the central steps in the elections." Besides, rapid results are only secondary to people's faith in the voting process.

Haridasan Rajan



### MIKA'S MATRIX



#### Awaken human values

Protracted armed conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are extracting high price on human life and an economic stress that falls largely on the weaker sections of society. It is never late for religious heads, of any denomination, to raise their concerns and to prod political leaders to scale back on needless violence and eschew a vendetta mindset. In adverse times, all leading lights of religions must strongly take up a return to basic human values. The goodness in men has to be awakened with resolve and a singular sense of purpose.

R Narayanan



## Wake-up call for MFs

Quick order from the regulator in front-running cases will help investors as well as the fund houses

**QUANT MUTUAL FUND'S** statement that the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is investigating front-running charges raises a lot of concerns. While the good news is that there hasn't been any run on the fund's schemes, the fact remains that the scourge of front-running continues to plague the over ₹50-trillion industry. Bigger fund houses like HDFC Mutual Fund, Axis Mutual Fund, and, more recently, Life Insurance Corporation of India faced similar crises in the past. Front-running happens when a company insider or broker makes a trade in advance based on information that a big client, a fund house in this case, is planning a big buy in a particular company. The market regulator, on its part, has been prompt in taking action and imposed strict guidelines for fund houses; it even went for surprise audits, but something seems to be still amiss.

Industry experts believe that the problem needs to be analysed from two sides — is it a systemic issue or individual greed? The former, for obvious reasons, is more worrying as it shows that controls in the fund house were not robust enough. But it also throws up another relevant question — did Sebi audits red-flag the issues? If they did not do so, the market regulator needs to sharpen its auditing skills. However, if it was a case of individual greed, the fund house, or for that matter, even Sebi can do little. In such cases, harsh fines, barring such individuals from the stock market, and involving other agencies like income tax department, Central Bureau of Investigation or Enforcement Directorate promptly are the only solutions.

With the Indian stock market growing at a rapid pace and adding millions of new retail investors every year, it is time financial crimes are taken much more seriously. In fact, a good example of harsh penalties globally is Bernie Madoff. The former Nasdaq chairman, whose Ponzi scheme was reported by his own sons in December 2008, was arrested within a day. By March 2009, he was handed a 150-year sentence in less than 150 days. Industry experts say the market regulator needs to come out with orders faster so that both the fund house and investors aren't kept on tenterhooks for an inordinately long time. A fund house like Quant MF, which is managing ₹93,000 crore and has over eight million investors, needs a quick resolution, as its functioning is bound to get hampered till there is clarity. Also, more stringent measures need to be implemented, which could mean stricter monitoring and auditing, besides enhanced compliance requirements. If investors have been affected due to front-running, the amounts collected through fines should be added back into the schemes to make good their losses.

A big problem is proving the allegations with evidence. A Sebi consultation paper last year on "Prohibition of unexplained suspicious trading activities" cited multiple cases where Sebi identified unnatural trades resulting in unusual profits, but was unable to prove guilt. The paper claimed that in 2022, some 5,000 suspicious trading alerts were generated, involving 3,588 unique entities, with 97 of these entities appearing more than five times each in suspicious trades. But Sebi could not find conclusive proof of communication. Nevertheless, in the past three years, this is the third case of front-running that the market regulator has unearthed. This should serve as a wake-up call for the entire mutual fund industry.

## Rivian embraced by a needy German sugar daddy

**IT SAYS** A lot about the predicament faced by Volkswagen AG, Europe's biggest automaker by sales, that salvation lies in writing a multibillion-dollar check to a US start-up that has lost \$20 billion since inception, built just 57,000 vehicles last year, and is expected to burn cash for several more years.

Tuesday's announcement of an electric-vehicle software joint venture with Rivian Automotive Inc., with VW ponying up as much as \$5 billion in equity and loans by 2026, offers benefits for both parties: Rivian gets a much-needed capital and greater scale, while lumbering VW has a more agile partner that actually knows something about software and EVs (VW's own in-house vehicle coding efforts have mostly been lamentable).

But announcing a marriage is much easier than making it work. The history of the auto industry is littered with failed unions and mismatched corporate cultures; investors in either company hoping this one will swiftly solve their respective problems may be sorely disappointed.

Following the ouster in 2022 of VW Chief Executive Officer Herbert Diess — aka Mr "Voltswagen" — the German automaker has reassessed a strategy of trying to develop proprietary software after the results proved disappointing and delayed key model launches such as the electric Porsche Macan. New boss Oliver Blume has made no secret of his frustration with VW's dawdling Cariad software unit, which lost around €4.5 billion (\$4.8 billion) in total in the past two years and is being restructured; and he's far more open to outside help and pursuing a more tailored, regional approach.

Last year, VW agreed to acquire a minority stake in XPeng Inc. to benefit from the Chinese group's expertise in vehicle software and connectivity and after VW's own EV offerings failed to delight local customers. Now the German group is dancing with Rivian. The California-based firm has built an exciting brand and some impressive vehicles, but has failed to scale fast enough to amortise those investments. The result has been an epic cash burn, which isn't solved by its decision in March to pause construction of a \$5-billion factory in Georgia.

Unlike Fisker Inc., which filed for bankruptcy last week, Rivian already has a wealthy anchor shareholder — Amazon.com Inc. — but the latter's priority is commercial vehicles. Rivian shareholders can now be more confident that the lights will stay on beyond the next couple of years. The beaten down stock's more than 38% jump in Wednesday's premarket is the definition of a relief rally. But they shouldn't get carried away: A joint venture run by two co-CEOs, one appointed by each company, seems predestined for squabbles. The first products featuring jointly developed software architecture won't arrive for several more years.

This isn't Rivian's first dalliance: A partnership with Ford Motor Co. was unwound in 2021 after the latter decided to develop EVs by itself. Meanwhile, a van partnership with Mercedes-Benz Group AG was cancelled in 2022 after only a few months. VW has a similarly spotty track record working with others: In 2022 it pulled the plug on investing in autonomous driving start-up Argo AI, triggering a writedown costing almost €2 billion.

A VW cash injection doesn't always provide lasting stimulus: Xpeng Inc.'s shares have declined by two thirds after initial excitement about the partnership announced last summer faded, amid continuing losses at the Chinese group.

In the meantime VW's market capitalisation has more than halved since February 2022 to just €55 billion. VW's engineering chops are unquestionable, but it has an unfortunate habit of spending vast amounts of capital for little reward (see, for example, its plans to build a network of battery factories).

Over the long term, its partnership with Rivian may help it rein in software spending relative to what it would have spent by itself, but in the short term it means spending more — VW has cut its full-year cash flow forecast by €2 billion. And if Rivian runs short of money again, you can bet VW's headquarters in Wolfsburg will receive the first phone call.

Frankly I'd be more confident if VW had hitched its wagon to a tech giant rather than another loss-making neophyte. But in a world where software code will dictate the future of the automobile, VW has at least recognised the value of humility.



CHRIS BRYANT  
Bloomberg

## POST-POLL DYNAMICS

EU ECONOMIC AGENDA A LIKELY MIXED BAG FOR INDIA: HARD ON IMMIGRATION, SOFT ON CLIMATE

# EU squeeze may shift to people

**THE RECENT ELECTIONS** to the European Parliament reflect a distinct change in the mood of the people across the continent.

The centre-right European People's Party (EPP), led by incumbent European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, won the most seats to be the single largest party. Together with the Socialists and Democrats party and other allies like the Renew and the Greens, it should have the majority for running the parliament. However, there would be some changes impacting policy focus and decision-making.

The first notable change comes from a stronger presence of the far-right political parties in the parliament. Two prominent right-wing blocs — the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Identity and Democracy (ID) — have enhanced their strengths. Between the ECR and ID, the latter is "farther" right. The two blocs together represent the more orthodox right-wing presence in the parliament and will be significant in influencing decisions.

The second significant change will be from what the election results mean for major members of the European Union (EU). This is where a palpable shift in domestic political balances of power in favour of the far right is becoming visible.

Results from the three largest EU member states — Germany, France, and Italy, all members of the rich and powerful G7 — demonstrate the shift. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) — a member of the ID coalition and among the most mainstream far-right political parties in Germany — performed remarkably well in the German elections for the EU parliament. It won 16% of the total votes to become the second largest party from Germany. Furthermore, it won more votes

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*Views are personal*

than the current German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz's Social Democratic Party.

France experienced a bullish rise of the far right. The ID coalition, led by Marie Le Pen's National Rally, won more than a third of the total votes to become the largest party. It got more than double the votes won by French President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance Party.

While Germany and France witnessed resurgences of the far right, Italy saw its consolidation. The conservative ECR led the show with its main constituent, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, winning the largest votes, nearly a third of the total. Among the premiers of Germany, France, and Italy, only PM Meloni could draw greater political strength and legitimacy from the results.

The results may not mean an overwhelming surge for the far right. But they reflect its growing popularity and greater acceptance. The chances of this trend strengthening further across Europe will depend on whether the headline right parties come to power in national assemblies. The upcoming French elections will be a major test in this regard, as will be the Austrian elections that will follow soon.

A more influential far right in European politics and decision-making will impact approaches adopted by the European Commission and European countries to some policy issues. These, in turn, can sway Europe's engagement with other countries, including India.

Immigration is clearly going to be one of the major issues. The far right in Europe has traditionally been Eurosceptic. The scepticism includes a critical view of migrants living and working in Europe and the civil and economic rights that they enjoy. The critical outlook might get more entrenched in EU's policy-making space, including the way the EU engages with major external partners, particularly labour-exporting countries like India.

India and the EU are at an advanced stage of finalising a comprehensive bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). The FTA has provisions on mobility of labour. It remains to be seen whether the new political dynamics in Europe introduces new complications on the subject. The apprehensions in this regard arise from the experience of the India-UK FTA. The FTA, which was ready to be signed and concluded almost two years ago, is yet to be finished. A change of leadership in the UK and hardline

**European fossil fuel-using industries such as automobiles can receive more political support. With "dirty" getting treated better, "clean" is bound to lose some shine**

# An emotional imperative for GenAI



ROHIT KUMAR SINGH

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By combining IQ with EQ, we can create AI systems that are not only intellectually capable but also emotionally responsive

**IN THE EVER-EVOLVING** world of artificial intelligence (AI), the focus has long been on developing systems that can process information rapidly and accurately. From chatbots to virtual assistants, these intelligent entities provide unprecedented levels of convenience and efficiency. However, as we continue to integrate AI into more aspects of our daily lives, a critical component is often overlooked: emotional intelligence (EQ). The future of generative AI (GenAI) must include not only intellectual capabilities (IQ) but also the ability to understand and respond to human emotions. According to Silicon Valley pioneer Reid Hoffman, a shift towards emotionally intelligent AI can serve humanity in a more holistic and compassionate manner.

Traditional AI systems, with their impressive computational power, have demonstrated remarkable proficiency in tasks ranging from language translation to data analysis. However, their primary limitation lies in their inability to comprehend and respond to the emotional states of their users. For instance, when a user interacts with an AI-powered customer service bot, the bot can provide factual answers and solve technical issues efficiently. Yet, if the user is frustrated, anxious, or upset, the bot's lack of EQ can lead to a dissatisfying interaction. Without the ability to recognise and address the user's emotional state, the interaction remains purely transactional, missing the opportunity to create a more supportive and empathetic experience.

EQ, as defined by psychologist Daniel Goleman, encompasses self-awareness,

self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. When these attributes are embedded in AI systems like chatbots, they can significantly enhance the quality of interactions, making them more engaging, supportive, and responsive to the emotional states of users.

Incorporating EQ into GenAI can significantly enhance user experience. Consider scenarios where users seek assistance or support during emotionally charged moments — such as dealing with a healthcare issue, navigating a financial crisis, or coping with personal loss. An emotionally intelligent AI can detect the emotional undertones in a user's language and respond appropriately, providing not only practical solutions but also emotional support. For instance, if a user is expressing frustration over a persistent technical glitch, an emotionally intelligent chatbot would not only address the issue but also acknowledge the user's frustration: "I understand that this issue has been very frustrating for you. Let's work together to resolve it." Such responses demonstrate empathy and can significantly enhance user satisfaction by showing that the chatbot genuinely cares about the user's experience.

Similarly, an emotionally intelligent healthcare AI could recognise a patient's anxiety about a diagnosis and offer reassuring words, along with detailed information about treatment options. This kind of response not only

addresses the practical needs of the patient but also helps to alleviate emotional distress, leading to a more holistic and positive experience.

Trust is foundational in any relationship, including those between humans and AI. EQ is key to building and maintaining this trust. When AI systems respond with empathy and understanding, users are more likely to feel valued and respected. This emotional connection fosters trust and encourages users to engage more openly with AI systems. In customer service, for instance, an AI that demonstrates empathy can de-escalate tense situations and build rapport with customers. This capability can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, as users perceive the AI as a reliable and compassionate entity that genuinely cares about their concerns.

In mental health and well-being, EQ-based AI systems can provide immediate emotional support, offer coping strategies, and serve as a first point of contact for individuals seeking mental health assistance. By recognising and responding to emotional distress, AI can play a crucial role in supporting mental health.

Imagine an AI companion designed to help individuals manage stress. By detecting signs of stress in a user's speech or writing, the AI could offer calming techniques, suggest a short break, or even initiate a conversation about the user's feelings. Such interven-

tions can provide immediate relief and encourage users to take proactive steps in managing their mental health.

As we move towards integrating EQ into AI, ethical considerations must be at the forefront. Ensuring the responsible use of emotionally intelligent AI involves safeguarding user privacy, avoiding manipulation, and ensuring transparency in how AI systems process and respond to emotional data. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure that these systems do not replace human interaction in contexts where human empathy and understanding are irreplaceable. For example, while AI can provide valuable support, it should not be seen as a substitute for professional mental health services. Instead, emotionally intelligent AI should complement human support systems, providing immediate assistance while guiding users toward seeking help from qualified professionals when needed.

The integration of EQ into general AI represents a transformative leap in the development of AI. By combining IQ with EQ, we can create AI systems that are not only intellectually capable but also emotionally responsive. This fusion can enhance user experiences, build trust, support mental health, and raise important ethical considerations. As we continue to develop and refine these technologies, it is crucial to prioritise the human element, ensuring that AI serves as a compassionate and empathetic companion in our increasingly digital world. The future of AI lies not just in smarter machines, but also in machines that understand and care about the humans they serve.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Not walking the talk

After taking oath, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that he would consider consultations and consensus in running the government. He has junked all his assurances, which is evident in the manner in which he has imposed his men as the pro-tem Speaker as well as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, unmindful of the objections raised by the opposition. We have helplessly observed during

the last five years how Om Birla conducted himself in a partisan manner and how he facilitated the passage of important Bills without any discussions in the house by throwing hundreds of the opposition members out on flimsy grounds. Though the head count of the opposition members have gone up, we are in for witnessing only autocracy in the house. It is indeed utopian to expect a leopard to change its spots. —Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

### Address water crisis

The government would do well to take the warning of Moody's seriously that a water crisis could could hit India's credit health. There is also considerable heartburn among the states on water-sharing agreements with each state demanding more to satisfy the needs of its own population. Weather patterns are changing and monsoons are far less predictable than before. India needs

to take up the challenge on a war footing to ensure an adequate supply of not just potable water but water for industrial use too. India is blessed with a long coastline and desalination projects must be considered to reduce water deficit. Rainwater harvesting should be introduced all over the nation to mitigate shortages. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

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DECCAN  
Chronicle

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# Chance to build consensus lost in election of Speaker

It is only fair to interpret the mandate of the 2024 general election as a popular call to political parties to shun unilateralism. No single party has got a simple majority in the House and the alliance in power has got just enough numbers to run the government. The mood of the nation was reflected in the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the opening day of the new Lok Sabha when he spoke elaborately on the subject of building consensus.

However, it appears that he either did not mean what he said or that the NDA wasted its first opportunity to prove its leader right.

That the 17 previous Lok Sabhas had decided on their custodians by election only three times tells a story that the post of Speaker of the Lok Sabha is considered non-partisan — irrespective of whether or not the leaders who have so far occupied the post followed that principle in practice. The parliamentary tradition of a government with a clear majority in the House allowing the Opposition to choose the deputy speaker also indicates that the Chair in the Lower House of Parliament is the spot where both the ruling side and the Opposition advocating different policies, programmes and perspectives pledge to build consensus on all possible topics.

There indeed was an effort to avoid an election and talks were held between the government side led by senior minister Rajnath Singh and the Opposition. According to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, the Opposition offered to support the choice of the NDA for Speaker should the ruling front go by tradition and let it choose the deputy speaker. The INDIA bloc claimed that it was forced to field a candidate after it found the government side non-committal. The saving grace was that the Opposition did not demand a division and facilitated the election of Mr Om Birla as Speaker for a second term by voice vote.

A government is formed on the support of a majority of elected members but the vanquishing of the “loser” is not the vision of democracy. Instead, they remain very much part of the democratic process, both in law-making and policy formulation. It is considered the job of the government, or the “winner”, to be inclusive; and not that of the Opposition to append its consent on the line dotted by the government. It is when both the sides meet half-way and shake hands, as Mr Modi and Mr Gandhi did in the House on Wednesday after the election, that they can take the nation forward. It is unfortunate that the government was found wanting nonetheless, despite its acknowledgement of the need for consensus.

There is a lesson for the Opposition, too, from the Speaker's election. With 237 members, a united Opposition is a formidable force that can refuse to be trampled on by the government in the House. There were voices of dissent in the INDIA bloc itself on the decision of fielding a candidate for Speaker; some parties were not on board. The bloc will do well to keep in mind that it also needs to build consensus amongst its own members in order that it may be effective. It must also be mindful of an emaciated and threatened government trying to engineer a split in it.

## Assange: A lesson for world

Mr Julian Assange, journalist and whistleblower who published streams of secret documents that were classified information to expose the wrongdoings of a superpower in war, including on how it killed civilians in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is a free man who is back Down Under, though convicted under US law.

A plea deal was cut 14 years after Mr Assange ran into trouble but was seen as a hero by the liberals because he revealed secrets that Washington wished to hide and riled the US Establishment into hounding a publisher it saw as a dangerous anarchist.

The power of the state to prosecute those it classifies as criminals or enemies has, however, not ended despite the ordeals that the publisher of classified information faced in a unique battle.

Political scenarios by which Mr Donald Trump could be President of the United States and Mr Keir Starmer leading a Labour government in the UK may have led to the hastening of this longstanding cause celebre towards a conclusion that may prove popular with the people at large.

The fact is the enormity of state power, even in an old and avowedly model democracy, has not changed. That was always apparent in the ordeals that Mr Assange faced, in self-exile in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and, when forced out of there under Mr Trump's prompting, in virtual solitary confinement in the high security Belmarsh prison in London where for 24 hours a day he had only his books for company.

Mr Assange argued that the First Amendment and the Espionage Act are in contradiction with each other but that it would be difficult to win such a case given the circumstances. The fact is the same model of democracy will long survive an embarrassing challenge that came in the WikiLeaks exposes, some of which touched the Indian political spectrum too as private conversations among diplomats became public knowledge.

Mr Assange may be Australian where there is no constitutional right to free speech and press freedom does not exist to the extent it may in the US, but his sacrifices to fight for absolute freedom of speech will not go unappreciated.

It is moot whether protection of accountability journalism has been enhanced or watered down in the longrunning Assange saga, but the showing up of how state power can be and is often misused will hold a lesson for the modern world.

Subhani



# How to stabilise, secure J&K for Assembly polls



Syed Ata Hasnain

Having witnessed at least five elections in J&K plus the panchayat polls of 2011, I find myself reasonably qualified to comment on the ways elections have to be secured in conflict zones. Jammu and Kashmir is actually no longer a conflict zone of the classic kind, where violence can take place for the asking, the streets are aflame with angry young men, terrorists have a field day striking at will at targets of choice and the security forces have to continuously monitor activities, especially movement along roads, tracks, jungles or elsewhere.

Yet every few months, a terrorist strike or a set of coordinated strikes by elusive terrorists, who have yet to suffer any casualties, ends up with people questioning what the reality of Jammu and Kashmir really is. There is also immense restiveness about the casualty figures, both of civilians and of soldiers, with observations by a rabble-rousing media that the only way to resolve this is by retaliatory strikes on the sponsors of terror in Pakistan. It is often said that if Israel has no qualms about taking the battle directly to the adversary, then why should India hold back.

All relevant questions, but they remain just that — questions. The answers are not difficult, provided people are willing to be rational and even-handed in their understanding about the compulsions of the Indian security establishment. There are two aspects about Israel which are not applicable to our situation. First, it functions and exists entirely under the shadow of the United States, being its primary frontline state in the Middle East. The US overlooks

almost everything that Israel does in terms of operations against terrorist elements, which invariably has heavy collateral; witness the situation in the Gaza Strip today. It metes out treatment to the population with little consideration for human rights and a complete disdain for following any of the rules which demand humanitarian considerations. Second, Israel with evident asymmetry in its favour, may respond to a terrorist action on its soil by an over the top and out of proportion hit against a target with full knowledge that it will not draw a counter response of similar intensity. Even Iran's response is usually comparatively muted. Contrast that with our situation, where the intent of the layered Deep State in Pakistan is mainly to make statements of capability through terrorist actions and instigate such turbulence as to ensure J&K does not stabilise.

The Government of India is right in its assumption that it needs to remain circumspect and on course to full normalisation in Jammu and Kashmir by providing a combination of a secure environment and rapid paced development; only responding when a strategic threshold is crossed. To discuss or even attempt to link a threshold to numbers, casualties and situations would be virtual sacrilege, and the last thing the Government of India needs is public pressure to do something which won't fetch strategic dividends or only contribute towards dissipating our national aim vis-a-vis J&K.

It's not as if India will sit back and accept being targeted by Pakistan-sponsored terror groups. However, its challenge lies in the fact that identi-

**It is suspected that 25-30 terrorists are currently roaming the Pir Panjal tracts in small groups, mostly avoiding contact but awaiting a chance to strike when feasible**

fyng suitable targets that hurt the adversary without escalation into a conventional war scenario is fairly difficult. Even if India is fully proficient in response and accepts the consequences of escalation, there is never a guarantee of a short, sharp conflict which will put an end to Pakistan's strategic intransigence. The matter is far too complex for public consumption and it's actually a “war gamer's” delight. It's far more important that we move towards the next big event, the Assembly elections. In that we must ensure we give a most honest and transparent electoral exercise to the Union territory and do it with full security to enable every citizen to vote fearlessly.

It's not just the presence of the security forces in large numbers, what is needed is to eschew any feasibility of slippages in the security grid. That means that units and sub-units of all forces must remain fully sensitized to the scenarios which could present themselves. We cannot afford the movement of personalities, resources or personnel without adequate protection. The responsibility for slippages has to be pinpointed and necessary action taken.

The Sri Amarnath Ji Yatra (SANJY) is just about getting underway. It potentially offers the largest target for anti-national elements and over a sustained period of time. The J&K government knows how to secure it, but primarily in very conventional ways. What the Deep State across the border would be observing is the potential of the yatra, long a potential target, for something out of proportion. I

recall 1999, the most happening yatra, with the backdrop of the then ongoing Kargil war. Securing the SANJY needs to be done in wargame mode, to identify potential loopholes and plug them. Much of this was done in 1999, the findings probably consigned to strong rooms full of archives. SANJY is not a routine event which can be secured by a transactional approach; it needs an all-agency approach which the security set-up of J&K seems to be adopting.

It is suspected that 25-30 terrorists are currently roaming the Pir Panjal tracts in small groups, mostly avoiding contact but awaiting a chance to strike when feasible. Their beat can be both sides of the Pir Panjal and with attempts to keep the security forces' focus rooted to this belt. That is often done through small-scale strikes while a bigger one is planned and the opportunity awaited elsewhere. We cannot bank on zero infiltration in the Valley and infiltration in the Jammu region is presumed to be feasible at any time. Thus, from Jammu to the holy cave, the multiple routes on which the “yatris” move, have to be secured in reasonable depth. That depth would also mean coverage of the Warwan Valley, and northwards in the valleys leading from Kishtwar to Kargil.

A secure and eventless yatra would be indicative of capability to ward off threats to the Assembly elections. The complete attention of the Central agencies would need to be focused on Kashmir, the Jammu region and North Punjab because they form a continuum of support networks for the management of physical and human resources. Narcotics, weapons and cash, including fake currency, will need to be worked upon. With all this in place, a safe and successful J&K Assembly election should be possible and is to be hoped for.

*The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 (“Chinar”) Corps*

## LETTERS

### INCREDIBLE AFGHANS

Full credit goes to Afghanistan for the way in which they planned their game against Bangladesh, beating them to qualify to the semi-finals of the T20 World Cup. They could set only a modest target but the Afghans took the bull by the horns with skipper Rashid Khan taking 4-23 and pacer Naveen-ul-Haq took the crucial last two wickets and shattered the Aussie dream of getting into the semis. The Afghans deserve praise for playing true to their potential and open a new chapter in world cricket. Spectacular performer and opener David Warner had to be disappointed as he had already played his last game and announced his retirement from international cricket after his team's exit.

A.P. Thiruvadi  
Chennai

### NEET-UG RETEST

Only 813 of 1,563 candidates took the NEET-UG re-examination on June 24. That 750 candidates did not appear clearly suggests that they should have been terribly affected by the mess the system is in today. The powers-that-be are to be blame for this sordid state of affairs. They have sounded a death-knell to the students' professional aspirations. The government, it appears, moves heaven and earth to streamline the system now. But what is that they are going to say for the students who are down in the dumps due to the NEET fiasco?

S.Ramakrishnasayee  
Chennai

### GST COUNCIL MEET

It is welcome that the GST council tweaked rates on some items and announced a series of steps to bring down litigation and ease compliance for taxpayers. While the recommendation for waiving the interest and penalties on demand notices for three years if tax is fully paid by March 2025 and the introduction of monetary limits for the tax department to file appeals, among others, are steps in the right direction, much needs to be done on the front of rate rationalisation. Also, the long-elusive issue of bringing items that are not currently under the GST framework, such as petroleum products, into its ambit needs elaborate deliberation among members of the GST council.

M.Jeyaram  
Sholavandan  
Mail your letters to  
chennaidesk@deccanmail.com



Mahir Ali

Julian Assange was already on a flight to Australia by the time the news broke early on Tuesday of a plea deal with the US, whereby he would plead guilty on a single count of violating the Espionage Act in exchange for being liberated.

This isn't an ideal outcome — he ought never have to been incarcerated in the first place, and cannot conceivably be compensated for the seven years he spent holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, let alone the nearly five years he endured in a tiny cell in Britain's high-security Belmarsh prison.

Nonetheless, it's a delightful alternative to what might have unfolded — extradition to the US; facing a court that may well have concluded that punishing those who expose crimes was more in keeping with the ideals of ‘the land of the free’ than pursuing the actual criminals; and a prison term effectively tantamount to a death sentence.

What hopefully turns out to be the final scene in the last act of a sordid drama should be over by the time you read this. It was scheduled to unfold this morning in a courtroom on Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands, an American Pacific territory closer to Australia than to the continental US. A federal judge is expected to sign off on the deal, whereafter Mr Assange

will return home as a free man. No one can guarantee that nothing will go wrong, but the chances are small.

In recent years, there has been a bipartisan Australian push to secure Mr Assange's freedom — combined with a bipartisan consensus on geo-strategically subordinating Australia to the very same empire whose depredations WikiLeaks helped to lay bare — which may have played a role in influencing the Biden administration's decision-making. The primary consideration, though, is likely to have been that pursuing Mr Assange's prosecution could compromise what had already been achieved by persecuting him — to deter anyone contemplating the idea of following in WikiLeaks' footsteps.

Throughout its existence, the American empire's primal urge has been driven by the fear of any individual or nation setting an anti-imperial example that others might seek to emulate: from Iran and Guatemala in the 1950s, to Cuba, Vietnam, Chile and innumerable others. Among whistleblowers, Daniel Ellsberg — who exposed the deep state's actual thinking on Vietnam — stands out as a worthy exemplar who escaped extended incarceration only because the Nixon administration slipped up. WikiLeaks' key collaborator, Chelsea

Manning, a soldier during the US deployment in Iraq, was sentenced to 35 years in prison after a court martial. She served seven years before being reprieved by Barack Obama in one of his few acts of decency shortly before he handed over to Donald Trump. The Obama administration also decided against pursuing Mr Assange on the sensible grounds that the logical consequence of targeting him would entail similar proceedings against *The New York Times* and other outlets that had republished selections from WikiLeaks' trove of documents.

It would be difficult to argue that the ‘Iraq War Logs’, the ‘Afghan War Diary’ and the more than two million diplomatic cables (which helped to trigger the short-lived Arab Spring) did not serve the public interest. The main US argument has been that the unredacted names of operatives and collaborators exposed them to retaliation, but there has never been any corroborating evidence of dire consequences. The main consequence for the empire was embarrassment, as its routine war crimes and frequently indefensible diplomatic machinations were publicised.

The US Democratic National Committee leaks on the eve of the 2016 polls particularly incensed the losing party, but suggestions that he should be assassinated had been made even

before that. When Assange faced extradition to Sweden over allegations of sexual misdemeanours, he claimed it was part of a ploy to extradite him to the US. Many of us were sceptical, but subsequent events bore out his suspicion.

His refuge at the Ecuadorian embassy became more uncomfortable after a change of government in Quito, and he was spied upon and maligned before the UK authorities were invited in to cart him away to Belmarsh. Whatever his flaws as a human being, the WikiLeaks founder and editor has done the world a great service by ripping off the empire's last shreds of self-ordained respectability. Amid the American war-mongering in Europe and the Middle East — with Biden's ill-disguised backing for the genocidal Zionist project — the world needs more revelations and clarifications of the WikiLeaks variety, and far greater freedom for journalists from Palestine to Pakistan, India and far beyond.

Fresh revelations are unlikely to come from Assange — and Julian undoubtedly deserves to be left in peace. But, hopefully, the seeds he has sowed will bear fruit time and again.

—By arrangement with Dawn



# Rahul should now behave like a PM-in-waiting

THE leader of Opposition is a very important post and it comes with great responsibility. Rahul Gandhi who has adorned this new position should re-invent himself and prove to be a role model. First thing is he should change his body language. He should speak less and make his team take on the government.

He should give the performance of being the most dignified leader so that the entire house including the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of Lok Sabha can pay attention when he stands up to speak. He should not get carried away by shouts and jibes from oth-

er members of the Congress party or members of INDIA bloc.

On the other hand he should be in a position to ensure that the members of bloc of INDIA participate more and more in debates and discussions and take on the Government instead of resorting to disruption of the house.

Rahul should show his mark as a mature leader, participate in debates, suggest solutions and not just criticise the government or point out the loopholes in the bills and force them to make necessary amendments to the bills introduced in Parliament. He should play the role of a Statesman not a man on

the street. For the first time Rahul has agreed to be the leader of Opposition and this is the best opportunity for him to prove that he is the PM in the making. This is an opportunity which he should not waste by indulging in the kind of acts he has been doing so far just as a member.

Every speech he makes on the floor of the house should be well researched and well packed with facts which should make the ruling party also listen with rapt attention. His speeches should be as impressive as that of Indira Gandhi. Like the iron lady who used to hear the opposition with equal

attention, Rahul should have the patience to hear the government version.

He should restrain himself from waving of copies of Constitution or some other material or making some quick comments. Lok Sabha got its leader of opposition after a long gap of 10 years and Rahul debuted as LoP. He should keep himself away from sloganeering or walking into the well of the house. Instead he should question the government's policies and play a proactive role.

Leader of the Opposition is considered to be the shadow Prime Minister with a 'shadow cabinet.'

Therefore, he has to carefully measure his words and actions and act with as much responsibility as is expected of the Prime Minister on matters of national interest. If the Leader of the Opposition feels that the government is trying to slide over an important issue and shun parliamentary criticism, he can rightfully demand a debate on the issue.

Rahul has every right to tear into the government policies on the floor of the house but when abroad he should forget party politics and defend the country and its policies more vehemently than the PM.

## MEDLEY



## LETTERS

### Parliament likely to face turmoil

DURING 2014-19 the NDA gave the Dy Speaker's post to it's ally AIADMK. But during 2019-24 the NDA wantonly kept the post vacant. With the changed circumstances the INDI group is vigorously staking claim for the Dy Speaker's post as per the tradition that was initiated by the Congress since long. That doesn't mean the NDA is bound by tradition. The opposition remained silent since 2014 on this matter for reasons better known to it. The Speaker's election won't throw major surprises but for some minor cross voting which can't rattle NDA as expected by the INDI group. By contesting for the Speaker's post the opposition permanently lost the chance for the post of Dy Speaker.

Govardhan Myneedu, Vijayawada

## II

THE Bharatiya Janata Party, right from the Prime Minister to the Member of Parliament level, have raised the issue of the Emergency imposed by late Mrs. Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975 and criticized it. Surprisingly, both the President of India and the reelected speaker of Lok Sabha, supposed to be apolitical, addressed the issue of Emergency in their speeches. It is possible, some of the critics might have been born after the imposition of Emergency. It is meaningless to politicise the issue now, as the BJP cannot get people's support who have forgotten it and were in fact happy because the country was functioning efficiently without corruption and peaceful as the trouble making politicians were either behind bars or forced to keep quiet. BJP has further strained its relations with Congress by raising the issue, which will definitely affect the smooth functioning of Parliament as well governing of the country.

Dr O Prasada Rao, Hyderabad

## III

THE Congress and all other opposition parties, who were against Emergency declared in 1975 by Indira Gandhi, have gathered together and claim that an undeclared Emergency is imposed in the country for the past 10 years. Then there is nothing wrong in Om Birla's talk on Emergency after taking charge as new speaker of the 18th Lok Sabha. It was the Congress which amended the constitution many times. It dismissed many state governments in the past. Now the party is talking about saving the constitution. Rahul is yet to tender an apology to the nation on the excesses committed during Emergency. Modi turned a little autocratic in his second term. So the people elected Modi with a lesser mandate as a course correction. This is not a defeat for Modi nor a win for the opposition. Knowing that the NDA has enough strength in the House, the opposition fielded a candidate for Speaker's post and faced defeat. The opposition wants the Deputy Speaker's post. The Congress seems to have had a bad start. The shouting of the opposition members in the House today speaks volumes on the intolerant attitude of the opposition. The opposition is expected to behave in a responsible manner with meaningful debates held in the House without wasting business hours of the house. Is it possible?

Shravana Ramachandran, Chennai

### Owaisi playing communal politics

IT is unfortunate that AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, who took the oath as Member of the Parliament has failed to live up as an Indian, chanting "Jai Palestine, Jai MIM, Jai Telangana, and Allahu Akbar". He already expressed his allergy to "Vande Mataram or Bharat Mata ki Jai" - but unfailingly remembered to show his loyalty to a Muslim state, undermining the country, and the electorate who made him a MP. This warrants strict action against Owaisi, who must either apologise for his deliberate blunder or be debarred as MP for his mischievous and uncalled for act that was intended to send a clear message to his Muslim supporters who voted for him.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

thehansreader@gmail.com

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### 'Provide saplings at discounted rates to zoo visitors'

BENGALURU: Minister of Forests, Ecology and Environment Eshwara B Khandre opined that the zoos of the state are known for their care of wildlife and it should also become a temple of knowledge.

While inaugurating various development works including South India's first and the country's largest leopard safari at the Biological Park in Bannerghatta, Bangalore, he said that people who come to the Biological Park are happy to see the wildlife. He also said that people should be made aware of at least 10 types of trees by telling them about each type of tree here.

Inform everyone who comes to the zoo about the importance of oxygen-giving trees and encourage them to buy a sapling on their way home and plant it in front of their house and nurture it. In the same way that farmers are given saplings at a discounted rate, they also instructed that the visitors to the zoo should also be supplied with saplings at a discounted rate.

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

# Climate change pushes women to limits of endurance

GAURAV SAINI

"It's all about survival," says Majida Begum, her face wreathed in sweat as she sifts through waste in Delhi's Seemapuri area, echoing as it were the everyday struggles of millions of women in India facing the brunt of the twin crises of heat and humidity. As climate change tightens its grip over the globe, a study by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization shows that on average, female-headed households in rural areas lose 8 per cent more of their income due to heat stress compared to male-headed households.

While men have moved on to secondary and tertiary sectors due to improved skills, women remain in unorganised sectors characterised by repetitive and labour-intensive tasks, explained Seema Bhaskaran, gender lead at the NGO Transform Rural India.

And Majida is living testament of it all. Spending hours beneath a makeshift shelter of four slender sticks and a torn bedsheet, the asphalt radiating heat from the sharp sun and high humidity, as she does her day's job, the 65-year-old ragpicker is weather-beaten and old beyond her years.

With beads of sweat tracing paths down her lined face, she walks to a community water tank located around a hundred metres away. She ducks her head beneath the tap, letting the water cascade over her. Refreshed, for the moment, she returns to her sorting in the oppressive heat. "It's about survival," she explained between tasks. "We drench ourselves with water every hour just to keep going."

This ritual is a necessity for

Majida and others like her amid the unbearable conditions of their work - the absence of sufficient drinking water, toilets, sunshades and prolonged exposure to the elements. Majida's husband, aged 70 and immobile, relies entirely on her earnings. Their estranged son offers no support.

On good days, she earns Rs 250 for separating recyclables from the waste stream, but when illness strikes and she cannot work, they are left with virtually nothing. "Whether we eat at night depends on whether I work during the day," Majida said.

"This is the hottest summer I have experienced in many years. The heat made me unwell, and I could not work for 15 days. I am a heart patient, but I cannot afford to stay at home," she said. In urban agglomerations and in rural India, climate change-fuelled extreme heat is making women from marginalized communities and poor households more vulnerable to economic and health losses.

Women already earn 20 per cent less than men on average, according to the International Labour Organization, and this gap is further widened due to heat waves. In an unprecedented summer, where the heat index has crossed 50 degrees Celsius in many places, the stories are many.

Basanti Nag, 28, from Kokawada village in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, said the summer this year caused nausea and lethargy never experienced before, and the problem was amplified for women who had to travel longer distances to fetch water.

In Dantewada district,

Experiencing one of its hottest summers, the country has recorded more than 40,000 suspected heat stroke cases and more than 100 heat-related deaths. According to IMD, around 40 per cent of the country recorded double the number of heatwave days than it usually does in the April to June period. Excessive heat leads to exhaustion, dehydration, and an increased risk of urinary infections. Women workers in tea estates, street vendors, and safai sathis are exposed to direct sunlight, affecting their productivity and health. Home-based workers also see their income impacted as they juggle household tasks and work, leading to a loss of income



Mangaldai's family of three depends on the labour-intensive task of collecting and selling mahua flowers in the peak summer months. "This year, there has been less mahua work than ever before, with almost half the amount compared to previous years. As a result, my income will also be halved," Mangaldai said. Mahua is a major non-timber forest produce and a primary source of income for many in the country's tribal areas. "In agriculture, women perform back-breaking operations like sowing, transplanting, and harvesting without any mechanization.

Excessive heat leads to exhaustion, dehydration, and an increased risk of urinary infections. Women workers in tea estates, street vendors, and safai sathis are exposed to direct sunlight, affecting their productivity and health. Home-based workers also see their income impacted as they juggle household tasks and work, leading to a loss of income," Bhaskar told PTI.

For women, sustenance tasks like fetching water, fuelwood, and fodder take longer in extreme heat. Pregnant women face risks of stillbirth. Care work increases with ris-

ing illnesses, leading to further loss of employment and economic participation, she added.

A survey conducted by Greenpeace India and the National Hawkers' Federation revealed that seven out of eight women street vendors in Delhi experienced high blood pressure during heat waves in April and May, while women in the middle age group raised concerns about delays in their menstrual cycles due to the extreme heat. All the women who participated in the survey mentioned that sleeplessness during the night is common due to increased heat, and this results in exhaustion throughout the day.

Back in Delhi's Seelampur, 30-year-old Saira has shifted from waste segregation to house cleaning because the punishing heat impacted her income. "I would often fall ill during summers because of the heat. There was no steady income even after working long hours among the mounds of trash emanating intolerable stench," Saira, who is raising her daughters aged six and 11 alone after the in-laws "rejected" her, told PTI.

The heat is making their already difficult daily life worse.

Amid the lack of cooling in her cramped single room home with no windows, the children often fall ill. "My employers have already warned me against taking frequent leaves. But since I am the only caregiver for my children, I have to take leave from work in such situations," she said.

In the city's Sundernagar slum, Radha Koli faces a similar predicament. She works as a domestic help to feed her family of five, including three daughters and her husband. The relentless heat made her youngest daughter, 10, sick forcing Radha to stay home for a few days which resulted in a pay cut. "We are barely able to afford food and shelter with the Rs 3,500 I earn working at two houses. We do our best to keep illness away, but this heat is taking a toll on all poor families," Koli said.

Experiencing one of its hottest summers, the country has recorded more than 40,000 suspected heat stroke cases and more than 100 heat-related deaths. According to IMD, around 40 per cent of the country recorded double the number of heatwave days than it usually does in the April to June period.

# Ingrained discrimination in marginalisation of Pak's Baloch and Pashtun communities

NEW DELHI

PAKISTAN'S Baloch and Pashtun populations encounter systemic discrimination within the country's socio-political landscape. Despite their rich cultural heritage and historical contributions, these communities face pervasive marginalisation and stereotyping, primarily from the dominant Punjabi demographic.

This discrimination is evident in economic disenfranchisement, social stigma, and political exclusion. Predominantly residing in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, respectively, Baloch and Pashtun groups are often misrepresented and marginalized, seen through a lens of prejudice and ignorance.

The Punjabi majority, holding significant political and economic influence, often marginalises these communities, viewing them as obstacles to progress rather than essential parts of the national identity.

## Socio-economic and political disenfranchisement

Systemic discrimination against Baloch and Pashtun communities is evident in the persistent underdevelopment of their

regions. Despite Balochistan's wealth in natural resources, it remains one of Pakistan's poorest and least developed provinces. The Pakistan's federal government's exploitation of these resources, without adequate reinvestment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, highlights ongoing economic marginalisation.

Similarly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces insufficient economic opportunities and developmental neglect, widening socio-economic gaps compared to more prosperous Punjab. Politically, both Baloch and Pashtun groups experience significant exclusion.

Power centralised in Islamabad, influenced by Punjabi elites, consistently sidelines these communities from meaningful participation in national decision-making. This political disenfranchisement perpetuates their marginalisation, sustaining a cycle of neglect and underdevelopment.

## Cultural stereotyping and social stigmatisation

Cultural stereotyping intensifies the discrimination faced by Baloch and Pashtun communities. Within the Punjabi majority, there's a widespread belief that

Systemic discrimination against Baloch and Pashtun communities is evident in the persistent underdevelopment of their regions. Despite Balochistan's wealth in natural resources, it remains one of Pakistan's poorest and least developed provinces. The Pakistan's federal government's exploitation of these resources, without adequate reinvestment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, highlights ongoing economic marginalisation.



these groups are uneducated and inherently prone to violence.

These stereotypes distort the rich cultural fabrics of Baloch and Pashtun societies and justify their marginalisation. The perception of Baloch and Pashtun people as uneducated stems from systemic neglect rather than inherent shortcomings. Educational infrastructure in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is severely lacking due to deliberate policy choices favouring other regions.

This educational marginalisation is then used to perpetuate stereotypes, reinforcing a cycle of under-achievement. Similarly, the stereotype of innate violence among Baloch and Pashtun communities lacks foundation.

It often justifies harsh military actions and stringent security measures in these areas, violating their basic rights and

portraying them as perpetual threats to national security.

This narrative dehumanises Baloch and Pashtun individuals, reducing them to simplistic portrayals of aggression and instability.

## Blame for national underdevelopment

Discrimination against Baloch and Pashtun communities is exacerbated by the Pakistani population's tendency to blame these groups for the country's broader socio-economic challenges.

Pakistan's issues are intricate and varied, yet Baloch and Pashtun people often bear disproportionate blame for impeding national progress. This scapegoating shifts accountability away from the central government and dominant ethnic groups, directing public dissatisfaction towards already marginalised communities.



## Optimistic outlook

Indian economy continues to grow despite facing hurdles like inflation and unemployment

In his second term, Prime Minister Modi had given a call to make India a ‘five trillion economy.’ Though the dream is still to be realised, it gave a sense of direction and hope to India’s entrepreneurs and stakeholders. But every goal has a meandering path one must negotiate to reach it. Indeed, as the world’s fifth-largest economy, India continues to capture the attention of global investors and economists alike. It is a key player in the global economic landscape. However, several impediments need to be done away with to reach the goal. Recently, Shaktikanta Das, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), expressed confidence in India achieving a 7.2 per cent GDP growth rate for the current fiscal year. This assertion is significant from the policy point of view and needs scrutiny of the factors contributing to this optimistic outlook. No doubt, India’s economy has shown resilience in the face of various challenges, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and global geopolitical tensions. Several economic indicators reveal a mixed yet promising picture. In recent years, the Indian economy has been touted as the fastest-growing economy in the world. The Indian economy has demonstrated robust growth in recent years, recovering from the pandemic. Its GDP grew by 7.8 per cent in the first quarter of FY 2023-24, indicating a strong economic momentum. But on the downside, price rise and inflation are a big cause of concern. Right now, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation stood at 4.6 per cent in May 2024, within the RBI’s comfort zone of 4%±2% which could be counted as a positive indication for the growth.



Another grey area of the economy has been unemployment. The unemployment rate remains a critical issue, with urban unemployment at 7.8 per cent and rural unemployment at 7.4 per cent in June 2024. Despite improvements, job creation in key sectors like manufacturing and services remains low. Jobs are essential for sustaining growth which is a red flag for growth right now. Sincere efforts need to be made to tackle this menace as it can mitigate all the positive indicators. On positive side, India continues to attract significant FDI, which totalled \$55.3 billion in the first half of 2024. Besides, the growth of the digital economy has had a good impact on the ease of doing business. India’s digital economy is booming, with a projected value of \$1 trillion by 2025. Not to forget the contribution of India’s young population which presents a significant demographic advantage. With over 50 per cent of its population under the age of 25, India has a large and dynamic workforce that can drive consumption and innovation. The confidence expressed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das in achieving a 7.2 per cent growth rate this year highlights the resilience and potential of the Indian economy. However, addressing the challenges of inflation, global economic uncertainties, and climate change will be crucial in ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

### PICTALK



Devotees visit the Kamakhya temple that opened for prayers after the four days of Ambubachi Mela, in Guwahati PTI

## India will be a true welfare state when it eliminates discrimination

India’s genuine progress will be reflected in its dedication to inclusivity, especially in upholding the dignity of individuals with disabilities

In the vibrant tapestry of India’s democracy, the concept of a welfare state has been a cornerstone since its establishment. Embedded in the Constitution, the commitment to justice, equality, and the promotion of general welfare forms the foundation of India’s identity. However, within this grand vision lies a harsh truth often neglected - the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Despite the existence of legal frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and international obligations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the everyday experiences of disabled individuals paint a different picture. In India, disability is not merely a physical or mental condition; it is a complex barrier that impedes access to basic rights and opportunities. From systemic discrimination to inadequate infrastructure, persons with disabilities face obstacles in every aspect of life. Essential areas like edu-



cation, employment, and healthcare - the pillars of a welfare state - often remain inaccessible dreams for them. Education is frequently highlighted as a key to progress and empowerment. However, for many disabled students in India, quality education is an elusive reality. Despite the National Education Policy and the Right to Education Act, educational institutions often lack the necessary support systems and infrastructure to accommodate diverse needs. The disparity in the national enrolment average between disabled and non-disabled students is stark, with the national average for non-disabled students at 28.4% and less than 2% for disabled students. Government data from UDISE+ shows a dropout rate exceeding 75% for students with disabilities in higher education.

Similarly, the employment scenario for persons with disabilities is bleak. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, the private sector remains largely indifferent, often citing concerns about productivity, costs, and a perceived lack of talented resources. Consequently, unemployment rates among the disabled population are disproportionately high, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and reliance on social welfare schemes. Healthcare, another critical aspect of a welfare state, presents its own set of challenges for persons with disabilities. Limited access to specialized care, the high cost of assistive devices, and stigma within healthcare settings contribute to their marginalized status. Amidst these challenges, the notion of India as a welfare state falls short for millions of disabled citizens. The true measure of a welfare state lies not in lofty ideals or legislative frameworks alone but in tangible improvements in the lives of its most vulnerable members. It is crucial for the government, civil society, and the private sector to bridge the gap between rhetoric and

reality and ensure the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Firstly, disability should be viewed not as a deficit but as a diversity that enriches the social fabric. Secondly, significant investment is needed in accessible infrastructure and services across sectors. From barrier-free buildings to inclusive technology, creating an environment that accommodates diverse abilities is essential for fostering equal participation. Proactive measures such as affirmative action policies, vocational training programs, and sensitization initiatives for employers are necessary. To achieve a truly inclusive society, concerted efforts are needed on multiple fronts. India’s journey towards becoming a welfare state must prioritize the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Disability should not be an afterthought but an integral part of policy and decision-making processes. (The writer is the assistant program manager at the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People; views are personal)



AKSHAY JAIN

Vinashakale Viparith Budhi (Sanskrit for ‘as doom approaches mind reverses’) is what Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan told his friends when he was arrested and was being led off by the cops on 25th June 1975 after the proclamation of internal emergency across the nation by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Even members of her cabinet came to know about the proclamation of emergency from the next day’s newspapers and the Akashwani bulletins. Jagmohan Lal Sinha, a judge of Allahabad High Court heard the election petition filed by socialist party leader Raj Narayan against Indira Gandhi alleging that she had violated all rules specified in the statute book while fighting the 1971 Lok Sabha election from Rae Bareilly. There was a nationwide belief among the leaders of the opposition parties that chemically treated ballot papers were used in the election. These ballot papers were supplied by the then USSR and they bore the symbol of Congress (Indira) but remained invisible at the time of voting. It was said that the voter’s original mark would disappear after voting, and the Congress mark would appear. (Ref: Courting Destiny, A Memoir by Shanti Bhushan, who appeared for Raj Narayan in the case). But Shanti Bhushan decided not to go ahead with the charge of the fake ballot paper and preferred the allegation that Indira had misused government machinery in fighting the poll. The court was convinced of the charge that she had misused her position and power while fighting the poll. Justice Sinha set aside Indira’s election and disqualified her for six years. But Sinha stayed his judgment to enable Indira Gandhi to appeal to the Supreme Court. Shanti Bhushan says in his memoirs that there had been several precedents before in which the election of sitting chief ministers had been set aside and they stood disqualified for the commission of corrupt practices and the Courts had never granted a stay to them during the pendency of their appeals. V R Krishna Iyer, the vacation judge

## The dark days of India’s Emergency

This period saw the suspension of civil liberties and the censoring of the press leaving an indelible mark on the nation’s political landscape



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

of the Supreme Court who heard Indira Gandhi’s appeal challenging the High Court verdict ruled that she could continue as Prime Minister though she was not permitted to her exercise her right to vote in Parliament. The decision of Justice Iyer was seen as an attempt by him to help Indira Gandhi come out of her predicament. Iyer was known for her servility to the then Prime Minister, having served as minister of home and jail in the first elected Communist government in Kerala under E M S Namboodirippadu. In his autobiography “Wandering in Many Worlds” Iyer has disclosed how EMS was instrumental in getting him appointed as a judge in Kerala High Court. The Communist infiltration of the Indian judiciary and other constitutional establishments is nothing new. Immediately after the proclamation of the emergency, the Constitution was amended by both houses of Parliament to put the election of the Prime Minister and President of India beyond the powers of Courts with retrospective effect. This was the infamous 39th Amendment of the Constitution (which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court). What happened during the Emergency is known to most of the literate people. State Governments not friendly to

TO DATE, INDIA HAS NOT EXPERIENCED THE KIND OF DICTATORSHIP THAT WAS IN FORCE DURING THE DAYS OF INTERNAL EMERGENCY. THE CONSTITUTION WAS DISTORTED AND MISINTERPRETED WHILE COURTS OF LAW WERE STERILISED

the Centre were summarily dismissed making use of the provisions under Article 356 of the Constitution. Press Censorship was imposed which made newspapers get prior sanction from censoring officers to publish news. To date, India has not experienced the kind of dictatorship that was in force during the days of internal emergency. The Constitution was distorted and misinterpreted while Courts of law were sterilised. The Preamble of the Constitution itself was amended unconstitutionally and terms like Socialism, secularism and unity of the Nation were inserted in it. This was done after putting all opposition members of parliament in prison under the DIR (Defense of India Rule 1962) and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1974, the statutes that gave power to the government to jail anyone daring to question Indira Gandhi’s superiority. Lalu Prasad Yadav named his daughter Misa Bharati to commemorate his arrest under the said Act during the emergency. Now Lalu and his family members are singing a paean to the Nehru-Gandhi clan! Indira Gandhi and the Congress failed to learn anything from the drubbing they got for subverting the Constitution. In 1984, the Congress again derailed peo-

ple’s mandate by getting the N T Rama Rao-led TDP government in Andhra Pradesh dismissed and anointing a faction led by Bhaskara Rao as chief minister. But NTR succeeded in getting his chair back thanks to the initiative by the opposition parties that included Janata Party, BJP and anti-Indira forces. Rajiv Gandhi during his tenure as Prime Minister tried in vain to muzzle the media by attempting to enact a legislation “Defamation Bill” to curb any kind of reports against the Government. This had to be dropped midway through due to massive protests against the same. One has lost count of the number of times State governments were dismissed by the Congress-led Government at the Centre misusing the provisions of the Constitutions. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was against the terms socialism and secularism for obvious reasons. Though we claim in the preamble of the Constitution that it was adopted on 26th November 1949, what we cover-up is the date on which it was amended by including the terms socialism and secularism in 1976. Congress pontificating the Constitution could be described as the devil quoting the scripture. (The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SUBSTANCE OVER SPECTACLE

Madam — The Prime Minister’s call for consensus underscores his commitment to respecting the people’s mandate. It is now imperative for the Opposition, especially the INDIA bloc, to collaborate with the Prime Minister. In the previous Lok Sabha, minimal opposition hindered effective governance due to disarray among opposing parties. The unity demonstrated by the INDIA alliance resonated with voters, who expect them to serve as a robust check-and-balance in Parliament. Despite ideological differences and occasional conflicts, their parliamentary performance should mirror the electorate’s expectations. The Prime Minister rightly stresses the need for decisive actions over theatrics, aligning with the public’s demand for effective governance amidst concerns like unemployment and inflation. Despite ambitious promises such as curbing black money and promoting initiatives like Make-in-India and Viksit Bharat, tangible improvements in people’s lives remain scarce. The central government must prioritize substance over spectacle to effectively address these pressing challenges.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

### THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE

Madam — Drug abuse and the illegal drug trade have grown into serious, intractable problems. Substance use disorder affects all age groups, but it is particularly prevalent among the youth. The United Nations observes the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADAIT) on June 26 to highlight the grave dangers posed by drugs. Drug awareness campaigns are central to addressing these issues. A society’s socioeconomic status cannot be improved with unhealthy and unproductive members, which is why the dangers of drug abuse are numerous. Drugs bring hazardous diseases and are

### Record crop but prices rising



Every year, food grain production in India reaches new record levels, yet retail prices continue to climb. In the 2023-24 period, rice production reached a record high of 1,367 lakh tonnes, and wheat production also hit a record

with 1,129 lakh tonnes. Despite these increases, the government’s Department of Consumer Affairs reports that retail wheat prices have risen by about 6%, with rice prices increasing even more sharply. Additionally, the prices of pulses have seen a significant spike over the past year. This paradox of high production and rising prices is largely due to low procurement. As of June 2024, the wheat stock in the central pool stood at 299.05 lakh tonnes, a 5% decrease from June 2023, when it was 313.88 lakh tonnes. This year, the wheat procurement target was set at 310 lakh tonnes, but only 260.71 lakh tonnes were procured. This shortfall threatens to destabilize the entire government-run procurement system, which could lead to cascading effects on the Public Distribution System (PDS) and ultimately cause further escalation in market prices of food items.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

often linked to crime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) monitors global drug addiction trends. Making healthy choices and valuing oneself can significantly reduce the risk of drug abuse, which has been a recurring theme of the UN on IDADAIT. Unfortunately, substances like cannabis, cocaine, and heroin are easily accessible in many countries due to lax laws, and their medicinal and recreational benefits are often overstated, overshadowing the harmful consequences of their use. A strong bond between parents and children can help mitigate the risk of drug abuse in the younger generation.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

### ROOF LEAKAGE AT RAM TEMPLE

Madam — It’s disheartening to note that just five months after the inauguration of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya, the newly constructed Ram Mandir experienced leaking from its roof following heavy rainfall. Head priest Acharya Satyendra Das men-

tioned that the temple’s roof lacks adequate drainage, exacerbating the issue. It raises questions about the rush to inaugurate the temple before completion, possibly driven by electoral considerations. This incident echoes a trend where everything, from examination papers to infrastructure like the Pragati Maidan underpass, seems to suffer under the Modi-led NDA government. Unlike ancient Indian temples that stood for centuries due to devotion rather than political expediency, the Modi government’s haste in inaugurating the temple without ensuring its readiness for the monsoon season is evident. The leaking roof of a globally renowned temple raises serious concerns. Fortunately, after senior officials were alerted, Nripendra Mishra, chairman of the temple construction committee, promptly instructed repairs.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

BENEFITS OF REMAINING IN SHELTER OF GOD

By seeking refuge in the divine, we can navigate the complexities of life with ease



All of us wish for a pleasant life ('theek chale'). But we don't know how. We try different things, but something or other keeps on going wrong. Is it an impossible dream? No, it is not. God, being very merciful, has indicated how this can be alone. Lord Krishna guides, "This 'maya' (illusory energy) of Mine is divine and very difficult to overcome. Only those, who take shelter in Me, they are able to transcend this maya." (7.14) We get in trouble repeatedly because we are naturally attracted to harmful sense objects. Useful sense objections are fine but how do you know which these are? God gives this intelligence if we remain in His shelter, just like a mother stops her little child from harming himself. God is that eternal mother for us. Lord Krishna informs, "After efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise, and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus everything is very rare." (7.19) We can get started on this journey beginning from now and God will begin to protect us. We must allow some time for it as instructed by Lord Krishna, "Steadfast in yoga, such people while always glorifying Me and endeavouring, having firm vows worship Me with devotion, offering obeisance." (9.17) Then, what happens? God promises, "These people, who worship Me with undivided attention, meditating on Me, for these practitioners of yoga, I help in getting what one does not have and provide security of what one has." (9.22) We get started and God gets started. It is that simple. Then, what happens? Lord Krishna states, "Fix your mind in Me only; engage your intelligence in Me; thus hereafter you will remain in Me only; there is no doubt about this." (12.8) We get to live in God. What does this mean? God takes care of us as our mother. Our lives will be micromanaged. One will benefit like one can never imagine, because, as indicated earlier, God is everything, not helpless like our bio-



logical mother. Over some time our consciousness will change, as detailed by Lord Krishna, "Through consciousness offering all activities to Me; practising buddhi-yoga, having taken My shelter be always in My consciousness." (18.57) Our consciousness, which otherwise is essentially material will change to God consciousness; it will turn spiritual. When this happens, a big change will take place in our lives, as explained by Lord Krishna, "Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My 'kripa' (grace)." (18.58) In the same verse, Lord Krishna warns, "If you will not heed on account of feeling of being the doer, you will perish." This is what normally happens to us human beings. We must curb our egos; God and ego do not go together. Can you imagine what privileged status we would have achieved if we heed God's instructions? Life will become smooth (theek chalegi). We will wholeheartedly take shelter in God, as instructed by God. In all respects take shelter of God only. We neither get any peace nor liberation at some stage in our eternal journey due to our refusal to surrender to God. We will do so now. What will we do then? We will follow God's instructions as detailed in verse #18.65, which is, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me. You will attain Me only. This I truly promise to you, because you are dear to Me." The last verse sheds light on the biggest benefit of all, in which the Lord promises, "Take My shelter only; I shall release you from all sins. Do not worry." (18.66) Why do we get repeatedly in trouble? Why are we always worried? Because our bad karmaphalas keep on manifesting. Now what will happen? They will make their appearance and God will forgive us, and we will not be troubled much. This is like being liberated while still in our material bodies. This is simply unbelievable to even think about. I won't stop trying to remain in the shelter of God as much as possible as fast as convenient. *(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)*

# A young mother becomes a symbol of hope

Arti, a child bride whose education was cut short, now shines as a local hero, transitioning from e-rickshaw driver to Amal Clooney Award winner, embodying resilience and empowerment



Her face is bathed in sweat and her hair is dishevelled. But neither the scorching June heat nor the humidity can wear down the wide smile on Arti's face. Even the power cut at the Aga Khan Foundation's Project Lehar Centre, where she has been coming for entrepreneurial training, cannot dim her joy. She has just admitted her young daughter to one of the top English medium schools in Bahaich district in Uttar Pradesh. This is a dream come true for the 19-year-old single mother whose own education came to an end after being married off as a child. What has made this feat even more special for her is that it was the school that expressed keenness to admit her four-year-old daughter. The telephone call from its founder inviting her to fill out the form came soon after Arti was returning from the school having been told admissions for the session were closed. While the call and offer to waive all tuition fees came as a big surprise to Arti, it was not totally unexpected. Ever since Arti, an e-rickshaw driver, hit the national headlines for winning the prestigious Amal Clooney Women's Empowerment Award in May this year, she has become a celebrity in Bahaich. Given to young women around the world in recognition of their determination and ability to overcome challenges and make a difference, the international award has catapulted Arti from being just another pink e-rickshaw driver to the official brand ambassador for women's empowerment in Bahaich, an aspirational district with low socio-economic indicators. The buzz around her has been non-stop since her return from London where she went to receive the award from the King's Trust International founded by King Charles. There has been unrelenting attention by local and national media to know more about her remarkable jour-



WHEN THE TEAM MET ARTI, SHE WAS LIVING WITH HER MOTHER IN BAHARAICH'S RISIA BLOCK HAVING LEFT AN ABUSIVE MARRIAGE, ARTI WAS DIRECTIONLESS. MARRIED AT 13 AND A MOTHER AT 14, ARTI LACKED BOTH SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

ney, including her ride in a pick-rickshaw to meet King Charles at the award reception in Buckingham Palace. She has also been publicly felicitated by top leaders and officials of the district. But all this would have never been possible had Arti not met the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) Project Lehar team. Instituted to provide vocational training, entrepreneurship, and life skills courses to marginalised young women, Project Lehar run by AKF in partnership with The King's Trust International, enables girls and young women from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn, earn, and thrive. When the team met Arti, she was living with her mother in Bahaich's Risia block Having left an abusive marriage, Arti was directionless. Married at 13 and a mother at 14, Arti lacked both skills and confidence. On her mother's insistence, she agreed to join Project Lehar. Little did she know that her life was about to change. Not far away, in Lauki, another village in the same block a young widow with three children was struggling to make two ends meet after the death of her husband. She was only 20 when she came in touch with the Lehar team. Left to fend for her children alone, Bitti wanted to do something other than supporting her family as a daily wage and registered for the project. Here she would meet Megha, Saira Bano and Bhagyalakshmi, all young widows with similar backgrounds and living in difficult circumstances. Fate was about to give these four and Arti a collective second chance at life. In June 2023, when Seema Shukla Project Coordinator, state programme

manager Sudhir and the AKF team were mulling over the possibility of teaching them to drive and using this skill as a means of livelihood on the lines of the popular Sakha cabs driven by only women, it was Monika Rani, the dynamic Bahaich district magistrate, who turned this idea into reality. "We were considering how to make the girls economically self sufficient and hit upon the idea of launching the pink e-rickshaw initiative under the government Mission Shakti scheme to empower women and expand their income earning opportunities. We wanted to give single mothers, widows and women separated from their husbands the first chance to come out of the house, increase their mobility and regain their confidence," says Monika Rani. So on October 2, 2023, these five girls were chosen as the first recipients of a batch of 10 girls from Project Lehar to be given the pink e-rickshaws under this innovative scheme. A loan of Rs 1.66 lakh was provided and repayable in 38 months at an EMI of Rs 4500. Since then, there has been no looking back. Not only have the women paid eight instalments already, but they are also transforming their lives. From eating just one meal a day, Saira Bano can now give her children proper nutritious food. "I have seen days where my two children and I ate just namak and roti. Now I earn enough to fulfill every need of my children. I want to do better so that I can build my own house and get an electric connection so that my children don't have to study under a lamp and I don't have to pay to charge

my e-rickshaw," shares Saira. The confidence Bitti has gained has given her the courage to demand her right to the family land. She has filed a case in the civil court and wants her father-in-law to put her deceased husband's share in her son's name. "I am paying the fees for the lawyer from the money I earn as a e-rickshaw driver. I never thought I would be able to take such a big step," reveals Bitti. Bhagyalakshmi has opened a tiny kiosk selling biscuits, sweets and pencils for her mother from her earnings. "I want to expand my business. My dream is to make my elder daughter a doctor and the younger one a policewoman. When my income increases I will shift them to an English medium school. I want my children to have a bright future," she says. For Megha too, the e-rickshaw has been life-changing. "I am happy because my economic situation has changed for the better. Now I can give my children better food. I have admitted the two children to private English medium school and can the monthly fee of Rs 250 for both of them Education will ensure they never have to live on charity like I did." While association with Project Lehar and the opportunity to become self-reliant thanks to the pink e-rickshaws has turned their lives around, it has been their confidence that has helped them hold their heads high in a male-dominated profession. This is inspiring other village women to step out of their homes and fulfil their dreams. *(Swapna Majumdar is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)*

# Battling the heat and hatred: The ongoing fight for LGBTQIA+ rights

There is widespread violence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, fueled by a deeply ingrained prejudices against 'transgressive' love

Be-Loved - Celebrating Pride Month through TheatreKhushi Pahuja In the scorching heat of June 2024, I, along with a lesbian couple, have been shuttling from police station to police station, all to protect their fundamental rights to life and equality. The constant torment from society's disdain for 'transgressive' love and an unquestioned acceptance of violence against women by family members. Familial and domestic violence is perpetuated and reinforced each time someone scrutinizes and polices one's queerness through one's body. Hope often dwindles with seemingly unending cycles of individual, systemic, and systematic violence. Especially, when



community members like Prerna (name changed), a 23-year-old lesbian woman says, "We are investing so much money, time, and energy for protecting my rights, is it even worth it? Will things ever change?" In the face of such questions, social workers not only provide a safe listening space and support in bureaucratic procedures; but also share the responsibility of holding on to the beacon of

hope. History reminds us that hope, and perseverance lay the foundational stones for advocacy, action, and change. One history of hope is that of Pride Month. Each Year, June is celebrated as pride month around the globe, commemorating the Stonewall Uprising. On June 28, 1969, like many other days in New York City, the police raided a small bar called the Stonewall Inn. Taking advantage of the laws against crossdressing, the police would raid bars to arrest queer and transgender persons. When the same happened at Stonewall Inn, the people protested. Days of riots against police brutality acted as a catalyst for the LGBTQIA+ rights movement. Following this, the movement for LGBTQIA+ rights has

expanded, bringing relief to many within the community. Various events like theatre, music, poetry, sensitisation programs, etc. happen during June all over the world, including India. Such programs are particularly important as they present possibilities for intersectional dialogue through non-conventional sensitisation methods. An example of this approach is 'Be-Loved', a theatre play by Mumbai-based Theatre Group 'Tamaasha', which was recently co-organized by Nazariya Foundation and SAATHII (Solidarity and Action Against The HIV Infection in India) on June 9 at the Bipin Chandra Pal Auditorium in Delhi. Be-Loved is a musical and satirical drama directed by Sapan



Saran and penned by 17 prominent writers, including artist Bhupen Khakhar, poet Josh Malihabadi, and LGBTQIA+ rights activists Maya Sharma and Saleem Kidwai. Recalling the journey

of making this play, Sapan shares, "Be-Loved is a collaborative effort. It took us about three months to put it together. We opened the play last year in June after rigorous rehearsal for 45 days." "The play dealt with a very sensitive issue with a lot of care, especially in a context where talking about sex and sexuality is a taboo. They emphasize, "You cannot forget about the issue once you have seen this play. It forces you to think and reflect when you come out of the theater hall." Resonating with this perspective, Urvashi Butalia, feminist publisher and writer says, "The play took stories on queerness by many writers and connected them with real life cases. People can dismiss stories, but it is difficult to dismiss lived realities."

As Rituparna Borah (she/they), Director, Nazariya Foundation pens, "Events like this are the best ways to show to the world that advocacy can be done in various ways either through UN mechanisms, through the government, or plays like this. With collective power we can challenge any hate, discrimination, and violence against the queer-trans community." "Such events help us to reach an audience that is generally not approachable for training sessions, or for whom training sessions are not accessible. Therefore, when we engage with allies through well-accepted mediums like theater, music, etc., the much-needed information gets conveyed to a huge audience," adds Randhoni Lairikyengbam, Assistant Director, SAATHII.

The echoing sentiments of audience members about how the play moved them to highlight the importance of collective efforts toward sensitization using multiple advocacy mediums. It restores hope that change is possible when we create spaces where people can critically reflect on their actions, thoughts, and behaviour, and feel part of the collective. Pride Month, therefore, is not only a time to celebrate queerness and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights but also an opportunity to look back into history and remind ourselves of the perseverance of those who fought for the rights and then move into the future with hope, care, and kindness. *(The author is a social worker and a sexuality educator; views are personal. Charkha Features)*





SACHIN PILOT  
Congress leader

“Lakhs and crores of people who have voted for I.N.D.I.A bloc to keep democracy alive and protect the Constitution have the hope that Rahul Gandhi will strongly fight for truth



ASADUDDIN OWAISI  
AIMIM MP

The opposition also has the support of the people. I urge you (Om Birla) to give chance to smaller parties also. The character of this House has changed. The BJP will not be able to steamroll



OLAF SCHOLZ  
German Chancellor

Three out of four Germans, three out of four Europeans, don't vote for populist and extremist parties but for pro-European forces, and we are obligated to them

## Assange walks free

Deified by some and despised by others in equal measure, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is finally a free man. After years of legal battles and confrontations with the governments of multiple countries, the whistleblower and publisher, who dominated media headlines for disclosing troves of secret documents exposing the brutalities of America's war in Afghanistan and Iraq, walked free after spending five years in a UK prison following a plea deal with the United States Justice Department on a conspiracy charge. As per the agreement, he will plead guilty to violating the Espionage Act and receive credit for the time he spent behind bars in Britain while fighting extradition to America. The implication of this development is that Assange's release from prison is a victory for him and his many supporters around the world, but not necessarily a win for the principles of press freedom. He will still be charged under the 1917 Espionage Act, for "conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified information related to the national defence of the United States". Although the WikiLeaks founder will get to walk free, the Espionage Act will still hang over the heads of journalists reporting on national security issues. It must be pointed out that, at a fundamental level, Assange, an Australian citizen, did what journalists in free societies are supposed to do: Speak truth to power. But, the hounding and harassment of Assange demonstrated the duplicity of Western democracies that take pride in their freedoms.

WikiLeaks founder did what journalists in free societies are supposed to do: Speak truth to power

A plea deal may have averted the worst-case scenario for press freedom, but it also means that Assange will have served five years in prison for activities that journalists engage in every day. It will cast a long shadow over the most important kinds of journalism, not just in America but around the world. The Assange case is the story of a man who was persecuted and abused for exposing the dirty secrets of the powerful, including war crimes. It is a story of deliberate judicial arbitrariness in Western democracies that are otherwise keen to present themselves as exemplary in the area of human rights. In 2010, WikiLeaks published hundreds of thousands of US diplomatic cables and military files, constituting the largest leak of classified government documents in history. The material included a video showing civilians being killed by fire from a helicopter in Iraq. One of Assange's collaborators, US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, was sentenced to 35 years in prison before then President Barack Obama commuted the sentence. Assange's activism made his case a cause célèbre among press freedom advocates around the world, who insisted his work in exposing US military misconduct is exactly what journalists are expected to do. His supporters see him as a champion of free speech but was projected as a villain in the US for endangering national security.

## Bringing peace to Manipur

The 'law & order situation' approach to the conflict is dangerous, and will elude any solution



GEETARTHA PATHAK

The Prime Minister's enigmatic silence on the Manipur conflict and its handling by both the State and the central government has aggravated the situation rather than finding an immediate solution. The Centre held a high-level meeting in Delhi only after fresh violence escalated tensions in Jiribam, a border district known to have maintained relative peace throughout the year-long violence.

Home Minister Amit Shah said after holding the meeting to review the security situation in Manipur that the government would work to bridge the ethnic divide between Meitei and the Kuki Zo groups. However, what the State government has done since the conflict began in May last is aggravating the situation by forgetting the Raj Dharma. The Union Home Minister has not disclosed any roadmap for bridging the ethnic divide.

### Mum Government

The new Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram has broken the silence and termed the year-long ethnic conflict in Manipur as a simple "law and order situation" which is being dealt with by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Oram said the problem is being handled by the Home Ministry, in coordination with the State government and the Governor, and hence it would not be prudent to comment on the issue without delving into the specifics.

Former Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda had maintained a silence since the conflict between two ethnic groups started and refused to answer questions on the problem. The conflict in Manipur began on May 3, 2023, after a State-wide protest march was held by all tribal communities, including Kuki Zo and Naga tribes of the State, against an order of the Manipur High Court that directed the State government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei



community in the Scheduled Tribes list.

In February this year, the Manipur HC ordered the removal of a paragraph advocating for Meitei inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe list due to conflict with Supreme Court precedent. The court ruling emphasises adherence to government procedure. The Supreme Court denounces the directive as "obnoxious" amid legal challenges. The HC highlighted the necessity for alignment with the Supreme Court's constitutional interpretation for amendments to the Scheduled Tribe list as detailed in the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' 2013-14 report.

Many representations have been sent to the office of the Tribal Affairs Minister from members of both communities. The Kuki-Zo people had written to the Minister seeking his intervention to protect them and defend the rights of their community. On the other hand, representatives of the Meitei community have written to the Minister asking for revoking the ST status of some Kuki-Zo tribes. Therefore, the Tribal Affairs Ministry cannot absolve itself of its responsibility and push it to the Home Ministry terming the unrest merely a law-and-order situation.

### Elusive Peace

On the other, it would be unfortunate if the Tribal Affairs Minister could not delve into the specifics of the problem even after more than one year of the conflict. The Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF), a Churachandpur-based Kuki-Zo civil society organisation, reacted to the remark of Oram. The ITLF said the minister was misinformed for thinking that the ethnic conflict in Manipur is a simple law and order situation.

Undoing the Manipur HC's order by the same court has failed to bring back peace in the border State as the widening gap between the two communities was placed elsewhere. The HC order was the immediate trigger, decades-long differences led to a deeper ethnic divide between the two communities. While Meiteis comprise 51% of Ma-

nipur's population, they hold only 10% of the land in the State. The Kukis and Nagas, who comprise 40% of the population, occupy 90% of the land. Hence, Meiteis have a larger share of representation in the legislative Assembly and control the government and the economy of the State which encouraged their majoritarianism. The underrepresented Kukis in sociopolitical settings feel marginalised. Minority communities, including Kuki and Naga, have always raised allegations that the bulk of the State's budget for development work was focused on the Meitei-dominated Imphal valley.

### Demographic Shift

The higher decadal growth rate of the population in the hills, particularly among the Kukis, compared to the valley has raised suspicions that people are illegally migrating from neighbouring countries predominantly from Myanmar. The rapid population growth among the Kukis is often attributed to the large-scale migration from Myanmar as the Kuki community is spread over the borders of both sides of the two countries.

The perceived demographic shift and an increase in the population of non-indigenous communities have led to concerns about Meitei marginalisation in Manipur. It is comparable with the problem of foreign nationals in Assam where the indigenous Assamese people feared marginalisation. In 1980, the Assam agitation was triggered after noticing abnormal growth in Muslim voters in the Mangaldoi constituency by election in 1979. A study

shows that high population growth is attributed mainly to poverty, underdevelopment, lack of education health-care etc. The trend is that economically and socially marginalised groups have more children.

Prime Minister Modi referred to Muslims as "infiltrators" and "those who have more children" in Baswara of Rajasthan on April 21. The narrative that the Muslims are digging into the resources of the country by raising more children is misleading. The census data reveals that the population growth in North India is far higher than in the South. Since the Muslim population in India is less than 15%, the higher growth of the population in the North cannot be attributed to the Muslims only.

As the delimitations of constituencies are due, North India will get more constituencies for high population growth and ultimately control the political power of the country. It is like rewarding the North for more population and punishing the South for abiding by the population control policy of the government.

Since Meiteis are dominantly Hindu and Kukis are Christian, and the Hindu nationalist party is at the centre of power both at the State and the Centre, consequently, the State which is predominantly controlled by the Meiteis took sides with the majority. The involvement of the armed militants on both sides has worsened the situation. Now all the communities, including Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas, blame the Biren Singh-led ruling BJP State government for the Manipur violence. If the government thinks that the Manipur conflict is a simple law and order situation, it cannot arrive at a solution. The Congress bagging both the Lok Sabha seats of Manipur even after the polling booth was captured by Meitei militants is a clear indicator of the mood of the people. They want normalcy to return in the State.

(The author is a senior journalist from Assam)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Traffic violations

Traffic rules mentioned in the Motor Vehicle Act are rampantly violated in Hyderabad. The main reason for this is wrong-side driving particularly by two- and three-wheeler drivers, closure of roads and replacing traffic junctions with U-turns. Driving without a helmet, triple, quadruple and entire family riding on one two-wheeler, using mobile phones while driving have become accepted norms of driving. It would not be an exaggeration to say at least 50% of drivers violate traffic rules in city and if the traffic police can fine them, the revenue generated will make the department self-sufficient.

Dr O PRASADA RAO,  
Hyderabad

#### Bond with Bangladesh

This refers to 'Deepening ties with Dhaka,' (June 26). India holds a special place in Bangladesh's history, particularly owing to the 1971 Liberation War wherein India played a key role. However, relations between them became tense during military rule in the mid-1970s, marred by anti-India sentiment. But the shared history has helped forge a strong bond, with Modi's tenure since 2014 giving a new fillip to bilateral ties. Earlier, a significant shift occurred in 1996, when Hasina took over as the Prime Minister for the first time. Since then, relations have steadily improved. However, challenges persist, such as border management, illegal migration, the National Register of Citizens, Rohingya and river water sharing. The Modi-Hasina partnership has the potential to further cement India-Bangladesh relations, navigating these challenges and leveraging their shared vision for mutual prosperity.

N SADHASIVA REDDY, Bengaluru

#### Relevance of yoga

The relevance of Yoga in modern man's life is quite comprehensible and unambiguous. Nowadays most people are living with stress, apprehension and restlessness. The hustle and bustle of modern life deprives the beauty and warmth of our lives. The disastrous aftermath of this is reflected in our daily life. Life becomes quite mechanical and monotonous. Under such circumstances, we seek a safe platform to get relief from this anxiety and monotony. Yoga and meditation render a perfect solution for a sudden recovery from all these hurdles.

PRABHAKARAN VALLATH, Kozhikode

#### Not so cool

The continuous rise in temperatures, with records being broken each year, can be attributed to the excessive use of air conditioners (ACs). Two decades ago, having a single AC per household was common but in the last 7-8 years, there has been a significant surge in AC demand. Now, many households have ACs in every room, impacting us in several ways. The heat released by AC compressors contributes to the rising ambient temperature, exacerbating global warming. The widespread use of AC leads to a significant increase in power consumption, straining energy resources. Excessive use affects health, particularly in children who spend long hours indoors playing mobile games. This reduces their physical activity and hampers their immunity to heat and direct sunlight. To mitigate these effects, it's essential to reduce the continuous and excessive use of AC. Even AC shopping malls should not be given permission to operate. Alternatives like water coolers can be employed during summers to maintain comfort while minimising environmental and health impacts.

Dr NAVNEET SETH, Dhuri (Punjab)

### India in the hotspot

■ BBC

#### Rahul Gandhi's big test as India's opposition leader

Rahul Gandhi of the Congress has been appointed leader of the opposition, filling a post that had been empty for a decade. It's the first time PM Modi's main rival has held a constitutional role since he joined politics in 2004. He will now sit on committees that make key appointments and act as a counterbalance to the PM.

■ Gulf Times

#### Brics gaining ground as hedge against West

The Brics group has progressed from a slogan dreamed up at an investment bank two decades ago, to a real-world club that also controls a major development bank. It doubled in size in 2024, pairing several major energy producers with some of the biggest consumers among developing countries.

■ The Washington Post

#### Modi will visit Russia, the Kremlin says

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Russia, the Kremlin announced Tuesday. Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs aide, Yuri Ushakov, said that Modi's visit was being prepared but didn't announce a date, saying that it will be done jointly later.



## OBC Parity

As MPs complete their oath taking, an overlooked landmark in Indian democracy needs highlighting. For the first time since Independence, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have achieved equal representation with upper castes, each with 26 per cent of the parliamentary seats. This shift is not just a statistical achievement but a profound transformation in the socio-political landscape of India, reflecting deeper changes in the electorate's priorities and the political strategies of major parties. Historically, Indian politics has been dominated by upper-caste representation, a vestige of colonial and pre-colonial socio-economic hierarchies. The underrepresentation of OBCs and other marginalised communities has perpetuated socio-economic disparities and limited their influence on national policy. The 2024 elections, however, indicate a pivotal change, suggesting that India's democracy is becoming more inclusive and representative of its diverse population. Both the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) have contributed to this increase in OBC representation. However, the dynamics within these coalitions differ significantly. The NDA, while increasing its OBC MPs, still displays a bias towards upper-castes. This reflects the coalition's traditional voter base and its attempts to balance representation with electoral pragmatism. On the other hand, the INDIA alliance, particularly the Congress party, has notably shed its historical upper-caste bias. This shift aligns with a broader strategy to appeal to a more diverse and inclusive voter base, recognising the growing political awareness and aspirations of OBC communities.

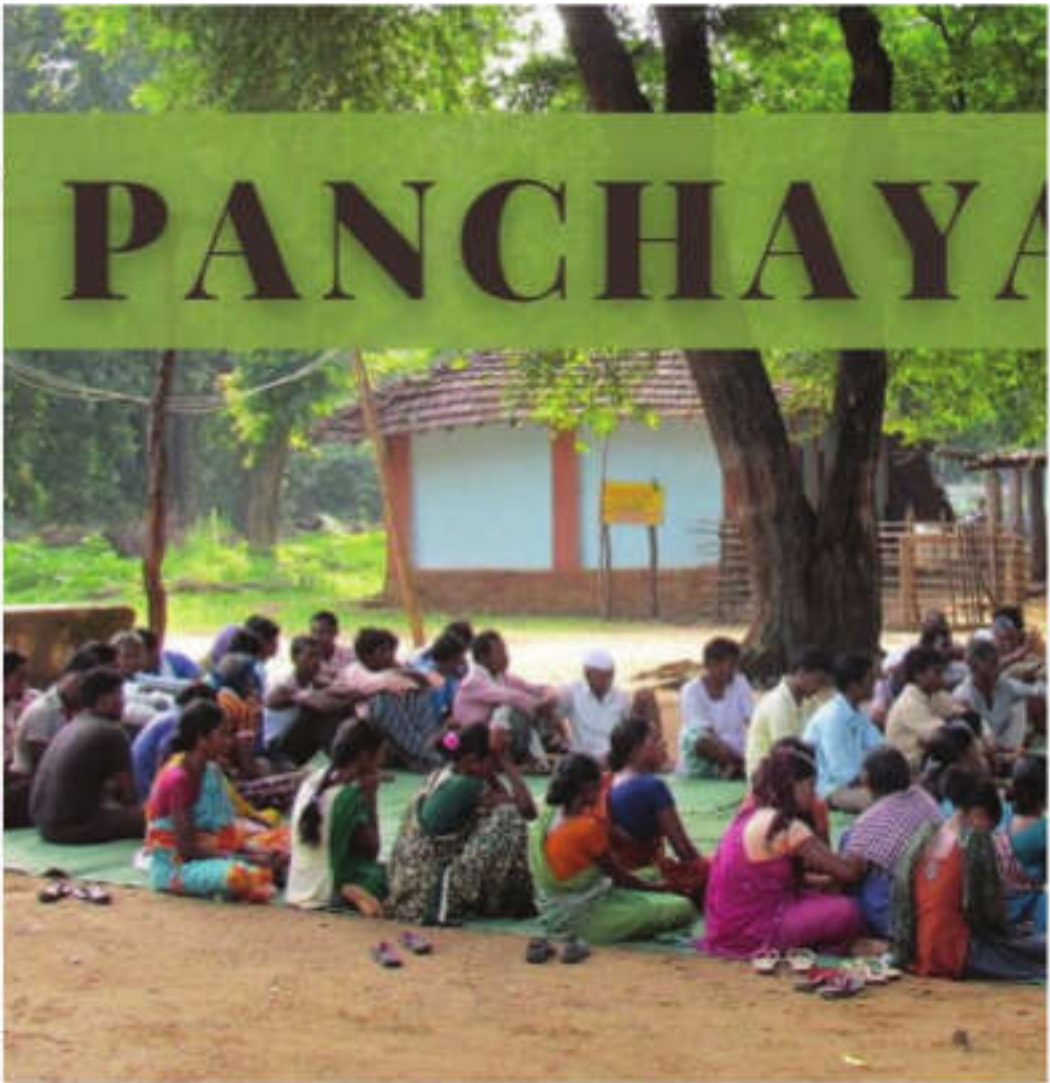
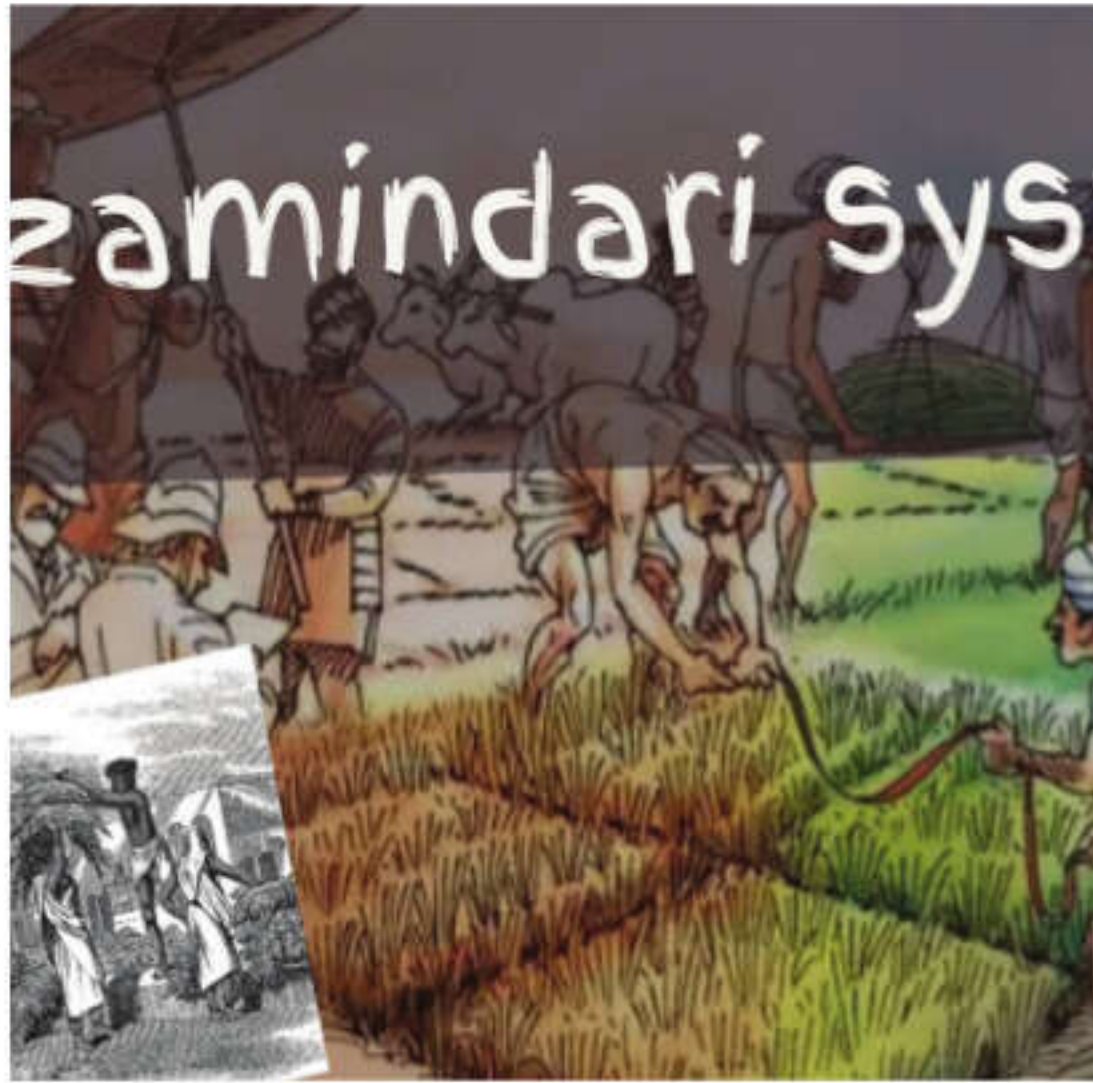
The parity in representation marks a critical juncture for India's social justice narrative. It underscores the success of affirmative action policies and the socio-political mobilisation of OBCs over the decades. The Mandal Commission's recommendations, advocating reservations in government jobs and educational institutions for OBCs, have gradually empowered these communities, culminating in their enhanced representation today. This development also raises important questions about the future trajectory of Indian politics. With OBCs achieving parity in the Lok Sabha, there is potential for more inclusive policymaking that addresses the unique challenges faced by these communities. Issues such as education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare, which disproportionately affect OBCs, may receive greater attention and resources. Furthermore, this shift could encourage more OBC leaders to emerge, fostering a new generation of politicians who can bridge the gap between different socio-economic groups. However, the journey towards true equality and representation is far from complete. While OBC representation has improved, other marginalised groups, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, still face significant barriers to political participation. Ensuring their equitable representation remains a critical challenge for Indian democracy. As India continues to grow and change, it is imperative that its democracy evolves to reflect the rich diversity of its people. This moment is not just a milestone but a call to action for further reforms that ensures every citizen has a voice in shaping the nation's future. There is a rider, though: marginalised communities joining the political mainstream must not forget their roots and the interests of those they represent.

## Trump and Biden

As the world watches the highly anticipated face-off between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump on Thursday night (early tomorrow in India), this presidential debate promises to be one of the most consequential in decades. This clash is not just a battle of words but a confrontation of two starkly different visions for America's future, carrying significant global ramifications. The stakes could not be higher for President Biden. His challenge is to project the vigour and sharpness necessary to counter the narrative pushed by his opponent that his age renders him unfit for another term. Mr Biden must harness the same energy that invigorated his State of the Union address earlier this year, where he displayed a command of the issues and a clear vision for the country. This debate, however, is not a controlled environment like Congress. It's a live, unscripted event against an opponent known for his aggressive style. Mr Biden's ability to remain composed and articulate under such pressure will be critical in reassuring both his base and undecided voters of his capability to lead. For Mr Trump, the challenge is equally daunting. He has the task of expanding his appeal beyond his loyal base to include moderates and swing voters disillusioned with both candidates. Mr Trump's previous debate performances have been marked by interruptions and personal attacks, which, while galvanising his core supporters, have alienated many potential swing voters. To succeed in this debate, Mr Trump must pivot from his usual rhetoric of division and retribution to present a positive, forward-looking agenda. His legal troubles, which include multiple felony convictions, are both a liability and a weapon. Mr Trump needs to navigate these issues skilfully, offering explanations and shifting focus to policy discussions where he believes he has the upper hand. The debate's structure, with muted microphones and no live audience, introduces a unique dynamic. This format minimises the potential for chaotic exchanges. Key issues likely to dominate the debate include abortion and immigration. Mr Trump's role in the overturning of Roe v. Wade has had profound implications, triggering a national conversation on reproductive rights. Mr Biden will likely highlight this, aiming to appeal to women voters and those concerned about healthcare rights. On the other hand, Mr Biden's handling of immigration, particularly the situation at the US-Mexico border, remains a significant vulnerability. Mr Trump is expected to attack Mr Biden's record on this issue, hoping to leverage it to his advantage. In addition, Mr Biden's foreign policy, particularly his stance on the Israel-Hamas conflict, will be scrutinised. This is a delicate issue that requires a balanced approach, given the divergent views within his own party and the international community. As India and the world watch, the outcome of this debate will not only influence the American electorate but also signal the direction of US policy on critical global issues.

# Failed Revolution ~ I

The British colonial administration recognized the significance of panchayats and promptly integrated them in their scheme of rural administration like the Zamindari system in greater Bengal. Impressed with the system, Sir Charles Metcalfe, Governor-General of India (1835-36) had referred to the independent Panchayats as 'little republics' where the arm of the colonial administration did not easily reach. In the modern era, Mahatma Gandhi and the Sarvodaya leaders talked of Gram Swaraj - self-reliant villages- as an article of faith of the nationalist movement



One of the revolutionary steps taken in new India had been the promulgation in 1993 of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992 installing Panchayati Raj as the third tier of democratic governance (independent Local Self-Government) in rural India.

Similarly, the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992 gave constitutional status to the municipalities and municipal corporations as independent self-government in urban areas. Thus, the Panchayat became the basic unit of democracy and administrative set up of the country and an essential part of the basic structure of the Constitution (Articles 243 to 243-O - Part IX).

Panchayati Raj is not new to India and has had a long history. The panchayat in its various avatars has survived through ages since the Vedic period. During the Mauryan and Gupta periods, till the thirteenth century, the panchayats received royal sanction and protection.

While during the Islamic rule the village panchayats didn't receive legal recognition and practically went into hiding in North and Central India, the village panchayats remained vibrant and continued to function independently in the Chola empire and other kingdoms in the major parts of Southern and Western India.

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Impressed with the system, Sir Charles Metcalfe, Governor-General of India (1835-36) had referred to the independent Panchayats as "little republics" where the arm of the colonial administration did not easily reach. In the modern era, Mahatma Gandhi and the Sarvodaya leaders talked of Gram Swaraj ~ self-reliant villages- as an article of faith of the nationalist movement.

The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution envisaged a 3-tier Panchayati Raj:

- \* Village Panchayat at the vil-

lage level (Gram Panchayat or Gaon Panchayat etc.)

- \* Intermediate Panchayat at Block level (Panchayat Samiti, Panchayat Union, Mandal Parishad, Mandal Praja Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat, Janpad Panchayat, Kshetra Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat etc.)
- \* District Council (Zilla Parishad, Zilla Panchayat, District Panchayat etc.)

The Village Panchayat consists of the Gram Sabha, a Sarpanch (President or Pradhan), the executive committee (the panchas) and standing committees on finance, development, education, health, welfare, etc. The Gram Sabha is the general assembly consisting of all voting-age adults of the village who elect themselves to the Sabha. The Sarpanch (president) is directly elected by members of the Gram Sabha by secret ballot.

Similarly, the members of the panchayat (7 to 31) including the chairperson and members of the standing committees are also elected by the Gram Sabha. One third of the seats (in some states 50 per cent) are to be reserved for women at all levels. Reservations for the SCs, STs and OBCs are also mandatory. Elections to the panchayats are held every five years, to be conducted by the State Election Commission. Financial assistance to the panchayats is determined by the State Finance Commission.

The Panchayat Samiti at the block level is mainly composed of ex-officio individuals ~ the Sarpanchas (presidents of village panchayats) of the area, the MPs, the MLAs of the region, the Sub-divisional officer (SDO), co-opted members (representatives of SC, ST, OBC and women), associate members (a farmer from the area, a representative each from the cooperative societies and marketing services) and a few elected members.

The composition of the

Zilla Parishad (District Council) varies from state to state. In West Bengal, the District Council is composed of all the SDOs of the district, a district panchayat officer appointed by the government, a civil servant nominated by the state government, all MPs and MLAs of the district, two members elected by the Sarpanchas of each sub-division, chairpersons of the Panchayat Samitis of the district, a chairperson or mayor of the local municipality nominated by the government, chairperson of the district school board and two female members nominated by the government. However, in the state of Kerala, both the Panchayat Samitis and the District Councils are composed of members who are directly elected.

In the majority of the States, the Zilla Parishad is headed by a president and a vice president and consists of the elected members, the ex-officio members and the standing committees. The total number of members of the Zilla parishad is not to exceed 30 (Rajasthan has 25). A civil servant, normally the district magistrate or the district collector acts as the chief executive officer and heads the administrative set-up. A deputy chief executive officer drawn from the district administration acts as the secretary to the Zilla Parishad.

At the apex level exists the Ministry of Panchayati Raj created in May 2004 with the motto "empowering every citizen to be a catalyst of change."

The Central ministry headed by a cabinet minister serves as the policy planning body and sets the goals and programmes along with financial assistance on an all-India basis.

The State governments have set up a separate department of Panchayati Raj for the supervision of the activities of the panchayats within the State. The States have also created a

State Finance Commission for devolution of financial powers to the Panchayats and other local bodies.

The States have also created a State Election Commission for conducting periodic elections to the local self-governments ~ the panchayats and the municipalities.

According to an estimate of the United Nations, India has surpassed China becoming the most populous country in the world with a population of 1.426 billion (as of April 2024). India has perhaps the largest workforce ('public servants') in the government sector. India's administrative set-up is a mammoth organization functioning at five levels:

- \* The Central level (the Union Government)
- \* The State level (28 State governments and eight Union Territories administration)
- \* The Public Enterprises Level (Central PSEs: 515 (2022); State Level PSEs: 1239 (2021).
- \* The Statutory Bodies and Autonomous Institutions Level like the IITs, AIIMS, ICAR, institutions of national importance, research institutions, universities etc.( Central: 650+; States: 1200+ - aggregate data not available)
- \* The Local Self-Government Level:

- (a) Urban Self-government (municipalities and corporations): 7,935 (2011 Census),
- (b) Rural self-government (Panchayats): 2,85,114 (2024)

Integrating into the tapestry of the vast administrative system, India's 641,000 villages are divided into and administered by 806 districts. A staggering number of Panchayats as shown below cover 99 per cent of the rural population and are responsible for electing more than three million people's representatives in rural India.

- \* Number of Gram Panchayats: 2,55,623
- \* Number of Panchayat Samitis: 6,897
- \* Number of Zilla Parishads: 665
- \* Number of Traditional Local Bodies: 16,129

(Source: Annual Report of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for 2021-22).

(To Be Concluded)

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## Game-changer for property sector

The real estate sector has been operating for decades with an inefficient property valuation system. Last June 13, President Marcos finally signed Republic Act No. 12001, or the Real Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act, to streamline, digitize, and enhance this through a uniform appraisal based on internationally accepted standards, concepts, principles, and practices.

"No longer will we rely on the outdated valuation system," he noted in his speech during the signing ceremony in Malacañang, expressing optimism that the new law will also improve bureaucratic efficiency.

This long overdue overhaul of the country's antiquated and problematic property valuation system presents what the President calls a game-changer that will dramatically improve the real estate landscape and benefit both the government and the private sector. It is part of the administration's Comprehensive Tax Reform Program that aims to promote a just and efficient property valuation system.

Its main effect is that it will broaden the tax base used for property and property-related taxes of the national and local governments.

But more than just increasing government tax revenues from real estate, the new law will hopefully put a stop to the recurring problems experienced by individuals and companies when they pay property taxes or sell their land. It will also minimize right-of-way (ROW)

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

problems that have delayed numerous public and private infrastructure projects, causing cost overruns that at times lead to their eventual cancellation.

The valuation system prior to this law was chaotic. When Mr. Marcos was a senator in 2013, he had actually introduced Senate Bill No. 415 on revamping it, citing that with 23 national government agencies, almost 1,300 local government units (LGUs), and hundreds of private appraisers performing valuation using different methods and standards, the property sector has been riddled with inconsistent property values.

As a result, many projects were delayed or scuttled due to just compensation issues and lengthy court litigation. Although the government is authorized under RA 10752, or the 2012 Right-of-Way Act, to purchase real property needed as a ROW site or location for a public infrastructure project, such acquisition often gets delayed by valuation problems.

Among the LGUs, it is more complicated as the technical process of property valuation is tied to real estate taxation, which is a political function of elected local officials.

With the approval of the schedule of market values (SMV) assigned to the local councils, the technical function of valuation is often influenced by highly politicized decisions. This compromised the capacity of LGUs to generate enough property taxes that could have funded public services for their constituencies.

A single valuation base for taxation purposes, which is the principal feature of RA 12001, will hopefully resolve the difficulties that taxpayers face every time they pay property taxes and other imposts on the sale of real estate, among them transfer taxes, capital gains and withholding taxes, documentary stamp tax, and value-added tax. This single valuation system will also facilitate and speed up private property transactions.

PERSONAL

'THANK you Jesus, Mother Mary & St. Jude for good results here'.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

## DMK and NEET

SIR, The NEET imbroglio has come as a shot in the arm of the DMK government which has been seeking its abolition as it is one of its election promises.

After initial dithering, a determined Centre has now taken various measures to steer the air. Hence, the DMK will not be able to fish in troubled waters.



While most States have sought to know how a test of this magnitude should go kaput, the DMK alone has sought its abolition.

Why is it that the DMK voice is so strident against NEET and why does it need a ban rather than seek hassle-free conduct of the test?

Does the DMK speak for students? DMK does not have any concern for students but is worried about the prospects of those political leaders, most of them belonging to the party, who own and operate medical colleges in TN.

It was during the regime of Manmohan Singh under the UPA dispensation that NEET had come into being. The DMK was the largest constituent of UPA then and it did not raise its voice at that time.

The intent of the NEET is to ensure that the admission process is transparent.

Though owners of private medical colleges challenged NEET, the Supreme Court junked their petition.

Tamil Nadu has more medical colleges than any other State. With seats under the management quota commanding a high premium and the affluent mak-

ing a beeline to get their wards admitted, it was raining money for the management.

As NEET has virtually abolished capitation fee, the DMK has

no other recourse but to launch a war-cry for the abolition of the NEET.

Yours, etc., V S Jayaraman,

Chennai, 24 June.

### WELCOME

SIR, In a welcome development, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on June 24 wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying no discussion on the Teesta river treaty should be taken up with Bangladesh without the involvement of the State Government. She rightly emphasised that if Teesta river water was shared with Bangladesh, lakhs of people in north Bengal would be severely impacted due to inadequate availability of irrigation water. People of West Bengal share a very close relationship with Bangladesh geographically, culturally and economically. West Bengal has cooperated with Bangladesh on several issues in the past.

Agreement on exchange of India-Bangladesh enclaves, also known as the Chitmahals, Indo-Bangladesh railway line and bus services are some of the milestones of working with Bangladesh for the betterment of the economy in this region. Hence, West Bengal cannot compromise on an issue which has severe implications.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 25 June.



# Why America’s top court is taking its time over Trump

CLAIRE B WOFFORD

Frustration is mounting as the country waits – and waits and waits – for the U.S. Supreme Court to issue its decision in Trump v. United States, the case that asks whether the former president is immune from criminal prosecution for what he did in the wake of the 2020 election.

For those on the left, the delay appears both political and purposeful, yet another example of conservative jurists in the court’s majority helping Trump avoid the accountability that might otherwise be inevitable.

I get it. The court’s failure to take the case when Special Counsel Jack Smith first requested in December 2023; its scheduling of oral arguments for late April 2024; and the ensuing months that have passed without a decision have made it quite likely that any trial of Donald Trump for his alleged coup will not happen soon. That is consequential.

But this doesn’t mean the court should depart from its standard operating procedure. In fact, if you ask the justices to proceed at anything other than their normally plodding pace, you are asking them to be exactly what critics so decry – political.

When the Supreme Court makes a decision, it is inevitably answering a very difficult legal question. If the answers were clear, the case never would have been the subject of high court litigation in the first place.

The court takes a case generally not just to decide a particular winner or loser, but to instead formulate broad legal principles that will guide lower courts, other branches of government and even American citizens. The court indicated it was thinking about the big picture when it expanded the legal question from whether a former president is immune from criminal prosecution to how far that immunity should extend. The ultimate ruling here will have implications well beyond Donald Trump.

During oral argument, Justice Neil Gorsuch brushed aside the ugly details of what Trump allegedly had

done, insisting the court was “writing a rule for the ages.” The comment drew ire from legal commentators for minimizing Trump’s alleged crimes, but as a scholar of the Supreme Court, I believe it was exactly right.

Once they changed the legal question to include “the extent to which the President enjoys immunity,” the case couldn’t be answered with a one word “yes” or “no.”

This case raises major questions about separation of powers, the power of the president, and the rule of the law. The Supreme Court has to transform those constitutional principles into workable legal doctrine that will apply well beyond the election of 2024. Writing such a rule is hard and takes time.

That rule has to be developed and justified through the rigor of legal discourse, which relies upon carefully constructed logic, sober analysis and appropriate use of legal precedent. Determining if, how and why previous cases shape a decision is painstaking to do, much less explain.

There’s a reason that judicial opinions can run upwards of 100 pages – they have to do a hell of a good job of justifying their choices.

Supreme Court decisions are never the product of any one single factor. No matter how much critics claim that the justices decide cases based primarily or solely on their political ideology, the evidence simply doesn’t bear this out.

Setting aside the obvious recent instances in which the conservative-dominated court acted in favour of more progressive interests, decades of empirical research from judicial politics scholars like myself have demonstrated that Supreme Court justices are not just what some call “politicians in robes” who vote the party line and use law as merely the fig leaf that disguises their ideology.

Instead, they are highly trained legal thinkers, acting within the constraints of the political environment and the law.

Perhaps setting aside Justice Clarence Thomas, whose outlier



status became all the more clear when he just opined in a solo dissent that those subject to domestic violence restraining orders should have access to guns, the justices must think carefully about the preferences of others. Among them: other court members, Congress and the executive branch, as well American voters.

When the court blindly adheres only to its own political preferences, it risks backlash from the other branches and a loss of public trust.

Rapid decisions have come from the court, but they happen once in a blue moon and rarely stand up well to either legal analysis or history.

Bush v. Gore, in which the justices took only two days to decide the legally contested 2000 presidential election, was so badly reasoned that the court itself said never to look at it again.

Scholars have more respect for the court’s 1974 ruling, 16 days after the oral argument, that President Richard Nixon had to turn over the Watergate tapes to criminal prosecutors, but that decision left unanswered a range of legal questions about executive privilege. Those questions would be later raised in court by Presidents

Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Subsequent litigation is not always problematic. But it can, – as many argue is happening here – generate the use and misuse of the legal system to avoid legal consequences. Trump has made it to the high court in part because the most relevant prior ruling, in which the court held Nixon immune from civil liability, may or may not apply to Trump’s criminal charges.

In the current Trump case, the court has a steep hill to climb. Both sides agree that a former president cannot be prosecuted for his exercise of “core executive functions,” such as the presidential pardon and appointment powers. Both sides also agree that he can be prosecuted for any unlawful actions he took that were private, rather than official duties, such as his enlistment of Rudy Giuliani to help challenge the election results.

This is a significant area of overlap between opposing sides in this case. But between those poles lies a vast fog of presidential activity that may or may not be subject to oversight by the legal system. It is this fog that the court must pierce, and pierce well.

The good legal ruling needed here won’t be easily formulated. If the court ignored the trappings of legal decision-making, simply sending Trump off with a wave and a goodbye kiss, total – or no – immunity in hand, its own institutional legitimacy would plummet even further.

The justices must meet this moment and determine if a president is above the law. But they are right to also be cognizant that they too are subject to the gauntlet of legal reasoning and writing. A hurried, sloppy decision will have damaging ripple effects far beyond what Trump may have done three-and-a-half years ago.

Indeed, given the potentially unconstitutional actions Trump has threatened to take if re-elected, the country will need a strong and well-respected Supreme Court in the very near future. Those angry with the court should actually be very glad it is working as usual here. If it weren’t, their fear that Trump will get away with it all may indeed be realized.

(The writer is Associate Professor of Political Science, College of Charleston.)

## 100 YEARS AGO

### OCCASIONAL NOTE

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald’s action in the Mexican affair appears to be strictly correct. The trouble has arisen from an entirely unwarrantable threat by the Mexican Government to expel the British Agent, Mr. H. A. C. Cumins, whose only offence has consisted in defending the rights of British subject-the latest case being that of a woman whose property was menaced with seizure. Other Powers besides Great Britain have had occasion to protest against the expropriation of private owners without compensation, in pursuance of what is dignified by the name of President Obregon’s agrarian policy; and the course taken by the Mexican Cabinet is not likely to be supported by foreign opinion nor by any sympathy from the United States, with whose representatives Mr. Ramsay MacDonald is acting in full communication. If the Obregon Ministry persists in what Mr. Ramsay MacDonald rightly describes as a grave breach of international courtesies, the hope of restoring ordinary Anglo-Mexican diplomatic relations will be disappointed. The United States has its own causes of complaint, and it seems doubtful whether even American influence will be of much avail in inducing the enfant terrible of the New World to observe the ordinary amenities of international intercourse.

## NEWS ITEMS

### MOTOR RIVER BOATS

## PASSENGER SERVICE FROM CHITTAGONG

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

SOME months ago, reference was made as to the way in which the navigation of the Karnaphuli above Chittagong was being solved by motor boats. Since then even larger boats have been put on the river, provided with upper first-class decks. From the beginning of June there is to be a regular service to Rangamati and back four times a week instead of twice. The largest motor boat has an engine which sounds like an aeroplane, and when it starts from the ghat in Chittagong it can be heard at Kodala 20 miles further up the river. Villagers of remote hamlets in the jungle have been asking what the remarkable noise is that they hear several times a week. Parcels are now being sent by the motor boats, and no doubt in time also will be conveyed in this way. As in addition to improved methods of communication - for the old steamers while more roomy sometimes sat on a sandbank for 36 hours there now dale bungalows both at Chandraghona and Rangamati, more people may be expected to take a trip up this beautiful river in the future.

Babu Nobin Chandra De, Sub-Inspector of Police, Chandraghona, draghona, retired from the service last week and was presented with a clock and ink-stand by the local missionaries as a token of their respect. Mr. De was an exceptional man. One of the chief things he did at Chandraghona was to put a stop to the traffic in Mog girls, who were enticed away to Chittagong. This is a subject that might well engage the attention of the society which has just been started in Chittagong to promote temperance and purity. This society is composed of representatives of all religions. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Mahomedan, and is making its lectures attractive by utilizing the excellent selection of slides which the Calcutta Y. M. C. A. loans out for such purposes.

### FASCIST OUTBREAKS

## PREFECT OF TURIN DISMISSED

OUTBREAKS of Fascist violence culminated on Sunday in a raid On the house of Senator Frassati, proprietor of the Opposition paper Stampa. The Government at Rome intervened very promptly, dismissing Signor Palmieri, Prefect of Turin.

Signor Federzone, Minister of the Interior, has sent a letter to Signor Frassati notifying him of the steps taken to discover the miscreants, but condemning the attitude of Stampa towards the Fascists.

### COCOA SCHEME

## CO-OPERATIVE MARKETING FAVOURED

LONDON, JUNE 25

A CONFERENCE in London of representatives of the chief cocoa growing countries in the world passed a resolution in favour of collaborating with the British Empire producers in a scheme for the co-operative marketing of cocoa, A Committee was appointed to discuss details.

# Psychopaths who are cruel to animals

RAFIA ZAKARIA

It has been about two weeks since a heartbreaking incident of camel mutilation came to light in Pakistan.

In that case, it was alleged that a landowner, enraged by a camel that had been foraging in his field, cut off the poor animal’s leg. The female camel was only eight months old. The camel’s poor owner named the landlord as the culprit, but said that the police were trying to protect him. Earlier, the police had arrested six suspects but said they could not find proof of the landlord’s involvement in this act of barbarity.

The case only gained prominence when a video of the maimed camel went viral on social media. The Sindh government is said to be working with an NGO to provide an artificial limb to the injured camel.

It is unfortunate that this is only one of several instances pertaining to animal abuse in Pakistan. In fact, this form of bestiality is rampant in the country. Just a little before the camel incident, an extremely disturbing video emerged of a dog being thrown from a balcony of a high-rise building, while days after it, news emerged about a man cutting off a donkey’s ears.

Taken together with the shabby treatment meted out to animals at Pakistan’s zoos, these incidents expose the depth of inhumanity that now exists in society.



Research shows that a proclivity for animal abuse is a primary indication that the perpetrator is a psychopath and likely to act similarly towards human beings. If this is true, Pakistan has no dearth of potential criminals whose complete lack of empathy for the suffering of other living beings is there for all to see.

There is no one in this country who has not been a witness to animal cruelty; but most of us continue to watch and allow it to happen. Dogs, known to be particularly intelligent companions for human beings, are treated abhorrently in Pakistan. While there may be notions about impurities regarding canines, that does not mean that those who subscribe to this view physically harm them. Harming living things is a sign of a sick and depraved society. All living things are

deserving of respect and a peaceful existence, and the idea that an animal is deserving of ill-treatment speaks volumes of the cruelty that abounds in the human race.

It is sickening to see helpless and voiceless creatures such as camels, dogs, cats and donkeys being mistreated — and everyone ignoring their suffering.

Human beings may be the most sentient creatures on the planet, but this does not mean that animals are not sensitive and do not experience emotions. It is not a question of who is more intelligent — human or animals — it’s just that there are different kinds of intelligence for man and beast. Studies have revealed self-awareness and emotions in the animal kingdom often through vocalisations and gestures. Experiments on

fish have shown that they express feeling pain through rocking and hyperventilating.

Marc Bekoff, the author of The Emotional Lives of Animals, presents the case of prairie dogs, which are a kind of large rodent, like a mongoose. One day while cycling in Colorado, Bekoff saw a telling interaction. A large black-tailed prairie dog was trying to retrieve the carcass of her young one. The baby had just been killed on the road, likely owing to an accident. Bekoff saw the mother try five or six times to drag the carcass off the road, perhaps so that it would not be further crushed by cars.

The example is telling because one may not expect rodents to feel sad or grieve for their young. However, there are many such examples of even smaller animals acting in ways that do not have a simple explanation in terms of the desire to safeguard one’s own. If anything, the mother was endangering her own life to retrieve the body that no longer had any survival value to her. Perhaps a better-known example is of elephants, known to mourn their dead and to bury them.

Even tiny sea creatures have their own kind of emotional interplay. The Curious World of Sea Horses, published last year, details how sea horse couples engage in ritual dances to ensure that their reproductive cycles are synced. Other research has provided proof that elephants indeed have an incredible memory, showing

that these social beasts can remember their relatives for up to 12 years just through their sense of smell.

All this is to press home the point that animals feel the cruelties that are inflicted upon them. They are also capable of experiencing fun and joy, as anyone with pets would know.

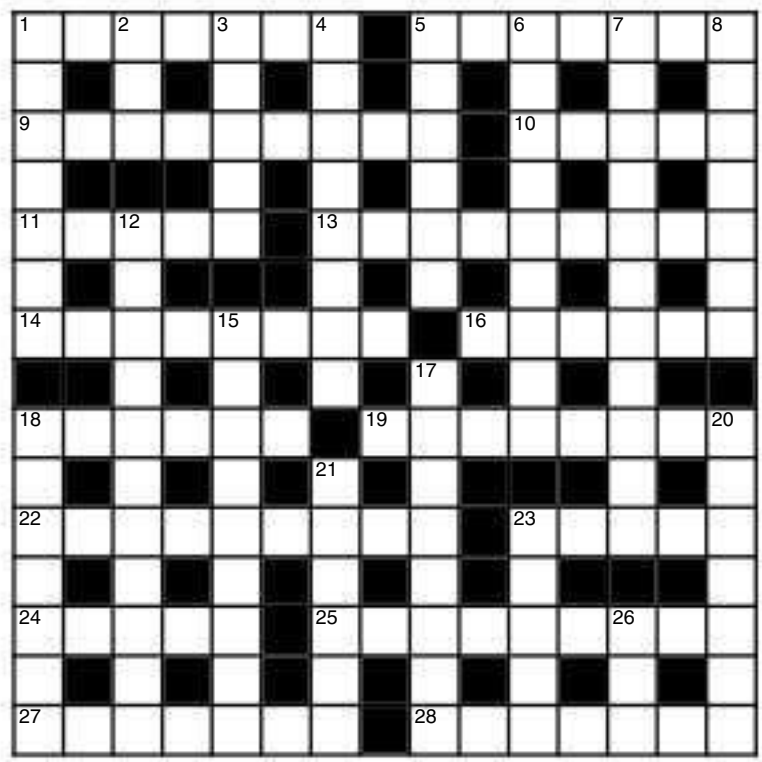
There are realms that have been written and that will be written on the glories of the natural world. It is useful to remember that there are many countries that do an excellent job of taking care of animals through stringent laws against any form of animal cruelty and through welfare projects. Take the case of Turkey, where there are no ‘stray’ animals as such, as the government takes care of all the cats and dogs on the streets and makes sure that they are well fed and not tortured or harassed, and that they have been vaccinated.

In Pakistan, too, awareness of animal rights is on the rise, with NGOs doing good work for animal rescue and rehabilitation. However, cruelty towards animals is still a behavioural trait. It is a sign of a society where nothing and no one is spared abuse. Being a good human being requires speaking up when helpless and voiceless animals are being abused. The least one can do is to record incidents of animal cruelty and proliferate them on social media so that all criminal abusers are exposed.

Dawn/ANN.

## CROSSWORD

NO-292823



### YESTERDAY’S SOLUTION

CAKE FALL VERVE  
O E L L A E E N  
P L A C E B O G E N E S I S  
I T S O E D O U  
O A S I S F O R E I G N E R  
U R E N N A E  
S U P R E M E A R G E N T  
R S D C  
P I X I E S M A D N E S S  
A Z T I E I  
P R E T E N D E R T R A I N  
A R R R A O M M  
C H I C A G O B A U H A U S  
H N T S L R T E  
E A G L E S T E P K I S S

### ACROSS

- Playwright in gamble, out of pocket, losing 33% (7)
- He created unusual sculptures of the French prize winner (7)
- Source regarding series to see in Paris (9)
- Article not entirely nasty? It gets a hammering (5)
- Bathroom accessory excessively and thoroughly trimmed (5)
- Limited connection, with hesitation, in sexual activity (9)
- Central Americans, ignoring expense, welcoming fine folk from another continent (8)

- Refuse to accept broadcast restricted by noise (6)
- Mid-20th century writer or early 20th century writer, mostly (6)
- New Zealand painter from good family, dosh liberally spread around (8)
- New Zealand writer offering sexist view of discipline? (9)
- Description of power reflected in natural oscillations (5)
- Part of opera to cut from Tosca, retaining tenor’s second note (5)
- Russian poet writing articles about Knight and Queen, tovarish? Not half (9)
- Temporarily stop America blocking outlay (7)

- Ebbing current with return of damage – metal? (7)

### DOWN

- Religious attire – black attire, restyled (7)
- Lettuce crops regularly denuded (3)
- Register ultimate in danger is involved in solo climbing (5)
- Run into the last place to be seen with a musician (8)
- Expression of annoyance about Wisconsin regional capital (6)
- Line in excellent meat product (9)
- Radio travel broadcast is a promotional feature (11)
- Guy in distress is a knight (7)

- Radical currently turning up in factory is to do marvellous stuff (4,7)
- Historic Arctic vessel trapped in ice – not one spot to grow plants (4,5)
- Staff’s methodology when hosting a travelling exhibition (8)
- Absorption? Unusually large bog will absorb one (7)
- Sharp humour a Roman Catholic displayed during disrupted Mass (7)
- Chap apparently owing money gets court decision (6)
- One slow-moving bridge team to fare badly (5)
- Awkward person puts it in propeller (3)

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





OUR VIEW



# Time to overhaul India's capital gains tax regime

*The Union budget should reset this levy for simplicity, uniformity and fairness. It's high time India relieved investors of the complexity that has made capital gains a bewildering maze*

As this year's final budget nears, taxation changes to relieve citizens and stimulate consumption are a subject of speculation. A focus area that awaits attention, though, is India's capital gains tax regime. While changes have been made, it remains complex and unfair. The rates of this tax differ by asset classes, while it also lacks consistency across investments in the way its short-term version is levied more heavily than the long-term kind. Gains from the sale of listed shares or equity mutual funds held for less than 12 months, for example, are classified as short-term, and as long-term beyond that period; the applicable rates are 15% and 10% respectively, with the latter tax kicking in if annual gains exceed ₹1 lakh. In contrast, gains on debt mutual funds are taxed at the marginal rate of income tax, regardless of how long they are held. And in the case of real estate, the cut-off is two years, with capital gains taxed at the marginal rate of income tax in case property is sold within that span, and at 20% (after adjusting for inflation) if it's held longer. Also, this tax can be avoided by reinvesting the proceeds in another property. Equity investors, however, must pay up even if they are only using the money to shuffle their portfolio. Holders of physical gold, meanwhile, must hold this metal for three years for their gains to qualify as long-term.

Each rule may have had a reason, but taken together, their variation makes investment planning painful for those who brave it on their own. Since all taxation should go by the cardinal principle that people should easily be able to work out their liability, it's time to simplify the regime. Rate variation serves as a device to alter investment incentives, no doubt, but the only

aspect of it that's easily justified is the heavier burden placed on quicker buying and selling. Speculators paying more is a well-accepted practice, though what counts as short-term should be the same for all avenues. Varied rates across asset classes are harder to explain, since their specific policy aims must outweigh the hidden ill-effects of distorted investment flows overall. The government has lately sought to end anomalies. Debt mutual funds, for instance, no longer enjoy a sweet deal if held long-term. While they have been brought at par with fixed deposits held with banks—which, like share dividends, are also taxed at the marginal rate—we find that investors don't have it any easier when it comes to picking assets. Consider the complexity faced by gold investors. Gains made from gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) bought after 2023-24 began are taxed at the marginal rate. All gains on physical gold sold within three years are treated the same, but a rate of 20% (with inflation adjustment) applies if liquidated later. Plus, capital gains on sovereign gold bonds are exempt from tax if held for their full eight-year tenure. Sure, stoking demand for paper gold can help contain our bullion imports, but why treat gold ETFs differently?

India's capital gains tax regime needs an overhaul aimed at simplicity, uniformity and fairness. For a non-distortive system that eases investment choices, we could treat all short-term holdings apart from long-term with a common cut-off of one year (and inflation adjustment for a half-decade span or more) and apply the same rates for both across asset classes. Changes may pose a challenge if their impact needs to be revenue neutral. But over time, a regime that's easier to follow will surely enthruse more investors and pay off fiscally.

MY VIEW | WORLD APART

# India should rethink its stance on trade policy barriers

RAHUL JACOB



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

Thirty-nine years ago this month, trade economist Jagdish Bhagwati submitted an article on the industrial deregulation by the Rajiv Gandhi government to an op-ed editor at the *New York Times*. What the editor was especially baffled by was what Bhagwati had referred to as "broad-banding," a recent liberalization move back then that allowed companies to diversify from one product to another in their factories without seeking permission from New Delhi. The *New York Times* editor could not quite believe that any government would have wanted to restrict product diversification.

The 21st century equivalent of this continuing lesson in illogical economics has been the grand (own) goal of a self-reliant India. To raise tariffs, as we have successively done over much of the past decade on more than 3,000 items, and then expect to see exports grow by leaps and bounds is a peculiar fantasy, given that we have the example of East Asia's export-led growth of

the past few decades in our extended neighbourhood to go by.

This week, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in effect made a plea for a return to saner thinking in trade and industrial policy. It underlined how India's much higher tariffs on electronic components set it at a disadvantage against competitors such as Vietnam and, if anything, hinder the localization of components. It pointed out that our tariffs, which range from 10% to 15% on many electronic components and go as high as 27.5%, mean that "tariff-induced cost" often completely neutralizes the productivity-linked incentive scheme, and is made worse by the fact that we are not part of significant regional free trade agreements (FTAs). If the World Trade Organization had the capacity to adjudicate on companies suing their government for assorted tariff and non-tariff barriers, Indian exporters, from electronics to garments, would arguably have a pretty strong case.

The almost 50-page CII study also seeks a rollback of measures taken after Beijing's attacks along our border in 2020, calling for what it calls a "non-restrictive approach" towards technology transfers and foreign direct investment (FDI) from China as well as an easing of the inward movement of

Chinese skilled manpower. It points out that openness to component imports in industries that China and Vietnam sought to turn into export powerhouses has been a bedrock of their trade policies. The report notes that China, with its dominating share of trade in electronics—from iPads and mobile phones to computers and countless components—imports more than 40% of its electronic components. The reason is simple enough: making such products requires high-end components such as screens and cameras, as well as chips made in countries such as Korea and Taiwan.

I would argue for a much more calibrated approach than the CII does in liberalizing trade with China. It is not coincidental that most of the developed world is seeking to reduce its dependence on China—and they were not attacked along their border by Beijing in the midst of the covid pandemic. The question is how to do it in a systematic way and how can we quickly build strong links

with Taiwan and Korea that could help us acquire the domestic capabilities we lack. As economists Ajay Shah and Ila Patnaik wrote this week in *Business Standard*, "New non-tariff barriers against Chinese imports into India should be accompanied with numerous elements of liberalisation of engagement with other countries."

This, as the CII authors would likely argue, is easier to champion in an op-ed article than to carry out overnight in the real world, given China's huge share of manufacturing different inputs that are critical to industries as varied as pharmaceuticals, garments and electronics. But we need to think along those lines, by starting, as I wrote in these pages in 2021, with building much stronger ties with Taiwan, ([shorturl.at/1VNIv](https://www.shorturl.at/1VNIv)). What is abundantly clear is that the reflexive attempt after the attacks and incursions in Galwan in 2020 to reduce our dependence on China has not worked. As a 'Mint Primer' observed this week, our bilateral trade defi-

cit with China in the last financial year "touched a record \$85 billion, having doubled in the past four years."

We need a rethink of our counter-productive trade policies. If we adjusted our annual merchandise export totals to account for inflation, it would be apparent that we are going backwards. As the Global Trade Research Initiative, a think-tank, observes, China's garments exports last year were \$114 billion, Vietnam's \$82 billion and India's just under \$15 billion and declining. Undaunted, the relevant ministries pluck targets for textile exports out of the air; \$100 billion by 2030 is one government projection, \$600 billion by 2047 is another. A senior bureaucrat with considerable experience in trade policy points out that our garment industry is hobbled by high tariffs on viscose and polypropylene, both essential for so much of global athleisure demand. Unsurprisingly, my last orders from Marks & Spencer India, of T-shirts and trousers in cotton and a gift of a tuxedo made of man-made fibre, were from Bangladesh and Vietnam. Alarmed by this foreign invasion of my wardrobe, I am trying to help the self-reliance cause by buying handloom sarees for friends instead, but am well short of my lofty targets.



**SAMIRAN GHOSH**  
is a technology advisor and podcast host of 3 Techies Banter.

Paul Graham of Y Combinator recently shared an anecdote that perfectly encapsulates the challenge of regulating artificial intelligence (AI). When he asked someone helping the British government with it what they would regulate, the response was a refreshingly honest, "I'm not sure yet." As Graham noted, this might be the most intelligent thing anyone has said about AI regulation thus far.

AI creates a "pacing problem," first explained in Larry Downes' book *The Laws of Disruption*. He states that technology changes exponentially, but corresponding social, economic and legal systems change incrementally. Regulators are trying to govern Hogwarts with rules written for a Muggle school. Good luck stopping magical mischief with detention and a dress code.

And they are also faced with the Collingridge Dilemma, the regulatory equivalent of being stuck between a rock and a hard place. A 2023 paper in *Science, Technology & Human Values* analysed 50 cases of emerging technologies and found that in 76% of cases, early regulation stifled innovation, while in 82% of cases, late regulation failed to address societal impact adequately. Regulate too early, and you might accidentally outlaw the cure for cancer. Regulate too late, and you might find yourself in a *Black Mirror* episode.

Governments are aware of the need

for regulation, but it is a tough job. A 2022 report by the Belfer Center at Harvard University found that only 18% of US federal agencies have employees with both technical and policy expertise in AI. A similar study by the AI Now Institute found that only 23% of government agencies across OECD countries have this expertise. This lack of skills would be common around the world.

The EU's AI Act and the US's proposed AI Foundation Model Transparency Act, which mandate several disclosures to increase transparency of AI models, are welcome steps. But these measures are still inadequate.

So, who can help? Big Tech? Can we count on it to self-regulate? It sounds a little like asking foxes to guard the henhouse. So far, Big Tech has cared little about societal polarization, disinformation on its platforms, or the ecological footprint of its inventions. OpenAI, which has the word 'open' in its name, has repeatedly stated that it will not be transparent about most aspects of its flagship model, GPT-4. It is in it for profit. I would even argue that they don't even pay their fair share of taxes, but that's a debate for another day.

What options does that leave us with? In my view, we should try to make this a fairer fight. Empower ordinary citizens with tools to manage their data and control who has access to it. We need to equip ordinary citizens to protect themselves and, if possible, profit.

The US Second Amendment protects individuals' right to possess firearms and use them for purposes like self-defence within their homes. If this is true, then it is logical to assume that individuals should have the means to defend themselves against misuse of their personal data. It is digital self-defence.

Is this a radical solution? Not at all. Study-after-study has concluded so.

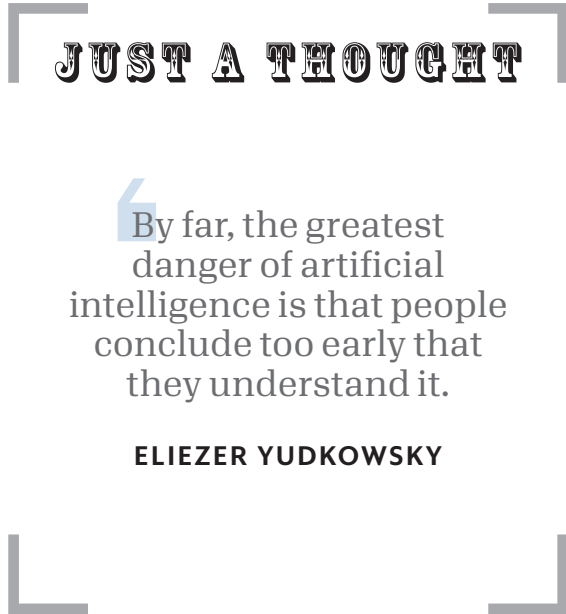
The 2022 Gartner Privacy Survey reveals that 75% of consumers want more control over their data. A 2023 report by the Oxford Internet Institute argues that user-centric data govern-

ance models are essential to ensure that AI is developed and deployed in a way that respects user privacy and autonomy. A 2023 report by the World Economic Forum emphasizes the importance of digital identity solutions in enabling individuals to control their data and participate in the digital economy.

So, it's not such a radical idea. And nothing new. These solutions could take the self-sovereign identity (SSI) approach. They could use zero-knowledge proofs (ZKPs). These are matters of detail. A 2023 study in *MIT Technology Review* demonstrated that decentralized identity systems could reduce data breaches by up to 70% while giving users granular control over their information. Furthermore, a pilot project by the EU found that user-controlled data-sharing increased willingness to participate in AI-driven services by more than 60%. It's like having a personal bouncer for your data—you decide who gets in and who gets rejected.

The cost of implementing such systems is significant, but manageable. While India's Aadhaar digital identity programme cost \$1 billion, a World Bank report estimates that appropriate agencies could set up a global decentralized identity infrastructure for \$25 billion. That's a fraction of the \$7 trillion Sam Altman is asking for to reshape the chip industry to power his AI dreams. The point is to stop businesses stealing more data from you and me only to misuse it with some dubious consent.

Regulating AI remains a challenge akin to nailing jelly to a wall. Providing citizens with tools to manage their data offers a pragmatic approach to mitigating risks and ensuring that AI development respects individual autonomy. As we navigate this rapidly evolving landscape, empowering users may be our best defence against the potential misuse of AI and our surest path to harnessing its benefits ethically and equitably. After all, in the high-stakes game of technological progress, it's better to be the player than a pawn.









# The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Rahul as LoP

Opposition banks on him to corner govt

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi has taken charge as the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha. This is the first constitutional position for Rahul, who has been in politics for the past two decades or so. No less important is the fact that the Congress, the single largest Opposition party, has got this post after a gap of 10 years. This is because of the party's good performance in the recent Lok Sabha elections after the back-to-back debacles in the 2014 and 2019 polls. It was shortly after the rout in 2019 that Rahul had stepped down as the Congress president. Since then, he has been reluctant to take up any party post. Speculation that he was not keen to assume the mantle of the LoP has now finally been laid to rest.

A resurgent Opposition is banking on Rahul to spearhead its fight against the BJP-led NDA government both in Parliament and outside. In his first speech as the LoP, he said the government had political power, but the Opposition also represented the voice of India's people. Congratulating Om Birla on being re-elected as the Lok Sabha Speaker, Rahul expressed hope that the Opposition would be allowed to speak in the House.

It will be Rahul's responsibility to walk the talk on his assurance that the entire Opposition would assist the Speaker in the functioning of the House. With the BJP no longer all-powerful in the Lower House, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family needs to seize every opportunity to corner the government on contentious issues such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register of Citizens and the Agnipath scheme. Much depends on him to ensure that the Opposition engages in a constructive debate with the government and resists the temptation of staging walkouts at the drop of a hat.

## Poor Class X results

HP should draw lessons to effect change

IN 30 government schools of Himachal Pradesh, not a single student could clear the Class X examination conducted by the state board of school education this year. In 116 schools, the pass percentage was less than 25 per cent. The standard intervention has been made — an explanation has been sought and teachers will be issued show-cause notices. What next? What is the plan to determine the administrative lapses or inadequacies in the teaching methods? How will the students be motivated to reappear, and those entering Class X have faith in the system? Accountability has to be fixed, whether of the teachers, the principals or those tasked with monitoring the running of schools. Zero in on what went wrong, take action, but don't stop at that. Channel the embarrassment to effect constructive change.

As an official aptly put it, something is seriously wrong somewhere if not a single student is able to obtain minimum pass marks. In some schools, the non-availability of teachers could be a major reason for the poor results. That said, schools with adequate staff strength, too, have fared badly. Concerns have been raised over the non-availability of teachers for specific subjects. Repeated below-par scores point to flaws in the teaching methodology. Boosting performance requires a concerted action plan, not a kneejerk reaction or an ad hoc arrangement. The policy of promoting every student up to Class VIII is also up for debate.

Data is being collected to closely examine the Class XII results, too. It's an appropriate time for a comprehensive audit of all government schools in the state — review their performance on various parameters, including staff and student strength, and make an assessment of the urgent requirements. Consistent feedback and a prompt response mechanism are systemic necessities.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

# The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JUNE 27, 1924

## 'No fratricidal war'

WE confess we do not find Mahatma Gandhi's latest statement regarding the Congress situation, made to an Associated Press interviewer, more reassuring than his previous statements on the same subject. Undoubtedly, Mahatmaji is emphatic in the avowal of his belief that he will be able to avoid "internal dissension". But as he himself says in the same breath, everything depends upon the construction that is put upon the words "internal dissension". If those words mean an actual split, the secession on the part of either the No-Changers or the Swarajists from the Congress in the sense of their not attending the annual session and not presenting on occasions a united front to the Government as Congressmen, we for our part never had any fear or misgiving. Mahatmaji is perfectly right in saying that both the Swarajists and the No-Changers are far too patriotic for such a course to commend itself to them. Nor is it a question of patriotism only. The superiority of the present Constitution of the Congress over its predecessor lies just in this that by making it possible for the minority of today to become the majority of tomorrow, it has for all time avoided the necessity of a split in this sense. And where no such necessity exists, it is a matter of ordinary common sense that each of the two parties has everything to gain by being within the Congress and everything to lose by going out of it. The influence, the prestige and the authority of the Congress are far too real for any group of Congressmen to light-heartedly forego the great advantage of being associated with it both for their own purpose and for the purpose of their patriotic activities.

# OPINION

## Canada's provocations know no bounds

Ottawa has not discouraged separatism among some of its misguided people



VIVEK KATJU  
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY  
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ON June 18, a year after the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia, the Canadian authorities allowed a 'mock trial' in front of the Consulate General of India (CGI) in Vancouver. According to a report carried by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), "an effigy of Modi, dressed in prison stripes, was paraded down the street in a makeshift cage before the mock trial began". Photographs of the encaged effigy were carried in the Canadian media.

This outrageous protest was organised by supporters of Nijjar, who was declared a terrorist under Indian laws a few years ago; he advocated violent secessionism. Once again, Canada ignored this while giving permission for the outrage against a foreign leader. So did the Canadian Parliament. It paid homage to Nijjar on his death anniversary. It is one matter for the Canadian Government to consider the killing of its national by proxies of foreign agents as a violation of its sovereignty and quite another for its Parliament to honour the memory of one who advocated violence. Canada simply does not get this basic fact.

Canada also does not appreciate what its veteran journalist Stephen Maher has noted in his recently published book on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, *The Prince*: "The dream of an independent Khalistan in Punjab, an idea long dead in India, lives on in the minds of many Canadian Sikhs." Instead of giving its people a reality check,



OUTRAGE: The anti-India protests by Hardeep Singh Nijjar's supporters have revealed Canada's laxity. AP/PTI

Canada has not discouraged violence and separatism among some of its misguided people.

India's reaction to Canada's recent provocations was subdued. The Ministry of External Affairs' spokesperson said on June 21: "We naturally oppose any moves giving political space to extremists and those advocating violence." He also reiterated the government's serious concern over Khalistani and anti-Indian activities in Canada. The spokesperson should have specifically denounced Canada for allowing the highly objectionable protest in front of the CGI. And, this occurred after Prime Minister Narendra Modi shook hands with Trudeau at the G7 summit in Italy recently. While Modi merely tweeted a photograph of his interaction, Trudeau told CBC on June 17: "Now that he is through his election, I think that there is an opportunity for us to engage, including on some very serious issues around national security and keeping Canadians safe and the rule of law". These are obviously code words for the Nijjar killing. Trudeau can hardly expect that Modi will be willing to 'engage' after what he allowed

PM Justin Trudeau has subordinated his India policy to his politics. Canadian Sikh votes are vital for his Liberal Party.

on Nijjar's death anniversary.

Trudeau has subordinated his India policy to his politics. Canadian Sikh votes are vital for his Liberal Party. Maher notes in *The Prince*: "The Liberals want Sikh votes. The Conservatives are after the Hindus." Besides, Trudeau is dependent on Jagmeet Singh's New Democratic Party for a majority in Parliament; his own party is in a minority. Thus, more than the claim that seeking secession is not against Canadian law, it is Trudeau's political compulsions that have consistently led him to

ignore India's concerns.

Soon after returning home following the G20 summit in New Delhi in September last year, Trudeau informed the Canadian Parliament that the country's agencies were "actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential link between agents of the Government of India" and Nijjar's killing. He gave no information or evidence to back his claim. Initially, he secured the support of the Opposition parties, but later they asked Trudeau to back his claim with evidence. On its part, India dismissed Trudeau's assertion as 'absurd'. Bilateral relations hit a new low as Canada expelled an Indian diplomat and India responded in kind. Later, India asked Canada to heavily reduce the strength of its diplomatic staff. Canada reluctantly complied. An early improvement in ties is unlikely, considering India's sharp remarks on the anniversary of the Air India's Kanishka bombing of June 23, 1985.

Some weeks ago, a sanitised report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Canada's Parliament was made

public. It claimed that after China, India interfered the most in Canada's internal affairs. The report asserted that India intervened through its diaspora, cultivating politicians and the media to manage criticism directed against it. Also, that it funded Canadian social and political actors. India rejected charges of seeking to influence Canadian affairs, including its elections. The fact is that seeking to build influence within a country is acceptable diplomatic activity. Yes, no country should interfere in the elections of another, but the truth is that all who can, try to do so subtly. This is the way the global diplomatic game is played and it is pointless for any country to get sanctimonious about it. All countries have to build their political defences against such activity.

Naturally, this is a far cry from fomenting violence against individuals or groups. Canada arrested three Indian nationals — Karan Brar, Kamalpreet Singh and Karanpreet Singh — on May 3 in connection with the Nijjar case. On May 12, it arrested a fourth Indian — Amandeep Singh. India has clarified that it does not pursue a policy of carrying out targeted killings or promoting violence abroad. It has stressed this in the Gupatwant Singh Pannun case, in which American law enforcement agencies claim that they foiled an attempt to kill the prominent Khalistani supporter. The US has succeeded in extraditing Nikhil Gupta, an Indian national, from the Czech Republic; its agencies assert that Gupta was acting on behalf of unnamed Indian officials to tie up the assassination bid.

Till now, despite the arrests, Canada has not named any individual having connections with Indian agencies or an Indian official in the Nijjar case. India will follow the trial of the arrested persons with great interest. National elections are due in Canada in October 2025. Trudeau can be expected to try to get the Nijjar trial over by then.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The thirsty crow and the thirsty man

KR BHARTI

PANDIT Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra* features many interesting stories, including the one about a thirsty crow. A crow lived in a jungle near a village. On a hot summer day, it flew over fields in search of water, but in vain. All sources of water had dried up. There was not a drop to drink. It was terribly tired but did not lose patience. At last, it reached a garden, where it saw a pitcher under a tree. It flew straight down to see if there was water inside. To its delight, the pitcher had water. The crow tried to push its beak into the pitcher. Sadly, it found that the neck of the vessel was too narrow and the water level low. The crow thought hard for a while. Then, looking around, it spotted some pebbles nearby. It suddenly had a brainwave. It started picking up pebbles and dropping them one by one into the pitcher. As more and more pebbles filled the vessel, the water level kept rising. Soon, it was high enough for the crow to drink. Its plan had worked! The bird quenched its thirst and flew away, leaving an everlasting moral — where there is a will, there is a way.

If Vishnu Sharma were to script a story of the present-day thirsty man, perhaps he would do it this way: It was a sizzling summer. The temperatures had broken all records. A man was very thirsty. Not a drop of water dripped from the taps at home. He requested his neighbour to give him a bucket of water. The latter lamented that he, too, was short of water. The man rushed to the *bowli* and the well, the traditional water bodies of the village. Alas, they had dried up. Having never bothered to maintain them, he had become fully dependent on piped water. But what could the poor pipes do when there were no sources of water?

Frustrated, he incited villagers to start an agitation against the government. He coined slogans against the government and hurled the choicest abuse at the authorities. But water eluded him. He convinced women activists to break empty pitchers in front of the office of the ruling party. The water still didn't come out of the taps. The state government blamed adjoining states for not releasing water from their barrages. The matter went to the highest court of the land, which advised the states to resolve the matter. But the states narrated their own woes of water shortage.

Ultimately, the government made an effort to supply water through tankers. But the demand outstripped the supply. The greedy man began to hoard water, even as others craved for every drop. There were brawls over water in the streets. Private contractors arranged hundreds of tankers to supply water. They were labelled 'money-making water mafia'. The poor man was left wondering: if the contractors can find a source of water, why not the government? After all, where there is a will, there is a way!

Sitting on a tree branch, the crow mocked the helpless man.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Glad tidings for Afghanistan

Refer to 'Afghan glory': just a few months after the Afghans prevailed over Pakistan, England and Sri Lanka in the ODI World Cup, they have scripted history by making it to the T20 semifinals for the first time. It is commendable that Rashid Khan's men managed to triumph over Bangladesh and send Australia home. The team's magical march to the knockout stage brings glad tidings to the citizens of Afghanistan, which has been mired in economic turmoil and political instability since the Taliban takeover. The Afghans' meteoric rise in the world of cricket is an inspirational story that should be celebrated.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

#### India on cusp of major growth

India stands on the cusp of remarkable growth. But its global aspirations must be balanced with awareness of regional challenges. The new government faces itself in a complex geopolitical landscape where agility and skilled diplomacy are crucial. While the country's economic trajectory has been promising, sustaining the momentum requires shifting from a business-friendly to a market-friendly approach, enabling broad-based growth. In foreign policy, strategic re-engagement with neighbours like China and Pakistan is essential. Additionally, India's role in alliances like Quad must be reassessed amid the evolving global dynamics. To maintain its stability and leverage on the world stage, India must stay ahead of the curve by addressing vulnerabilities with foresight and strategic planning.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

#### India's engagement with China

Apropos of 'India must remain ahead of the curve', the article underscores the need for India to deftly traverse the complex geopolitical landscape. Amid escalating global conflicts and shifting alliances, India must leverage its economic growth and stability to bolster its global standing. Addressing controversies like the alleged assassination plot involving Indi-

an agencies, which could strain its relations with the West, is crucial. As long-time rivals like the US and China seek rapprochement, India's strategic re-engagement with China and Pakistan becomes even more vital for regional stability. Balancing global aspirations with an acute awareness of immediate regional challenges is the need of the hour.

AMARJEET MANN, UNA

#### NTA's role under the scanner

Irregularities and paper leaks roiling premier examinations in the country have hit the credibility of the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the centralised system of examinations and admissions. The row has prompted the government to show the NTA chief the door. A key takeaway from the raging controversy is that there are flaws in the functioning of the NTA that should be looked into. Fixing the system is the first major challenge for the newly formed NDA government. Notably, this is not the first time that a nationwide entrance exam has sparked controversy. Even in NEET 2022, the CBI had to intervene over allegations of impersonation. The move to set up a high-powered committee to examine the NTA's functioning is welcome.

SK SINGH, BY MAIL

#### Punjab's fight against drugs

The transfer of thousands of police personnel in Punjab is a step towards eradicating the drug menace that has plagued the state for over a decade. It seems the debacle in the recent General Election has nudged the AAP-led state government to take a serious note of the rumblings of anger on the ground about the easy availability of drugs. The latest data released by the Narcotics Control Bureau shows that Punjab recorded the highest number of drug overdose deaths in the country last year. Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann has rightly warned that if any police official is found to be hand in glove with drug dealers, he will be dismissed from service.

LJ SINGH, BY MAIL



# India losing ground on global research front



**DINESH C SHARMA**  
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

INDIA is facing its worst-ever crisis in higher education. Admission tests for entry into medical colleges and research institutions have been affected by serious questions about the credibility of the process. Among the tests hit because of the leak of question papers is the qualifying test for research fellowships in national laboratories and lectureship in sciences in Indian universities. Top institutions like the Indian Institute of Science and Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) depend on the National Eligibility Test (NET) for their intake of entry-level research students. Qualifying in NET is a prerequisite for PhD admissions and teaching jobs in universities. The timely conduct of the examination and its integrity have a direct bearing on the future of higher education and research in India.

While the Central Government and its agencies grapple with the unprecedented situation, the global research landscape is changing fast, and India is lagging badly behind its neighbour China.

Two prestigious publications — the scientific journal *Nature* and the international weekly *The Economist* — have declared the emergence of China as a global research leader and a science superpower. India has long taken pride in possessing the world's third-largest pool of science and technology manpower and claimed success in sectors like atomic energy, space and vaccine development. This is changing. China has surged ahead of not just India but also the US and Europe as well in several key sectors and on important parameters like the publication of scientific papers.

The science and technology prowess of any nation is determined by the expanse of its higher education and research infrastructure and its ability to produce high-quality research. The output can be measured in many ways — the publication of scientific papers, the number of patents, international awards like the Nobel Prize, technology transfer to industry and contribution to society. The annual listing of research leaders, published by *Nature*, uses research publication as its main criterion. It ranks 500 institutions based on counts of high-quality research outputs in the last calendar year (January 1 to December 31, 2023). It is an indication of research performance at the institutional level. The list is based on the publication output in 145 natural science and



**ATTENTION:** The reports on China's leadership in science should serve as a wake-up call. ISTOCK

health science journals selected by an independent panel of scientists.

In the research output of countries, China is at the top and ahead of America, Germany, the UK, Japan, France, Canada and South Korea. India is at the ninth position on the list. It's good news that India figures among the top 10 countries in terms of high-quality research output, and its change in share from last year is marginally higher than that of China. However, the picture gets dismal for India if we look at the institutional-level output. Of the top 10 scientific institutions globally, seven are from China. The only non-China institutions in the top 10 are Harvard (at No. 2), the Max Planck Society

China has surged ahead of not just India but also the US and Europe on important parameters like the publication of scientific papers.

(ranked third) and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (seventh). The MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Stanford University are at 14th and 15th positions, respectively. The Chinese Academy of Sciences tops the chart.

Among the top 500 institutions, Indian research universities are ranked much lower — Indian Institute of Science (174), IIT Bombay (247), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as a whole (275), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (283), Homi Bhabha National Institute (296), Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Kolkata (321), IIT Guwahati (355), Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sci-

ence (363), IISER-Bhopal (379), IIT Kanpur (405), IIT Madras (407), IIT Delhi (428), IISER Pune (439), Jawaharlar Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (450) and the Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research (487).

Among the research subjects in which China leads the world are physical science, chemistry and earth and environment sciences, while America and Europe retain their lead in general biology and medical research. China dominates in research papers relating to applied sciences. China has invested hugely in some big science projects as well, like the world's largest filled-aperture radio telescope and a massive underground dark-matter detector. Several Chinese laboratories have dedicated groups working on quantum computing. In space, China is at least 10 years ahead of India, having sent its first manned spacecraft in 2003. It is already building a space station. Recently, it executed a robotic sample-return mission from the Moon.

How should India react to China being named the science superpower or a global leader in research? An easier option, which the government has exercised in the past 10 years with such indices, is to reject the research index or point holes in its methodology. But this is not going to change the situation on the ground or alter the global perception of Indian science.

A saner approach would be

to welcome the fact that India figures in the top 10 countries and seek ways to improve that position further. We also need to see what China has done right and where it has faltered. In recent years, the Dragon has invested heavily in initiatives like the China Nine League or Project 211 to develop its universities and government labs into world-class research institutions. The Indian initiative to develop IISERs as research universities has paid rich dividends, but we need to do much more to nurture research in middle-ranking universities. China has gone wrong with the initiative to provide cash incentives for the publication of research papers, which led to unethical practices. India should refrain from doing so.

The general stagnation on several fronts — research funding as a percentage of the GDP, funding mechanisms, creation of new research institutions, promotion of research in universities, and so on — is worrying. The institutions that are supposed to generate new ideas and public discourse — national science academies, the office of the Principal Scientific Adviser, the technology forecasting agency and others — appear to be in deep slumber or busy conducting celebratory events of the government by setting up selfie points. The reports on China's leadership in science should serve as a wake-up call.

# PLA reorganisation has implications for China's neighbours



**JAYADEVA RANADE**  
PRESIDENT, CENTRE FOR CHINA ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

APPARENTLY undeterred by the turbulence in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), sparked by the disappearance of China's then Defence Minister Gen Li Shangfu and the 'removal' soon thereafter of the Commander and Political Commissar of the PLA Rocket Force and at least 11 other Generals, Chinese President Xi Jinping has effected the largest reorganisation of the PLA since 2016. It demonstrated his grip on the PLA. It showed that the PLA officers have imbibed lessons from their close study of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. One major lesson has been the importance of propaganda and the ability to craft and shape popular perceptions. In Gaza, for example, Israel found that it lost global popular support, which had suddenly and overwhelmingly shifted in favour of Palestine. This was one backdrop that possibly precipitated the dissolution of the PLA Strategic Support

Force (SSF) and the establishment of the PLA Information Support Force (ISF).

On April 19, Xi announced the formation of the PLA ISF. He simultaneously announced the establishment of the PLA Aerospace Support Force and the PLA Cyberspace Support Force and the dissolution of the PLA SSF. The order of precedence for the new services, important for the hierarchy-conscious PLA, was indicated as thus: the PLA Aerospace Support Force, PLA Cyberspace Support Force, PLA ISF and the Joint Logistics Support Force. Each of these is now an independent entity at the Deputy Theatre Commander-level, reporting directly to the Central Military Commission (CMC). They have single missions and are focused on one aspect of warfare, which would be intended to make command and control, as well as their performance, more effective.

Among the reasons for the reorganisation would be that the capital-intensive PLA SSF encompassed a range of varied aspects of modern hi-tech warfare capabilities, probably making it difficult for the PLA SSF Commander to pay adequate attention to the individual specialised forces under his command. At a time of rapid advances in technology and battlefield tactics evolving on the battlegrounds in Ukraine and West Asia, which the PLA



**STRATEGY:** Chinese President Xi Jinping has effected the largest revamp of the PLA since 2016. REUTERS

leadership has been studying and analysing very carefully, this would be an impediment to the PLA becoming a world-class military capable of fighting and winning wars.

As the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia have also shown, the battle of perception has become very important in present-day warfare to win popular support and influence outcomes. Information warfare and shaping scenarios has been noticeably prominent and successful in both these conflict zones. Reorganisation of the SSF will ensure focused attention and better utilisation of funds for each force. Since all forces are specialised, they will establish separate training establishments so that professionally competent personnel are available.

As the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia have shown, the battle of perception has become very important in present-day warfare to win popular support.

The main functions of the PLA ISF, as presently discernible, includes communications, including satellite communications, analysis of battlefield environment and target data, and maintenance, disruption and monitoring of cyber and communications channels. Many of the entities integrated into the ISF are from the SSF.

Available information shows that the agencies integrated into the PLA ISF include the headquarters of the now-disbanded SSF, the Information and Communication Base, and the Information and Communication Brigades of the Xinjiang and Tibet Military Districts. Additionally, it encompasses the Target Data Battalion, Battlefield Environment Battalion, Communica-

tions Support Battalion, Spectrum Control Battalion, and the Intelligence Analysis Centre of the Joint Staff Department of the CMC. Certain functions and capabilities from the Battlefield Situation and Strategic Early Warning Sub-Centres of the Joint Operations Command Centre of the CMC, as well as the Battlefield Situation Battalion, Information Service Battalion, and Command Operations and Maintenance Battalion of the Theatre Command Joint Operations Centres, have also been integrated. Furthermore, some forces from the 35th Base and the Satellite Communications Centre of the former SSF, along with the Battlefield Environment Research Institute and the Network Information Research Institute of the Systems Engineering Research Academy of the Academy of Military Sciences, are now part of the ISF.

Most personnel of these formations and units would have been retained and moved to the ISF with their original units. The leadership elements would largely have been left undisturbed. The Commander and Political Commissar of the Aerospace Force and Cyberspace Force could similarly have been left in place.

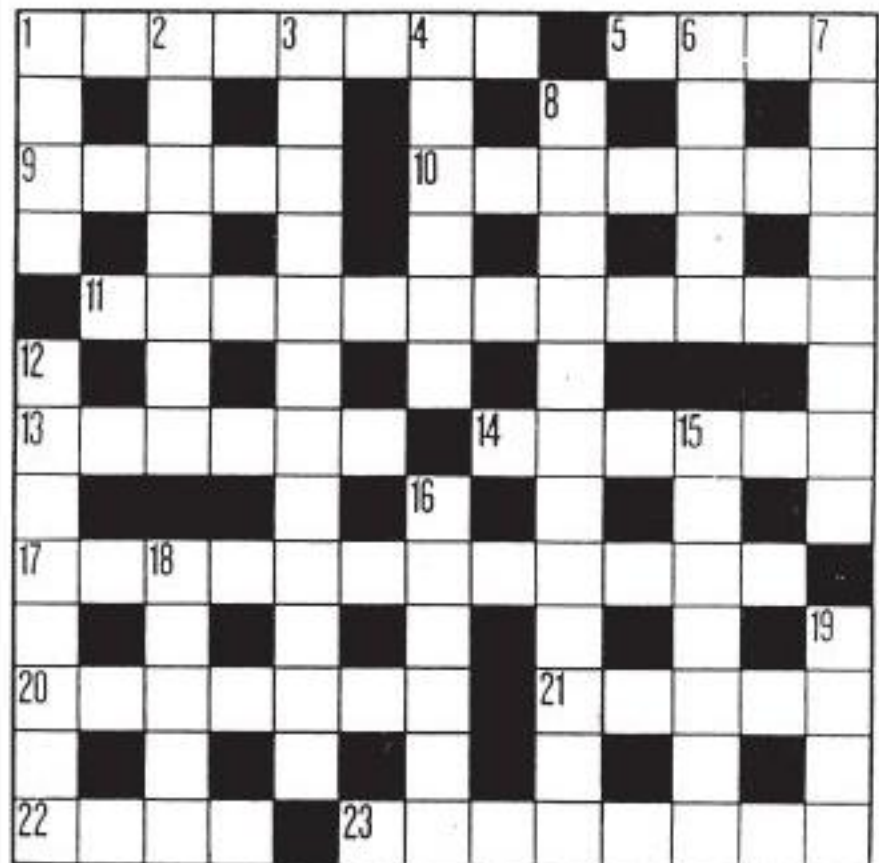
Earlier, speaking at the National People's Congress on March 7, Xi had focussed on the building of strategic capabilities in emerging

fields, the need to understand developments in emerging fields, and efficient integration of new productive forces and new combat forces.

Xi also underscored the importance of innovation and deepening reform of the national defence science and technology industry system. He stressed the importance of "integrating preparation for maritime military warfare, safeguarding of maritime rights and development of the maritime economy". He simultaneously highlighted the importance of a network space defence system and enhanced safeguards for national network security.

The reorganisation has implications for China's neighbours. Creation of the ISF implies increased attention to signals and electronic monitoring, interception and disruption capabilities. It will probably be responsible for disinformation campaigns and will enhance its cyber warfare capabilities. The ISF will be under pressure to show results, and cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns against targets — Indian, South Asian, South East Asian, etc. — can be expected to increase. The Dalai Lama's establishment would equally be a target. An important area of focus for the new force will be the maritime domain and particularly the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea.

QUICK CROSSWORD




**ACROSS**  
1 Person devoted to reading (8)  
5 To barter (4)  
9 Disconcerted (5)  
10 Conditional stipulation (7)  
11 Apparently from nowhere (3,2,3,4)  
13 Adroit (6)  
14 Pamper (6)  
17 The practical details (4,3,5)  
20 Fall rapidly (7)  
21 Bring up (5)  
22 Cast off (4)  
23 Recklessly extravagant (8)

**DOWN**  
1 Boxing match (4)  
2 Little known (7)  
3 Cordially (4,4,4)  
4 Attributed character (6)  
6 Revolve at speed (5)  
7 A quality (8)  
8 Optimistic (4-8)  
12 A strong Dutch liquor (8)  
15 Session (7)  
16 Senior journalist (6)  
18 Armistice (5)  
19 Set of tuned bells (4)

**Yesterday's solution**  
**Across:** 1 Take sides, 8 Poser, 9 Agitate, 10 Mirage, 11 Cringe, 12 White lie, 15 Betrayal, 18 Forged, 20 Hourly, 21 Stilted, 22 Lucid, 23 Eradicate.  
**Down:** 2 Augur, 3 Extent, 4 In the way, 5 Sprint, 6 Assault, 7 Green-eyed, 11 Cubbyhole, 13 Ill-fated, 14 Staunch, 16 Allude, 17 Frolic, 19 Event.

SU DO KU



**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**

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

**CALENDAR**  
JUNE 27, 2024, THURSDAY  
■ Shaka Samvat 1946  
■ Aashadh Shaka 6  
■ Aashadh Purnimite 14  
■ Hijari 1445  
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 6, up to 6.40 pm  
■ Ayushman Yoga up to 12.28 am  
■ Shatbhisha Nakshatra up to 11.37 am  
■ Moon enters Pisces sign 4.32 am

FORECAST

SUNSET:	THURSDAY	19:28 HRS
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	05:24 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	32
New Delhi	38	30
Amritsar	44	31
Bathinda	43	35
Jalandhar	42	34
Ludhiana	42	32
Bhiani	40	34
Hisar	40	29
Sirsa	42	35
Dharamsala	32	24
Manali	26	15
Shimla	24	17
Srinagar	33	19
Jammu	40	31
Kargil	29	16
Leh	25	10
Dehradun	35	25
Mussoorie	24	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C



# Calibrated support

MSP hikes on oilseeds, pulses, millets are welcome

After deficient rains last year in both the South-West and North-East monsoons which dampened agricultural output, a stalling monsoon this year has delayed sowing operations. Therefore, the Centre’s announcement of Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for the upcoming kharif is timely, ensuring that farmers have visibility on prices if not on yields. Hikes in MSP have been quite handsome for most crops at 6-13 per cent over the previous year.



Two factors seem to have dictated the fixation of crop-wise MSPs. The need is to step up output of oilseeds and pulses — particularly tur which is an exclusively kharif crop — where India is highly import dependent. There were significant reverses in the output of pulses (down 6 per cent), oilseeds (down 4 per cent), maize (down 8 per cent) and coarse cereals (down 4 per cent) last season. MSP increases this year seem designed to encourage farmers to shift to higher acreages of ragi (11.5 per cent increase in MSP), tur (7.8 per cent increase) and oilseeds such as sunflower seed (7.7 per cent), sesamum (7.3 per cent) and nigerseed (12.7 per cent). In line with poll promises, MSPs for the current year also factor in margins of 50 per cent or more over cultivation costs (including family labour) for each crop. MSPs for crops such as bajra, tur and maize in fact factor in margins of 54-77 per cent.

MSP announcements do influence sowing decisions. But policymakers should bear in mind that they alone are not sufficient to nudge farmers away from paddy to other crops; they need to be backed by significant procurement by the state. While there is a well-oiled Central as well as State procurement machinery for paddy and wheat to feed the PDS (Public Distribution System), procurement mechanisms for other crops such as millets, oilseeds haven’t yet evolved. Last year, well over a third of the marketable surplus for paddy and over 40 per cent of the surplus for pulses were mopped up by official agencies, but maize, millets and oilseeds saw less than 6 per cent of their marketable surplus being procured. To better meet the nutritional needs of lower income households, the PDS in any case needs to diversify beyond cereals into millets, pulses and edible oils.

Then there is the problem of uneven distribution of benefits from state procurement even with respect to rice and wheat. As the State cannot procure the entire marketable surplus of any crop or ensure even purchases across farmer segments or regions, the real solution to remunerative prices for farmers lies in them being able to freely market their produce to private buyers, both in the domestic and export markets. For this the Centre needs to prevail upon States to lower the barriers that impair inter-State movement of produce. Farmers need timely access to market intelligence and must be empowered vis-à-vis intermediaries and large corporate buyers, through collective initiatives such as co-operative societies and farmer-producer organisations.

## FROM THE VIEWSROOM.

### Leader of Opposition must be on the ball

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

Now that he has been elected Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, will Rahul Gandhi hug Narendra Modi and wink? Remember that ridiculous episode in February 2019? Jokes aside, as LoP now he will be a member of several committees that also have the prime minister as a member. They will have to sit across or around a table to thrash out a consensus on many contentious issues. How Rahul Gandhi conducts himself in committee will be closely watched. It’s one thing to grandstand on the floor of the House and quite another to do it in a committee. The LoP position isn’t a consolation prize for not being prime minister. The record so far is that Rahul Gandhi has often repudiated in public what Mallikarjun Kharge as LoP had agreed to in committee. Indeed, no one has forgotten how he dramatically tore up a Cabinet decision on corruption of his

party’s own government in 2013. The question that’s begging to be asked is if Rahul Gandhi will act as a more mature man now, or whether he will continue to be childish. The biggest problem he has in this regard is that he has zero administrative experience. He steadfastly refused to become a minister after the Congress came to power in 2004. More importantly, he has grown up in a family that was privately very contemptuous of politicians. Stories of that abound. That atmosphere, say those who know him, has shaped his conduct and behaviour. Sonia Gandhi, with her European upbringing, is respectful of other people. She is never discourteous as Rahul can be, as Hemanta Biswa Sarma found out when he was in the Congress and had gone to see him. The LoP in committee needs to be fully aware of details, effects and consequences of whatever is under consideration. That requires serious application of mind. So far, Rahul Gandhi has not surprised us with an exhibition of that quality. Maybe he will, now.



VIPIN SONDHI

That manufacturing is a key pillar for a Viksit Bharat in 2047 is a given. Most economists, barring a few, are in agreement on the criticality of manufacturing for a nation to become developed. Job creation should be targetted as the biggest outcome of the transformation of India into a manufacturing powerhouse, as we need to convert the power of our young demography into a massive dividend. Therefore, for India to reach a GDP of \$30 trillion from \$3.6 trillion today, manufacturing will need to contribute a minimum of 20 per cent, preferably 25 per cent, of GDP by 2047. Up from a stagnant 13.17 per cent in the last four decades. That would make its contribution from \$0.5 trillion today to \$6-7.5 trillion in 2047.

The previous government had taken several steps to provide a fillip to manufacturing, including creating champions in 14 sectors through the PLI schemes. Corporate taxes for new manufacturing units had been reduced considerably. Taking it further, the BJP in its recent manifesto has pledged to transform India into a global manufacturing hub and boost employment in crucial sectors such as electronics, defence, mobile, pharma, textiles and automotive.

While the Centre, possibly through the Budget in mid-July, will continue the thrust towards the transformation, the action on the ground takes place in the States. The implementation of central policy has to be suitably adapted by the States and then executed. In the States. At their districts. That is where the real challenge lies and must be addressed.

The appointment of a ‘sherpa-like’ person of high credibility at the Centre and individually in key manufacturing States could be a pivotal step in orchestrating this transformation of India as a manufacturing powerhouse, by creating for businesses a pathway through the complexities of India’s myriad — as each State has its own — manufacturing ecosystems.

Josh Linkner, a best selling author, delineates five powerful lessons borrowed from the original sherpas, who we all know as a part of the Tibetan ethnic group with their rich culture, climbing skills and ability to endure high altitudes with little oxygen. These lessons are: leading others to the top; detailed planning; expecting and preparing for setbacks; walking with the team; and being a great listener.

Therefore, selection of the right person(s) as sherpas, at the Centre and the States, will be critical. They must command respect at the Centre and within their respective States, by having delivered in manufacturing and/or industrial policy in the past.

India’s federal structure: Requires



# Making India a global manufacturing powerhouse

WAY AHEAD. Appoint a ‘sherpa-like’ person of high credibility at the Centre and in each of the key manufacturing States

alignment not only of policies, but also on seamless implementation between the Centre and the States, i.e., a coordinated approach to leveraging opportunities and overcoming challenges at various levels. While the Centre’s sherpa would be intimately involved in formulating policies at the Centre, the State sherpas would tailor these policies to the needs and requirements of their respective States and convert them into a plan for implementation. Both the Centre and States would, therefore, have the ownership to see these policies through to implementation.

**Policy formulation:** Facilitation thereof would be a key role of the Central sherpa in close collaboration with the State sherpas. We have to go beyond the PLI scheme applicable to the champion sectors already mentioned. While mobile phones have done well, the other sectors have until now underperformed. It would be important to understand the causes thereof and smoothen the bumps. The sherpas must work with industry chambers, especially those representing MSMEs, to facilitate policy formulation, adaption and implementation.

Having said that, what is required is deeper reforms, specifically in land and labour. Land (acquisition and requisitioning of property) and labour fall under the Concurrent List and are politically sensitive. Land itself falls under the State list. Amongst the biggest contributions of the sherpas would be to

The sherpas must work with industry chambers, especially those representing MSMEs, to facilitate policy formulation, adaption and implementation.

facilitate reforms in land and labour, even if in stages.

**Infrastructure and logistics :** Businesses prefer plug-and-play industrial parks as industrial parks come with requisite infrastructure and pre-approved clearances. This allows businesses to start production in the shortest possible time frame, as also focus their energy and resources on innovation. The Mahindra World City at Chennai and Jaipur under the public-private-partnership are good examples. The State sherpas could do well to facilitate creation of many, many more industrial parks, preferably under the PPP mode, while ensuring that the connectivity to-and-from these parks to the State and National Highways is world class.

Similarly, the PM’s Gati Shakti programme for multi-modal connectivity which expects to reduce average logistics cost to 8-9 per cent by 2030 from 13 per cent today, and further to a globally competitive 6-7 per cent in due course, must be expedited to completion within the targeted time-frame or earlier.

**Ease of and cost of doing business:** One of the greatest contributions that the sherpas can make is to help dismantle our cumbersome regulatory framework, particularly at the States. Simplicity, together with self-regulation must be the objective. Manufacturing companies — both domestic and foreign — will be attracted to States with the highest ease and lowest cost of doing business as it makes them more competitive.

**R&D and innovation:** This forms the foundation for the success of the transformation to a manufacturing powerhouse. The sherpa at the Centre would do well to work with the Department of Science and Technology, the Principal Scientific Advisor, industry

chambers and directors of the institutes of higher learning, to understand and facilitate the implementation of the National Research Foundation Bill, 2023 and the ₹1-lakh crore corpus to promote technological innovation in sunrise sectors as announced in the interim budget in February 2024.

These juxtaposed with solutions to bridging the valley of death — that is, from Technology Readiness Levels 3 to 7, when most ideas do not make it from the experimental proof-of-concept to prototype demonstration in an operational environment.

Taken together, these will go a long way in enhancing the national investment in R&D from our 0.7 per cent to the developed world’s 2.5 per cent.

**Trade and export:** A manufacturing powerhouse by definition means a global player. The central sherpa would do well to work with the Commerce and Industry Ministry, the Ministry of External Affairs and the chambers of industry to identify key export markets — by product — and facilitate prioritising of and negotiation of Free Trade Agreements. Through autonomous organisations like the Quality Council of India, the sherpas could ensure that Indian manufacturers, especially MSMEs, meet global quality standards and certifications.

The appointment of the sherpas at the Centre and States can go a long way in addressing the multi-faceted challenges facing the manufacturing sector in its quest to become globally competitive. We have the leadership, the desire, the will, the ambition and the talent to transform India into a global manufacturing powerhouse. We need better seamless coordination amongst all stakeholders.

The writer is Independent Director, and former MD and CEO, Ashok Leyland and JCB India. Views are personal

# Residual dividend policy is gaining traction

It makes available more funds for capex, acquisition and R&D, thereby helping companies boost growth and profits

P Saravanan  
A Paul Williams

Dividend policy, a critical aspect of corporate finance, has witnessed significant shifts in recent years. Prominent business houses, both globally and in India, are increasingly adopting a residual dividend policy, a strategy that prioritises investment in growth opportunities before distributing profits to shareholders. Let us look at the evolving trends in dividend policy, the rationale behind the shift towards residual dividends, and its implications for investors.

Dividend paid by the company is not an expense in accounting terms, rather it is an appropriation of profits to the owners of the company. Dividend is always paid as a percentage on the face value of the share. As per the SEBI’s current Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements it is mandatory for every company to disclose their dividend policy in their annual report and website. Traditionally, companies adhered to stable dividends, aiming to provide consistent payouts to shareholders. However, the dynamic business environment, characterised by

rapid technological advancements and evolving market conditions, has prompted a re-evaluation of this approach. Residual dividend policy, which emphasises reinvesting profits into the business to fuel growth, has gained traction among major corporations.

At its core, residual dividend policy entails prioritising capital expenditures and working capital requirements. After these financial obligations are met, any remaining profits, or residuals, are distributed to shareholders as dividends. This approach aligns with the company’s growth objectives, ensuring that sufficient funds are available for reinvestment in profitable ventures.

**RATIONALE BEHIND THE SHIFT** The shift towards residual dividend policy is driven by several factors. It allows companies to reinvest a larger portion of their earnings into growth opportunities, such as research and development, capital expenditures, and acquisitions. This could lead to higher long-term profitability and increased shareholder value. Further, this policy provides flexibility in dividend payouts. If a company has lucrative investment projects, it could allocate more funds



BENEFICIAL. Less payouts more payoffs

towards it, while reducing dividends. Conversely, if investment opportunities are limited, it can distribute more dividends. Investors often perceive companies with residual dividend policies as financially disciplined and focused on long-term growth, which can boost investor confidence.

An examination of top business houses reveals a clear trend towards residual dividend policy. Companies like Reliance, TCS, and others have consistently prioritised reinvestment in their businesses, resulting in substantial growth and shareholder value creation. Further, tech companies, distribute a relatively small portion of their earnings

as dividends, opting to allocate a significant portion towards research and development, and acquisitions. While residual dividend policies offer several benefits, it is important to consider their potential drawbacks. Dividend payouts can vary significantly year to year, which may not be attractive to investors seeking consistent income. Fluctuating dividends could confuse investors who are looking for stable dividend.

The adoption of residual dividend policy has significant implications for investors. While it may result in fluctuating dividend payouts, it could lead to long-term capital appreciation as the company’s investments drive growth and profitability. Investors seeking stable income may prefer companies with established dividend track records, but those with a longer-term investment horizon may find companies who adopt residual dividend policy, more appealing. As companies focus on innovation, growth, and long-term sustainability, residual dividend policy has emerged as a strategic tool for achieving these objectives.

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

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### Election of Speaker

This refers to ‘Om Birla re-elected as Lok Sabha Speaker in unanimous voice vote’ (June 26). It was an appreciable gesture on the part of the Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi to congratulate the NDA nominee Om Birla on his re-election as the Speaker of the 18th Lok Sabha. It’s a different matter that Rahul Gandhi also went on to gainfully utilise this opportunity to highlight the crucial role of the Opposition in representing the voice of the people within the House. Let us hope that both our elected representatives will genuinely ‘rise to

the occasion’ and the nation will no longer witness the frequent walkouts by the Opposition even as the same is represented by a much stronger INDIA bloc this time around.

SK Gupta  
New Delhi

### Address rural distress

The new government at the Centre has its tasks cut out to address the mounting rural distress and continuing high food prices that continue to plague the Indian economy. Higher fuel and food prices have driven up inflation in rural markets more than in urban

areas over the last 18 months, while growth in agriculture production has tapered, largely owing to unseasonal rains. With global warming-induced climate change resulting in lower yield, it is time to focus more on developing climate-resilient crops.

M Jeyaram  
Sholavandan, TN

### Compensation mechanism

With reference to ‘The Champerty route to consumer justice’ (June 26), this compensation settlement mechanism is really cost-effective and speedy. Apart from the pre-financing benefits extended by

the attorneys, the process relieves attending of courts by the claimant. However, in India it is not mandatory to engage an attorney in consumer cases and the filing process is simple and cost-free. But attendance is a requirement.

Necessary regulatory amendments may be brought out to encourage redress through the Champerty route, considering the immense benefits attached to it.

Sitaram Popuri  
Bengaluru

### Consumer interest

Apropos ‘Glitches galore’ (June 26),

the Supreme Court mandated establishment of a self-declaration mechanism for advertisements directing broadcasters, print and digital media to file self-declaration certificates of compliance before publishing or broadcasting any advertisement is welcome. Technical glitches and procedural issues have to be sorted out and consumers should be insulated from deceitful and exaggerated advertisements, particularly on healthcare, gaming and share market

Vinod Johri  
Delhi



# What next for our cities?

Greater thrust must be given to public transport

Kala S Sridhar

What should the urban development agenda of the new government be? Very few countries of the world have become developed and reached a per capita income of \$10,000 without at least becoming 60 per cent urban.

Where are Indian cities placed? Taking a global perspective of our cities, we note that they are like cities in the US in terms of mobility: Public transport is more a feature of large cities both in India and the US, when compared with smaller cities in both the countries where mobility is increasingly driven by own private vehicles. Based on a survey (<https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1348453/most-common-modes-of-transportation-for-commuting-in-india>), as of March 2024, nearly 43 per cent of respondents reporting using their own car in the first place, followed by those owning a motor bicycle at the second place (34 per cent), and only 31 per cent of Indian commuters reportedly used public transport, ranking it in the third place after cars and motor bicycles.

For comparison, in the US, the proportion of commuters using public transport accounted for a meagre 5 per cent as of 2019, based on the American Community Survey (ACS). Per a Eurobarometer survey, 49 per cent of people in larger cities of the European Union cities used public transit to commute to work, while in the case of some cities like Vienna, nearly 74 per cent of commuters used public transit. So we find Indian commuters between those in the US and Europe in their use of public transport.

The new government should consider the peculiar features of Indian cities while devising policies. While Indian cities like Bengaluru are projected to have a per capita GDP of nearly \$12,600 by 2030, as per McKinsey (2010), Bengaluru and Pune are designated among the sixth and seventh most congested cities in the world, in terms of their vehicular traffic.

The average Indian city's per capita income is about ₹63,945 (about \$800), based on data from the Global Human Settlements Layer.

So paradoxically enough, poverty is also relatively more urbanised in India now with steadily increasing urbanisation. For several reasons, urban



**PUBLIC TRANSPORT.** Driving jobs PICHUMANI K

poverty is more challenging than rural poverty because of social exclusion, food insecurity, environmental challenges and housing unaffordability.

We do not yet have estimates of urban poverty which are significant for their effects on the use of public transport. Given our cities' income, it would benefit a significantly high proportion of our urban poor and the middle class to have access to public transport.

There is evidence that the existence of public transport ensures unconditional access to jobs, which is important for ensuring growth with jobs.

The evidence from Hurricane Sandy, based on recent research, is that when it cut off parts of New York City from public transit, it affected severely prospects of workers who were looking for jobs. We need to make the various parts of our sprawling cities accessible to the poor and middle class via public transport.

### MIXED ZONING

To encourage proximity of residence and workplaces and minimal time spent commuting, mixed use zoning with multiple land uses would be conducive, even while cities in the US typically use low density residential zoning.

Indian cities are also organic, with many informal settlements and little planning. So master planning exercises, which currently span over a few years, must be completed in minimal time and not be very detailed. Indian cities are also unique in their strong land use regulations such as floor area ratio.

The new government can carry forward the agenda of public transport for growth with jobs, appropriate land use regulations and mixed use zoning for cities.

The writer is professor, Institute for Social and Economic Change, and a visiting Honorary Fellow, Stanford University's Center for South Asia.



AASHEERWAD DWIVEDI

Over the next few decades, most of the countries, including India will go through a significant energy transition to achieve their Net Zero targets. This would entail a steady reduction in the share of fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas, along with increasing share of greener sources of energy in the overall energy portfolio.

India has pledged to move to Net Zero by 2070, though the energy transition is happening at an even faster pace. The installed solar energy capacity stands at 82.63 GW as of April 2024, increasing by 30 times in the last nine years.

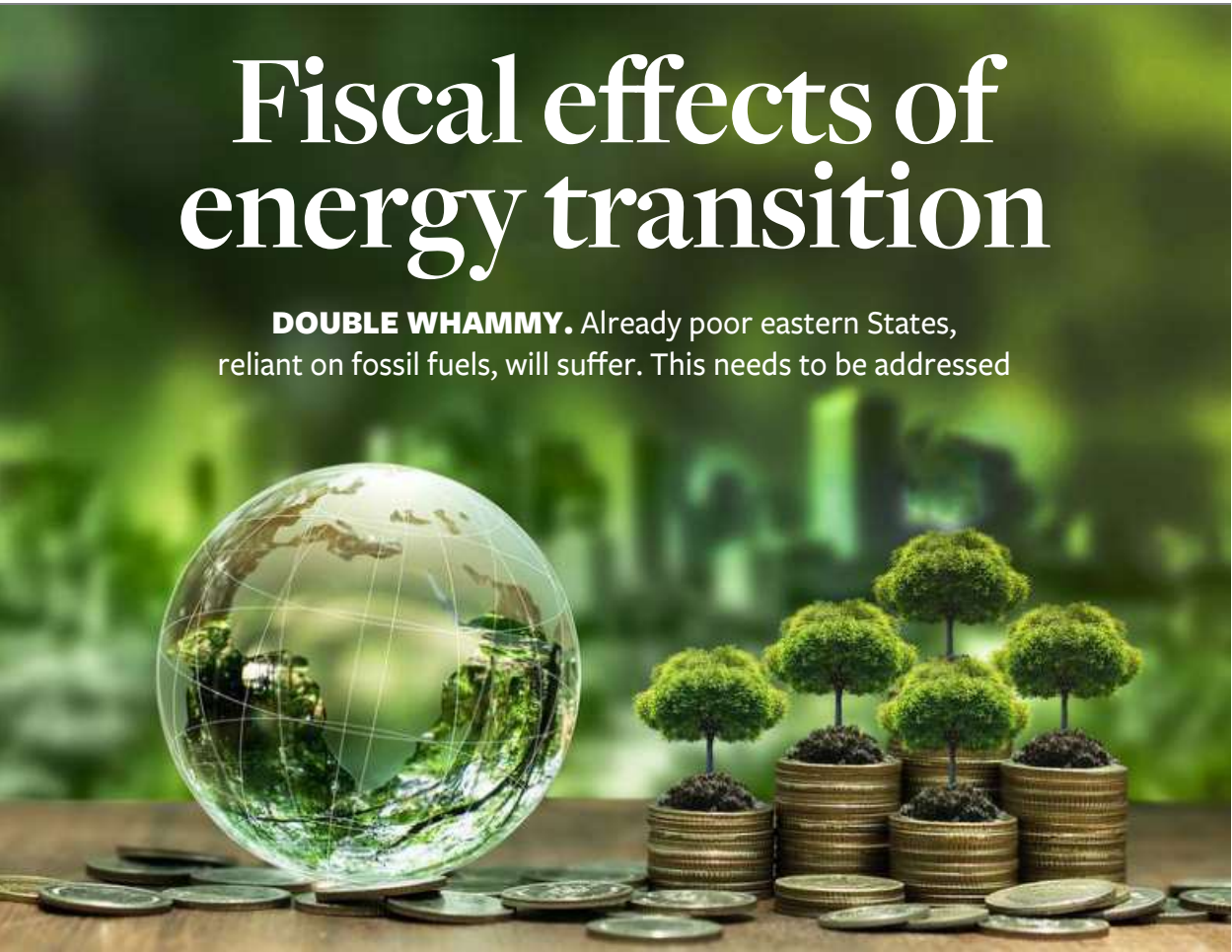
Though this energy transition is important and inevitable, it is bound to lead to disruptions. One impact that is often not appreciated fully is the 'Fiscal Impact' given India's high dependence on fossil fuel revenue. Both the Centre and State governments impose a multitude of taxes, cesses, duties and even non-tax levies such as dividends and royalties on fossil fuels. And the amount collected is not insignificant.

Bhandari and Dwivedi (2021) (<https://shorturl.at/V5Jo7>) estimated that revenue collected from these sources amounted to approximately 3.2 per cent of GDP in 2019-20, out of which 2 per cent was for the Centre and 1.2 per cent was for States. To understand its importance, this amounted to 20.8 per cent of revenue for the Union Government and 8.3 per cent for the State governments.

Going forward, with the transition from fossil fuels, the revenue from these sources will decline correspondingly. The same paper estimated that if the transition progresses at the current pace, total revenue would decline to 1.8 per cent by 2030 and 1 per cent of GDP by 2040. So the Centre and States will soon have to figure out how to raise revenue from alternative sources.

The challenge doesn't end here. Another issue is that not all States will be affected uniformly. Bhandari and Dwivedi (2022) (<https://shorturl.at/8wVN3>) found that currently States such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh obtain 22-23 per cent of their Own revenues from coal, oil, and natural gas combined.

In contrast, Gujarat, Haryana,



GETTY IMAGES

Karnataka get 14-15 per cent and Delhi gets 8 per cent. So, naturally the fiscal impact of moving away from the fossil fuels will vary widely across States, with some States taking much bigger hit.

### STATE VARIATIONS

Now this would have been less problematic had the renewable capacity of States been similar. However, that is not the case as the renewable energy potential is largely dependent on geographical conditions.

States like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan etc. located in the western region have highest renewable capacity in the country. On the other hand, the eastern States like Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand, which are also the ones more dependent on revenues from

**A GST-like compensation formula for the eastern States can be considered by the Centre and it can seek the help of the Sixteenth Finance Commission for this.**

fossils, have much lower renewable capacity. Hence, it is clear that the ongoing transition would create winners and losers among States.

Additionally, States which will lose out more on the revenue front are mostly located in eastern part of the country with relatively poor socio-economic conditions.

On the other hand, States in the western part are more comfortably placed, with relatively better socio-economic status.

There is also no possibility of levying tax on renewable energy to compensate for revenue loss in the near future. States on the contrary provide subsidies for installation of solar panels, windmills etc. to promote the transition. Hence, States with lower capacity at the moment may have to bear a bigger fiscal burden on that front too.

This shortfall in own revenue would mean that their reliance on fund transfers from the Centre would increase, creating additional impact in central government finances. This can lead to some key issues.

In fact, the States which will be negatively affected may not cooperate fully in the green transition. More

importantly, if the policy makers do not device a mechanism to compensate the 'disadvantaged' States in time, it might have serious political economy consequences.

But for the Centre this will not be an unfamiliar situation as it faced such issues during GST implementation, where the GST compensation played a key role in States' acceptance.

Union government will need to do something similar in this case as well to ensure that not only the States are on board but also minimise socio-economic disruptions.

The Sixteenth Finance Commission can come up with a strategy. Finance Commissions use different criteria for the interstate distribution of tax sharing across States in order to maintain horizontal equity reflecting its need in terms of population, area, infrastructure distance etc.

The variance in impact on energy transition between States can be considered as a factor while deciding the devolution formula to ensure horizontal equity.

The writer is Assistant Professor of Economics at Faculty of Management Studies, Delhi University

thehindubusinessline.

## TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 27, 2004

### RBI tightens norms for appointment for pvt banks' directors

The Reserve Bank of India has tightened norms for appointment of directors on the boards of private sector banks through a process of checks and balances. In a circular addressed to CMDs and CEOs of private sector banks, RBI has stated that private banks should undertake due diligence to determine the suitability of the persons for appointments/continuing to hold appointment as a director on the boards.

### Paswan rules out Salem Steel sale

The Union Steel Ministry is considering two major decisions for Steel Authority of India (SAIL). First, it might merge Indian Iron and Steel Company Ltd (IISCO) with SAIL and second, it might drop the idea of privatising Salem Steel Plant. Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Steel Minister, announced this at a press conference in Kolkata after visiting Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP).

### US State pays Tatas \$1 million for scrapping deal

The US state of Indian has paid nearly \$1 million to Tata America International Corporation, a subsidiary of Tata India, for prematurely scrapping an outsourcing contract last year.

# MSMEs: The digital path to sustainable growth

Harjit Singh

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, embracing technology is a necessity for the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) sector to thrive and sustain growth.

This sector plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship, especially in semi-urban and rural areas, providing employment opportunities and driving economic growth. It also significantly contributes to the country's GDP and exports. But to stay economically relevant, the sector needs to leverage technology for growth.

To improve operational efficiencies and reduce costs, a lot of MSMEs commenced digitising their operations. Nonetheless, the evolving digital landscape has highlighted the need for a more comprehensive, integrated approach. This shift enables the democratization of digital transformation for MSMEs, creating a digital-first ecosystem that drives sustainable growth and customer centricity.

MSMEs' adoption of digital payment systems has streamlined transactions, reduced processing times, and minimised errors. This shift towards

digital payments is evident, with over 72 per cent of transactions now being conducted digitally.

Equally important is the need of MSMEs to secure their data and networks against sophisticated cyber threats. With limited budgets, MSMEs can benefit from structured, managed cybersecurity systems that protect operations comprehensively and cost-effectively.

Incorporating digital technologies fosters innovation, enabling MSMEs to develop new products and services tailored to market demands.

Furthermore, digital adoption enhances resilience, allowing MSMEs to quickly adapt to market changes and disruptions. Technologies like cloud computing, AI, and big data analytics enable MSMEs to analyse market trends, customer preferences and operational bottlenecks, allowing them to make informed decisions quickly. This agility is crucial for staying ahead of competitors and responding to market demands effectively.

Moreover, technology adoption facilitates better risk management.

While security remains a primary concern for businesses, integrating advanced connectivity solutions can



**MSMES.** Digital pathways ISTOCK

significantly enhance an organisation's ability to manage data securely and efficiently. Enterprises can leverage secure connectivity solutions to transform communication networks by deploying the cloud-native contact centre solutions.

This implementation can establish a robust business communication framework across their offices, improving customer centricity and ensuring continuous connectivity. Cloud solutions with dedicated and secured features, facilitates faster customer connects and keeps them connected to business representatives at all times.

Incorporating financial inclusion initiatives is crucial for empowering

MSMEs to thrive in the digital era. Cloud migration presents tangible financial advantages for MSMEs, enabling them to optimise operational costs while simultaneously expediting the introduction of new products and services to the market.

Moreover, MSMEs stand to gain considerable benefits from embracing cloud technology. One of the primary drivers behind this trend is the desire to enhance security compliance measures.

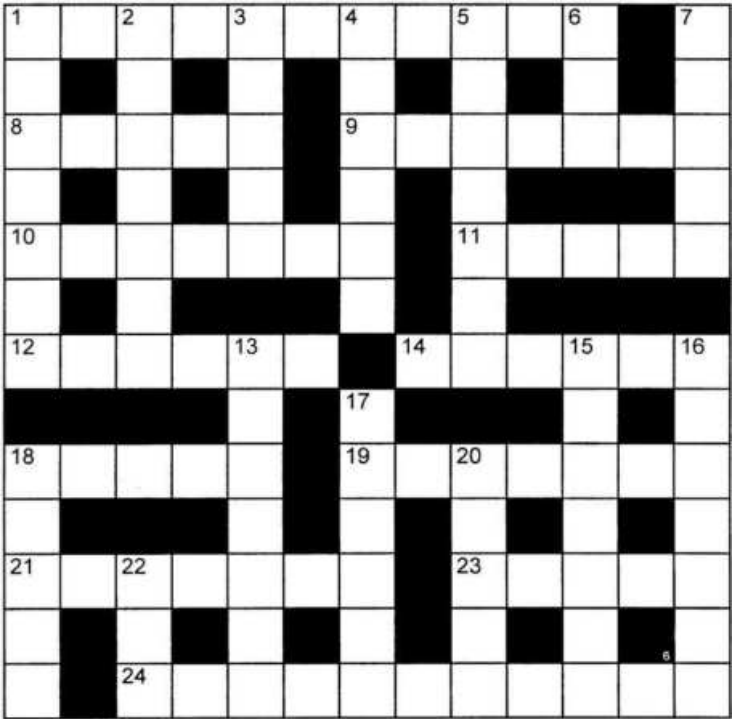
### REALISING THE POTENTIAL

The importance for MSMEs to embrace technology is clear: it is not just a pathway to improved efficiency and cost savings, but a critical strategy for long-term sustainability and growth. By integrating digital tools and solutions, MSMEs can significantly enhance their competitive edge, foster innovation, and build resilience against market fluctuations and cyber threats.

Digital tools enable MSMEs to optimise operations, make informed decisions, and navigate the complexities of the digital economy effectively.

The writer is Managing Director, Tata Teleservices

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2470



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Injurious, detrimental (11)
- Lift up (5)
- One bringing salvation (7)
- Bull-fighter (7)
- Inclined as stage, auditorium (5)
- Wearisome (6)
- Like duck foot (6)
- Hung on tightly (5)
- Chooses (7)
- Laid with rounded stones (7)
- Floating; out of element (2,3)
- One keeping carriageway clean (4,7)

#### DOWN

- Monumental structure (7)
- Letter (7)
- Turn over (5)
- Put in (6)
- Upside down (7)
- Zodiac sign (3)
- Showed one's teeth (5)
- Royal trappings (7)
- Confirms (5,2)
- Hopelessness (7)
- Stage whispers (6)
- With overmuch self-assurance (5)
- Hire (5)
- Excepting (3)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Harmful before June half gone, I'd go back to one in state (11)
- To lift an Academician is the start of ecstasy (5)
- Enjoy the taste of holding one who is the one to rescue us (7)
- Man in suit of lights, or dam at being upset by him (7)
- Worked on bed and got the floor raised (5)
- In a non-alcoholic setting the listener is so dull! (6)
- Marry when about to go out, having feet like a duck (6)
- A number took a breather and held fast (5)
- Picks a form of steel with little science (7)
- Roughly mended hose, like some old ways (7)
- Sailing, and not knowing where one is (2,3)
- One who has a brush along the way (4,7)

#### DOWN

- One of seven wonders is a shapely thing (7)
- Letter – Greek letter: is the French to include it? (7)
- You'd half take in a writer to turn one over (5)
- Put in what is inactive around the South (6)
- How poet writes, contrary to the established order (7)
- Sign for a pope? (3)
- Nakedly exposed, tar loses head in his berth (5)
- Crown and Sceptre – and the big smoke (7)
- Lends support, like angry cats (5,2)
- Awkward ride around health resort makes one lose hope (7)
- Squadron-leader among confidential assistants whispers (6)
- Being pert, get gun ready to shoot at end of day (5)
- Agreement to gratify, when topped off (5)
- Some soap may be required where people drink (3)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2469

**ACROSS** 1. Salon 4. Heroism 8. High water mark 10. Spell 11. Owns 12. Sign 16. Trace 17. Non-appearance 19. Surgeon 20. Sabot

**DOWN** 1. School outings 2. Leg 3. Newish 4. Hither 5. Rarely 6. Imagining 7. Makes ends meet 9. Gun-runner 13. Staple 14. Cavern 15. Beards 18. Nab





## Lip service

Ruling party cannot critique Emergency while promoting authoritarianism

The Emergency, imposed on June 25, 1975 by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and which lasted 21 months till March 21, 1977, remains a blot on the history of democratic India. The rule by decree, the suspension of civil liberties and free speech, the arbitrariness of government actions, and the indiscriminate arrests of dissenters and Opposition figures using draconian preventive detention laws, among other measures, continue to haunt Indians who experienced it in all its vicious forms. The traumatic episode is a reminder of the responsibility of democratic institutions in always safeguarding the freedoms and rights of citizens. When freshly elected and returning Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla read out a resolution, on Wednesday, “condemning the imposition of Emergency” and termed it as an attack on the Constitution, one could have considered this as a note of caution about the perils of suspending civil liberties, and as a pledge that this would never be allowed to happen again. But seen in the light of Mr. Birla’s actions, when, as Speaker in the 17th Lok Sabha, he indiscriminately used his powers to suspend several Opposition MPs, and the executive’s use of draconian laws to stifle dissent from civil society, the polity and the media, the resolution seems not much more than lip service against the Emergency. It seems more a political ploy to target the Congress party. Indeed, the ruling BJP in the recent past resorted to similar excesses without even the fig leaf of a declaration of Emergency.

If the government of the day is truly committed to undo the damages of the Emergency and not repeat its grave errors, it would have not taken recourse to the same measures in the recent past, seen in the attack on the free press, the use of enforcement and investigative agencies to selectively target Opposition representatives, and draconian preventive detention laws to keep political prisoners, activists and journalists in jail without trial, including by the foisting of charges against them. The BJP’s authoritarian actions are one reason why its electoral representation in the 18th Lok Sabha has been trimmed to below the majority mark. The 2024 general election verdict might not have been a decisive rejection of the ruling party – as it was in 1977 – but it is no less significant as it empowers those in responsible positions in Indian democratic institutions to resist authoritarianism. A more thoroughgoing Opposition in Parliament that questions ruling party high-handedness; a vigilant judiciary that ensures justice to the many unjustly held dissidents; and a civil society that pushes for the withdrawal of draconian preventive detention laws and a ruling party that coheres with these – only such substantive steps will enable India to decisively move on from the dark period of the Emergency.

## Ending defections

Engineering defections goes against the spirit of the people’s mandate

With the defection of MLA M. Sanjay Kumar, who represents the Jagtial constituency in Telangana, from the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) to the ruling Congress, the strength of the principal Opposition has come down from 39 to 33 in the State Assembly. True, such defections have plagued India, and several States, including Telangana, since its inception in 2014, have seen mass defections. Despite winning 63 of the 119 Assembly seats, Telangana’s first Chief Minister, the BRS’s K. Chandrashekhhar Rao, effected a series of defections across the political opposition, until he was able to garner a brute majority of 90 MLAs and the dissolution of the State unit of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) by the end of his first term in office in 2018. Such defections, much like the current case, violated the 10th Schedule of India’s 1985 Anti Defection Law, which was amended in 2003 to provide an exception to disqualifications if the defectors formed two-thirds of a party and merged with another party. This rule and the absolute power vested with the Speaker of the Assembly and the Chair of the Council to decide on members’ disqualifications, without setting any time limit to do so, have often rendered the law ineffective. The Telangana Assembly Speaker is the ruling party’s Vikarabad MLA, Gaddam Prasad Kumar. While he must serve in the interest of fostering principled democratic practices, seldom have Speakers, in the States or at the Centre, risen above their party’s diktats.

Mr. Kumar’s defection has particularly caused some disquiet in the Congress, as it has slighted T. Jeevan Reddy, the candidate who lost the Jagtial Assembly seat. Mr. Reddy now serves as a Congress MLC. The Telangana Chief Minister, A. Revanth Reddy, has been accused of attempting defections in the past, the most infamous being his attempt in 2015 – when he was a TDP member – to bribe a nominated member of the House, Elvis Stephenson, to vote in favour of the TDP. These defections go against the spirit of participatory democracy, where the existence of a strong Opposition enhances governance and acts as a check on unilateral decisions taken by the ruling government. The experience of the past 10 years, both in New Delhi and in Hyderabad, has made apparent the dangers of parties with brute majorities. With a stronger Opposition at the Centre in 2024, perhaps it is time to seek more amendments to the anti-defection law. Prescribing a timeline for Speakers and Chairpersons to decide on disqualifications might not be enough; the power must be vested with an independent Election Commission.

# Opposition’s larger demography, LoP’s big responsibility

The 2024 general election is historic in as much as it resulted in the numerically largest Opposition in the Lok Sabha. It is perhaps the largest in the history of the House. With the Opposition securing over 234 seats, one also saw the debate on the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) come alive. In the 16th and 17th Lok Sabhas, there was no LoP because under a direction of the Speaker issued in the 1950s, in order to get recognition as a party in the House, it should have a minimum of 10% members in that House (Direction 121).

This direction was issued for the recognition and categorisation of parliamentary parties for the sake of providing them certain facilities in Parliament. But this direction does not deal with the recognition of the LoP. Later, Parliament enacted the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977, which for the first time, defined the term Leader of the Opposition as “the Leader in that House of the party in opposition to the Government having the greatest numerical strength and recognised as such by the Chairman of the Council of States or the Speaker of the House of the People, as the case may be”.

The definition shows that in order to recognise a person as LoP, there are two conditions that need to be fulfilled. First, the party should be numerically the biggest one in opposition to the government. Second, that party should be recognised by the Speaker as a party. As mentioned earlier, the Speaker can recognise a party as such only if it has 10% of the strength of the House. In other words, only a party which has 10% of the strength of the House can put forth its claim to the post of LoP. Under the direction cited, a party which has less than 10% members shall be categorised as a group which cannot claim the post of LoP. Thus, the Congress parliamentary party which had only 52 members, in 2019, in the Lok Sabha, two less than 54 which is the threshold, could not get this post.

However the enactment of the 10th Schedule has, in a way, rendered the categorisation of parties into parties and groups by the Speaker/Chairman (Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha) irrelevant. Under this schedule, all political parties, irrespective of the number of Members that they have in the Houses, are “parties”. The term ‘group’ is not recognised by the Schedule. So, in tune with the Schedule, necessary changes in the Leaders of Opposition Act should have been made to enable the Speaker to recognise the leader of the largest Opposition party in the House, irrespective of whether it has 10% Members or not. Anyway, the leader of the Congress party is now the Leader of the Opposition in the 18th Lok Sabha.

### In the Westminster system

The post of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha has great political significance. In the British parliamentary tradition, he is called the Prime Minister-in-waiting as he is the one who the



P.D.T. Achary

former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

The Leader of the Opposition in the 18th Lok Sabha must take his cue from the verdict of the 2024 general election – to restore normalcy in Parliament and highlight the government’s failures

king turns to when the incumbent government falls, to form an alternative government. He, therefore, forms a shadow cabinet of his colleagues in his party. It is an interesting feature of the Westminster system of government.

The shadow cabinet is formed under the leadership of the leader of opposition who will be called the shadow prime minister. According to this tradition, the shadow cabinet scrutinises the policies and actions of the government and offers alternative policy. It is called the shadow cabinet because its members mirror the positions of the individual member of the real cabinet. As members of the shadow cabinet, these Opposition members familiarise themselves fully with the operations of the government. They can seek all relevant information about the entire gamut of the activities of the government. Erskine May, an international authority on parliamentary system says, “The Leader of the Opposition and some of the Leader’s principal colleagues in both Houses form a group, known as ‘the Shadow Cabinet’, each member of which is given a particular range of activities on which it is their task to direct criticism of the Government’s policy and administration and to outline alternative policies....”

Although we have adopted the Westminster system, the practice of forming a shadow cabinet does not exist in Parliament or State legislatures. The post of the Leader of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament has been a statutory position since 1977. However, this statute does not define the functions of the Leader of the Opposition. Traditionally, he will be a very senior member of the principal Opposition in the House who commands great respect and has wider acceptability among the parties in the Opposition.

### With change in 2024, the challenges

Since the Opposition in the Indian Parliament is not monolithic and is composed of multiple parties with divergent ideologies and programmes, the role of the Leader of the Opposition is full of challenges. The biggest problem he faces is that he has no power. It is easy for a party in power to attract other parties and keep the alliance together through a power-sharing arrangement. The opposition to the policies and programmes of the government is a major factor which keeps them together. In certain situations, the hope of bringing down the government acts as a unifying factor. In fact, the traditional role of the Opposition is to “oppose the government, to criticize it and to seek to replace it”.

In the past 10 years, the Lok Sabha has seen a rather lean Opposition which could not mount any serious challenge to the government. A large majority enjoyed by the ruling party and its intimidatory postures overawed the Opposition which often felt helpless. But the 2024 general election has brought about a sea change in the political atmosphere and the demography of the

House. It is perhaps for the first time that the Lok Sabha has such a huge number in the Opposition. With over 234 Members in the Opposition benches, the House is almost evenly divided. This has, no doubt, boosted the morale of the Opposition which, to a great extent, can influence the running of the House. It would be reflected in the admission of questions, the content of the answers, debate on Bills, general debates such as the debate on the motion of thanks, urgent matters of public interest, admission of adjournment motions, and reference of Bills to the committees for detailed scrutiny, to name a few.

The Leader of the Opposition should be able to capture this new mood of the Opposition and present his views in the House in the most effective way. The LoP of the 18th Lok Sabha has the onerous task of serving the unity of the Opposition at all costs. As the prime minister in waiting, he has the responsibility to inform the nation about the failures of the government based on truth and with a great sense of responsibility. In the House he has primacy in debates and other interventions. It is the well-accepted parliamentary tradition that the Speaker permits the Leader of the Opposition to make interventions on any matter without any notice. He can demand the presence of the Prime Minister in the House when it debates serious issues. According to the British tradition, the Prime Minister directly informs the Leader of the Opposition about major policy initiatives. Thus, the channel of communication between the Prime minister and the Leader of Opposition is always kept open.

### The past has lessons

In India too, this healthy tradition can be followed, which will certainly strengthen democracy. Jawaharlal Nehru had created certain traditions such as being present in the House during Question Hour on most of the dates and supplementing the replies given by Ministers whenever he felt that such replies were inadequate. Nehru is said to have pleaded with the Speaker to grant more time to the leaders of the Opposition and he would invariably be present in the House to listen to them. He used to say that it is only from the Opposition members that he would come to know about the real situation in the country, and not from his own party members who would only praise him and not speak the truth. The Indian Parliament evolved in its early stages in such an environment. There is much in the past which can be learned and emulated by the new generation of parliamentarians. Repudiation of the past will take us nowhere. Intolerance towards dissent was never a part of that tradition. The people of India have given the political class a great opportunity to restore normalcy in Parliament. The main function of the Leader of the Opposition is to constantly remind the ruling Benches of the need to normalise Parliament.

# Read the rocks to improve India’s geological literacy

With landscapes that range from the world’s greatest peaks to low-lying coastal plains, India showcases a diverse morphology that has evolved over billions of years. In several places, we find a variety of rocks and minerals and distinctive fossil assemblages. These geological features and landscapes tell us the spectacular ‘origin’ stories derived not from mythology but from scientific interpretations. India’s tumultuous geological past is recorded in its rocks and terrains and should be considered as our non-cultural heritage. India offers many such examples. Geo-heritage sites are educational spaces where people acquire much needed geological literacy, especially when India’s collective regard for this legacy is abysmal.

### Scant traction in India

Geological conservation seeks to ensure the survival of the best representative examples of India’s geological features and events so that present and future generations can appreciate more of the world’s best natural laboratories. Despite international progress in this field, geo-conservation has not found much traction in India. Many fossil-bearing sites have been destroyed in the name of development and real estate growth. Destructive stone mining activities also add to this misery. The magnitude of these activities is evident from the fact that the area covered under stone-mining operations exceeds more than 10% of the total area of India.

These geological features tell us how the land we are so familiar with came to be, and are part of an evolutionary history that has made Indian terrane what it is today. Ironically, on the one hand, we reach out to Mars in search of evidence for early life but on the other, we destroy such proof that is so precious and right in our backyard. How many of us know about the little-known Dhala meteoritic impact crater in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh? This between 1.5 billion to 2.5 billion-year-old crater is evidence of a celestial collision when life must have begun. The more famous Lonar crater in Buldhana



C.P. Rajendran

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India’s collective regard for its extensive geo-heritage is abysmal

district of Maharashtra was earlier dated to be about 50,000 years old, and a recent study suggests its origin around 5,76,000 years ago.

The importance of the shared geological heritage of our planet was first recognised in 1991 at a UNESCO-sponsored event, ‘First International Symposium on the Conservation of our Geological Heritage’. The delegates assembled in Digne, France, endorsed the concept of a shared legacy: “Man and the Earth share a common heritage, of which we and our governments are but the custodians”. This declaration foresaw the establishment of geo-parks as sites that commemorate unique geological features and landscapes within their assigned territories; and as spaces that educate the public on geological importance.

Geo-heritage sites in many countries such as Canada, China, Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom have been developed as national parks. UNESCO has also prepared guidelines for the development of geo-parks. Many countries also have the necessary legislation to build, protect and designate geo-parks. Europe celebrates its geological heritage across 73 zones. Japan offers another good lesson in such conservation. Today, there are 169 Global Geoparks across 44 countries. Thailand and Vietnam have also implemented laws to conserve their geological and natural heritage. Though a signatory, India has no such legislation or policy for geo-heritage conservation.

This situation calls for sustainable conservation approaches, such as those we have been able to formulate to protect biodiversity. The Biological Diversity Act was implemented in 2002 and there are now 18 notified biosphere reserves in India. Although the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has notified 34 geological monuments, it lacks the regulatory powers to implement the preservation measures. A recent development in the case of a cliff in Varkala in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala, is a typical example. This cliff which overlooks the Arabian Sea is made up of rocks deposited millions of years ago and has been declared by the GSI as a

geological heritage site. To save some unauthorised structures, the district administration recently demolished a part of this cliff citing landslide hazards. Many such features around the country face such survival threats.

### Half-hearted measures

The Government of India has attempted to address these concerns on some occasions. In 2009, there was a half-hearted attempt to constitute a National Commission for Heritage Sites through a Bill introduced in the Rajya Sabha. Though it was eventually referred to the Standing Committee, the government backtracked on it for some unstated reasons and the Bill was withdrawn. The Bill was meant to constitute a national commission to implement the stipulations of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972 and to create a national roster of heritage sites. More recently, in 2022, the Ministry of Mines has prepared a draft Bill for preservation and maintenance, but no further progress on this has been heard. As the annexure to the Draft Geoheritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill, 2022 says, “In sharp contrast to the well laid out protection and conservation measures addressed with relevant legislation on archaeological and historical monuments and cultural heritage sites, India does not have any specific and specialized policy or law to conserve and preserve the geoheritage sites and geo-relics for future generations.”

Specifically, India needs the following at the earliest: first, create an inventory of all prospective geo-sites in the country (in addition to the 34 sites identified by the GSI); second, frame geo-conservation legislation for the country along the lines of the Biological Diversity Act 2002; and third, have a ‘National Geo-Conservation Authority’ along the lines of the National Biodiversity Authority, with independent observers, while ensuring that the establishment will not lead to red tape and encroach on the autonomy of researchers and academically-inclined private collectors.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The Speaker

The words by the top leader in the country, of there to be consultations and consensus in running the government, seem to have gone up in thin air. In the

17th Lok Sabha, the present Speaker was seen to be acting in a partisan manner. Given his past conduct in the august House, where the Opposition was hardly given a chance to air its

views, it remains to be seen how Parliament will run in the days ahead. It is utopian to expect a leopard to change its spots. **Tharcus S. Fernando,** Chennai

### Governor’s view

One is in agreement with the sentiment expressed by the Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi — “We must not be in denial over drug abuse, illicit liquor in T.N.”

(Chennai, Inside pages, June 26). The ruling party in the State needs to act. The Chief Minister must issue a comprehensive statement on the subject without any

delay. The State elections are not far away and this is an issue that can be used as a plank by the Opposition to reap political dividends. **Mani Natarajan,** Chennai



# It’s time for India to reclaim its voice on Tibet

The timing of the visit by a delegation of U.S. lawmakers to Dharamshala made it clear what it would be about. The delegation arrived just days after the passage of the ‘Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act’ in both Houses of U.S. Congress, which now awaits U.S. President Joe Biden’s signature. Both Democrat and Republican co-authors of the Bill were part of the delegation, invited by the Central Tibetan Administration that manages affairs of the Tibetan diaspora-in-exile worldwide, for a special facilitation. Given the circumstances, New Delhi would have been more than aware of the content of the speeches they would make, slamming China for its repression of the Tibetan people, calling for talks between the Dalai Lama’s representatives and Beijing that were suspended in 2010 to be restarted, and for a Free Tibet. “This bill is a message to the Chinese government that we have clarity in our thinking on this issue, for the freedom of Tibet,” said former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. “[The Dalai Lama’s] legacy will live forever, but you, the President of China, will be gone, and no one will give you credit for anything.”

**Weakness, not strength**  
While the sharp tone of these comments and even the presence of U.S. officials and lawmakers in Dharamshala is not new, this is the first time in recent years that a public rally of this kind has been held in India. India’s External Affairs Minister hosted the delegation for a late dinner the same evening as the rally, and the Prime Minister met them the next day, indicating that this was a more considered decision by New Delhi. Some people have even interpreted it as a strong message from New Delhi to Beijing amidst continuing tensions between the two countries, as a resolution to the Line of Actual Control military stand-off eludes them since the deadly 2020 Galwan clash. However, New Delhi’s decision



Suhasini Haidar

to allow American politicians to take centre stage amongst the Tibetan refugee population in India in order to promote a U.S. law and pitch U.S. policy is not a show of strength, but could convey weakness. It also denotes the danger of letting a carefully calibrated foreign policy narrative on Tibet spin out of its control. To begin with, India has not joined the U.S. in publicly articulating its concerns on the treatment of Tibetans simply because its actions since 1959, of offering the Dalai Lama refuge and allowing Tibetan refugees to settle in India, speak much louder. To this day, people from Tibet trek across the Himalayas to seek refuge in India. Often, parents send just their children over, fearing for their future as Tibetan curriculum gets more standardised to the mainland’s system, rigorously enforced by the Chinese Communist Party. Given India’s own sensitivities on sovereignty and territorial integrity, New Delhi has worked out its own formulation on the Tibet issue and ties with China. It has “recognised” the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) as part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China since 1954. Since 2010, however, given China’s refusal to respect India’s territorial integrity, its renaming of places in Arunachal Pradesh, and its issuance of stapled visas to residents of Jammu and Kashmir, India stopped articulating a ‘One China’ policy or making references to Tibet in official statements. It contends that the Dalai Lama is a revered spiritual leader, despite China’s protests that he is a “separatist” or “splittist”. India also does not officially recognise the Tibetan Government in Exile or Parliament in Exile as more than organising mechanisms for the Tibetan people based here and abroad. Even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the Tibetan Sikyong (elected leader) to his swearing-in ceremony in 2014, he did not do so in 2019 or this month. In 2018, a government circular reminded

officials of India’s policy, asking them not to attend events commemorating the 60th year since the Dalai Lama’s flight to India. New Delhi has become more sensitive on such issues, as is evident from its objections to U.S. Ambassadors visiting Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, or to the space given for political or extremist Khalistani separatist rallies and referendums in the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia. **Moving out of the picture**  
If the government wishes to change its line to mirror the more strident position on Tibet adopted by the U.S., then Indian officials and leaders should have made the statements that were addressed instead by U.S. lawmakers to Tibetans in Dharamshala, who were all waving U.S. flags (Indian flags were far fewer). The superfluosness of allowing the U.S. delegation to do so is underlined by the fact that the Dalai Lama travelled to the U.S. for medical treatment just days after their visit, and all the U.S. lawmakers could have met him in Washington DC instead. Above all, the problem with allowing U.S. leaders to aim messages at Beijing from a pulpit in India, and then have Beijing respond to those directly, is that India is getting cut out of a picture where it has been the most important external figure. This is not unlike its predicament in other parts of South Asia, including the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Indian Ocean islands where its space is being diminished by growing U.S.-China contestations. With the U.S. giving the Karmapa a home and accepting more Tibetan refugees on the one hand, and China’s ever-tightening control of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the TAR on the other, India must consider the future of its own policy, especially with regard to the question of the Dalai Lama’s succession. New Delhi must move more decidedly to reclaim its own voice and the pace of its own policy narrative without being “bigfooted” by others.

India must avoid ceding the centre stage in its own region on foreign policy and on Tibet issues

# Capital changes, changing prices

With the change in government, real estate may once again shift to Amaravati

## STATE OF PLAY

G.V.R. Subba Rao



The National Democratic Alliance (NDA)’s landslide victory in Andhra Pradesh is expected to give clarity to the real estate sector. The realtors, who were awaiting the results on June 4, are now planning investments and businesses more in Visakhapatnam and Amaravati than in other parts of the State. A correction in investments in Visakhapatnam is likely, while the real estate sector in Amaravati is expected to witness a sudden surge. The realtors in Amaravati and Visakhapatnam invested hundreds of crores of rupees between 2014 and 2023. During those 10 years, real estate growth was not natural either in Amaravati or Visakhapatnam. It was a bubble created by the players, and supported by successive governments. Soon after the bifurcation of combined Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the realtors and investors looked for greener pastures in residual Andhra Pradesh. They made huge investments in the expectation that there would be phenomenal demand for housing as the capital was to move to Amaravati from Hyderabad. However, there was an inordinate delay in constructing the capital of Amaravati. The foundation was laid in October 2015, but the real estate market failed to gain traction, and real estate players and investors returned to Hyderabad. During the same period, the government changed in Andhra Pradesh. The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), led by Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, accused the previous Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government of insider trading concerning

wada city, a 3 BHK costs ₹1.5 crore-₹2.5 crore in the city. Most people in Visakhapatnam are salaried middle-class income groups. They do not buy properties for investment purposes; they buy it for residential purposes. In comparison, investments were made in Amaravati predominantly for investment purposes. Now, in both Amaravati and Visakhapatnam, realtors are optimistic about the sector’s growth in the coming months. Though deals have not been closed, they have been getting enquiries. The policies of the TDP or the YSRCP governments did not fuel the real boom; instead, a bubble was created. The realtors recalling South Korea’s experience in the late 1990s say that the governments should take corrective measures in Andhra Pradesh. Though the registration fee is one of the main revenue sources, the government should focus on the gradual development of the real estate sector for sustained development. The industry and services sectors must be developed so that there are more buyers for both residential and commercial spaces. Industry-led development and the creation of new jobs will bring in new buyers. Real estate growth depends on other factors also. It is important to develop basic infrastructure facilities such as roads apart from strengthening flight and railway connectivity. Hyderabad gained from the uncertainty over the capital issue in Andhra Pradesh. But other factors also played a role, such as the robust growth of the industrial and services sectors, as well as infrastructure. The new government should start constructing the capital and focus on the same areas in which Hyderabad is doing well.

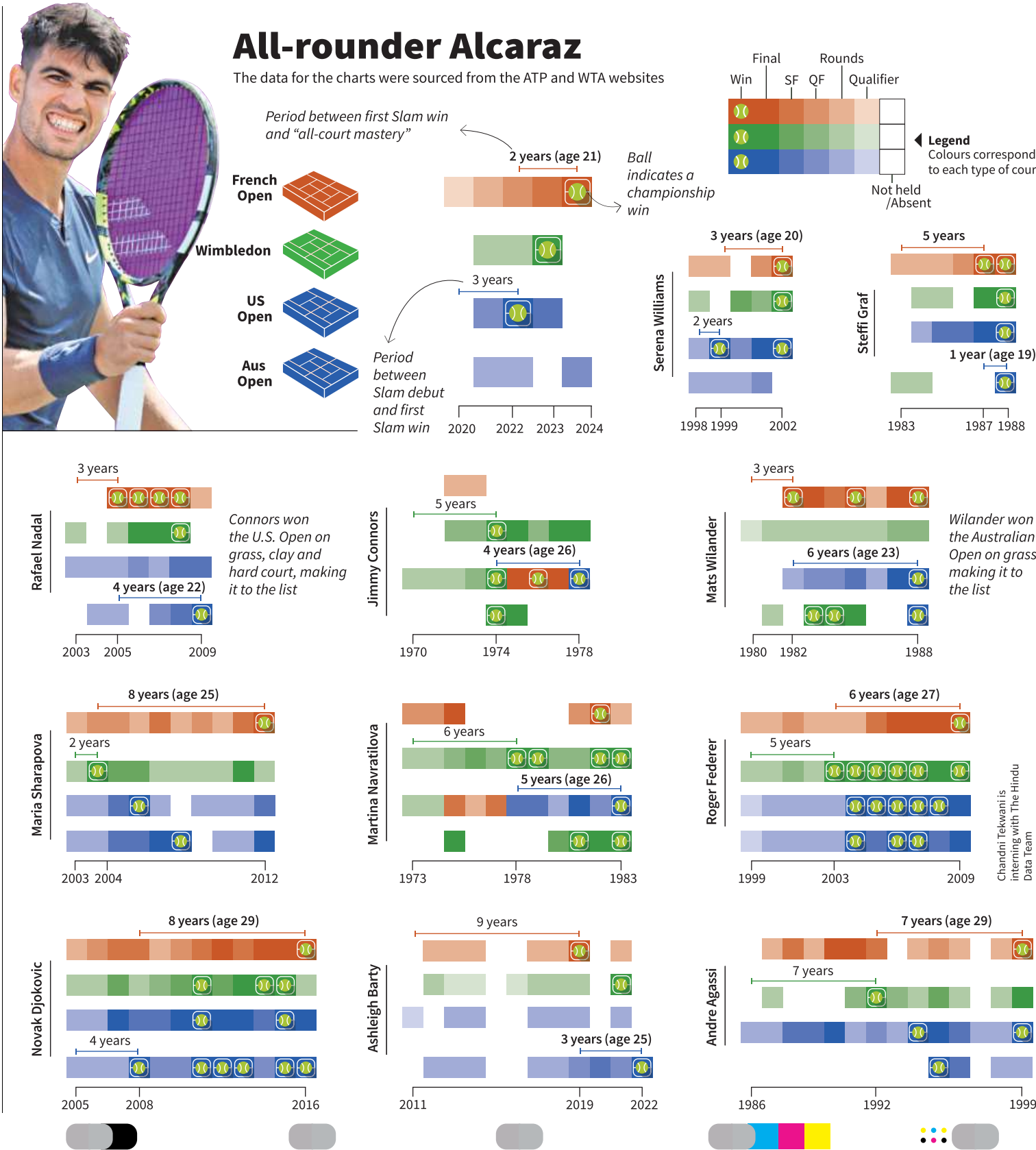
# Alcaraz, the youngest male tennis player to master all three courts

Among women, Serena Williams and Steffi Graf managed the feat at a much younger age

## DATA POINT

Chandni Tekwani  
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

When Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz won the French Open final for the first time this June, he became the youngest male tennis player to win a Grand Slam title on all three surfaces: hard, grass, and clay. Only six other male tennis players have achieved this feat: Mats Wilander, Jimmy Connors, Andre Agassi, Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer, and Novak Djokovic. However, what sets Alcaraz apart is that he mastered all the surfaces by the age of 21, which makes him the youngest of the seven men. Nadal was 22 when he achieved this feat and Wilander was 23. All the others in the list were aged 26 or more when they managed to become all-surface elites. Among women, five players have made three-surface history: Serena Williams, Steffi Graf, Martina Navratilova, Maria Sharapova, and Ashleigh Barty. Notably, Graf did so as a teenager, the only player to do so across both genders. Williams was 20, a year older than Graf and a year younger than Alcaraz, when she achieved this milestone. It is important to note that the Australian Open and the US Open have not always been played on hard courts. The US Open was first played on grass and then on clay for three years before it began being played on hard courts from 1978. The Australian Open was played on grass and has been played on hard courts since 1988. The graphic depicts all the 12 players who won at least one Grand Slam on all three courts. The number of years they took to win their first Slam is mentioned. The time taken in years between their first Slam win and the victory that made them all-court masters is also mentioned.



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1974

## Return to Gandhian ideals urged

Chandigarh, June 26: The President, Mr. V.V. Giri, to-day called for gearing up of the educational system to meet the social needs of the society. “Unless we give the youth a stake in the future by assuring them of job prospects, the outlook is indeed gloomy,” the President warned. Mr. Giri was speaking after laying the foundation stone of Lala Achint Ram auditorium in the premises of Lala Lajpat Rai Bhavan here. He said the energies of the youth and their enthusiasm were being diverted to “wrong channels”. In convocations students shout “we want jobs and not degrees.” Have we ever thought of the significance of this genuine demand?” Mr. Giri asked. Mr. Giri repeated his suggestion that there should be a one-year holiday from the university after they completed their matriculation. The students should be made to work on the land and also learn to operate cottage industries during this period, he said. “The divorce between intellect and labour is the bane of our agriculture and we must end this by making more and more of our educated people take to agriculture,” he said and added once the youth saw the opportunity of a new and meaningful life they would like to settle down in villages. Mr. Giri said he was of the firm belief that a return to the Gandhian ideals was the only way to solve the crisis the country was facing to-day. Mr. Giri said these sins were present in the society in a virulent form and called for steps to remove them.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 27, 1924

## Preventive vaccine for tubercle

Paris, June 26: The Havas Agency says Professor Calmette of the Pasteur Institute has invented a vaccine for the prevention of tuberculosis composed of bacilli carefully enfeebled by 230 successive processes. A hundred experiments have already been made on animals and 217 new-born children showing symptoms of likelihood of tuberculosis were administered the vaccine. All babies were under observation for 18 months and so far none has showed any sign of the disease developing.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of  
Palestinians killed in  
Gaza since October 7

**37,718** The health ministry in Gaza said that at least 86,377 people had been wounded in the Gaza Strip since the war began when Hamas attacked Israel on October 7. AFP

Gap after which  
Nagaland civic bodies  
went to the polls

**20** In years. The polling for 25 civic bodies in the State was held on June 26, after a gap of two decades. The last elections were held in 2004. Three municipalities and 22 town councils went to the polls. PTI

The partial debt deal  
sealed by Sri Lanka  
with bilateral lenders

**5.80** In \$ billion. The country sealed a partial debt deal by reaching a final restructuring agreement for \$5.8 billion of debt with its bilateral lenders. AFP

Length of the first  
plastic road of Jaipur  
Military Station

**100** In metres. The Jaipur Military Station is the second military station to construct the plastic waste road and the first to make it part of its maintenance programme. PTI

Grassroots workers  
trained on new  
criminal laws

**40** In lakh. Over 5.65 lakh police, prison, forensics, judicial and prosecution officials have also been trained about the laws to ensure that people are aware of the legislation. PTI

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## The row over Delhi's water crisis

Why is the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi government blaming the Haryana government for the capital's water shortage? Is Delhi dependent on its neighbouring States for water? What has the Lieutenant Governor's (L-G) office said?

EXPLAINER

Satvika Mahajan

The story so far:

Amidst a heat wave in several parts of north India, the national capital has been struck with an acute water shortage over the past couple of weeks sparking a battle in the Supreme Court with its neighbouring States including Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi government has alleged that Haryana is blocking water to Delhi and has asked them to release it.

Why is there water shortage in Delhi?

Delhi depends heavily on its neighbouring States of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh to fulfil its drinking water needs. The capital's raw water supply comes from four sources with approximately 40% of it coming via Yamuna through Haryana. The raw water is treated in Delhi's Water Treatment Plants (WTPs) and sent across through its pipelines that covers over 15,000 kilometres.

In the past couple of weeks, the Delhi government has blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for blocking Delhi's share of water through the Munak Canal, which is one of the primary sources of water for the capital. The canal, which falls under the Haryana government, starts from Haryana and enters Delhi with raw water. If there are any problems, the Delhi Government is responsible for notifying the issue and financing the problem. Delhi's Water Minister Atishi has claimed that Haryana is purposely blocking water, in an already difficult situation due to the heat, which is resulting in the residents of Delhi being forced to go waterless for days.

However, the Lieutenant Governor's (L-G) office has maintained that Haryana and other neighbouring States are releasing adequate supplies of water, and that the shortage is due to a leakage in the



Scorching heat: Residents fill containers with water from a tanker in New Delhi, on June 24. REUTERS

Munak Canal, and the lack of cleaning of pipelines and WTPs. Additionally, the L-G office has claimed that the presence of privately run tankers which are finding illegal sources of water and selling them at high rates is adding to the issue.

What is happening in the SC?

The Delhi government had moved the Supreme Court to seek a direction to Haryana to supply more water to the crisis-hit national capital on May 31. The AAP government in Delhi has told the top court that the water demand in the city has risen significantly due to heatwave conditions, and that Haryana be directed to release extra water for a month. The Supreme Court on June 3 directed the Centre to hold an emergency meeting of its Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) with the States of Delhi, Haryana, and

Himachal Pradesh to address water scarcity in the national capital amid soaring temperatures. On June 6, the Congress-led Himachal Pradesh government agreed to share water resources with the capital in the Supreme Court, promising to release 137 cusecs of water through the Hathnikund barrage in Haryana into the Wazirabad barrage in Delhi. However, Haryana, through which the water must pass to reach Delhi, raised objections. And later on, even the Himachal Pradesh government went back on its statements, stating that water was already flowing in the Yamuna, and that it had made an incorrect statement of being able to spare Delhi 137 cusecs of water.

What has been the court's response?

The SC has now bowed out of the row, stating that it does not want to interfere

with the proceedings of the UYRB. The Bench headed by Justice P.K. Mishra said it did not want to either violate or tinker with the MoU settled among the States by even passing an interim order. "The issue should be left to be considered by the Upper Yamuna River Board, a body constituted with the agreement of parties in the MoU of May 12, 1994," the Bench observed in its order. The board was directed to hold a meeting with stakeholders and was asked to take a call on the matter. Delhi MLAs have since written to Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil seeking help on humanitarian grounds. The main function of the UYRB is to regulate the allocation of available flows amongst the beneficiary States.

What is next for Delhi?

With an acute water shortage in Delhi, the powers in the capital need to focus beyond politics, be it the Centre or the State government, Rajendra Singh, a water conservationist who is popularly referred to as the 'Waterman of India' said. He explained that Delhi must focus on three solutions to the problem. "First, drinking water in the capital needs to be made its top priority; water for irrigation and other works needs to be redirected for drinking water."

He further stated that "Delhi needs to thoroughly re-examine its water resources and work on the principles of 'retreat, recycle and reuse'." The capital needs to look closely at its WTPs and build successful models to sustain its needs. The water flowing through Delhi needs to go into the cycle of reuse.

Additionally, instead of depending on other States, Delhi should investigate its harvesting methods. The spaces in Asola Bhatti mines can be made into water harvesting structures, Mr. Singh suggested. Ground water resources used to be recharged in Delhi by the water in the Aravalli belt, but that is not the case anymore which is leading to wastage. The Aravalli belt should be modelled into a water sanctuary and the Yamuna flood plain banks into a water bank.

THE GIST

New Delhi depends heavily on its neighbouring States of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh to fulfil its drinking water needs.

Delhi's Water Minister Atishi has claimed that Haryana is purposely blocking water, in an already difficult situation due to the heat, which is resulting in the residents of Delhi being forced to go waterless for days.

The Delhi government had moved the Supreme Court to seek a direction to Haryana to supply more water to the crisis-hit national capital on May 31.

## How well is India tapping its rooftop solar potential?

Which are the States with the highest RTS capacities? How can more awareness be spread?

Shantanu Roy

The story so far:

India's installed rooftop solar (RTS) capacity increased by 2.99 GW in 2023-2024, the highest growth in a year. As of March 31, the total installed RTS capacity in India was 11.87 GW, according to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. To meet rising energy demand, India needs to double down on its efforts to expand its RTS potential.

What is the RTS programme?

India launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission in January 2010. Its main objective was to produce 20 GW of solar energy (including RTS) in three phases: 2010-2013, 2013-2017, and 2017-2022. In 2015, the government revised this target to 100 GW by 2022, including a 40-GW RTS component, with yearly targets for each State and Union Territory. In December 2022, India had an installed RTS capacity of 7.5 GW and extended the deadline for the 40-GW

target to 2026. While financial incentives, technological advances, awareness, and training have improved RTS installation numbers, there is a long way to go. India's overall RTS potential is approximately 796 GW. To meet India's target of installing 500 GW of renewable energy capacity, with a solar component of 280 GW, by 2030, RTS alone needs to contribute about 100 GW by 2030.

How are States faring?

As of March 31, 2024, the RTS capacities of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan had taken big strides while some others were behind the curve. An installed RTS capacity of 3,456 MW in Gujarat is the result of its government's quick approval process, a large number of RTS installers, and high consumer awareness. Similarly, Maharashtra, with an RTS capacity of 2,072 MW, is one of the top-performing States owing to its robust solar policies and conducive regulatory environment.

Thanks to its land area and high solar irradiance, Rajasthan boasts of the

highest RTS potential in the country: 1,154 MW. Its efforts to streamline approvals, provide financial incentives, and promote RTS through public-private partnerships have spurred this growth.

Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, with respective installed capacities of 675, 599, and 594 MW, have also performed reasonably well. However, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, among others, are yet to fully explore their RTS potential. Their challenges include bureaucratic hurdles, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of public awareness.

The 'Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana' is a flagship initiative to fit one crore households with RTS systems and help them get up to 300 units of free electricity every month. An average system size of 2 kW for targeted households will result in a total RTS capacity addition of 20 GW. The scheme has a financial outlay of ₹75,021 crore, which includes financial assistance for consumers (₹65,700 crore), incentives for distribution companies (₹4,950 crore),

incentives for local bodies and model solar villages in each district, payment security mechanisms, capacity building (₹657 crore), and awareness and outreach (₹657 crore). The scheme also encourages the adoption of advanced solar technologies, energy storage solutions, and smart grid infrastructure.

How can we ensure RTS growth?

Creating awareness is key to getting consumers on board. In addition, RTS needs to be economically viable for households. While government subsidies are helping, multiple low-cost financing options are required. The number of banks and non-bank financial companies providing RTS loans has increased of late. Access to low-cost RTS loans should be as easy as getting a bike or car loan.

Promoting R&D in solar technology, energy storage solutions, and smart-grid infrastructure can lower costs, improve performance, and enhance the reliability of RTS systems. Investments in training programmes, (like the 'Suryamitra' solar PV technician programme initiated in 2015), vocational courses, and skill development initiatives will help build a skilled workforce.

As the scheme's implementation enters full swing, net-metering regulations, grid-integration standards, and building codes should be reviewed and updated to help address emerging challenges and facilitate smooth implementation.

Shantanu Roy works with the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy.

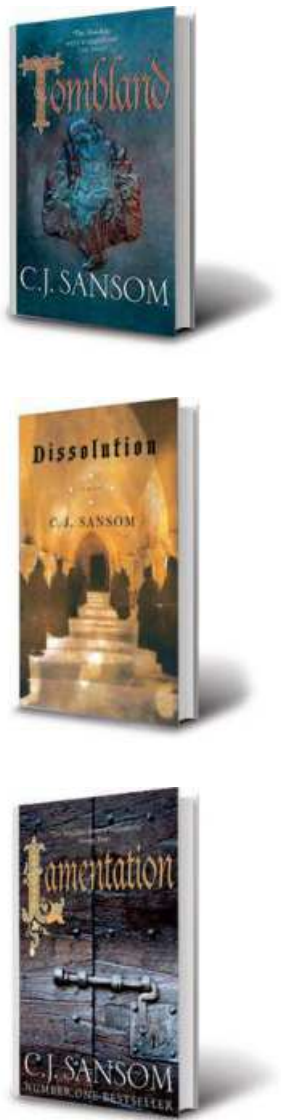
THE GIST

India's installed rooftop solar (RTS) capacity increased by 2.99 GW in 2023-2024, the highest growth in a year.

As of March 31, 2024, the RTS capacities of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan had taken big strides while some others were behind the curve. An installed RTS capacity of 3,456 MW in Gujarat is the result of its government's quick approval process, a large number of RTS installers, and high consumer awareness.

Creating awareness is key to getting consumers on board. In addition, RTS needs to be economically viable for households.





# Know your English

“Enlarge on (K.T. Raju. Vijayawada).”  
 “ ‘Enlarge on’ means ‘to expand on’.”  
 When you enlarge on something, you give more details about it. This is used with reference to a topic.  
*He enlarged on the problem of AIDS.*  
*I asked him to enlarge on what he had said earlier.*  
 When you enlarge on something, you dwell at length on it.”  
 “Gum up (Si Srikala, Hyderabad).”  
 “ ‘Gum up’ means to become ‘clogged or obstructed with stickiness’.”  
*I have a bad cold and my nose is all gummed up.*  
 ‘Gum up the works’ means ‘make a machine or system unable to operate.’  
*He meddled with the generator yesterday and gummed up the works.*  
 ‘Gum up the works’ is used colloquially. ‘Up a gum-tree’ is also a colloquial expression, it means ‘in great difficulties’.  
*Don't bother him now. Poor fellow! He is up a gum-tree.*”  
 “Panegyric (S. K. Bannerjee, Calcutta).”  
 “ ‘Panegyric’ means ‘a speech or piece

The crime novel has often been held up as the perfect way to study society and the novels featuring Matthew Shardlake do that elegantly. A reluctant player in the politics of Tudor England, Shardlake provides a millennial perspective, which does not come across as anachronistic

When C.J. Sansom, one of Britain's best-selling historical novelists, passed away on April 27, four days before the television adaptation of his well-known crime fiction, *Dissolution*, dropped, there was an outpouring of grief for the reclusive writer. Thankfully, he has left behind a rich legacy of work, which will endure.

We first meet Matthew Shardlake in Sansom's *Dissolution* (2003), in which the 35-year-old lawyer is disillusioned with the direction the reform is taking. Over seven novels of increasing girth, that does not sacrifice an iota of pace or thrills, we see the idealistic Shardlake stubbornly try and make sense of his violent world where one could be killed for one's religious beliefs as easily as for a penny.

The novels, spread over 12 years from 1537 in *Dissolution* to 1549 in *Tombland*, evoke the public and personal. The crime novel has often been held up as the perfect way to study society and the Shardlake novels do that elegantly. Shardlake, the reluctant player in the “gilded sewer pit” that is politics in Tudor England, provides a millennial perspective, which does not come across as anachronistic. There is no reason why 16th century England could not have a forward thinking person as much as say ancient Greece or Bengaluru circa 2024!

Each of the novels is set against seismic changes and show the effect of these changes on common people. *Dissolution*, which brings to mind Umberto Eco's

brilliant monastic murder mystery, *The Name of the Rose*, is set against the dissolution of the monasteries. When one of Thomas Cromwell's commissioners is killed at a monastery in the port town of Scarnsea, he orders Shardlake to find out who the killer is. The more Shardlake uncovers, the more he learns about his patron, Cromwell, and how far he has gone from the idealism of the early days.

*Dark Fire* (2004) is set in 1540 and introduces many of the series regulars, including the nasty lawyer, Stephen Beaknap, and Jack Barak, Cromwell's strong arm man. Guy Molton, the Moor from Malta, who was a monk at Scarnsea, comes to London after the dissolution. Guy starts as an apothecary and is later accepted into the physician's guild. Like many detectives, Shardlake too is an outsider on account of his hunchback as are Barak because of his Jewish roots and Guy for his colour.

*Dark Fire* sees the introduction of the pattern of Shardlake working on two cases concurrently, which while not related, have a profound effect on his world view. In the book, Shardlake defends a young orphan girl, Elizabeth Wentworth, accused of drowning her cousin while Cromwell sets him the task of finding the missing formula for Greek fire. Cromwell, who is out of favour with Henry VIII for the so-called Anne of Cleves debacle, hopes the formula will find him back in the King's good graces.

*Sovereign* (2006) is set in 1541 and features Shardlake's first meeting with the King, who is revealed to have a high voice and not above petty cruelty as he taunts

Shardlake for his hunchback. Set against the backdrop of the Great Progress, Shardlake is working for Bishop Cranmer, officially dealing with the petitions brought to the King while secretly ensuring the good health of a prisoner. The commission forces Shardlake to wonder at the justness of his cause as he is protecting a prisoner only so that he can withstand torture at the tower.

In *Revelation* (2008), the King wants to marry Catherine Parr, there is a serial killer on the loose and Shardlake is fighting to keep a young boy, Adam Kite, suffering from religious mania from being burnt as a heretic. Adam in Bedlam introduces Shardlake to Ellen Fettiplace whose secret is revealed in book 5, *Heartstone* (2010).

Shardlake sets out to help Queen Catherine's servant and gets involved in the preparations for the King's ruinous Battle of Solent. A young Queen Elizabeth makes a guest appearance in *Heartstone*, impressing Shardlake with her intelligence. *Lamentations* (2014) features a dying King and a beleaguered Queen with power struggles going on behind the scenes for who will be regent after the king's death. When her book, *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, goes missing and the printer is found dead, the queen seeks Shardlake's help. There is also a vexatious case between siblings that Shardlake is fighting.

In the final Shardlake novel, 2018's *Tombland*, Shardlake is working for the 15-year-old Lady Elizabeth in 1549 when a murder once again drags him into the Ketts rebellion. While the mysteries are

brilliantly plotted and the research, well detailed, it is the everyday details, that effortlessly transport the reader into another time.

Whether it is the shark or (is it a whale?) that floats up the Thames in *Revelation* or the security procedures, that include pricking the name on the visitor's list with a pin and London constables recognising seals as part of their training, or sending rat catchers ahead of the King to Hampton Court, it brings the hurly burly of Tudor times alive. While there is the pomp and glory of the royal progress, with the clothes and codpieces, there is also the ready humour of the streets and Barak's inventive swearing providing a counterpoint.

The most vulnerable, children and animals, do not have a very good time in Shardlake's England. Barak was rescued from the streets by Cromwell and there is little gap-toothed Timothy who did not have a friend in the world apart from the horse he was caring for, till Shardlake took him into his household. Exploitation and privation twists children as Shardlake discovers to his horror in a couple of cases. Animals, whether bear baiting, or the cruel practice of sewing a falcon's eyes shut, suffered in 16th century England as they do around the world today. For each of Queen Catherine's spaniels there were dogs kicked to death and horses dying on the street like the glazer's or Shardlake's Chancery.

Sansom had plans to continue the series with Shardlake working for Queen Elizabeth and it is the greatest tragedy that he passed away four days before the television adaptation of *Dissolution*, Shardlake, dropped.

On June 27, 1954, the Obninsk Nuclear Power Plant became the world's first nuclear power plant to produce industrial electricity. A quiz about nuclear power generation

**QUESTION 1**

Many of the world's first generation of nuclear power plants had twin responsibilities: to generate power for the electrical grid and to produce \_\_\_\_\_ for the national nuclear weapons programme. Fill in the blank with the identity of a particular isotope.

The last first-generation nuclear power station to halt operations was the Wylfa facility on the Isle of Anglesey (Wales), on December 30, 2015, following 44 years of operation. Why did its operator, Magnox Ltd. have the facility built on the coast of the island?

## The world's oldest commercial nuclear



This is a view of the world's largest nuclear power plant in terms of net electric power, although not all of its reactors are operational at this time. Name it.

IAEA (CC BY-SA 2.0)

**day's daily quiz:** 1. This character travels to Harry's house to deliver the Hogwarts acceptance letter. **Ans: Rubens Hagrid**

2. This filmmaker had become a fan of the book series after his daughter persuaded him to read the first three books. **Ans: Chris Columbus**

3. The platform number on which one boards the Hogwarts Express. **Ans: Platform 9+3/4**

4. This previous work of Daniel Radcliffe had impressed the director to cast him for the role. **Ans: BBC's production of David Copperfield**

5. This character is a poltergeist who causes trouble in Hogwarts. **Ans: Peeves**

Visual: This actor essayed the role of one of the most famous characters in the whole series. After he passed away, this actor took on the role. **Ans: Richard Harris and Michael Gambon portrayed the role of Albus Dumbledore**

**Early Birds:** Aishwarya Srivastava| Debarati Kar| Prerana Chakraborty| Aaradhy Yadav| Krishna

**Fastidious:**  
giving careful attention to detail; hard to please;  
excessively concerned with cleanliness

**Usage:** *She dressed with fastidious care.*

**Pronunciation:** [bit.ly/fastidiouspro](https://bit.ly/fastidiouspro)

**Alphabet:** /fæ'stɪdi.əs/, /fə'stɪdi.əs/

For feedback and suggestions for  
Text & Context, please write to  
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with the subject 'Text & Context'



# Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha: the position, role, responsibilities

ASAD REHMAN  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

RAE BARELI MP Rahul Gandhi is Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, a position that lay vacant for 10 years because no party had numbers equalling a tenth of the strength of the House, which has been by practice a requirement to lay claim to the post.

The Congress, the largest opposition party, won 44 and 52 seats in the 543-member House after the elections of 2014 and 2019 respectively. The party has almost doubled its 2019 tally to 99 seats in this election.

In 2014, Mallikarjun Kharge — who is now Congress president and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha — was recognised Leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha. In 2019, this position went to then Baharampur MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. Both Congress leaders were part of panels to select candidates for high positions that required the presence of the Leader of Opposition.

## Who can serve as Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha?

The position of Leader of Opposition was officially described in The Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977.

The Act describes the Leader of Opposition as a “member of the Council of States or the House of the People, as the case may be, who is, for the time being, the Leader in that House of the party in opposition to the Government having the greatest numerical strength and recognised as such by the Chairman of the Council of States or the Speaker of the House of the People”.

In an article written for *The Indian Express* in May 2017, former Lok Sabha Secretary General PDI Achary said: “The law is clear that the Speaker is required to recognise the leader of the numerically largest party in opposition as the leader of opposition. The option of not recognising him/her is just not available.”

Achary, however, rejected the conventional understanding that to get the post of

Leader of Opposition, a party must have at least 10% of MPs in the House. He wrote:

“A mysterious rule is often quoted by some self-styled experts, which requires a party to have at least 10 per cent of the members of the House for the Speaker to recognise someone as the Leader of the Opposition. There is no such rule. Yes, there is direction 121 issued by the Speaker for recognising a party or group for the purpose of providing certain facilities in the House...

This direction relates to the recognition of a party, not the Leader of Opposition.”

Before the BJP in 2014 and 2019, the Congress, which had 415 members in Lok Sabha in 1984, had denied the TDP, which had 30 MPs, the post of Leader of Opposition.

## What position does the Leader of Opposition have in the House?

The Leader of Opposition sits in the front row to the left of the Chair, and enjoys cer-

tain privileges on ceremonial occasions like escorting the Speaker-elect to the rostrum. The Leader of Opposition is also entitled to a seat in the front row during the Address by the President to both Houses of Parliament.

The main duty of the Leader of Opposition is to serve as the voice of the opposition in the House. An official booklet on Parliament published in 2012 says the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha “is considered as a shadow Prime Minister with a shadow Cabinet, ready to take over the administration if the Government resigns or is defeated on the floor of the House”.

Since the parliamentary system is based on “mutual forbearance”, the Leader of Opposition lets the Prime Minister govern and is, in turn, permitted to oppose. “His/her proactive role in facilitating smooth functioning of the business of the House is as important as that of the Government,” the booklet says.

## Theory apart, what practical role and

## responsibility does the Leader of Opposition have?

Most importantly, the Leader of Opposition is the opposition's representative in the high-powered committees headed by the Prime Minister for appointment to key posts such as the Director of CBI, the Central Vigilance Commissioner and Chief Information Commissioner, the Chairperson and Members of the National Human Rights Commission, and the Lokpal.

As the Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha from 2014 to 2019, Kharge had alleged that the government repeatedly tried to keep the opposition out of the selection of the Lokpal on the ground that there was no Leader of Opposition.

In order of precedence, the Leaders of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha come at No. 7, along with Union Cabinet Ministers, the National Security Advisor, the Principal Secretary to the PM, the Vice-Chairperson of the NITI Aayog, former PMs, and Chief Ministers.

## IN THE POST IN THE PAST

SUSHMA SWARAJ  
(DEC 2009 TO MAY 2014)

L K ADVANI  
(MAY 2009 TO DEC 2009;  
MAY 2004 TO MAY 2009)

SONIA GANDHI  
(OCT 1999 TO FEB 2004)

SHARAD PAWAR  
(MAR 1998 TO APR 1999)

ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE  
(JUN 1997 TO DEC 1997)

RAJIV GANDHI  
(DEC 1989 TO DEC 1990)

## EXPLAINED GLOBAL

# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN FRANCE: WHAT IS COHABITATION?

ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

AFTER TWO rounds of polling on June 30 and July 7, France will elect a new National Assembly. For the first time in 22 years, there is a real possibility that the President and the Prime Minister, leader of the National Assembly, will not be from the same party.

This phenomenon is called cohabitation, and has only occurred thrice ever since France transitioned into the Fifth Republic.

## President vs Prime Minister

France is a semi-presidential, representative parliamentary democracy, with clearly defined roles for the President and the Prime Minister.

The current political regime, called the Fifth Republic, first came into effect in 1958, with the President being directly elected by popular vote since 1962.

The President, elected for a term of five years, serves as the head of the state and Commander of the Armed Forces. She enjoys regulatory power, exercising control of all decisions on matters of foreign policy and defence. Until 2000, the President enjoyed seven-year terms, which was then reduced to five-year terms.

The Prime Minister is the leader of the largest party/coalition in the National Assembly.

The parliament, which she heads, is responsible for all domestic policy decisions. The cabinet is appointed by the President under the Prime Minister's recommendation.

The Prime Minister herself cannot be dismissed by the President, but her resignation can be requested. The President can be impeached by the Parliament for willfully violating the Constitution or the national laws. This requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of the French Parliament, as well as in a joint session of both Houses.

## Cohabitation in France

This system can lead to situations where the French legislature is dominated by a coalition/party opposing the President. In such instances, the President is obliged to appoint a leader from the opposing party as Prime Minister, who enjoys the support of a parliamentary majority.

Cohabitation is very rare in France, and has historically been marred with controversy. There have only been three such instances in the French Fifth Republic: President François Mitterrand of the Socialist Party and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac heading the right-wing RPR/UDF coalition (1986-88); President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Edouard Balladur of the RPR/UDF coalition (1993-95); and President Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party (1997-2002).

Each of these periods was marked by administrative logjam and friction between the executive and the state. President Mitterrand in 1986 had refused to sign ordinances on denationalisation that Chirac's government had proposed. The move would have ensured the privatisation of over 60 industrial groups, reversing the work done by the previous Socialist government. While this legislation would eventually take the form of a bill and be passed in Parliament, it allowed Mitterrand to reiterate his status as a Leftist leader.

A similar outcome appears to be likely following the upcoming elections. All opinion polls project a slim chance of victory for President Emmanuel Macron's liberal-centrist Renaissance Party-led Ensemble coalition, which trails both the far-right National Rally of Marine Le Pen, and the left-wing New Popular Front headed by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

The upcoming polls will elect legislators for 577 seats in the National Assembly, including 13 overseas districts and 11 constituencies that represent French expats abroad. A party needs 289 seats to secure an absolute majority.

APURVA VISHWANATH  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

AHEAD OF the Supreme Court hearing on granting bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on money laundering charges linked to the alleged excise policy scam, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday took him into custody in the same case.

Special Judge Amitabh Rawat in a Rouse Avenue court allowed the CBI to formally arrest Kejriwal and, in the evening, granted remand of three days.

## How is the CBI investigation different from that of the ED?

While the Enforcement Directorate (ED) case investigates the alleged money trail, the CBI case will have to prove corruption and bribe-taking by public servants.

The ED arrested Kejriwal in March on money laundering charges. This was the charge against Kejriwal — the generation of alleged tainted funds and its use. Section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), which criminalises money laundering, lists concealment, possession, acquisition, use, projecting as untainted property, or claiming as untainted property as crimes.

The CBI had registered a case of corruption under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PC Act) in 2022, but it did not name Kejriwal as an accused. In fact, this March, when the ED took Kejriwal into custody, Additional Solicitor General S V Raju had told the Delhi court that “one need not be an accused in the predicate offence to be an accused under PMLA.”

Essentially, the ED's argument was that money laundering was a standalone offence that did not depend on the existence of a predicate offence.

In April, the CBI called Kejriwal for questioning, but, according to the arguments of his lawyers in court, it was as a witness and not as an accused.

Kejriwal has so far not been named as an accused in the corruption case. The remand now will allow the agency to investigate further. It will have to file a chargesheet within two to three months of the date of arrest.

In April 2023, the CBI had filed a supplementary chargesheet in the case naming former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia as the prime accused. Three others — Amandeep Singh Dhal, owner of Brindco Spirits, Arjun Pandey, an alleged middleman, and Butchi Babu Gorantla, the chartered accountant/auditor of K Kavitha, former Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MP and daughter of



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is taken away from the Rouse Avenue court building after he was remanded in three days' CBI custody by a special judge on Wednesday evening. Praveen Khanna

former Telangana CM K Chandrashekar Rao — have also been named accused in the case.

All four have been booked under Sections 420 (Cheating) and 120 B (Criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Sections 7 (Offence relating to public servant being bribed), 7A (Taking undue advantage to influence public servant by corrupt or illegal means or by exercise of personal influence), 8 (Offence relating to bribing of a public servant) and 12 (Punishment for abetment of offences) of the PC Act. So far, a total of 17 individuals have been named accused in the case.

## Why has Kejriwal been arrested now?

While the CBI always had the option of arresting Kejriwal, it would first need to gather some plausible evidence linking Kejriwal directly to the alleged scam.

This direct link is suspect in the ED's case as well. The ED has made a case alleging vicarious liability, both as Chief Minister of Delhi and convener of the Aam Aadmi Party, to link Kejriwal to the alleged tainted funds.

However, this cannot be an option in the corruption case.

Additionally, since the bar for granting bail under the PMLA is high, leading the prosecution effort with the ED case allows for prolonged custody of the accused.

Under PMLA, all courts are mandated to apply the stringent twin test to decide on bail.

The requirement of a 'lack of *prima facie* guilt' virtually amounts to a mini-trial, while in the CBI case, a lack of proximate evidence is also considered as a crucial factor in granting bail.

## How do courts grant bail in corruption cases?

An accused can seek anticipatory bail in a corruption case. Grant of bail in non-bailable offences is subject to judicial discretion.

Unlike the PMLA, which is an alternative criminal law framework to deal with the offence of money laundering, the PC Act does not impose stringent qualifications for bail.

Under the PC Act, an accused moves court for regular bail under the Code of Criminal Procedure. However, according to an amendment introduced in 2014, no accused shall be released on bail under the PC Act unless an opportunity is provided to the public prosecutor to oppose the bail application.

In 2019, while granting bail to former Union Minister P Chidambaram in the INX media case, the Supreme Court underlined the factors that are to be taken into consideration for deciding an application for bail under the PC Act.

It said: “The nature of accusation and the severity of the punishment in the case of conviction and the nature of the materials relied upon by the prosecution; reasonable apprehension of tampering with the witnesses or

apprehension of threat to the complainant or the witnesses; reasonable possibility of securing the presence of the accused at the time of trial or the likelihood of his absence; character behaviour and standing of the accused and the circumstances which are peculiar to the accused; larger interest of the public or the State and similar other considerations” must be taken into account.

## What happens in this case next?

After the three-day remand, the CBI will likely seek either an extension of the remand or judicial custody. The remand can also be challenged or a bail application can be moved.

In the ED case, the Supreme Court on May 17 reserved its verdict on Kejriwal's plea challenging the legality of his arrest in March. It is in this case that the top court had granted him interim relief to campaign for the Lok Sabha election. While reserving the case for verdict, the court also gave Kejriwal liberty to separately approach the trial court for bail. On June 20, the trial court granted bail to Kejriwal in the ED case. However, soon after, the Delhi High Court stayed the trial court order — the larger hearing on cancellation of bail is still pending before the High Court. Kejriwal's lawyers plan to move the Supreme Court against the stay by the High Court.

With a fresh CBI case now, Kejriwal will have to get bail in that case too for his release.



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Total 10 Tests: 5 Paper-I & 5 Paper-II  
7 July 2024 | Test Schedule: Every Sunday & Wednesday

# Setting targets in rain-truncated matches: How the DLS method works

ARJUN SENGUPTA  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 26

FRANK DUCKWORTH, 84, passed away on June 21. He, along with his fellow English statistician Tony Lewis, co-invented the Duckworth-Lewis method used to fairly determine results and set targets in rain-truncated matches. The method was first used in international cricket in 1997, and was fully adopted by the ICC in 1999. In 2014, the DL method became the DLS (Duckworth-Lewis-Stern), after some key updates by Australian statistician Steven Stern to better reflect modern scoring trends.

## Inspired by a farce

In 1992, Duckworth presented a paper titled “A fair result in foul weather” at the Royal Statistical Society — a response to the farcical end of the South Africa vs England World Cup semi final in Sydney. Batting second, South Africa needed an achievable 22 runs from 13 balls when rain stopped play.

When play resumed, South Africa was given a revised target of scoring 22 of 1 ball.

This impossible target was determined by the newly adopted “Most Productive Overs” (MPO) method. Runs scored in the best ‘x’ number of overs in the first innings were taken into account to set the target — ‘x’ being the number of overs the second innings was reduced to. So, if a team scored 300 in 50 overs, and 200 of these runs came in 25 overs, a match reduced to 25 overs would set a target of 201 for the chasing team.

While the MPO method factored in that scoring is not evenly distributed across innings, it unfairly penalised the chasing team by ignoring the best overs bowled by them in its calculation of a revised target. It also did not take into account how wickets impacted run-scoring.

“[Watching that match] I realised that it was a mathematical problem that required a mathematical solution”, Duckworth would say in an interview in 2007. In his 1992 pa-

per, he presented his idea for an alternative — following which Lewis got in touch.

## The DL method

The DL method introduced the concept of ‘resources’ in making score estimations for truncated games. In limited-overs cricket, each team, in effect, has two ‘resources’ to score as many runs as possible — the number of overs (balls) yet to be bowled, and the number of wickets in hand.

Simply put, the more the balls left to be bowled, the more the batting team can score; and the more the wickets in hand, the more it can score.

In a paper they wrote jointly in 1997, Duckworth and Lewis said: “Clearly, a team with 20 overs to bat with all ten wickets in hand has a greater run scoring potential than a team that has lost, say, eight wickets”.

The DL method converts all possible combinations of balls and wickets in hand to a combined “resources remaining” figure, which is expressed in percentage — a

## EXPLAINED SPORTS

## OVERS, WICKETS, AND RESOURCES REMAINING

Wkts lost	0	2	4	9
50 overs	100	83.8	62.4	7.6
40 overs	90.3	77.6	59.8	7.6
30 overs	77.1	68.2	54.9	7.6
25 overs	68.7	61.8	51.2	7.6
20 overs	58.9	54.5	46.1	7.6
10 overs	34.1	32.4	29.8	7.5

From ‘A fair method for resetting the target in interrupted one-day cricket matches’, by Duckworth and Lewis, 1998. This has since been updated multiple times.

full 50 overs and 10 wickets in hand means 100% resources are available.

Target scores for a team batting second can be adjusted (either up or down) from the total of the team batting first, based on the number of resources either team has lost. The following formula is used: Team

2's par score = Team 1's actual score X Team 2's resources/Team 1's resources.

The real achievement of Duckworth and Lewis was in calculating the relation between total runs that can be scored, and the resources remaining (both runs and balls). While the extremes are intuitively arrived at, how each over and wicket impacts the state of the game was determined through significant number-crunching and some “statistical sorcery”, as critics have said.

“Commercial confidentiality prevents the disclosure of the mathematical definitions of these functions. They have been obtained following extensive research and experimentation so that...they behave as expected under various practical situations,” Duckworth and Lewis wrote.

## Problems with DLS

Even with Stern's additions, DLS has been criticised for weighing wickets more heavily (as a resource) than balls available. This means that in big run chases with rain looming, teams simply need to keep wick-

ets in hand to match the DLS par score.

The tactic of “keeping wickets in hand” aligns with traditional cricketing logic but flies in the face of the reality of the game today, where run-scoring has become ever more rampant. The emphasis on wickets also means DLS is less accurate for T20s, where one good partnership can change a game.

DLS also does not take into account other variables that definitely play a part, like quality of bowling, ground dimensions, pitch conditions, batting depth, etc. For instance, this year's IPL winner KKR had solid hitters coming in at number 8 or 9. Thus, any fast-scoring handicap that a team might face after losing five or six wickets did not apply (or applied to a much lesser extent) to the team.

Today, there are two versions of the DL/DLS method — the publicly available DL Standard Edition, used in lower levels of cricket, and the DLS Professional Edition, which the ICC maintains as a proprietary computer software to be distributed only through countries' cricket boards.



# The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## NEVER AGAIN

Remembering Emergency is a necessity, learning its lessons more so — for both sides of the aisle in the 18th Lok Sabha

WHAT MAKES THE Emergency “the darkest hour” in India’s democratic history? Many answers are well-known but this question is worth revisiting, especially as a new Parliament begins its tenure. In a pointed coincidence, Speaker Om Birla, after his re-election, called out Indira Gandhi and the Congress for the “dictatorship” that was imposed, the horrors that marked those two years between 1975 and 1977. Their list is endless: The suspension of fundamental rights, the jailing of the Opposition, censorship and intimidation of the press, forced sterilisation, homes bulldozed in the name of “urban renewal”, a “committed” judiciary and a bureaucracy that remain a “blot on our history”. Significantly, Birla flagged how power was concentrated “in the hands of one person”, and the amendments to the Constitution were meant to destroy its “basic structure”. Not surprisingly, the Congress tried to shout down the two-minute silence. For, the Emergency touches many a raw nerve in its history and legacy; the party hasn’t slayed many of its demons from those days. Instead, it tends to brush all invocation of that period under the self-serving carpet of whataboutery. Indeed, the disruption by the Congress — most of its allies didn’t join in — stood out in sharper relief given how a copy of the Constitution has been the Opposition’s most visible accessory during the campaign — and after the results on June 4. The Congress, more so a revitalised Congress, needs to realise that condemning the Emergency is being on the right side of history.

That said, the BJP-led ruling establishment — by the very fact that it begins its third term as the ruling establishment — needs to learn lessons and take notes. At the Emergency’s diseased heart lay a fundamental violation — the government of the day used its electoral victory to make Parliament rubber-stamp laws that shrank freedoms and killed democracy. It’s the spirit of the Constitution — encapsulated in the Supreme Court’s “basic structure” doctrine — that is paramount. In practice, this must mean that a government is accountable, no matter its majority. It cannot wish away the Opposition or curb dissent.

The 18th Lok Sabha has an Opposition with renewed strength. One clear message from the mandate was apprehension among a section of the voters that an overweening majority imperils the Constitution. Misuse of central agencies, arrest of Opposition Chief Ministers, weaponising draconian laws — these did have an echo on the poll street. To do justice to its mandate, the Opposition must push for deliberation, debate and even contestation. The Speaker must allow them the space to do so. In the Winter Session of Parliament last year, as many as 146 MPs from both Houses were suspended. That act curtailed democracy. In his second term, Birla must give all Indians a voice through their representatives. That, as much as remembering the horrors of the Emergency, is the only way to ensure Never Again.

## MOODY’S WARNING

Rating agency’s report on water stress affecting India’s credit profile should spur conversations on sustainable use

INDIA’S PERSISTENT WATER crises and increased vulnerability to climate change could dent its sovereign credit strength, at a time when the country is gearing up to be the world’s third-largest economy. The rare use of this non-economic metric is especially pertinent given the difficulties people face in several cities and towns this summer. With meteorologists warning of more exacting heat waves in the coming years, water security would be critical to the country’s economic ambitions. Any drop in water supply could disrupt operations in farms and factories, Moody’s has said. This, the firm, has cautioned can precipitate a rise in food prices and lead to a decline in people’s real incomes. The agency identifies coal-fired power generation and steel production as the industrial sectors most vulnerable to water stress.

According to government estimates, per capita water availability in the country is likely to fall from an already low 1,486 cubic metres — much below the Ministry of Water Resources’ benchmark of 1,700 cubic metres — to less than 1,400 cubic metres by 2030. India’s historical inclination to address water-related deficits by focusing on supply-side parameters has led to uneconomical use of this resource, especially the overutilisation of groundwater. Water pricing mechanisms do not adequately account for the perilous state of the country’s aquifers. In 2019, the Water Resources Ministry launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan for rainwater harvesting and water conservation. Metros such as Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai do have laws on using rainwater. But, by all accounts, these have remained on paper. India’s metros do not have any data on buildings with water-harvesting structures. State governments and municipal corporations do very little to either incentivise housing societies — by linking rainwater harvesting with tax regimes such as property taxes, for example — or penalise builders who do not factor water efficiency in construction projects.

In the next 20 years, India will likely add more than 270 million people to its urban population, intensifying the competition between businesses and households for water. Conversations on water audits are at a nascent stage in industry. The Moody’s report could occasion such discussions. For instance, as the International Energy Agency has pointed out, 70 per cent of India’s projected electricity generation for 2040 will come from plants not yet commissioned. Technologies — dry cooling and non-fresh water cooling, for instance — to reduce pressure on water resources are available today. Moody’s warning should push policymakers to arrive at innovative ways for ensuring sustainable use of water.

## SMALL AND COMPETITIVE

Showing of underdogs at T20 Cricket World Cup and European Football Championships confirms sport is a great leveller

IN ITS 30 years of independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia had 14 failed attempts to reach the World Cups and European Championships (Euros) until the nation of 3.5 million made it this summer. Another footballing lightweight, Slovenia, qualified for the Euros directly for the first time in 24 years whereas Austria has had little to boast about in international competitions since finishing third in the FIFA World Cup way back in 1954. None of these teams were expected to do well in the ongoing championships. But as the curtains fell on the group stage, matches involving some of the so-called “smaller” teams have provided the most entertainment.

When the Euros moved from the compact 16-team format to a 24-nation party in 2016, the idea was ridiculed. The snobs scoffed that a bloated tournament would compromise quality and dilute the field given a high level of competition from the outset would no longer be the case. But like Iceland showed eight years ago, football can be a great leveller. Georgia’s fearlessness made them a joy to watch. Albania, playing only their second-ever Euro, played a central role in puncturing the Luka Modric-led Croatia’s ambitions to go deep in another tournament. And Austria, who stunned the Netherlands on Tuesday, have emerged as the best team in a group also comprising tournament favourites France.

These results show that when it comes to sport, especially at major tournaments, quantity doesn’t necessarily compromise quality. This was seen also at the ongoing ICC T20 World Cup. In the early stages of the Euros, where the traditional favourites have looked sluggish and seem to be pacing themselves for the long run, it’s the nothing-to-lose attitude of the underdogs that has given birth to compelling storylines. As the tournament rolls into the knockout stages, the big guns will begin to fire because of the sheer quality of their players. But in the early rounds, it’s the minnows who’ve punched above their weight.

# Safe drinking, not morality



VIKRAM PATEL

Tamil Nadu hooch tragedy is a reminder: India needs a public health-centred approach to alcohol

INDIA’S RECURRING TRAGEDIES which lead to countless lives lost and maimed, from road traffic accidents to monsoon flooding, have one common thread running through them: An incompetent state that is unable to enforce the laws. In addition, for some of these tragedies, there is a moral dimension that lurks just beneath the surface, and there is no better example of this than the recurrent calamities due to the consumption of illicit alcohol.

The most recent such occasion is only remarkable because of its sheer scale. Nearly 60 persons have died in the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy in Tamil Nadu. Alcohol consumption is associated with mortality in all countries, both due to its direct effects on various organs such as the liver and its indirect effects that impair one’s abilities, leading to accidents. But deaths due to poisoning by illicit alcohol are limited to a handful of countries, among which India ranks at the top. This is in large part due to the conflicting relationship the state has with the consumption of alcohol, oscillating between a sledgehammer condemnation of drinking as a symbol of the decay of cultural values on the one hand, and an embracing of forward-looking modernity in which citizens are entitled to enjoy personal freedoms, on the other.

This combination of contradictory positions is the result of the multi-hued history of alcohol consumption in India. References to alcohol use can be found in Vedic texts. There was widespread alcohol use even during the Mughal period, despite Quranic prohibition. The arrival of the British radically altered the dynamics of this laissez-faire situation as they strove to restrict the culturally sanctioned patterns of drinking, such as in community celebrations, which were closely tied to the consumption of indigenously produced alcoholic beverages. The colonial narrative was that such practices were primitive. They introduced the gin tonic and whiskey soda, conveniently distilled in industrial quantities and taxed generously under their watch, which spread from the secluded compounds of the British to the upper-class elites of brown *sahibs*.

Thus was born the uniquely Indian moniker of “Indian-made foreign liquor”,

The first hints of prohibition were evident even before 1947. But it was only when our Constitution was ratified that India became the only secular and democratic country which required the state to implement prohibition of intoxicating substances, lumping alcohol with other drugs. As with all exhortations of moral purity, such values were heavily gendered with women being tarnished as being ‘loose’ if they drank alcohol.

which became a symbol of colonisation designed to deplete Indians of their moral fibre. Abstinence and prohibition became a clarion call for the temperance movement that blended seamlessly with the Independence movement.

The first hints of prohibition were evident even before 1947. But it was only when our Constitution was ratified that India became the only secular and democratic country which required the state to implement prohibition of intoxicating substances, lumping alcohol with other drugs. As with all exhortations of moral purity, such values were heavily gendered with women being tarnished as being ‘loose’ if they drank alcohol.

But, gin tonics and whiskey soda had already become an integral part of the social worlds of too many of India’s elite and governing classes. The actual realisation of the lofty ideals of abstinence was left to the individual states, of which only a handful, notably Gujarat, the birthplace of the Mahatma, imposed prohibition.

In the decades that followed, state policies have had to navigate the tightrope of not being perceived as licentious while also recognising that drinking is an integral part of society. Moreover, as Bihar’s experiment with prohibition demonstrated, alcohol became a potent electoral issue due to the pervasive experience of domestic violence fuelled by alcohol while, as the ongoing crisis engulfing the AAP government in New Delhi demonstrates, the sale of alcohol was a major contributor to the exchequer.

Each state has evolved its own policy, somewhere on the spectrum, from liberal to draconian. Some states have even evolved a hybrid approach to accommodate this contradictory stance. For example, Gujarat came up with a bizarre policy wherein residents were banned from drinking but out-of-state visitors could procure alcohol if armed with a doctor’s certificate stating that they had a drinking problem. More recently, the state allowed liquor in the ambitious GIFT City but only to permanent employees and their authorised visitors.

Such contradictory positions have led to the persistence of the illegal moonshine industry that thrives on the enormous profits which are to be generated to fulfil the desire

of people to drink in contexts where the substance is criminalised, and where law enforcement agencies and the political class collude with the mafia or are simply incompetent to enforce the law. And, as with all such laws which limit personal freedoms, the poor suffer the most. In Bihar, prisons are bursting with poor men who were arrested for drinking. As everywhere in the country, most victims of hooch tragedies are the poor.

We need nothing short of a national consensus on finding the right balance in our approach to drinking alcohol. We can be guided both by public health science and the experiences of other countries. This might also offer an opportunity to revisit our policies on cannabis, another substance with a long and storied history of use in India. It was criminalised under pressure from the US while that country itself has become home to the largest legal cannabis industry in the world. Such policies would permit alcohol consumption and legalise, with strict quality controls, indigenous alcohol production. At the same time, there would be zero-tolerance for alcohol-related offences, for example on bars for selling alcohol to underage drinkers — as has belatedly happened in the context of the notorious “Porsche” drink-driving deaths in Pune. The treatment of harmful drinking would need to evolve beyond the historic focus on in-patient de-addiction centres, a legacy of a morally grounded, disease-focused approach and offer evidence-based psychosocial interventions in a non-stigmatising way through the country’s primary care network.

I remember when I was a hospital resident in London back in the late 1980s when it was commonplace to drink heavily as pubs approached the mandatory closing hour of 11 pm, and then drive home inebriated. It required more than a decade of a combination of policies, from extending the closing hours of pubs to strict enforcement of drink-driving laws to lead to a culture change in British society such that it became socially unacceptable to drink and drive. It is time for us, as a nation, to engage in this journey.

The writer is Paul Farmer Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School



NANDITESH NILAY

## WE, THE PEOPLE IN THE HOUSE

543 MPs represent all in their constituency, not just those who voted for them

## IN GOOD FAITH

On the floor of the House, listen, listen, listen. When we genuinely listen, there is a deep sense of empathy. Shouting may be needed at times, but shouting someone down is not just impolite, it denies people the space and time to listen to themselves. When the nation watches the Parliament, every citizen wants to hear their representative — and the other’s representative too.

people in that constituency, not just those who voted for them. In short, a good MP is a good leader who knows how to read the silence of the *aam aadmi* and the *aam aurat*.

Three, campaigns make for good speeches, but how do you remain good as a communicator post-election? Only if the self gives space to the human values of promise, trust, care and courage. Promise prepares the MP to weigh the responsibility of their words. Trust is when the MP acts on the promises made and if they can’t, comes clean with the people. Care and courage flow from the realisation that the mandate is a responsibility, not a privilege or an entitlement. Care is a reminder that directly or indirectly, someone can depend on you.

Four, there is a lot of talk about the Constitution as MPs wave copies and flag the need to protect it. The Constitution doesn’t belong to Party A or Party B, it is a set of principles that rise above party lines, that are the beating heart of the Republic. It has laid down our rights, it has drawn the lines around those in power, it empowers those on the margins, it is our promise to each other that it doesn’t matter who you vote for, who we pray to, what is constitutional will always be yours. Respecting Mandate 2024 means swearing to uphold every letter and the spirit of the Constitution. The Constitution cannot be a book to hide behind or use as a weapon to beat anyone with. It is the text that binds us all.

Five, on the floor of the House, listen, listen, listen. When we genuinely listen, there is a deep sense of empathy. Shouting may be needed at times, but shouting someone down is not just impolite, it denies people the space and time to listen to themselves. When the nation watches Parliament sessions, every citizen wants to hear their representative — and the other’s representative too. In a democracy, that’s their sacred right and that’s why they have participated in the seven-phase elections, braving the elements and their own adversities. Listening is what makes us look beyond the My and the I.

And especially for a mandate that is so nuanced, that carries within it so many messages, listening is more important than ever. In the end, all five things add up to one: Being good. Goodness empowers both the speaker and the receiver. It will help MPs be aware of the fact that people are not votes, people are not winning percentages, but individuals with hopes, aspirations and fears, members of families. They are parents, siblings, someone’s children, colleagues at work, neighbours in the building, fellow passengers on a journey. They are you and me and us — and that’s why the 18th Lok Sabha is not just 543 MPs, it’s also we, the people.

The writer is the author of Being Good, Aaiye, Insaan Banen and Ethikos. He teaches and trains courses on ethics, values and behaviour



## JUNE 27, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### VAJPAYEE ATTACKS CONG

BJPPRESIDENT ATAL Bihari Vajpayee accuses the Congress (I) of having “a fascist mentality”, after the party’s reaction to the BJP’s resolution on the Punjab issue, which blames the Congress and the prime minister for the foment of terrorism in the state. Vajpayee cites numerous accounts where Bhindranwale, complicit in many acts of violence, was spared by the Congress.

### ARMS IN KASHMIR

THE FLOW OF arms from Pakistan to Kashmir has added a new dimension to Indo-Pak rela-

tions. Given the heavy presence of security forces on the border, the flow of weapons is not brisk. However, the arms trade has continued for around three years. The arms manufactured in Pakistan’s NWFP are smuggled through various points on the border.

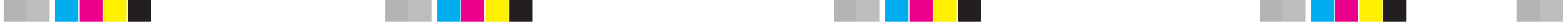
### RIOTS IN BOMBAY

SHIV SENA WORKERS are engaged in widespread rioting across various parts of Bombay like Sahar, Tilak Nagar, and Bhatwadi in Ghatkopar. As a result, two individuals were stabbed to death. Sena members also set fire to a shop outside the international airport in Sahar and smashed 30 taxis. The secretary of

the Bombay Taximen’s Union said that several cabs were damaged, during periods of no police intervention. He also claims that eight taxi drivers have been stabbed during the rioting, across the city.

### EEC TO PAY BACK UK

THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC Community summit meeting on June 26 in Paris decided on a compromise formula to resolve the budgetary crisis. The formula is based on the question of refund to Britain, which complained about contributing too much to the EEC budget, given its economic status. The EEC will be refunding Britain one billion ECUs.





# THE IDEAS PAGE

## Only by eternal vigilance

Emergency is a reminder of the need to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals in society. A government that undermines the Constitution will be held to account



M VENKAIAH NAIDU

HISTORY OFFERS INVALUABLE lessons on how to keep from repeating the mistakes that led to the lowest points in our past. The imposition of Emergency is one such dark episode that continues to guide present and future generations, given its implications for democracy and the right of citizens to live with dignity.

Article 352 of the Constitution provides for the proclamation of national emergency on the grounds of internal disturbances, threat to national security due to war or external aggression. A state of emergency has been imposed thrice since Independence — during the wars with China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1971 and for the third time in 1975, this last episode being the most infamous in the annals of our democracy.

This year marks the beginning of the 50th year since the imposition of Emergency on June 25, 1975. It was imposed because of the political insecurity of the then Prime Minister, not because of any genuine “internal disturbance”. Many factors were making the PM’s position untenable at the time. Among them were concentration of power in the hands of one leader, lack of respect for democratic functioning, a culture of sycophancy, corruption in the vital organs of the state and the undermining of constitutional organs like the judiciary. Amidst widespread resentment against misrule, Jayaprakash Narayan called for “sampoorna kranti” (total revolution) and the nation responded in unison.

The last straw was the judgment of the Allahabad High Court on June 12, 1975, which nullified the election to the Lok Sabha of the then Prime Minister in 1971 on the grounds of abusing official machinery for electoral gains. Emergency was proclaimed two weeks later.

The first lesson to be learnt from the dark saga of Emergency is how not to govern the state. Our Constitution mandates democratic governance based on people’s participation, wider consultations and consensus, conformity with the spirit and provisions of the Constitution and compliance with the laws made by the legislature. Despotism has no place in democracy. The period from 1971 to 1975 saw brazen violations of all conventions of democracy. People’s resentment against growing misrule and abuse of power was misunderstood as a threat to despotic rule. The Supreme Court’s judgments in Golaknath and Kesavananda Bharati in defence of the basic rules and framework of the Constitution and in support of the fundamental rights of citizens were taken as serious threats to rule by an individual. This was also the case with the Allahabad High Court judgment.

An elected ruler can’t afford to have an unclean mind and hands. She or he should rule in the best interests of the people, in true democratic spirit, within the constitutional framework, not in personal interest



C R Sasikumar

and for aggrandisement.

The second lesson is that people, including the poor, do not live by bread alone and that they draw greater meaning from their lives. They want to live with dignity and self-respect too. They value their right to freedom of speech, their right to life, etc. They won’t tolerate any infringement on fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The 21-month-long saga of Emergency was lifted on March 21, 1977. India was poorer and more illiterate than now. In the general elections that followed, the poor and illiterate Indians revolted against the excesses of the Emergency and voted in the first-ever non-Congress government at the Centre. Individual rights that accord dignity to life are as important to people as their daily bread.

Since 1977, people have often expressed their concerns about such rights in different elections. They have expressed their aversion to leaders who have betrayed arrogance, disrespected democracy, degraded the spirit of the Constitution and acted against the laws and interests of the people. Humility and a demonstrated spirit of service to the people are highly regarded and rewarded in democracy.

There is a third lesson to draw from this chapter in history. The excesses committed during the Emergency are too many to recall in this space. A reign of terror prevailed across most parts of the country and citizens, deprived of fundamental rights, lived in a state of fear. Amidst this, every organ of the state and every pillar of the Constitution crumbled, and the media was no exception.

The role of large sections of the media during the time has come in for sharp criticism.

Since 1977, people have often expressed their concerns about such rights in different elections. They have expressed their aversion to leaders who have betrayed arrogance, disrespected democracy, degraded the spirit of the Constitution and acted against the laws and the interests of the people. Humility and a demonstrated spirit of service to the people are highly regarded and rewarded in democracy.

cism. Except for The Indian Express under the fiery Ramnath Goenka, The Statesman headed by CR Irani and Nikhil Chakravarty’s The Mainstream, the print media of the time surrendered meekly to the diktats of the government. As my mentor, Lal Krishna Advani told journalists after the Emergency had been lifted, “You were asked only to bend, yet you crawled.”

The government used preventive detention provisions nationwide to suppress dissent and stifle opposition voices. Leading lights of the Opposition, including stalwarts like Jayaprakash Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L K Advani, JB Kripalani and many others, were detained.

As I was actively engaged in student politics at Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, in 1974, JP Narayan appointed me as convener of the J P Yuvajana Chhatra Sangharsha Samiti, Andhra Pradesh unit. Later, I was detained under MISA for seventeen-and-a-half months in three different jails. The only reason for my detention was that I had invited JP Narayan to the university to address the students.

To learn from such excesses and their implications for democracy, the dark saga of the Emergency, the factors that led to it and its consequences should be made a part of the curriculum for students. All of us, and the youth particularly, need to learn from history to guard against such unsavoury episodes. Let’s resolve to safeguard our democracy. The Emergency serves as a stark reminder of the need to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals in any society. As the well-known adage goes, “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

The writer is former Vice President of India

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The political solution to this lengthy saga is welcome, particularly given the reported impact on Mr Assange’s health after years holed up in London’s Ecuadorian embassy and then in Belmarsh prison. But the threat to press freedom has not ended. Its defence cannot rest either.” — THE GUARDIAN

## It is about the jobs

India is set to be the third-largest economy in the world. But quality of employment will determine how benefits of growth reach people



ISHAN BAKSHI

OVER THE NEXT few years, as the Indian economy continues its forward march, there are likely to be significant changes in the global economic order. Going by IMF projections, India is on track to surpass Japan to become the fourth-largest economy in the world by the end of 2025. Two years thereafter, it is expected to whisk past Germany to become the third-largest economy. From then on, the top three slots in the global economic rankings — occupied by the US, China and India — are likely to be fixed, barring, of course, any major catastrophe.

Five years from now, by roughly the end of the current government’s term, the IMF expects India’s GDP to have increased to \$5.8 trillion, up from \$3.5 trillion now — implying an addition of \$2.3 trillion, which is just shy of the combined size of Spain and Netherlands today.

The Fund’s projections imply real growth, averaging 6.5 per cent during this period. This seems achievable. After all, it is broadly in line with the pace at which the economy has grown over the past two decades. But, it is a far cry from the growth rates achieved during the mid-2000s. It also implies a more gradual upward climb, not quite the rapid catch-up that many have hoped for. Thus, for the foreseeable future, India will remain the poorest nation amongst the largest economies in the world. With its per capita income expected to touch \$4,281 by 2028-29, the country is unlikely to make the ranks of the upper middle-income category by then. That will have to wait.

These are, however, projections. And going by the past, such projections can be quite off the mark, on both the upside and the downside. Sustaining the healthy growth rates of the last few years over the medium to longer term, broadening the consumption base, will be challenging, considering that large sections of the labour force in the country continue to be trapped in low-productive jobs.

Data from recent government surveys shows that the number of informal enterprises in the country has risen from 5.76 crore in 2010-11 to 6.34 crore in 2015-16 and further to 6.5 crore in 2022-23 (There are some differences in coverage). Roughly 11 crore workers continue to be engaged in these establishments, a sizeable number of which are essentially one-man roadside shops. If the economy was producing more productive forms of employment, both these numbers — informal firms and the workforce therein — should have been going down sharply. In 2015-16, just under 16 per cent of these establishments hired workers. By 2022-23, it was down to less than 15 per cent. Hiring fewer workers is not something productive firms do.

This kind of employment is characterised by low levels of productivity and earning. Value added in such establishments

works out to around Rs 1.4 lakh, while in comparison, it is roughly 10 times higher at Rs 15.04 lakh by workers in formal enterprises as per the annual survey of industries. For these workers in informal enterprises, wage growth has barely kept pace with inflation, which implies little to no real wage growth for the better part of the last decade.

To these 11 crore workers in non-farm informal enterprises, add the 23-odd crore engaged in agriculture and that is almost two-thirds of the labour force which continues to be engaged in low productive jobs in less productive sectors — sectors which are now capturing an even lower share of the entire value added in the economy than before. And then there are those informally employed in construction, and the formal parts of the economy. In the absence of low or semi-skilled job opportunities in the more productive formal manufacturing sector and lacking the education to enter the more skilled forms of formal employment in both manufacturing and high-end services, their alternatives only include precarious forms of employment in the gig economy. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that after the various arms of the Indian state such as defence and Railways, Uber, with more than 10 lakh drivers in the country, now ranks as amongst the largest employment generators in the country, followed by companies like Zomato and Swiggy, which together have more than six lakh delivery personnel.

The issue of jobs, or the lack thereof, has been a constant in India’s development story, not just restricted to the ruling dispensation. But what has changed in recent years is the youth bulge; the rising labour force participation rate, especially of women, as financial distress pushes them into the labour market; the dwindling share of value added by the informal sector; and the growing capital intensity of production in sectors that not only account for more value addition in the economy, but also those that are more labour intensive in nature. Add to that the fall in migration — the decline in Railway passenger traffic both suburban (where distances are less than 150 km) and non-suburban (longer distances) compared to pre-pandemic levels indicates that possibility — and the channel that facilitates the transfer of resources from urban to rural areas also appears to have cracked.

If such an employment situation persists, governments will find it difficult to restrict fiscal transfers to the less well-off. An obvious corollary is the possibility of continuing high levels of taxation of the more affluent — collections from the surcharge levied on high-income individuals have increased by almost 50 times over the past decade, from Rs 1,343 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 65,000 crore in 2023-24. But this approach of milking the rich, while increasing giveaways at the lower end, also has its limits.

The fallout from not being able to create more productive jobs on a sufficiently large scale, the deepening labour market duality, is likely to manifest in many ways, perhaps more visibly in the form of less social mobility and high-income inequality. As others have also noted, it will determine whether the country will resemble East Asia or end up going the Latin American way.

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OOPALEE OPERAJITA

## A lasting harmony

Remembering CV Chandrasekhar’s sublime and soulful Bharatanatyam

PROFESSOR C V Chandrasekhar (May 22, 1935-June 19, 2024) — Chandru Anna to us — was one of the last of the legendary greats who studied Bharatanatyam with Peria Sarada, Chinna Sarada, and Guru Dandayudhapani Pillai, in the Pandanallur style, at Chennai’s Kalakshetra during its founder Rukmini Devi’s time. He was, afterwards, a senior member of the faculty of Dance at Banaras Hindu University; and professor and head of the Dance department, and, then, dean of Fine Arts at M S University, Baroda, for a long period. He won the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the Padma Bhushan, and the Kalidas Samman. He was a student of music before he became a dancer; and that wellspring illuminated his art. A robust knowledge of music is imperative for classical Indian dance, and Chandrasekhar possessed way more than a fair share of it.

Chandrasekhar was blessed with a handsome and expressive face and a lean, tall frame. He was a dancer’s dancer: Eloquent, chiselled, poised, perfect, and moving. Bharatanatyam’s sitting posture is called the *araimandi* (or *ardhamandali*) and it is the mandatory base from which the dance grows, and strikes roots, branches and flowers. It is difficult, but compulsory, to maintain the *araimandi* through an entire recital — but it is alarmingly absent today. When you sit in the *araimandi*, and your feet are together, pointing out in opposite directions, at 180 degrees, and, consequently, you are at two-thirds of your height, you are doing Bharatanatyam in the

classically prescribed way. Sitting any less, or having your feet not quite out, is cheating. Chandrasekhar sat much more — his *araimandi* was sustained, even at 85, and a sight for the gods.

In a full-blown traditional recital, or *margam*, performed at age 82 — with not a sliver of a concession to his age — Chandrasekhar started off with a crisp *alarippu*, breezing through, among the other classic repertoire pieces, the challenging *varam*, all the way to the *tillana* in Natabhairavi. His *abhinaya* was most convincing, if subtle, as his face became the palette for a gamut of emotions. There was not a single moment in this recital which was not complete in itself; and not a single moment which you might have wished for in any other way. That is perfection, and it generates exhilarating *rasavada*. Chandrasekhar’s costume, minimal jewellery, and no makeup, save an outline of the eyes, did justice to a prized aesthetic in which less is more. It is this Bharatanatyam which I love, and have practised since age six; and it is this Bharatanatyam which is never excessive, but, nevertheless, exuberant and brilliant, and contains complex multitudes. Bharatanatyam is a grand style: It integrates dance and music, *sahitya*, *raga*, *bhava*, and *tala* — in a repertoire of over a thousand pieces, and steadily growing — and it is the god Shiva’s dance, as well as his consort, Parvati’s. As you watched Chandrasekhar, it was Shiva’s dance which came to mind.

I contrast Chandrasekhar’s sublime art to

the ubiquitous razzle dazzle of today; and, to some of Bharatanatyam’s prima donnas, who are profoundly restless and overdone: They flash repeated come-hither expressions, even as they do *mritha*, or pure dance pieces. Yamini Krishnamurti articulated being dismayed at this phenomenon to me, way back in 1981, when I spent two years in close proximity to her. Their costumes often resemble Christmas trees at Walmart. I also contrast his meditative and self-assured dance to the aggressive selfie-and-Instagram-addicted cadres who post inconsequential, narcissistic — and often plagiarised — dance clips of themselves, three times a day. Their live performances thus become an agglomeration of selfies, with a plethora of unappealing dazzle, “in a spirit of gluttony and bricolage”. They don’t possess a hint of the Yeatsian merging of the dancer and the dance, which you witness in Chandrasekhar.

I first met Chandrasekhar, together with his lovely wife, Jaya, a sought-after Bharatanatyam guru herself, in Varanasi, in September 1979, when I was first invited to dance there. My guru Kelucharan Mohapatra accompanied me on pakhawaj (he always did), and I gave a recital at the Nagri Natak Mandali. Chandrasekhar played the manjira for me at my concert because my guru asked him to. Think of the extreme good fortune of a rather young girl: Two great gurus simultaneously onstage, accompanying you at a recital. In my audience that evening were Pandit Kishan Maharaj, Pandita Girija Devi,

Ustad Bismillah Khan, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra, professor Veer Bhadra Mishra, and other Varanasi legends.

The day after my recital, Chandrasekhar and Jaya Akka invited Guruji and me to their charming Varanasi home. We spent the better part of that day and the next day together. How precious those two days were, I always knew, but after Chandrasekhar’s passing, they seem even more so.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit poet, and a favourite, writes of the opposites which make for the miracle of divine creation: Whatever is “sweet-sour; swift-slow, adazzle-dim”. In tribute, I will always recall the inherent grandeur in Chandrasekhar’s art, which enabled him to create and easily juxtapose dichotomous emotions and *tattwas* (attributes), and reach into the deep recesses of our beings, creating within us, the spectator/*rasika*, a lilting and lasting harmony.

As the novelist Raja Rao said: “When movement is from oneself to the Self, one dances”. That Self is the divine: It is, verily, the universe.

Professor Chandrasekhar is survived by his wife, Jaya, and lovely dancer daughters, Chitra and Manjari.

The writer was appointed Distinguished Fellow at Carnegie Mellon University in 1990. She is also a global adviser on public policy, communications, and international relations and is an award-winning Odissi and Bharatanatyam artiste and choreographer

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### INDIA’S GROWTH

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Putting manufacturing on track’ (IE, June 26). We are far from the target of achieving 25 per cent manufacturing share in GDP and generating 100 million jobs. While PLI was launched with much hope, it has not achieved the desired goals. It was meant to increase domestic manufacturing and make India an export hub. For the manufacturing sector to thrive in India, both land and labour reforms need to be implemented earnestly. This would automatically improve India’s EDBI ranking. Once the manufacturing sector is revived, MSMEs will also get boosted and subsequently, generate employment.

Bal Govind, Noida

### FREEDOM CALLS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial ‘Holding the spotlight’ (IE, June 26). WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange’s release from prison marks the culmination of a long-running saga. Assange pled guilty to breaching the Espionage Act and returned to Australia, which Canberra has been pushing for. In 2016, Russian interference was suspected when Wikileaks released the Democrats’ emails which harmed Hillary Clinton’s electoral prospects and boosted Trump’s. So, it’s difficult to predict how this will affect the coming US presidential elections.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Holding the spotlight’ (IE, June 26). Julian Assange did what journalists do in a free world when he published secret documents exposing the truth behind America’s wars in the Middle East. For this, he was denied freedom. This is a rare story in Western democracy — which boasts of its democratic record yet punishes whistleblowers. The way Assange is being released raises concerns. Obama commuted the sentence of Chelsea Manning, the military analyst who published the documents on WikiLeaks, yet Assange remained in jail. The West settled on a convenient deal — conviction for the US and freedom for Assange. How this all unfolds with regard to freedom of information is yet to be seen.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

### A&N’S FUTURE

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Security and ecology’ (IE, June 26). NITI Aayog’s plan to turn A&N into a mega-infrastructure and strategic hub is a result of security concerns due to Chinese belligerence in the Indian Ocean Region. This threat perception explains why there’s a need to enhance the security around A&N islands by turning some of the islands into strategic strongholds. However, at the same time, the policymakers should not lose sight of the ecological aspect.

Manish Mishra, Bhopal











OPINION

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

House keys with  
Speaker Om Birla

He — and the treasury benches — need to gain the trust of a revitalised Opposition

The decision of the BJP to repeat Om Birla, the Speaker of the 17th Lok Sabha, for the office is of a piece with its intent to project stability and continuity in government. He was elected on Wednesday by a voice vote, a rare event for the last time an election was held for the office of the Speaker was in 1976 when the nation was under the dark blanket of the Emergency. The election, a departure from the convention of nearly half a century, also marks a lost opportunity for the government to build bridges with the Opposition. All that the treasury benches needed to do was to assure the Opposition that it would concede to the latter's choice for the office of the deputy speaker, a convention followed until 2014. Such a gesture would have helped the new House to begin on a clean slate and bury the bitterness that defined relations between the government and the Opposition in the last term.

Speaker Birla would do well to recognise the sentiment in the speeches of the Opposition leaders who congratulated him on his appointment. Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav may have spoken for all of the Opposition when he said, "We expect that the Opposition's voice won't be crushed in the House." And the new Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi offered a hand of friendship: "Opposition would like to assist you in your work. I am confident you will allow us to speak in the House." The 17th Lok Sabha witnessed many acrimonious scenes and the perception of the Speaker as a non-partisan arbitrator of parliamentary proceedings took a hit following a flurry of suspensions of members: The last winter session of Parliament saw 146 MPs, all from the emaciated Opposition, getting suspended, 78 of them in a single day. In this chaos, many important legislations were turned into law without necessary debate or scrutiny.

The new House has a completely different look: A 236-member strong Opposition will be a different challenge for a 293-member NDA. It will require skillful floor management by the treasury benches if the House is to deliver on its mandate. Speaker Birla's inaugural address to the House was ominous as he invoked the Emergency to say that the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had imposed dictatorship on the country. The government can still retrieve lost ground — the onus on ensuring the smooth running of Parliament rests with the treasury benches — by inviting the Opposition to nominate the deputy speaker. A harmonious Parliament with bipartisan consensus is a welcome, and possible, idea.

Julian Assange and the battle for open society

Julian Assange walked free on Wednesday after a breakthrough plea deal with the United States that ended years of legal drama. Assange has long been a cause célèbre for founding WikiLeaks, a hacktivism operation that has been as revered as it has been reviled. WikiLeaks became best known in 2010 with the release of classified US military information, including chilling footage of a helicopter gunning down people in Baghdad and the airmen laughing about the "dead bastards". The people they killed included two *Reuters* journalists. Several such leaks exposed military excesses and abuse of power by religious and political leaders. On the other hand, WikiLeaks was also indicted for its role in leaking a tranche of Democratic emails, which was seen to have tilted the scales against the then presidential candidate Hilary Clinton.

WikiLeaks and Assange are a reminder of the intractable tension between the governed and the governors even in open, liberal democracies. Assange was helped by or, in turn, helped other whistle-blowers such as Chelsea Manning (who sourced the Iraq footage) and Edward Snowden. Then US President Barack Obama commuted Manning's sentence, while Snowden lives in self-imposed exile in Russia, fearing arrest for having exposed a sweeping American surveillance operation.

Whistle-blowing can be tricky — technology has changed the scale of data and care must be taken to protect the innocent. But as long as asymmetries remain between the State's power and its obligations, there is a moral imperative to protect those who expose wrongdoing. It is reassuring that Assange's ordeal has come to an end.

Delhi must act now  
to beat extreme heat

A modified definition of a heatwave to incorporate humidity would be a key first step to correctly quantify the scale of the problem in summer

Summer arrived early this year in India, bringing 50 degrees Celsius temperatures in several parts of the country. While India is no stranger to high heat and humidity during the summer months, the climate crisis is causing heatwaves to be longer, more frequent, and more intense. By 2050, parts of India are projected to be too hot in the summer to be habitable. Heat stress can cause a spectrum of health impacts, from reduced productivity to headache, nausea, cramps, increased heart rate to, eventually, heat stroke, organ failure and death. With less than 10% of Indians having access to air conditioning today, there have been several reports of deaths, and thousands have been hospitalised due to heat stroke during the May-June heatwaves.

Humid heat can be more lethal than dry heat as the body is unable to cool down by sweating. The combination of temperature and humidity is captured in the heat index, which gives an indication of "perceived heat stress as experienced by a healthy adult resting in the shade with access to water". Revised heat index calculations by University of California, Berkeley, professor David Romps have demonstrated that a temperature of 39 degrees Celsius in conjunction with 70% humidity and above, or 45 degrees Celsius with 45% humidity and above, could result in heat exhaustion, stroke, and even death. In Patna, Bihar, the afternoon of May 30 saw a temperature of 37 degrees Celsius with humidity reaching 80%. These conditions are equivalent to a heat index of 74, when the body's core temperature begins to rise due to heat retention. And in direct sunlight, the heat index was deadly at 82.

In such conditions, it is critical to protect vulnerable groups such as outdoor manual workers, the homeless, children, the elderly, or those without access to cooling. About half of India's adult workforce (over 300 million individuals) is engaged in labour-intensive jobs such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction and street vending that involve direct exposure to heat stress. These manual workers are disproportionately affected by the heatwaves and currently are left to fend for themselves. Projections by the International Labour Organization, assuming a conservative global temperature rise of 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century, indicate that India could see a 5% loss to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030 due to the impact of heat stress on labour productivity unless measures are taken.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the deaths due to heat stress are undercounted, as the cause of death could present as heart attack, kidney failure, etc. Recent research by Jeroen de Bont of the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden and others quantifies additional deaths due to heatwaves across India's ten largest cities. They find that two-day heatwaves can cause a bump of 15% in daily average deaths, while a five-day intense heatwave can push up daily deaths by over 30%. This would amount to tens of thousands of additional deaths if an intense five-day heatwave occurred everywhere in India just once during the summer season, making a single intense heatwave the most lethal annual disaster.

Over the last decade, both the Union and several state governments have devised programmes to increase awareness of and deploy early warning systems for heatwaves, as well as enhance the preparedness of public health infrastructure during the summer months. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued guidelines for the prediction and management of heatwaves, based on which 17 states have prepared Heat Action Plans (HAPs) for responding to extreme heat. However, most HAPs fall short on several fronts, including accounting for humid heat, hot nights and urban heat island effects, delineating adequate funding, and long-term infrastructure interventions to prevent heat deaths.

A modified definition of a heatwave to incorporate humidity would be a key first step to quantifying the scale of the problem correctly. A revised heat index that accounts for thermal load from direct exposure to the sun, as



Shruti M Deorah



Ashok Gadgil



By 2050, parts of India are projected to be too hot to be habitable AFP

well as internal heat generation due to manual labour, should be assessed. The HAPs should be based on heat index projections to prepare for a warmer future. Secondly, a district-level vulnerability assessment to prioritise interventions for high-risk regions is urgently needed. This mapping should include variables such as population density, temperature and humidity patterns, per capita income and the share of the population employed in manual casual work. In the medium-term, HAPs must expand their interventions to include access to cooling shelters. Public spaces such as community centres, schools and libraries, can be fitted with air conditioning and stocked with water and electrolytes for a low-cost upgrade to function as a cooling shelter. For example, in the United States, 80-plus cities have put in place 1,400-plus cooling shelters to protect the vulnerable during heatwaves. In the long-run, creating a network of cooling shelters that use passive cooling methods in times of grid failures would be critical.

Long-term interventions have to combine regulatory measures with local heat resilience and investment in research and development (R&D). For instance, increasing green cover in urban spaces that are suffering from the heat island effect could help assuage the situation. However, cities must select the tree species for planting today that can withstand the projected temperatures 20 years hence and are drought-resistant. Light-coloured concrete or reflective paint on footpaths, roads and building roofs can reduce the ambient temperature during the day and night. Regulatory enforcement would be key as landlords are unlikely to invest on their own for the benefit of tenants and renters. Lastly, attention is also needed in urban slums where roofing materials such as corrugated galvanised iron sheets create oven-like conditions inside the informal settlements. Modular roofing slabs made of agricultural and packaging waste can help reduce indoor temperatures by over 5 degrees Celsius.

Institutions and the public infrastructure in India are not ready for the monstrous beast of extreme heat that will mark the climate crisis. The government needs to prioritise the allocation of the R&D budget for developing, validating and disseminating creative and cost-effective solutions to minimise loss of life, productivity, and GDP due to heat stress and other impacts of the climate crisis. Significant investment in institutional preparedness and adaptive measures are urgent and critical for India to build resilience to the new grave threats from a warming planet.

Shruti M Deorah and Ashok Gadgil are with the India Energy & Climate Center, University of California, Berkeley. The views expressed are personal

Reaching for the sky  
on a wing and a prayer

On June 13, Madhya Pradesh (MP)'s newly appointed chief minister (CM) Mohan Yadav announced the PM Shri Vayu Seva, a new air service connecting eight cities in the culturally rich and geographically vast state. The Dil Se Dil Ki Yatra, under the aegis of the MP tourism board, promised to connect Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Rewa, Ujjain, Gwalior, Singrauli and Khajuraho through an air service starting June 16 to improve access between tourist spots in the state. The press release that followed the announcement carried a photograph of the two aircraft that will fly on the routes. The release added that travellers can book tickets and get information about the offers, schedules and fare details at [www.flyola.in](http://www.flyola.in).

The idea seemed a good one. However, there wasn't much available on the website that could validate the antecedents and credentials of those offering this new intra-state air service. After talking to industry insiders and officials at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) officials, I learnt that S Ram Ola, the managing director of FlyOla, had landed on the Indian aviation scene after outbidding rivals by a large margin to win the bid to set up a flying training organisation (FTO) at Khajuraho. His firm was one of the eight private players selected by the government — a majority of which are yet to take off — when the Airport Authority of India liberalised the flying training policy back in 2021.

Although the FTO he bid and won is yet to see the light of day, Ola, with a never-say-die attitude, has now opted to launch this latest service, probably realising that this might be easier to get off the ground than a certified flying school with instructors and students. As a former Jet captain pointed out wryly: "It is easier to become a Member of Parliament in India than set up a flying school or any aviation-related business." At first glance, FlyOla appears to be one of many examples of organisations with little or no proven track record to speak of being given clearances and licences that entrust them to undertake operations such as passenger flights.

FlyOla is not unique. Sometime last year, I was approached by public relations executives who were seeking coverage for their client Zoom (yes, triple "o"; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom\\_Air](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoom_Air)) which had been given a permit to operate flights as a scheduled operator. Later I learnt that this was the rechristened avatar of Zoom Air (presumably with an additional letter "o" inserted for good luck), promoted by Zexus Air Services which had started services in February 2017 but faced suspension of its licence in July 2018. The permit was revived in December 2019 and the airline operated very briefly until it went bankrupt and was declared insolvent, which led to the revocation of its flying permit.

Post Covid-19, a fresh licence to operate was issued to the airline in September 2023, and Zoom took to the skies at the end of January 2024. At the time I was contacted by the PR team, I made attempts to reach the airline CEO Atul Gambhir to get a better understanding of their plans but to no avail.

Nonetheless, in its new avatar, the operator began flying thrice a week between Delhi and Ayodhya, which had for a short time become the hotspot for all Indian carriers following the inauguration of the Ram mandir. At the time of writing this article, the service had been discontinued for reasons yet unknown although industry watchers and insiders speculated that Ayodhya's own fall from grace in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections might have played a role!

Although these are two very recent instances, the history of aviation in India has been littered with such examples, where the abilities, financial worthiness, intentions, credentials and antecedents of the founders of various aviation-related businesses have been more than suspect and which led to many failed ventures, closures and bankruptcies, leaving a trail of unpaid dues and many disillusioned employees in its wake. The sector attracts more than the usual share of fly-by-night players, most of whom are attracted by the glamour, the lure of the (non-existent) lucre, or both.

Both the instances cited above raise larger, regulatory, questions: Can Zoom reappraise and hope to reinvent itself yet again, perhaps as Zooom (with four "o"s)? How exactly do India's safety regulator and other authorities assess and validate these startups? Who will be responsible in case of any mishaps? Who does the public turn to in such situations?



Anjali Bhargava



The history of aviation in India has been littered with examples where the abilities, financial worthiness, and credentials of the founders of various aviation-related businesses have been more than suspect and led to many failed ventures HT PHOTO

Anjali Bhargava is a senior journalist who writes on governance, infrastructure and the social sector. The views expressed are personal

{ RAHUL GANDHI } LEADER OF OPPOSITION IN LOK SABHA

The people expect the Opposition to defend the Constitution of India... By allowing the Opposition to speak, you (the Speaker) will do your duty of defending the Constitution

How WikiLeaks shook up  
the Western world order

The freeing of Julian Assange, the Australian activist and founder of the whistle-blowing website, WikiLeaks, through a plea bargain after 14 long years in isolation, uncertainty and imprisonment has ended a saga that holds a mirror to defining issues of our time. His high-profile ordeal reflects fundamental debates relating to press freedom and the role of the news media in the internet age, the conflict between national security establishments and anti-war movements, and the alliances and rivalries in international politics that impinge upon acts of individual courage and defiance.

Assange's ordeal began in 2010, when his guerrilla media operation used cyber hacking tactics to publicly release a massive trove of classified American military documents which exposed the dark side of the United States (US)'s then ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was a daring digital strike meant to mobilise public opinion against what Assange and his band of progressives considered Washington's illegal and immoral wars being waged in the name of a "global war against terrorism".

Motivated by the ideal of speaking truth to power and uncovering the excesses and abuses of the US's military machine, including killings of innocent civilians, Assange became a global icon for opponents of American neo-imperialism in developing countries. Advocates of press freedom believed that Assange broke through a web of deception and cover-up in which mainstream western news media houses were invested, and heralded a new transparent era where unfiltered information could fulfill citizens' "right to know" about their rulers' misdeeds.

But since WikiLeaks was not a traditional media institution with editorial discretion, and given the indiscriminate and damning military and diplomatic cables and content it kept disclosing, the American establishment went after it on grounds that its recklessness was endangering the lives of US troops, diplomats and their local collaborators in sensitive parts of the world. The so-called American deep State saw in Assange a threat to its viability and sought his arrest and extradition to set a punitive deterrent for other cyber activists who might dare to emulate him.

WikiLeaks also rubbed the entrenched political class in the US up the wrong way by releasing emails that damaged Hillary Clinton's presidential election chances in 2016. If angry "super-empowered individuals", as Thomas Friedman put it, could "increasingly act on the world stage directly, unmediated by a State", the very order in which formal institutions dictate terms could be upended. Hounding Assange was felt to be absolutely necessary to preempt a transnational movement that might undermine America's freedom to intervene globally and challenge the legitimacy of western democracies.

One big ideological division that Assange's troubles revealed was between the Global Right and the Global Left. The US mobilised its allies and partners like Britain and Sweden to apply legal pressure on Assange, who, in turn, found asylum in the embassy of socialist-ruled Ecuador in London for seven years. The line-up of governments and voices demanding that Assange be freed as opposed to those baying for his blood displayed the fault lines of an international order where western dominance was being contested.

Assange was both a victim and a beneficiary of the intense competition to set the terms for a new world order. He could avoid arrest and prison while stranded in the UK until 2019 because his case turned into a cause célèbre for worldwide anti-colonialist sentiment.

WikiLeaks allegedly received the help of Russia in its propaganda campaign to sow doubts about the quality of democracy in the US. Ultimately, the plea bargain that enabled his freedom was possible due to internal pressure on the Joe Biden administration from American liberals, and also due to the concerns of the US's ally, Australia, which had been seeking closure on the unending agony of one of its most famous citizens.

In hindsight, did Assange, who suffered greatly in terms of his personal liberties, succeed in his struggle against western hypocrisy and hegemony? Champions of press freedom have decried the dangerous precedent that he was forced to admit guilt for committing conspiracy in order to finally win freedom. But in a political sense, Assange did manage to let the genie out of the bottle. The 2013 leak by Edward Snowden of top-secret information about global surveillance programmes by American intelligence agencies, and continued efforts by online whistle-blowers to unearth dirty truths about western shenanigans, suggest that Assange has lit a fire that is not extinguishable. The hesitation in Washington to directly intervene in costly unwinnable wars abroad, which we see these days, may even be termed a moral victory for Assange. Ultimately, he might be vindicated for contributing in a small way to ushering in a post-western world order.



Sreeram Chaulia

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## ASSANGE SAGA A REMINDER FOR STRONG WHISTLEBLOWER LAWS

JULIAN Assange, the 52-year-old founder of WikiLeaks, finally walked to freedom in the early hours of Wednesday after a 12-year ordeal. Assange, who had been fighting US efforts to extradite him from the UK where he was holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy during 2012-19 and in prison afterwards, had leaked over 7,00,000 classified documents and videos linked to alleged US war crimes. These included the US military’s operating manual for its infamous detention camp in Guantanamo Bay and a classified US video of a July 2007 helicopter attack in Baghdad that killed a dozen civilians, including two journalists. The trove of leaked classified documents was aimed at exposing the US’s involvement in what Assange described as “compelling evidence of war crimes”. For his whistleblowing and alleged role in breaching US security, Assange faced 18 charges and a maximum of 175 years in prison. In an unexpected bargain plea struck over the last few days, the Australian citizen pled guilty to a single espionage charge before a judge in Saipan, capital of the US territory of Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific, for a sentence of 62 months—which he has already served in the UK—before flying home.

Whether through Wikileaks or the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists’ exposés of the Panama, Pandora and Paradise papers, whistleblowing with credible evidence is a necessity in a democracy. It forces transparency and acts as a formidable weapon to inhibit corrupt practices that violate human rights, including the right to live.

But India does not have an effective central law to protect whistleblowers. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act passed through parliament in 2014 and got as far as the president’s assent, but did not come into force because of technicalities to do with national security. The Whistle Blowers Protection (Amendment) Bill 2015 tried to revive the effort and sought to prohibit the reporting of corruption-related disclosures under 10 categories, but it got stuck in the Rajya Sabha and subsequently lapsed. A robust democracy needs protective laws encouraging citizens to step forward to expose malpractices in the government or in private enterprises. Only a few states in India have such policies. We do need Assanges in our midst, but where are the effective laws to protect them?

## CAUTION NEEDED BEFORE HOSTING THE OLYMPICS

JUST over a month ahead of the Paris Olympics, a new sports minister has taken charge—Mansukh Mandaviya has replaced Anurag Thakur. Mandaviya’s first gesture was notable—he became the first sports minister to visit the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) after assuming office. It is possible that the sports ministry is trying to send a signal to the fractured IOA, where executive committee members are in revolt against president P T Usha over the appointment of the CEO in January. Even now, with just a month to go for the Olympics, there is no sign of a truce. The IOA is yet to announce the *chef de mission*, a post vacated by M C Mary Kom in April. The government is also serious about going ahead with the 2036 Olympic bid with Ahmedabad as the venue. The process of bidding has already started with IOA’s engagement with the International Olympic Committee. More talks will take place in Paris next month. At these parleys, it would be better if the IOA presented a united face.

The main question is whether India is ready to spend so much money. Sure, it will further raise the country’s profile. India’s sporting movement will get a fillip as athletes and fans will enthusiastically engage with the event. This much is undeniable. What is also undeniable is the effect the Olympics will have on the economy, especially in a developing country like ours. If the government is keen to go ahead with Ahmedabad as the host, a lot of infrastructure will have to be built or redeveloped, as there are not many readymade venues. The Indian government will have to prepare for the costs to shoot up.

Recent history can be instructive. One only has to look at Greece. They spent so much on the 2004 Games that it plunged the economy into a crisis. Twelve years later, Rio de Janeiro faced similar issues, though an independent study later claimed the city had benefitted from the Olympics. There is a reason why even developed countries shy away from hosting big-ticket events. The Commonwealth Games, which India hosted in 2010, is struggling to find a host city for 2026. Australia was in line, but walked back. The government should not lose sight of these examples and issues.

### QUICK TAKE

#### WATER CRISIS & CREDIT RATING

THERE could soon be a new cost attached to India’s poor water management efforts. Moody’s, one of the three most influential sovereign credit rating firms, said on Tuesday that India’s worsening water shortage might affect the nation’s sovereign credit strength as it would affect a number of sectors. A downgrade or change in outlook would affect the interest rate at which the Union and state governments—and other sovereign-backed funds—are able to raise foreign debt. When Moody’s last downgraded India four years ago to Baa3, there were protests from the administration. Rather than poking holes in ratings, the government should forge a national plan for water conservation.

L IKE Mark Twain said about himself, the report of the dollar’s death is exaggerated—though its health problems are multiplying. The dollar dominates trade, payments and reserves. About 96 percent of trade in the Americas, 74 percent in the Asia-Pacific region, and 79 percent in the rest of the world is denominated in the currency. Only in Europe, where the euro is dominant with a 66 percent share, is its market share low. About 60 percent of international and foreign currency claims (primarily loans) and liabilities (primarily deposits) are in US dollars. Its share of foreign exchange transactions is around 90 percent. US dollars constitute around 60 percent of global official foreign reserves. These shares are disproportionate to the size of the US economy (around a quarter of global GDP or 15 percent adjusted for purchasing power).

The dollar’s difficulties are largely self-inflicted. Incontinent fiscal and monetary policy—with the US budget deficit and government debt at around 7 percent and over 100 percent of GDP, respectively—has diminished long-term purchasing power of the dollar. Since 1972, it has fallen by 99 percent against gold and lost 90 percent of purchasing power of real goods and services.

American policymakers have sought to weaponise the dollar in multiple ways to further political objectives, compensating for economic weaknesses such as a lack of competitiveness in particular. The US has sought to exclude foreign entities from international payment systems like SWIFT.

There are secondary sanctions penalising people and organisations not subject to US legal jurisdiction. If a Russian entity is under sanctions, anyone dealing with it may be liable to prosecution, even if it is complying with laws in its own nation. This is done via the tenuous nexus of dollar payments through the US banking system. International banks and others have been prosecuted for transactions legal in their country. The threat has been sufficient to deter dealing with US sanctioned entities.

Weaponisation extends to asset seizures. In the wake of the Ukraine war, the US and its allies have frozen \$300 billion of Russian central bank dollar holdings. The Biden administration passed the REPO Act authorising the confiscation of about \$20 billion worth of Russian assets held by US banks, primarily government securities that were legitimately purchased, and transferring it to Ukraine. Selective cancellation of US government obligations held by a foreign power is now a policy option, despite its doubtful legal basis. It would represent a selective US government default.

For the moment, the US believes the dollar’s reserve currency status is secure. Given the nation’s economic, political and social problems, this belief will be tested

## THE INEVITABLE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN DOLLAR

SATYAJIT DAS

Former banker and author



MANDAR PARDIKAR

American policymakers also exert disproportionate influence on currency values and the cost of capital globally. A strong dollar and devaluation of local currencies fuels imported inflation in many emerging nations. Borrowers with US dollar denominated debt now face higher debt servicing costs. A rise in US government bond rates result in a similar increase in term interest rates globally, increasing borrowing costs.

These factors are driving foreign public and private institutions’ increasing reluctance to transact in dollars or hold dollar assets. But American authorities assume continuation of the dollar hegemony because of limited alternatives.

Two principles lie at its heart. The first is the ‘policy trilemma’ or ‘impossible trinity’ proposition of economists Robert Mun-

dell and Marcus Fleming. It argues an economy cannot simultaneously maintain the following—a fixed exchange rate, free capital movement and an independent monetary policy. The second is the paradox named after economist Robert Triffin. This states that where its money functions as the global reserve currency, a nation must run large trade deficits to meet the demand for reserves. Any aspirant to a new global reserve currency status faces an unacceptable loss of economic control and must run large current account deficits.

Other essential requirements include deep liquid capital markets, high credit quality, suitable clearing, custody and transfer mechanisms, strong governance, legal enforceability, and universal acceptance.

Potential contenders such as the euro or

## BUILDING ANDHRA PRADESH: NEW GOVT IN A NEW STATE

UNDER the leadership of Nara Chandrababu Naidu, the TDP-BJP-JSP combine within the NDA umbrella won a landslide victory in Andhra Pradesh at the recent elections, bagging 164 of the 175 assembly seats and 21 of the 25 Lok Sabha seats. The vote was for Viksit Andhra to be part of Viksit Bharat.

Two projects would be crucial to meet the aspirations of the people and develop the state—building the new capital Amaravati and completing the Polavaram irrigation project. These two projects are expected to contribute substantially to the country’s GDP and create considerable wealth for the state. There is also a huge potential for employment generation as Amaravati will first need to be built, then be the seat of the state government’s executive functions, and thereafter will be a services hub. In the case of Polavaram, it will support the entire state’s drinking water and irrigation needs and generate hydel power to serve industrial needs.

During the 2024 election campaign, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah expressed the NDA’s support for building Amaravati, which was abruptly stalled by Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy’s government. Work on the new state capital was purposely neglected by the outgoing chief minister as his priorities were scattered across freebies in the name of welfare measures.

This led to a neglect of using the capital expenditure route for creating productive, revenue-generating assets for the state. The YSR Congress government buried the efforts made prior to 2019 for the development of Amaravati as a ‘growth engine’ for the state. As a result, investors across the world lost confidence in the state being able to honour project commitments despite a change in government—it had an adverse impact not only on foreign direct investments, but among domestic investors too.

Now the people of Andhra Pradesh have given a clear and absolute mandate for development and for creating employment opportunities for them. The point is about carrying out the development of Amaravati’s infrastructure in a phased manner according to the master plan approved by the Amaravati Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) and reconnecting with the set specifications of a project stalled since 2019. There are three main questions that would need to be addressed. First, is it necessary to revise the detailed

project report for the changes needed in the structures and funds to ensure that Amaravati is a self-sustainable project? Second, are the old contractors ready to take up the project, or would new contractors be invited? And third, are any changes needed in the law governing the CRDA since a few amendments had been made by the previous government during 2019-2024?



EXPRESS

Building the new capital Amaravati and completing the Polavaram irrigation project are priorities for the new NDA government in AP. They can generate wealth and jobs, and contribute substantially to India’s GDP. There is also a need to decentralise the state’s development

It should be noted that the Union government is continuing to play a vital role in the process of building Amaravati. First, a Rs 1,500-crore grant has already been given by the Union government for setting up infrastructure such as an assembly, a secretariat and a high court, among other structures needed for the city to function as the capital. A Hudco loan of Rs 10,000 crore has also been facilitated by the Union government.

Second, the Centre has recognised it as a smart city and a heritage city. It allowed capital gains tax exemption on the sale of land by farmers who offered it under a land pooling system; farmers had voluntarily offered nearly 35,000 acres of land to the CRDA on a call from the then CM Chandrababu Naidu.

Third, nearly 50 central government institutions had procured land in Amaravati to build their facilities, but they now need to start construction.

The people of the state have given their mandate in favour of the NDA for coordination between the state and Union governments in developing the capital. The newly-formed government will have to plan for the required funds to complete the phased development with Union government assistance through the ministries of urban development, highways, aviation, jal shakti and tourism, among others. The plan will also include internal resources like project loans that are repayable from the future revenues generated from Amaravati.

Apart from this, the new government will implement other industrial projects along 975 km of the sea coast similar in importance to building Amaravati. This will include looking at the western Prakasam district and the Rayalaseema region for decentralising development, since all regions of the ‘Sunrise State’ have potential with their own resources and advantages.

In addition to Amaravati, the NDA government’s priority is in creating 194 thousand million cubic feet of storage capacity for the multi-beneficial Polavaram undertaking, which has been accorded priority as a national project under Section 90 of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014. It has been noted that among the important components of the project are funds for the rehabilitation and resettlement plan and providing water for drinking and industrial use—these parts can be accommodated through various Union government schemes on a priority basis. It is estimated that the Polavaram project can be completed within the next 4 years with the assistance of the Union government.

Apart from Amaravati and Polavaram, better capacity utilisation in the industrial areas along the Visakhapatnam-Chennai, Bengaluru-Chennai and Bengaluru-Hyderabad corridors would lead to inclusive and decentralised development of Andhra Pradesh and would be a considerable contribution to nation building.

(Views are personal)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: [letters@newindianexpress.com](mailto:letters@newindianexpress.com)

#### Gandhi’s vision

Ref: *The need to empower the third tier* (Jun 26). The creation of panchayats and municipalities with self-government status was symbolic of Mahatma Gandhi’s vision that development should start from the bottom. The article has rightly pointed out that the 16th Finance Commission should address the concerns of local governments.  
**Dharmarajan A K, Thalassery**

#### Political involvement

Ref: *NTA 2.0: Spacemen’s countdown to launch countless careers* (Jun 26). Such an in-depth analysis by the author is welcome. Still, we need to address how to eliminate the political involvement in this massive exercise.  
**DT Thyagarajan, Bengaluru**

#### Generational illiteracy

Ref: *June 26, 2024: Golden Jubilee of the Blackest Day* (Jun 26). The author rightly points out the illiteracy of the post-Emergency generations about the suppression of democracy. But he fell short by failing to observe the amnesia of the media and opposition leaders, not presenting the right perspective.  
**Ashok Kumar, Kozhikode**

#### Repeal inadvisable

The author has elaborated the arbitrary action taken by the then government by curtailing fundamental rights during the Emergency. It is true the 42nd Amendment paves the way for interference in the independence of the judiciary, but it is not good to repeal it entirely. It added the terms socialist and secular to the Preamble. These are the distinct features enshrined in our Constitution.  
**A Iniyavan Abdullah S A, Madurai**

#### Hurried construction

The statement by the Ayodhya Ram temple’s chief priest on seepage inside the sanctum with no drainage provision inside shows the temple construction was completed in a hurry. Obviously, the BJP wanted to take credit for not only getting a nod from the court but for completing the construction in record time.  
**N Nagarajan, Secunderabad**

#### Argument points

Ref: *Debating empathy at the dinner table* (Jun 25). I am a vegetarian by birth, choice and conviction. This article is the most nuanced comment on the subject I have read. There are generally two sets of people: non-vegetarians who think vegetarians have lost something in life, and vegetarians who think non-vegetarians are committing a sin. I am grateful this article has given me some extra points to pull up while arguing with my sons, when they pose questions in the matter.  
**V Venkateswaran, Chennai**

### THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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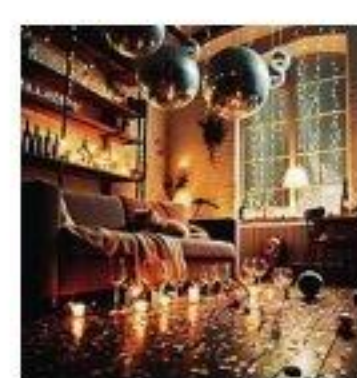
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## It's Going to Be Good After It Gets Quieter

Markets are yet to price in moderation

The economy is projected to moderate its growth in the current fiscal, raising the prospects of corporate earnings and profits peaking. This is a likely outcome, given inflation is trending towards target, and interest rates are yet to begin their descent. India Inc had increased its share of profits as a percentage of GDP in an environment of high inflation and low interest rates. The scenario is reversed now, with interest rates at their peak and disinflation in progress. Companies no longer have the pricing power they had in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic when consumption demand was roaring. That has now played out in manufacturing and services. The growth from here on should be more sedate, building on the economy's post-Covid revival. The markets are yet to price in this moderation, and some froth may be removed once the volatility around the election results settles.



While this may be the majority view about the economy's and, by extension, India Inc's prospects, it's certainly not the consensus one. The economy is undergoing four structural shifts that could negate the assumption of moderating growth. A long-overdue investment cycle is gaining momentum, with a positive effect on the economy's potential to grow. Exports are reviving with policy-induced manufacturing chipping in alongside services. Consumption demand is increasingly being supported through a new social security architecture. An infra upgrade could lead to a reset of the economy's growth-inflation trade-off. Each on its own has a knock-on effect on corporate profitability. Combined, the effect could be multiplied.

There will be some earnings moderation in the near term, though. That is because all three upcycles — investment, exports and consumption — are nascent. But once inflation and, as a corollary, interest rates turn benign, the economy should be firing on all cylinders. A sustained period of India growing above 8% has a reasonable likelihood. In that case, the markets may have got it right even at the current rich valuations.

## Water Stress Pouring Into Economic Stress

How we manage our resources is affecting how India's perceived as a place for doing business. Delhi and Bengaluru's water crises, triggered by low rainfall, poor water management, weak conservation efforts and opportunistic politics, could impact India's sovereign credit strength, warns a new Moody's report. This is not more 'things that happen to other people'. Reduced water supply can disrupt farming and industrial operations, leading to food price inflation and harming the credit health of water-dependent sectors like coal and steel.

According to a CSE analysis, India experienced extreme weather events on 235 of the 273 days during Jan 1-Sep 30, 2023. The water emergency, however, is not just about scarcity. Rivers are polluted, traditional water harvesting systems are gone, catchments are deforested, groundwater levels are depleting and water bodies are disappearing. India has only 4% of the world's population, but only 4% of its freshwater resources. A 2018 NITI Aayog report stated that India is 'suffering from the worst water crisis in its history'.



Yet, political and public response has been tepid. There was no conversation to counter India's growing water stress crisis even in 'visible' urban India in the recent elections. Neither did India's votary seem to make a connection between democracy and its resources. Steps must include public availability of accurate water data, large investments for water conservation and fixing transmission leaks, and an overhaul of the water governance structure. We must recognise that groundwater is India's lifeline, necessitating a focus on its recharge and aquifer management. India must act now, if not for its people then at least for its economic growth.



For a consumer-spectator nation, why isn't anyone showing Copa América?

## Where, O Where is Our Morning Copa?

Don't blame this column on our inner troll, but for us being super under-cafeinated, India, a great footballing *spectator* nation — let's not talk about its footballing prowess — has got all 'European' as footie fans here follow the Euro with the enthú of a masked Mbappé. And, yet, no channel, no streaming platform is showing the Copa América, the super-carnival of football taking place in the US, where another tournament of another keenly watched sport is on now. Yes, because of the time difference, watching, say, Wednesday's glorious game between Argentina and Chile would have meant screen-gluing from 6.30 a.m. Squeezed between this ungodly hour for most of us who skip our daily Gayatri Mantra and the other ungodly hour past midnight when many Euro games are on, catching Copa can be an ordeal. But isn't that up to the football pilgrim to decide?

Why, oh why, dear broadcasters and streamliners, have you forsaken us? A Copa aficionado is likely to be a much more affluent, selective consumer (read: spender for ads) than a watcher of the Euro, which even your granma is now familiar with. ('This Griezmann boy is so handsome!') Which is where VPNs — and rebel sites like Soccerstreamlinks and epicports — come in handy. Dodging geo-restrictions, some of us watched Lautaro Martínez's 88th-min goal on Wednesday morning. Yes, not legally, but...

Exams like NET and NEET need to stick to the tried-and-tested computer-based test format

## Pen'n'Paper Just Won't Pass



Rajeev Kumar

By now, we're all familiar with the fiasco that's been the 2024 National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) UG — inflated scores and ranks, chaos in question paper distribution, alleged leak of question paper: UGC-National Eligibility Test (NET) 2024 also saw question papers being leaked. This chain of errors can be attributed to the pen'n'paper (PnP) exam format.

What is surprising is that NET was conducted as a computer-based test (CBT) for many years, with minor glitches. Why such critical exams were conducted in PnP this year is a question worth asking.

**► Problems with PnP** PnP introduces several logistical concerns including transportation of question papers, strongroom storage, transportation of used optical mark recognition (OMR) answer sheets back to exam authority headquarters, and keeping record of unused OMR sheets and question paper booklets. Inappropriate handling of any of these may have introduced paper leakage, compromising the sanctity of the exams. Possibility of unauthorised access to the printed papers is a critical concern.

**► CBT as default** CBT has emerged as a practical alternative worldwide to counter such logistical and security challenges. Since its establishment in 2017, National Testing Agency (NTA), the autonomous agency for admissions and fellowship exams to higher educational institutions (HEIs) in India, has been conducting tests in almost all education domains, and has specialised in CBT.

NTA conducted Joint Entrance Exams (Main) 2024 in two sessions — January and April — totalling over 1.4 mn distinct students via 500-plus exam centres across more than 300 cities in India and abroad. Paper I for BTech/



Binned there, done that

BE admissions in 13 languages was fully CBT, spread over 10 shifts in 5 days.

The mega operations were conducted almost free of online glitches, although there were some past issues concerning impersonation due to ambiguities in Aadhaar-based authentication. Learnings from past incidents stabilised the operations significantly. The CBT result was announced in a record 15 days. Similarly, NTA has historically conducted UGC-NET in CBT mode.

NET is an eligibility test for junior research fellowship (JRF) and appointment as assistant professor. UGC-NET is more diversified, conducted in many subjects. Other than one-off cases of online glitches, there was never any major issue.

From 2024, NET will also be applicable for admission to PhD research. So, the number of candidates in UGC-NET 2024 was much higher, with about 0.9 mn candidates. NTA also conducts Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-NET in CBT mode. Thus, NTA has a proven track record for conducting CBT tests for a few million candidates.

**► Transparency** CBT can easily be scaled to a much larger number of candidates, say, to the size of NEET 2024, by spreading it over a few more days and increasing the capacity of the on-line system. In CBT mode, NTA has been following the best models of transparency. Question papers with respective answer keys were displayed. The final answer keys were published after subject expert verification. Recorded OMR sheets were displayed for self-evaluation and verification of a candidate's score with the official score. NTA also voluntarily disclosed the most relevant information through its press releases.

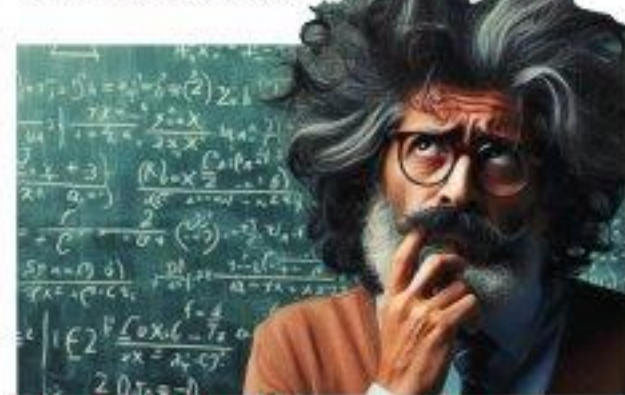
These SOPs were developed through a decade-long (2006-15) legal battle in the Supreme Court and high courts to ensure transparency for admissions to IITs. Stakes in NEET are astonishingly high, making it vulnerable to irregularities, accidental or intentional. Quality of education and college fees are critical factors that vary widely. NET, too, is a high-stakes exam for the appointment of assistant professors in thousands of colleges, institutes and universities. Hence, it's vital that the most professional exam format be adopted.

So why did NET revert to PnP? It's puzzling why despite the progress made in CBT as the primary format, UGC announced NET 2024 to be conducted

in PnP. And why hasn't NEET adopted CBT yet? Did National Medical Commission (NMC) or National Board of Examinations (NBE) advise against it? It's a fact that many irregularities seen in NEET 2024 would have been avoided with CBT.

**► Coaching conspiracy?** Due to the NEET fiasco, the medical coaching and counselling (C&C) industry's brand value has increased considerably. A retest will again benefit C&C and create confusion, stress, time loss and academic session delay for aspirants. The ultimate sufferers are millions of NEET and NET aspirants.

**► Start the SOPs** NTA should work



**NET was conducted as CBT** for many years, with minor glitches. So, why were such critical exams conducted in PnP this year?

to adapt and improve CBTs, while also using well-defined, secure SOPs to ensure integrity at every stage. Security protocols should be upgraded with fast-changing cybersecurity technology. NTA should follow a professional war-room culture to facilitate quick and sound decision-making during the entire examination process.

Work-outsourcing should be categorised, based on the criticality and confidentiality of the operations, and handled with appropriately defined SOPs. While this primarily focuses on the logistics of exams, several technical issues remain unaddressed, such as score distribution, score normalisation, question complexity distribution, and other factors crucial for merit-based effective ranking.

India's exam system doesn't need to reinvent the wheel. It needs to stick to tried-and-tested formats like CBT, and have SOPs not just in place but strictly observed. In other words, it needs to get professional and professionalised.

The writer is former professor of computer science, IIT Kharagpur



THE SPEAKING TREE

## What is Mantra

SHRI SHRI ANANDAMURTI

Before we try to understand a mantra, let us be clear about shabda, sound. Everything in this manifest universe is vibrational. Creation is also vibrational. And the first and subtlest expression of the vibrational flow is shabda. Shabda Brahmn is the first expression of Karya Brahmn, Effect Brahmn, Expressed Brahmn. The fundamental difference between Karya Brahmn and Karan Brahmn, Causal Brahmn, is that all vikalpa, expression, in Karan Brahmn is purely subjective and blissful. There is no objective or extroversive pleasure therein.

Being purely subjective and blissful, it has no exceptional quality. Before its practical emergence, shabda existed in the realm of bhava, or ideas. The starting point of shabda in the world of ideation is called para-shakti. Parashakti exists both in the unit and in the cosmos. Although parashakti has full possibilities of expression, it is not expressed due to a lack of a medium. Its vibrational expression is shabda.

Karan Brahmn is represented in tantric scriptures by all the svaravarna, vowel sounds taken together. When those sounds are converted into action, that is, acquire the potential to form mixtures and compounds, they are called consonants. The diversity of creation is expressed through consonants, not through vowels.

What is a mantra? A mantra is a collection of a few particular shabdab. Mantra means 'that collection of sounds, meditation on which leads to liberation'.

## Chat Room

### Paying a High Price of Truth

Appropos the Edit, 'Spiller of Beans, and State vs Open Society' (Jun 26), WikiLeaks cofounder Julian Assange, who had been in the crosshairs of the world's most powerful nation ever since he exposed its wrongdoings in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is free man at last. His journey highlights the fragility of free speech and press freedoms in the West, where laws meant to prosecute government officials for leaking protected information were used to imprison a journalist. It's difficult to predict how the story would play out in the coming US presidential elections as the Trump administration was more vocal about his arrest. Fortunately, better sense seems to have prevailed and under pressure from right activists and journalists, the Biden administration has let go of him.

GREGORY FERNANDES  
Mumbai

What Julian Assange did is what every person in the media is supposed to do. For having discharged his duty with commitment and courage, he has been hounded down, harassed and punished by the countries that project themselves as champions of democracy and freedom. Assange's revelations plunged the entire world in a state of shock and enabled it to learn further about the illicit and unethical military activities carried out by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. This at a time when the role of media is being redefined as playing a subjugated role to someone or the other without any space for ethics, sentiments and norms of journalism. Assange's activities made an impact on the US presidential election; his release, too, comes at a similar time. Assange deserves to be honoured with the Nobel prize.

time when the role of media is being redefined as playing a subjugated role to someone or the other without any space for ethics, sentiments and norms of journalism. Assange's activities made an impact on the US presidential election; his release, too, comes at a similar time. Assange deserves to be honoured with the Nobel prize.

A GRAJMOHAN  
Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

### High Interest In Inflation

Appropos the Edit, 'Time to Reset the 4% Inflation Target?' (Jun 25), the MPC majority decision is inflation-centric, which is moderating close to the target despite volatility in food and energy inflation. The moot question is whether the interest rates will be allowed to stay high despite growth falling below 8% as high interest rates would depress consumption and growth in a growing economy.

CL SURI  
New Delhi

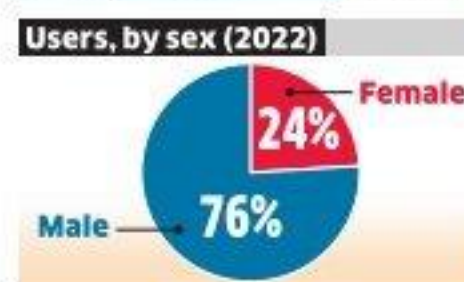
Letters to the editor may be addressed to  
editet@timesgroup.com

### Drug Use Warning

The Taliban-ordered crash in opium production in Afghanistan, long the world's dominant supplier, could drive up overdose deaths as heroin users switch to synthetic opioids already proving deadly in Europe, according to a report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The number of people who use drugs has risen to 292 million in 2022, a 20% increase over 10 years. Cannabis remains the most widely used drug worldwide. A snapshot...

Global number of people who...

Year	Use drugs (in millions)	Prevalence
2012	243	5.20%
2017	277	5.61%
2022	292	5.64%



\*30m were opiate users (mainly heroin)

Global magnitude of use of different drugs, 2022

Drug	In millions
Cannabis	228
Opioids*	60
Amphetamines	30
Cocaine	23
Ecstasy	20



Nitazenes — a group of synthetic opioids which can be even more potent than fentanyl — have recently emerged in several high-income countries, resulting in an increase in overdose deaths

Source: UNODC, Reuters, AFP

### Bell Curves ■ R Prasad



The truth always fumbles with its shoelaces. Run barefoot to get the first-mover advantage.

## Dig In Smartly to Grow



Dhanendra Kumar

India's natural resources sector — mining, metals, minerals and hydrocarbons — serves as the backbone for manufacturing and infrastructure sectors. But the country heavily relies on imports for various metals, importing nearly 93% of its copper ore and concentrates (₹7,374 cr), 100% of its lithium, nickel and cobalt, and 21% of its coal requirement.

In FY23, total value of mineral production (excluding atomic, minor and hydrocarbon energy minerals) touched ₹1,18,246 cr. India's import dependence on crude oil is 87%, costing over \$132 bn in FY24 on oil imports. By enhancing exploration efforts, India can significantly reduce its import dependence, conserve forex and potentially transform into a net exporter in the mineral sector.

Effective use of natural resources can catalyse economic progress, surging emerging economies such as India to developed economy status. This sector is important from the jobs perspective, too. For instance, the mining sector employs more than 10 mn workers. If we add employment generation in hydrocarbons and other natural resources, the number is substantially higher.

**► The US** has benefited immensely from its abundant resources. Starting with the Gold Rush of the 19th century to the oil boom of the 20th century, natural resources have fuelled economic growth and industrial expansion. The discovery of vast oil reserves in Texas and Alaska transformed the US into one of the largest exporters of petroleum and natural gas, generating enormous wealth.

**► Russia's** vast landmass with substantial mineral wealth became a major economic growth driver. The country's rich

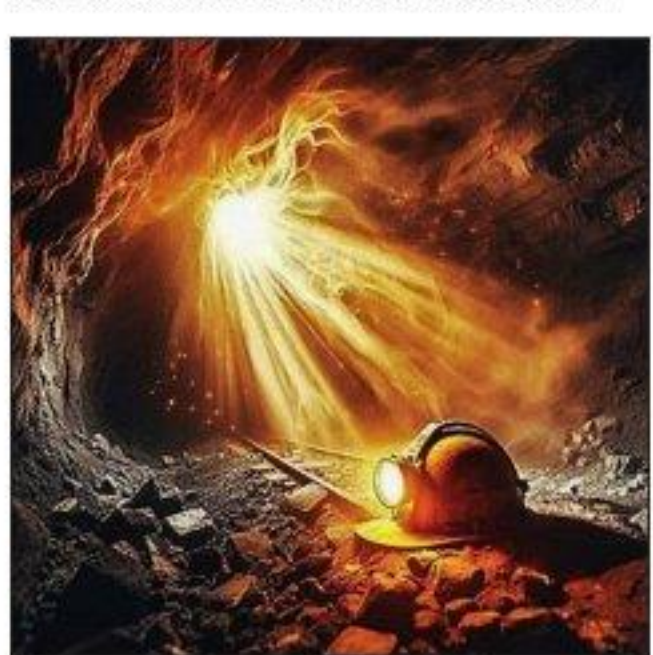
deposits of oil, almost 80 bn barrels, minerals such as coal and iron ore, and natural gas have helped fund infrastructure projects and social welfare programmes.

**► China's** economic ascent has been fuelled, in part, by its strategic approach to natural resource management. As the world's largest producer of certain commodities — including rare earths — and also one of the largest consumers, Beijing aligns use of natural resources with its national goals.

Natural resources also generate substantial revenue for governments through taxes, royalties and other levies. Historically, natural resources have been one of the highest revenue contributors to the exchequer, especially in countries in West Asia, where a major chunk of government revenue comprises income from natural resources. This revenue can be reinvested to promote socioeconomic development.

Go! must focus on optimising exploration of its natural resources. It's expected that the mining sector can contribute up to 3% to GDP by 2026-27. With employment generation a priority, Go! can harness natural resources to create a plethora of new job opportunities. The mining sector is highly labour-intensive and needs a diverse workforce, both skilled and unskilled.

India's rich reserves of coal, iron ore, bauxite and other minerals can boost



Light at the start of the tunnel

employment in states that have large mining projects, as well as across industries that are heavily dependent on these materials, such as automobile manufacturing, electronics and construction. Several programmes in Go!'s 100-day-to-do list, like providing 3 cr affordable houses, will get much-needed support.

Natural resources are crucial for India's focus on sustainable growth, maximising the use of RE and phasing out fossil fuels in the long term. Most nations, including India, substantially rely on fossil fuels for energy, transportation and other uses. Transitioning to RE will get expedited, balancing India's energy needs and economic growth with new domestic exploration of oil and gas.

Similar benefits can be derived from metals and minerals. For instance, copper is extensively used in electrical wiring, circuit boards and telecom cables, powering everything from RE to AI. Aluminium has widespread applications across various industries.

Expansion of India's transportation networks, including the development of metro systems and high-speed rail corridors, relies heavily on aluminium. The metal is essential for lightweight initiatives that enhance fuel efficiency and reduce emissions. It also plays a significant role in construction, packaging, electrical applications and consumer goods.

Recent discoveries of new lithium reserves in Jharkhand, Rajasthan and J&K in 2023 have attracted attention from government and private players. To leverage the deposits, Go! has eased the mining process by allowing the auction of lithium mines. This can be a game-changer, given its requirement for batteries powering EVs.

The future of the natural resources sector looks promising. With the right policies, investment and focus on sustainable practices, it can contribute to India's growth.

The writer is former chairman, Competition Commission of India (CCI)



### Plénitude Paris

Plénitude lives up to its name. Its split-level dining room situated on the first floor of Cheval Blanc Paris, the LVMH-owned lux hotel in the heart of the city, offers stunning views of the Seine and Parisian landmarks from every table. The menu, curated by Chef Arnaud Donckele, provides an extensive selection of dishes.

Each dish is built around a particular sauce of the chef's invention. These sauces and their ingredients are served in a glass to sip alongside the dish. Diners, however, can't simply enter and head straight



to the table. A choreography team guides them first to the cellar to savour exquisite wine. One course is served in the kitchen, and at another point, diners are invited into a 'secret' cheese cave adjacent to the dining room to select vintage plateware and their chosen cheeses. Top choices on the 7-course tasting menu include sardine served with a piquant green Eden sauce, plump langoustine with an airy sabayon, and turbot meunière topped with caviar and served with shellfish, hazelnuts and potato, all surrounded by a fish broth sauce containing oysters. C'est merveilleux!





**A thought for today**  
*For a change, start by speaking to people rather than walking by them like they're stones that don't matter*  
MAYA ANGELOU

# RaGa On Double Duty

Opposition's new leader in LS also has to keep delivering on the campaign trail

Rahul entered politics and Lok Sabha in 2004. His family name ensured that predictions of a glittering political future were there from that start. And yet it is only now, 20 years on, that he has taken up his first constitutional post – Leader of Opposition in LS. In poor performances in 2014 and 2019, Congress didn't muster enough numbers to claim this spot. In 2024, he is being widely credited not just for Congress coming back as a player of note, but also for INDIA standing solid against BJP. So, after scripting a roller-coaster CV, where he's been written off many times, today he's being trusted with heavy-duty KRAs, one inside and the other outside Parliament.

**Alliance jugalbandi** | In his welcome speech to the 18th LS Speaker yesterday, Rahul underlined that while it is govt that has "political power", opposition also represents "the voice of India", and this time it represents "significantly more" voice of the Indian people than it did last time. SP, TMC, DMK speeches followed and in tandem. Its bigger numbers naturally have the opposition walking with a bigger vibe. Rahul's KRA is not just to be a better opposition *sutradhar* than the previous leader of Congress in LS, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. Because that's too low a bar. He has to maximise the INDIA voice in Parliament, constructively and effectively.

**Accountability dandia** | LoP role will also be constantly scrutinised through the 'Modi vs Rahul' prism. From never having shared a panel, they will now be sitting together to select key functionaries from CBI director to CEC. Rahul will also likely be chairman of the all-important Public Accounts Committee that examines CAG reports and can also seek probes from govt. It has to be seen if there's a follow-through of the combative stance that has brought him electoral success, in his new parliamentary responsibilities. And if this ends up making govt more accountable.

**Constitution song** | There are assembly elections coming up in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana and J&K, and early next year, Delhi. For Congress and INDIA to maintain electoral momentum, Rahul will have to be really out on the campaign trail as well. Can he stay on two treadmills non-stop, à la Modi? From 10,000km worth of yatra to building a Constitution-upholding brand, Rahul has got many things right of late. But at root, it is about his communication with voters finally working well. This is where he cannot afford any slackening.

# Jail Mustn't Be The Norm

Twists in Kejriwal case urgent reminder that question of bail mustn't get entangled in procedural knots

Supreme Court, on Monday, considered "unusual" Delhi high court's decision to reserve its order on ED's appeal against Kejriwal's bail. Yesterday, one had to wonder what the top court would have had to say about the timing of Kejriwal's arrest by CBI in the same excise policy case, albeit a separate strand. The arrest came just as SC was to hear his appeal against HC's stay on his bail in the ED case. CBI and ED should, of course, not work at cross purposes. But what happened on Tuesday night doesn't appear to be an example of investigative efficiency.

On Tuesday, SC also rebuked Delhi HC over adjourning a bail plea. It made its comments while refusing to consider ex-Delhi minister and AAP functionary Satyendar Jain's appeal against HC's adjournment of his bail hearing. SC reiterated for the nth time that "it goes without saying that bail matters are not to be unnecessarily adjourned." The trial court that granted Kejriwal bail had taken the cue from SC's frequently repeated emphasis on bail.

Yet, chronology of events has been such that Kejriwal has been in and out of various courts, from trial to SC, for bail and in his challenge to the legality of ED's arrest. The latter is currently in SC. PMLA is a stringent law, but as courts wrangle over bail while investigators figure out Kejriwal's "vicarious liability", it is pertinent to remember the far-reaching impacts of a CM behind bars – political, electoral and, of course, on governance. This is not an irrelevant factor in bail pleas.

In May, SC granted Delhi CM interim bail, keeping under consideration the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Opposition alleges arrests of opposition CMs Kejriwal and Soren aren't delinked from political considerations. Probity in public life is non-negotiable. And anyone can be and should be investigated. But, through that process, justice must be seen to be done.

# Netasana

Maha CM: 'Make yoga part of daily life.' Netas do so too

**Bachi Karkaria**

As an Iyengar practitioner, I'm weary of International Yoga Day's usual *bakwasana*. Last week, our no-longer-Maha CM instructed us to make yoga a part of 'daily living'. Helloh-ji! Aren't we already forced to do this vis-a-vis all genres of authority, from traffic cop to top boss? It's mostly stretching in supplication via dog pose, *adho mukha shvanasana*; some do it with a hint of defiance, via upward-facing *urdhva mukha shvanasana*. Everyone must submit to backbends, forward bends and supine positions since everyone, bar none, has someone above him/her. Elections are the time for inversions, when 'below' become 'above', and *aam janata* revels in victorious breath, *ujjayi pranayama*.

Politicians don't need Eknath Shinde's advice. They are adept at so many poses, but not everyone is called 'Yogi'. Here are some common *netasanas*.

**Padmasana** remains top of the pops, even if this time it wasn't quite the tomtommed lotus feat. *Sirasana* is the uncrowned 'king of yoga poses'; our ruler party's braggadocio too was made to stand on its head. Fittingly, for yoga aims at taming ego. 'Queen' pose is *sarvangasana*; in body politic too, all parts have to be fully stretched. In yoga sequence, *sarvangasana* is followed by *halasana*. *Netas* are furiously perfecting this plough pose after farmers showed that you can't reap electoral yields by sowing despair.

Undivided Shiv Sena owned *dhanurasana* since bow (along with arrow) was its symbol. Now allotted to Shinde's breakaway faction, our Eknath-ji must work at *virabhadrasana 1* to show that he's still the standing archer. Maharashtra politics itself has been a *trikonasana* with dizzying variations of Sena, NCP and BJP. Now Dilli too submits to this triangle; BJP's NDA is still at its head, but without Naidu-Nitish, there'd be no tale.

With coalitions inevitable, political landscape resembles one mega class perfecting only one pose, bridge-building *setu bandha sarvangasana*. It needs total alertness since one member may suddenly rock the boat with *navasana*. Then, as in every yoga session, the ruling alliance could end in corpse-like *savasana*.

Alec Smart said: "Critically-ill NEET is a clear case for 'Physician, heal thyself!'"

# Om Shanti Om?

Lok Sabha has re-elected Om Birla as its Speaker. He must be non-partisan and maintain peace between govt & opposition. Changing archaic parliamentary procedures will help

**Chakshu Roy**

A contested election for the post of Lok Sabha Speaker is a sign of a broadening divide between treasury and opposition benches. Before Independence, contests for the position of president (equivalent of modern-day Speaker) were quite common. In the first election in 1925, Vithalbhai Patel defeated the govt nominee by two votes. He went on to lay the institutional foundations for the independence of the Speaker's office.

The next exciting contest was in 1946. In this election, the colonial govt thought its nominee would win. But to its surprise, its members cross-voted, leading to GV Mavalankar's election by a margin of three votes. Govt was incensed and wanted to examine the ballot papers to identify which of its members had voted for Mavalankar. Anticipating such an eventuality, the assembly secretary destroyed the ballot papers.

**A high-pressure job** | In a parliamentary democracy where govt is answerable to the legislature, a non-partisan Speaker is critical. It's one of the most challenging offices. It combines constitutional responsibility with a political millstone. When the electoral verdict is that of a majority govt, Speaker has to ensure adequate space for minority voices and not allow govt to ride roughshod over them.

In a coalition scenario, Speakers are under pressure from their party to secure govt's continuity and ensure the passage of its legislative business. Speakers have to walk a fine line, where they are not with any side but belong to the entire House. In both these situations, Speaker must ensure that the House fulfils the constitutional mandate of a deliberative legislature.

In 1952, when Mavalankar became Speaker of the first LS, he started the conversation to ensure Speaker's impartiality. In his acceptance speech as Speaker, he highlighted the British convention about Speakership, "the principle of which is that, once a Speaker, he is not opposed by any party in the matter of his election, whether in the constituency or in the House, so long as he wishes to continue as Speaker".

He championed this issue in parliamentary forums and pushed for it with Congress party. The party, however, felt that "this was not a feasible proposition for the present in view of other political parties being involved in the question." Since then, the practice has been that

political parties come to a consensus, and Speaker (usually from the majority party) is elected unanimously. Part of the consensus-building exercise is that the post of Deputy Speaker often goes to opposition benches.



**Adding to complications** | Over the years, the job of Speaker has become more complex and contentious. His responsibility is to conduct the proceedings of the House on the colonial principle that govt will decide the agenda for debate in the national legislature. The rules of both Houses of Parliament also prescribe that govt business takes priority. As if this were not enough, in

1985, the anti-defection law gave Speakers the power to decide on the disqualification of MPs for voting against the party whip and for anti-party activities. They could now make or break parties and govt.

Some of these structural issues have become more prominent now. They have led to successive govts shying away from uncomfortable debates in Parliament, and ministers are requesting the Speaker to exercise his/her discretion in fast-tracking govt business through LS. Limited space for opposition and inadequate scrutiny of govt bills by parliamentary committees have become a bone of contention between govt and opposition benches. Speaker's decisions in state assemblies under anti-defection law have also tainted the office. There is apprehension that some of the unhealthy practices in states might find their way to Parliament.

**Getting it right** | The strengthening of the office of Speaker to better serve our national legislature requires interventions at two levels. The first is an urgent need to change some of the old procedures in the functioning of LS. For example, currently, Speaker has discretion in sending bills for scrutiny to parliamentary committees. Then, most decisions by the House get taken by a voice vote, but rules require an MP to demand a recorded vote to register whether they support or oppose a decision. In most developed countries, all legislation is scrutinised by committees, and all House decisions are recorded. These changes in India can insulate Speakers from unnecessary controversy in how they exercise their discretion.

On the aspect of anti-defection law, a pertinent question is why should the constitutional office of Speaker be required to solve the internal struggles of a political party? Perhaps it's time to abolish the law to save the office of Speaker from aspersions of partisan behaviour.

In gist, what is expected of a Speaker was ably captured by Sir William Harcourt, who summed up the matter in the House of Commons: "We expect dignity and authority tempered by urbanity and kindness; firmness to control and persuasiveness to counsel; promptitude of decision and justness of judgment...a natural superiority combined with an inbred courtesy, so as to give by his own bearing an example and model to those over whom he presides an impartial mind, a tolerant temper, and a reconciling disposition."

The writer is with PRS Legislative Research.

# 'Soft corner for INDIA, but will stay Independent. Joining them will jeopardise our future, our community, our movement'

**Rajkumar Roat** is lone Lok Sabha member from Bharatiya Adivasi Party (BAP). The Bhil legislator achieved a giant upset, though few outside of Rajasthan took note. It was the first time Banswara rejected BJP. Congress candidates to elect the 31-year-old founding member of Bhil Pradesh Vidyarthi Morcha. Roat not only elbowed out both mainstream opponents, but remains equidistant from either coalition. **Swati Mathur and Siddhartha Dutta** spoke to the Banswara MP about staying outside INDIA bloc, and his plans as debutant MP.

**● You were seen as a weak link in the battle for Banswara. What worked?**

As Chorasi MLA, I raised issues that bother resident tribals, such as education, malnutrition. We forced govt to amend Forest Rights Act. I also raised the reservations issue. People saw me as one who could fearlessly speak their concerns in assembly. BJP's rhetoric about changing the Constitution also made people realise the importance of democracy.

National parties have done little to improve tribal lives. BJP branded anyone who wouldn't toe its line as 'Naxals'. They used this label to demotivate tribal movements and prevented people from supporting them. In Banswara, RSS's Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram was badly hit since Bhil Pradesh Vidyarthi Morcha was founded, and BAP came into being.

They misused funds, stifled information mechanisms, so people remained unaware of their rights. RSS used tribals from across Rajasthan to make 'jhande aur dande' (sticks and flags) for their marches. These processions have stopped since we began to make tribal masses aware.

**● You took help from Congress for LS polls, but are not part of INDIA. Why?**

Before polls, I sought Congress's support via a tweet because I felt the party was confused. They seemed to have received conflicting feedback about Banswara and my prospects. I tweeted to clarify to party brass that

Congress would lose the seat following their partyman's rebellion and defection to BJP. Congress had no replacement. It needed to support me since I was the only one capable of defeating the defector. My party also wanted an alliance with Congress on the Udaipur seat – Congress could either field our candidate on its symbol or vice versa.

So, we sought its support. It had an impact. Congress's Rajasthan in-charge SS Randhawa and PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra, both announced their support soon after. Congress also repaid a debt it owed us. When Gehlot govt was unstable in 2023, we helped them. Rahulji also took feedback on Banswara during Bharat Jodo Yatra.

**● So, why aren't you part of INDIA even after you met Kharge?**

We met Kharge and Venugopal. Though we had initially planned to contest LS polls independently, a situation arose where Congress fielded its candidate and later, announced it as an alliance seat. Considering this was done for our benefit, it was our duty to formally meet and thank them.

We've never been part of INDIA. We were independent in the run-up to polls. Our alliance – for just one LS seat – was only

firmed up five days ahead of polling day. We are, at present, independent and not part of any alliance.

We were, of course, asked to join INDIA. We treat them with respect, and acknowledge the friendship. But we won't join. We've put this matter on hold for now. We've neither turned it down, nor said yes. Our organisation will take a call at the right time. We do, however, have a soft corner for INDIA.

**● Will BAP consider merging with Congress?**

That is not possible. We'll remain independent because joining them will jeopardise our future, our community's future, and future of the movement we are leading. The same old conditions would return to our area.

**● Will you extend issue-based support to both INDIA and NDA?**

Yes. We'll stand by issues raised in the nation's interest or in the interest of the tribal people without viewing them through the prism of politics. We'll assess issues basis merit, not political alignment.

**● What are your priorities for Banswara as MP?**

I can't resolve all issues afflicting tribals, but am confident I'll do better than previous MPs. The biggest issue is lack of education and rapidly increasing malnutrition. We want policy measures to address malnutrition. The demand for a separate Bhil state, a sentimental issue connected to the sacrifice of 1,500 tribals in the Mangarh massacre, will continue because of historical reasons and discrimination tribals face in budget allocation by all govts. As for tribal reservation, we believe it should be implemented as per constitutional provisions. Andhra has a provision for 100% reservation in tribal areas. This can be replicated in other states.

**● You're a single-MP party in LS. Yet, you flex your muscles at mainstream parties. How do you pull that off?**

By the time politicians or parties reach this level, they've inevitably made many mistakes that make them fearful and susceptible to blackmail. Our working style has been transparent. We have not made mistakes. So, there is no fear. As a result, we stand our ground and fight.

## Calvin & Hobbes



# Being Aware Transforms Our Popcorn Mind

**Pulkit Sharma**

A recent study published in *Nature Communications* journal has revealed that our attention span, or the ability to focus on something for an extended period, is becoming shorter. In present times, an information overload from digital gadgets, numerous apps and social media channels confronts the limited resources of our brain. To cope with this onslaught, our mind sifts through the incoming information and rapidly shifts from one thing to another. It develops the habit of getting distracted frequently and loses the capacity to engage in activities which require sustained attention, focus and patience.

Psychologists have called this phenomenon 'popcorn mind', as it resembles popping corn kernels. The

phenomenon is so prevalent that most of us don't even see it as a problem. In other words, it has just become the way we are and the way the world around us happens to be. Without us realising, this syndrome creates havoc in our system. It leads to problems, including mental fatigue, stress, boredom, meaninglessness, irritability, anxiety, poor decision-making, disturbed relationships and lack of initiative in the real world.

The first crucial step in rewiring our mind is to become aware of our short-attention span, its negative effects and the amount of time we waste in dealing with the inconsequential information overload. This awareness will make us see through our denial and we will acknowledge the gravity of the situa-

tion. As we become aware of the problem, we can use our discernment and inner power to overcome it.

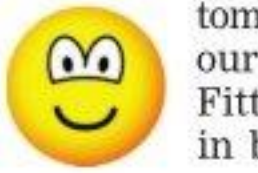
The Bible states, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Our eyes, senses and minds are not passive entities that must grapple with whatever is presented. Rather, they are powerful entities that can choose what to take in, when, how much, and when to stop.

Let us begin by becoming conscious of our body and its associated physical sensations. The body sends strong signals when it is at ease and when it is in distress. We need to receive these signals,

nourish it with care and love and make sure that we are not subjecting it to toxic stimuli. The next step in healing our popcorn mind is to teach ourselves the art of mindfulness or being in the 'here and now'. This involves keeping a deep focus on whatever we are doing or experiencing in the moment, maintaining our awareness on it and attending to all the sensations, thoughts and feelings that are coming up. If our attention wavers, we bring it back gently to the 'here and now' as soon as we realise it.

With practice, we realise that the aim of our life is not to exist in some dreamland and chase some obscure fantasies. The reality is in 'here and now' and we can only make a difference to our lives, the lives of others around us and our planet in this realm.

The writer is a clinical psychologist based in Puducherry



## erratica

with arrow) was its symbol. Now allotted to Shinde's breakaway faction, our Eknath-ji must work at *virabhadrasana 1* to show that he's still the standing archer. Maharashtra politics itself has been a *trikonasana* with dizzying variations of Sena, NCP and BJP. Now Dilli too submits to this triangle; BJP's NDA is still at its head, but without Naidu-Nitish, there'd be no tale.

Alec Smart said: "Critically-ill NEET is a clear case for 'Physician, heal thyself!'"

## Sacredspace

In dwelling, live close to the ground. In thinking, keep to the simple. In conflict, be fair and generous. In governing, don't try to control. In work, do what you enjoy. In family life, be completely present.  
Lao Tzu