



## On the right path

Elections will address the yearning for substantive democracy in J&K

**W**ith the Election Commission of India (ECI) announcing the dates for elections in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) – in three phases between September 18 and October 1 – a major lacuna in the conduct of democracy in the province has been addressed. The absence of an elected and functioning State legislature, along with the abrogation of special status and the bifurcation of the erstwhile State, followed by J&K's diminution into a Union Territory (UT) had resulted in significant despondency and alienation among the people. The absence of a legislature to express concerns and the muzzling of dissent by arresting students, journalists, lawyers among other civil society representatives under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Public Safety Act have been recipes for furthering the alienation. In its judgment that upheld the abrogation of special status – a flawed one – the Supreme Court had also ordered that elections to the Legislative Assembly had to be held by September 30, 2024, besides expressing its opinion on the need to restore statehood as soon as possible. The ECI has done well to heed the first directive. The absence of an elected legislature has meant that the people have lacked a voice to articulate their concerns even as they have yearned for their rights of electoral participation. This is evident in the participation levels in the local body and parliamentary elections since 2019 – the numbers were much higher than in earlier elections, especially in the Valley.

In the last-held Assembly elections nearly a decade ago, the mandate was split on communal lines with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning nearly all of the seats that it contested in Jammu, and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the National Conference (NC) and the Congress winning most of the seats in the Valley. Much water has flowed down the Jhelum after the formation of the coalition government between the PDP and the BJP, an unnatural alliance that was doomed to fail. The NC and Congress had fought the 2024 general election as part of the INDIA bloc and there is the likelihood of an alliance between these parties and smaller ones in these elections. The need for like-minded parties, that agree on changing the status quo in the UT by bringing back statehood and promoting secular governance, to come together, is promising not only for electoral tactical purposes. It is an imperative in order to ensure that the discourse in the province, which has been beset with fresh waves of terrorism in Jammu and south Kashmir, is not communalised. An election that is contested on civic issues and rights discourses, rather than on communal lines, would help bring back peace to India's northernmost province.

## Regressive move

Reducing work hours of women is not the way to ensure their safety

**T**he last thing that a rape and murder need are platitudes, and a predictably true one is being peddled after the brutal killing of a woman doctor on duty at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Hospital on August 9. One of the guidelines issued by the West Bengal government calls for minimising night duty for women. How will this dictum – “wherever possible, night duty may be avoided for women to the extent possible” – secure safety at the workplace? This regressive move will only end up removing women from the workforce, instead of ensuring a stop to violence. With the labour force participation rate for urban women in India, ages 15 and above, pegged at an abysmal 25% in April-June 2024, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey's quarterly bulletin, the governments at the Centre and States must ensure that women, employed as health-care professionals, gig and factory workers, call centre staff, auto drivers, hotel duties and journalists, are able to work safely, anywhere, and at anytime. Reducing their time at work will only lead to women losing jobs and their financial independence. The other guidelines, as part of the programme called ‘Ratir Shanti’ (helpers of the night), include the call for separate rest rooms and toilets for women, creating safe zones with CCTVs, and a special mobile phone app – measures which should have been already in place.

The Supreme Court, taking *suo motu* cognisance of the Kolkata case, in its hearing on Tuesday announced a national task force to look into the safety of doctors and medical professionals. Gender violence should be a matter of serious concern in every sphere, not just the informal sector, where women are employed in large numbers. The sweeping changes brought into the system after the 2012 Delhi rape, such as harsher laws and stringent punishment, have not been enough. The National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) annual report of 2022, the latest one available, shows that 4.45 lakh cases of crimes against women were registered, which is equivalent to nearly 51 FIRs every hour. Protocols cannot be just on paper. The Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said. In 2017, when the Court was confirming the death penalty of four men, who were accused in the 2012 Delhi rape, Justice R. Banumathi had said that apart from effective implementation of laws, a change in the mindset of the society at large and creating awareness in the public on gender justice would go a long way to combat violence against women. Campaigns led by women after the R.G. Kar rape, to ‘Reclaim the night’ in Kolkata and other parts of the country, should serve as wake-up calls to governments, and society, to do it right by women.

**T**he big Budget announcement of five major employment-related schemes sounds impressive. The schemes are to have an ambitious ₹2 lakh crore outlay spread over five years to facilitate jobs and skillings and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth. The Economic Survey has made a strong case for employment, goading the private sector to create jobs, the reasons being lower taxes since 2019 and higher profits post the COVID-19 pandemic. The Prime Minister's package for employment must be seen along with other initiatives for human well-being.

Any evidence-based road map for sustainable mass employment with dignity must begin by recognising the race to the bottom on wages, when unlimited unskilled workers are available. Let us not forget that the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2019-20 had found that a wage earner is in the top 10% if he/she earns ₹25,000 a month. Short-duration skill programmes have had low long-term placements. This is often on account of wage being low for a life of dignity in urban areas. Many went back to their villages to do something else.

Evidence also points to the continuum of education and skills. Monthly per capita consumption is the highest in States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Goa and Sikkim. These States have better human development indicators as well. Odisha, in spite of pushing short duration skillings, has a low per capita consumption in the absence of robust higher secondary/higher vocational opportunities in institutions.

Mass employment with dignity requires productivity increases. While it is fine for the Economic Survey to urge the private sector to create jobs, it must be understood that the state also has a role in determining the floor rate of wages and in assuring high quality public goods. There is enough evidence that public employment per unit of population in India is much lower than what it is in most of the developed world. What should the key policy initiatives in creating sustainable mass employment with dignity be?

### Skilling needs

First, begin from below through decentralised community action, to identify skilling needs. Ownership by a community of State programmes only comes through direct community action. The *gram sabha* or *basti samitis* in urban areas can play a critical role in taking government programmes to the people. The steps can be as follows: Create a register of all those wanting employment/self-employment. Create a plan for every youth in partnership with professionals at the cluster level. Well-educated professionals are needed on fixed-term appointment at the local government level, to ensure evidence-based outcomes. Make it the basis for finding skill providers and employers. Let apprenticeships too base themselves on such a community context. The result will be transformational. Let us begin from below.

Second, converge initiatives for education, health, skills, nutrition, livelihoods, and



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employment (at the local government level) with women's collectives. This will ensure community accountability with upskilling, functions and functionalities for effective quality outcomes. Employment does not improve in isolation. All human development indicators achieve better when they devolve and converge. Untied funds are transformational as communities make effective choices. India's failures in public goods (education, health, nutrition, environment, and sanitation) can improve through such an approach. We need to put in more money in these sectors, through decentralised community action.

### Education and employability

Third, introduce need-based vocational courses/certificate programmes alongside undergraduate programmes (B.A., B.Sc., B. Com.) in every college. This has been done in the past. It needs to be made compulsory in every college. Give them the resources to experiment. For example, there are some colleges in Mumbai that provide certificate courses (with graduation) such as tourist guide, counsellor, and so on. This will greatly improve employability on scale. Make graduation programmes employable.

Fourth, standardise nursing and allied health-care professional courses in all States according to international benchmarks. Nurses, geriatric care-givers, and health paramedics are required on scale in and outside India. The biggest problem is the uneven quality of institutions and the absence of a standardised course curriculum and duration. We need to standardise these skill sets to international standards.

Fifth, create community cadres of care-givers to run crèches universally so that women can work without fear. We have a four- to six-hour anganwadi service but the number of infants is more than what a crèche care-giver can manage. We need to create a community cadre of crèche care-givers, who can be paid by the local governments/women's collective after intensive training. The Community Resource Persons of the Rural Livelihood Mission is a good model to follow. Community cadres can have multiple livelihoods in agriculture, animal rearing, non-farm opportunities, and retail shops.

Sixth, invest in Industrial Training Institutes (ITI), polytechnics as hubs in skill development for feeder schools. The absence of quality and up-to-date infrastructure in many ITIs, polytechnics, and Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs) is a very critical gap in an age of upskilling and re-skilling. Institutions have to be autonomous and community managed. These technical institutions can also work as a hub for feeder schools. Schools must develop an equivalence framework for academic and vocational inputs in terms of credits and hours. The focus should be on States/districts with the least institutional structure for vocational education. Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have large capacity that has helped manufacturing in those States. Human capital matters.

Seventh, introduce enterprise and start-up

These 12-point policy initiatives can pave the way for employment with dignity

# West Asia crisis spells tough choices for China, Russia

**T**he assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, chief of Hamas's Politburo and the group's negotiator, in central Tehran, in July, has pushed Israel and Iran to the brink of a full-scale war. The region is bracing for an Iranian response that is expected to be more violent than the exchange between the two foes in April. However, amidst these heightened tensions, Iran's closest partners, Russia and China, have maintained a curious level of distance and ambiguity.

The war in Gaza is a regional flashpoint and has been so for decades. But, in 2024, it has also been subsumed into a larger big-power competition between the United States and its western partners on the one side, and a China-led grouping on the other, which, loosely, includes Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Iran has played a central role in this construct, from providing military technical capacity to Moscow in the form of drones for its frontline against Ukraine, and cheap oil for Beijing, which it has used to top-up its strategic reserves.

### The 'influence architecture'

But both Russia and China have individualistic aims that often diverge from each other. Tehran getting bogged down by a conventional conflict across the region will mean that its capacities will also need bolstering, demand that may land up on the doorsteps of both Moscow and Beijing. While the two powers have a common aim of undermining, and even dispelling, the U.S.'s hold on West Asian security, they have also individually built their own influence architectures which operate less as a collective, and more at an individual level.

China has been more active diplomatically, from playing a mediator's role in the normalisation of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023, to, more recently, hosting a



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group of Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah, both of whom have been at loggerheads with each other since 2006. Beijing has remained steadfast and consistent in its support for the Palestinian cause, which it sees from two strategic lenses. First, that of an injustice perpetuated by western colonisation, and second, a general support for Arab positions. In the Chinese press for example, one outlet highlighted Haniyeh as a “pacifist”.

For Russia, the scenario is very different. Moscow has been militarily embroiled in the Syrian conflict since 2015 when the Arab state's embattled leader, Bashar al-Assad, requested military support to ward off the threat posed by the so-called Islamic State. Since then, Moscow has maintained permanent bases around Latakia province, which also provide it critical access to the Mediterranean. Along with Russia, Iran also stepped in to safeguard the Assad regime, and in return strengthened a web of proxies across the country to secure its own strategic aims.

### The issue of Iran's nuclearisation

Despite the convergences mentioned above, there remains one area where China and Russia continue to align with their western foes – that of a potential nuclearisation of Iran. This concern is more heightened today than it has ever been, as Iran is viewed as a threshold nuclear state, i.e., being very close to attaining weapons capability. The recent successful election of Masoud Pezeshkian, a now tempered moderate President, and his selection of some reformists including familiar names such as Abbas Araghchi as Foreign Minister, may raise hope for the P5+1 capitals that nuclear negotiations could be brought back to life. While this would depend on multiple factors, including the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections in November, access to familiar faces is being seen

skills through professionals in high schools. Schools need to introduce technology and enterprise as a subject at the upper primary/high school-level onwards. It is important that experimentation and innovation with an understanding of business processes are a part of the regular school curriculum. Visits by professionals to schools can impart finishing skills to students; employment/enterprise follows.

Eighth, have a co-sharing model of apprenticeships with industry on scale. This is critical as far as manufacturing sector opportunities or even the services sector is concerned. Skilling costs must be shared with potential employers as standalone government-funded skilling is not always the best way forward. Unless industry has a stake in the apprenticeship, it does not work.

### Capital loans and enterprises

Ninth, streamline working capital loans for women-led enterprises/first-generation enterprises to enable them to go to scale. The lessons from the lakshmi of the Rural Livelihoods Mission bring out the challenges in getting working capital loans. While efforts to create comprehensive credit histories of every woman borrower is underway, technology can be a great enabler in going to scale. The Reserve Bank Innovation Hub and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission are trying to come up with innovations that give confidence to banks to lend on a higher scale. The success of the Start Up Village Enterprise Programme (SVEP) under the NRLM brings out the importance of hand holding, Community Enterprise Fund, and end-to-end solutions for first generation entrepreneurs.

Tenth, start a universal skill accreditation programme for skill providing institutions, and let the state and industry jointly sponsor candidates for courses. Skill providers can be accredited after a rigorous assessment process. Candidates can be co-sponsored by the state and employers.

Eleventh, use 70% funds under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2,500 water-scarce blocks and blocks with high deprivation, with a thrust on the poorest 20 families. Individual beneficiary schemes under MGNREGA allow for livelihood security through income-generating initiatives such as animal sheds, irrigation wells, work sheds, and so on. Focus on skills for higher productivity of MGNREGA wage earners. Better wage rates will facilitate lives of dignity on scale, in very poor regions.

Twelfth, apprenticeships on scale can facilitate the absorption of youth in a workplace. The scale must go up. The focus must be on skill acquisition or else it can get routinised with a stipend being provided, merely as an incentive. The government's condition for employer subsidies in any form must always be for wages of dignity on successful completion of apprenticeship. Let us create a higher order economy, with higher productivity and a higher quality of lives for workers.

The views expressed are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Malayalam filmdom

The present state of the Malayalam film industry is reminiscent of Charles Dickens' lines in his *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” The

industry has done itself proud by garnering a lion's share of the recently announced national film awards. Yet, the publication of the K. J. Somaiya committee report on the issues faced by women in the Malayalam

film industry shows the sorry state of things. The damning report is an eye-opener for arguably the best film pool in India in terms of talent. The industry should take immediate collective action

and do away with the rotten apples if it is to retain its top notch status.  
**Sharada Sivaram,**  
Ernakulam, Kerala

**J&K Assembly election**  
The announcement of dates

for the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir marks a significant step forward in fulfilling the democratic aspirations of people in these two regions. Voter turnout in the 2024 general election was a signal that

people are for change and prefer the ballot over the bullet. The Union government must pay heed to the legitimate aspirations of the people.  
**M. Jayaram,**  
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu



## Creating employment in the long run

**O**ne key flaw with the annual Budget process is that the Finance Minister gets a platform to make grand announcements, which trigger banner headlines. The next year, more announcements are made, triggering more mega headlines. No one bothers to hold the Finance Minister accountable by checking whether the previous year's headline scheme was implemented successfully.

### Promises of employment

For a few years, the current Finance Minister used to announce huge disinvestment targets, the proceeds of which would lower the fiscal deficit significantly. None of these efforts saw the light of day (except when one government's job-creation efforts came to a halt in another). This time, disinvestment declarations were displaced by announcements on employment. While the belated acknowledgement of the jobs crisis is welcome, unfortunately, these too are designed to remain unfulfilled. A month after the announcements, there seems to be no substantial progress.

The Finance Minister announced a five-scheme package to address the unemployment crisis. Borrowing ideas from the Congress's manifestos, the government said it aimed to incentivise corporates to take on 1 crore interns over the next five years. The design of this scheme makes it a non-starter. The internship programme is supposed to be run by the top 500 companies. Not including micro, small and medium enterprises, who could use lower-cost interns, in the ambit of the programme defies logic. The scale announced works out to each company, on average, taking on 4,000 interns every year. Most companies do not have more than 4,000 permanent employees on their rolls. With Artificial Intelligence tools making more positions redundant, why will companies double or triple their workforce in the short run? A



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Former MP who heads the Congress's Research Department



**Akash Sanyawali**

National Coordinator of the Congress

day later, the Finance Minister clarified that the scheme was not mandatory and merely a nudge. The Congress's Right to Apprenticeship proposal was planned to be open to all companies. Its foundation involved the operationalisation of an Apprenticeship Act that meets the needs of job seekers and employers. It recognised that when youth get an opportunity to learn and train on the job in a nurturing environment, their capabilities would be transformed. That would help them to overcome the deficiencies in their education and skilling. However, none of these nuances are even acknowledged by the government.

Employment-linked incentives are a good idea in principle. But the government erred in choosing measures that are destined to fail. As it did with the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, the government is principally relying on supply-side measures to solve issues that are predominantly driven by lack of demand. It is promising to finance a portion of the recruitment expense. But if demand does not pick up and production capacity remains the same, which company will risk reducing profit margins by adding more workers?

### The lack of jobs

Just before the Budget, a report by Citigroup Inc highlighting the persistent job crisis spooked the government. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) promptly released data saying about 109 million jobs were created between 2019-20 and 2023-24. Experts have questioned the methodological limitations of the RBI data as it relies on extrapolation of population data and results from various employment surveys. Additionally, it fails the smell test. Claims of mass employment generation fall flat when we refer to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), which shows that labour force participation rate since 2019-20 has increased by only 4% points. A 109 million new jobs would have led to a sharp increase

in labour force numbers.

The bulk of the job creation is from agriculture and self-employment. Almost 46% of the workforce is 'employed' in agriculture. Since there has been no major rise in agricultural income, the only conclusion we can draw is that people are working in farms because there are no gainful jobs available elsewhere. Further, MGNREGS data show that in 2024-25, 24.8 lakh new persons have been included in the job cards. Overall, 5.8 crore people have demanded jobs already. This increase suggests rural distress.

The decade of 'Make in India' saw the share of manufacturing in the workforce decline from 12.6% in 2011-12 to 11.4% in 2022-23. Industrial production in job-creating sectors like textiles, electronics, leather, and paper products has been negative.

The recent tragedy in Delhi, where three students preparing for government exams drowned, demonstrates the pitiable conditions students have to bear to crack competitive exams. Lakhs of people go through the rigour of the exam only to find that the government is the only guarantee of upward social mobility.

In a reply in the Lok Sabha, the Ministry of Personnel said that in the first eight years of the BJP government, 22 crore government job applications were received whereas only 7.2 lakh were provided employment. There are nearly 30 lakh vacancies in government jobs at various levels in the Central government. This is where the government can step in by ensuring timely recruitment and curbing paper leaks.

Instead of nudges, the government should have relied on an economic package for a long-term investment plan in essential public services. A thrust towards green jobs can have various benefits. Addressing the deficiency in services will have a massive impact on the quality of life, help generate a productive workforce, and create jobs.

## Governance on the back burner

The Congress government in Karnataka is busy fighting corruption charges

### STATE OF PLAY

Nagesh Prabhu

**D**uring the 2023 Assembly elections in Karnataka, the Congress relentlessly accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of charging a 40% commission on state contracts. The campaign worked and the party stormed back to power. Today, the Congress is struggling to fend off similar charges. In the process, the quality of governance has become a casualty in the State.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Deputy, D.K. Shivakumar, have sought to project their government as one that delivers on its promises, especially the five 'guarantees' assured to the people before the elections, as well as a corruption-free administration. But just 15 months after being in power and even instituting judicial probes into the alleged corruption under the BJP regime with no tangible outcome, Mr. Siddaramaiah and his Cabinet colleagues find themselves on the back foot. They have even issued full-page advertisements in newspapers to counter the combined onslaught from the BJP and its ally, the Janata Dal (Secular) or JD(S).

Mr. Siddaramaiah is serving his second term as Chief Minister. He has presented a record number of Budgets (15). He also enjoys a reputation of having a grip on governance. However, none of this is helping him as the government seems to be floundering on governance. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister has been carrying on a tirade against the Centre for its "unjust treatment" to Karnataka in the devolution of funds. The reality, though, is



that the government has little to show in terms of governance or implementation of new schemes. Most of the development and infrastructure projects have come to a halt as the government faces an acute financial crunch, apparently because of the massive cost incurred by it in implementing the Congress's five poll "guarantees" and having to pay the 7th Pay Commission salaries to its employees from this month. Bengaluru City, which faced an acute water crisis during the summer, is unable to solve traffic congestion and the problem of poor roads and potholes. All this has dented the government's image.

Even Mr. Shivakumar, who holds the portfolios of Irrigation and Bengaluru Development, has been unable to make any headway in his 'Brand Bengaluru' project. He ensured that Ramanagara was renamed Bengaluru South District, arguing that the change in nomenclature would bring in a real estate boom. The continuous war of words between him and Union Minister and JD(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy, in a bid to dominate Vokkaliga politics, is not helping matters.

Mr. Siddaramaiah is also caught in a legal and political storm over an alleged scam in the allocation of 14 Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) sites in an upmarket area to his wife Parvathi, when the BJP was in power, as

compensation for the 3.16 acres taken over "illegally" by MUDA. The issue has also resulted in a face-off with Governor Thawarchand Gehlot. All the ministers are involved in protests across the State condemning the Governor's decision to issue a show-cause notice to, and grant prosecution of, the Chief Minister based on the complaints of three social activists. With the entire Cabinet forced to rally behind the embattled Chief Minister, the focus on governance has taken a further hit.

On the other hand, the ₹187 crore scam in the State Mahashil Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation, which came to light after an employee died by suicide leaving behind a letter alleging irregularities at the behest of his higher-ups, has resulted in the arrest of a dozen people as well as the resignation of Minister B. Nagendra. The involvement of nationalised bank officials has resulted in the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation stepping in. While the government seems to have weathered this storm, the MUDA case could consume a lot of its attention. There has also been constant chatter on interference and corruption in transfers, particularly in the Police Department, with the untimely deaths of two officers linked to it.

As the Siddaramaiah government is busy warding off the taint of the MUDA scam by waging a legal and political battle, the long-delayed elections to the rural and urban local bodies as well as the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, the civic body of Bengaluru, are hanging in balance. Karnataka, which has a reputation for good administration and governance, needs to reclaim its image.

## Do women prefer the BJP/NDA over other parties?

The data indicate that the belief that women voters have consistently and overwhelmingly favoured the BJP over the past decade is an overstatement

### DATA POINT

Sanjay Kumar  
Jyoti Mishra  
Vibha Attari

**T**he role of women voters in Indian elections has become a matter of discussion and analysis over the past decade. A popular narrative suggests that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has effectively garnered the support of women voters. Many credit this achievement to various women-centric welfare schemes launched by the Narendra Modi-led government. Among several policy initiatives, the Ujjwala scheme, which provides free cooking gas connections to women from low-income households, is considered a game-changer. In prevailing discussions, it is believed that these schemes have significantly improved the lives of Indian women, and in return, they have started favouring the BJP/National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidates during elections.

However, the outcomes of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections present a more complex picture. The election results, especially the performance of high-profile women candidates of the BJP, suggest that the narrative of overwhelming female support for the BJP may not be as definite as it appears. Of the 69 women contesting on BJP tickets, only 31 were elected to the 18th Lok Sabha, with several prominent candidates losing their seats in significant battles. Smriti Irani, the former Minister of Women and Child Development, had won the high-profile Amethi seat in 2019, defeating Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. During the 2024 election, however, she lost the seat to Congress leader Kishori Lal Sharma by a margin of 1,67,196 votes. Similarly, Dr. Bharti Pravin Pawar, the former Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, who contested from the Dindori seat (Scheduled Tribe reserved seat) in Mah-

arashtra, lost to Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar's) Bhaskar Murlihar Bhagare by NDA. Made significant inroads, with 60% of women voters supporting the BJP in 2024, compared to 53% in 2019. The increase in women's support for the NDA in Andhra Pradesh was largely due to the BJP's alliance with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Although the BJP performed well in Odisha, the gains among women voters were modest. In Gujarat, despite losing one Lok Sabha seat, the BJP managed to retain its support base among women voters.

The UPA/INDIA bloc gained support among women voters across many States. The most significant gain for the INDIA bloc among women voters was in Uttar Pradesh, where 45% supported the Congress and Samajwadi Party (SP) candidates. It is important to note that the Congress and SP had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election against each other, not as allies. In Jharkhand, the share of women voting for the Congress increased from 29% in 2019 to 49% in the 2024 election. The INDIA bloc won five of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in the State, whereas during the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the NDA had won all 10 seats.

There was also a significant shift among women voters in favour of the INDIA bloc in Karnataka and Maharashtra, where the alliance performed much better in 2024 compared to 2019. In Telangana, there was a noticeable shift among women voters towards the INDIA bloc. Although the BJP performed very well in Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Chhattisgarh, the NDA suffered losses among women voters in these States (Table 4).

The data indicate that the belief that women voters have consistently and overwhelmingly favoured the BJP over the past decade is an overstatement. It is clear that women voters display diverse political preferences across States and elections.

and 2024 Lok Sabha elections are shown in Table 3. Madhya Pradesh is the only State where the NDA made significant inroads, with 60% of women voters supporting the BJP in 2024, compared to 53% in 2019. The increase in women's support for the NDA in Andhra Pradesh was largely due to the BJP's alliance with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Although the BJP performed well in Odisha, the gains among women voters were modest. In Gujarat, despite losing one Lok Sabha seat, the BJP managed to retain its support base among women voters.

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### A woman's choice

The data for the tables were sourced from Lokniti-CSDS



**Table 1:** How women voters have voted for the NDA in the past three general elections

	LS 2024	LS 2019	LS 2014
Overall vote share	43.6%	44.5%	38.4%
Men	44%	45%	40%
Women	43%	43%	37%

**Table 2:** How women voters have voted for the UPA/INDIA bloc in the past three general elections

	LS 2024	LS 2019	LS 2014
Overall vote share	33.4%	26.5%	23%
Men	34%	26%	23%
Women	33%	27%	23%

**Table 3:** The share of women voters in States where the BJP/NDA gained support among them in the 2024 general elections

State	LS 2024	LS 2019	Gain
Andhra Pradesh	52%	1%	51%
Telangana	34%	18%	16%
Madhya Pradesh	60%	53%	7%
Kerala	21%	15%	6%
Odisha	43%	39%	4%
Delhi	57%	56%	1%
Gujarat	64%	64%	0%

**Table 4:** The share of women voters in States where the UPA/INDIA bloc gained support among them in the 2024 general elections

State	LS 2024	LS 2019	Gain
Uttar Pradesh	45%	9%	40%
Haryana	49%	29%	20%
Delhi	41%	22%	19%
Karnataka	52%	41%	11%
Telangana	39%	28%	11%
Chhattisgarh	45%	37%	8%
Maharashtra	42%	36%	6%
Rajasthan	39%	34%	5%
Bihar	37%	33%	4%
Uttarakhand	36%	32%	4%
Assam	37%	34%	3%
Gujarat	31%	31%	0%

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### FROM THE ARCHIVES

#### The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 21, 1974

### Use of cement banned for some buildings: houses exempt

New Delhi, Aug. 20: The Union Government has banned the use of cement for certain specified types of construction for one year. The banned categories are: buildings intended to be used as offices, theatres or cinema houses, residential hotels, restaurants or eating houses, shops, roads or pavement. The ban will apply to constructions, in the private and public sectors, where they have not proceeded beyond the plinth level.

The Cement (Conservation and Regulation of Use) Order 1974, was notified on August 16. It issued under the Essential Commodities Act, it gives official sanction to the proposal which Mr. C. Subramaniam, Union Minister for Industrial Development, has been anxious to enforce.

The ban does not apply to residential buildings. But use of cement for miscellaneous items of construction, including fence-posts and compound walls, concreting of courtyards and driveways, tree guards, concrete benches, terraces (jali) work, etc. is to be discouraged. Central and State Governments, local bodies, public sector organisations, etc., have been asked to give a lead in this matter.

All Government bodies have also been asked to issue instructions discouraging the use of cement for these works.

The objective behind the order is to conserve cement, and use alternative materials wherever possible.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 21, 1924

### Mettur project

A Press Communique, dated August 19, 1924, published in this week's Fort St. George Gazette says: The Legislative Council having approved on the 18th instant of the proposal to construct the proposed Cauvery Irrigation Project, consisting of a storage reservoir at Mettur on the river Cauvery and the necessary canals and distribution works, Government propose at once to appoint a Committee representative of the interested districts, of which the Chief Engineer for Irrigation will be a Member, and Hon'ble the Law Member President, to consider and advise Government upon certain details relating to the location of irrigated areas and distributaries.



# The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA  
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## NO SHORT-CUTS

Lateral entry enriches bureaucracy but government should respect a basic premise: Talent, social justice are not at odds

THE NARENDRA MODI government's decision to cancel an advertisement for recruitment of 45 mid-level specialists through the lateral entry route, after it stirred controversy, has company. It follows its other conspicuous steps back recently, on the Waqf Amendment Bill, which has now been sent to a joint parliamentary committee, and the draft Broadcast Bill, put on hold for wider consultations. But, of course, the lateral entry issue is unique, it has a special resonance. The UPSC ad immediately stoked criticism and apprehensions — both within the ruling coalition and outside it — that by treating the 45 positions as specialised and designating them as single-cadre posts, the government was short-circuiting the system of reservation. Given the political context of the recently concluded general election in which the BJP-led NDA's losses have also been attributed to perceptions among backward classes that it sought a "400 paar" majority to dilute the constitutional commitment to social justice, this rollback was, arguably, politically inevitable.

The fact is that lateral entry is desirable and that, as it has done in the past, it can bring in much-needed fresh ideas and energy. It is required to enrich state capacities to meet the increasingly complex tasks of governance. While lateral entrants are no magical cure for systemic ills and deficiencies, and a case may be made for a more fundamental restructuring, they can help fill the gaps of expertise and specialisation for specific durations, for well-defined objectives. Be it the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2005, or the Sixth Pay Commission, 2013, or the recommendations of the Niti Aayog in 2017, the need for the induction of personnel at senior and middle management levels in government has been repeatedly upheld and affirmed. In recent years, the government has also expanded the scale and ambit of the lateral hiring strategy. And yet, the problem arises when the demands of "expertise" and "merit" are ranged against the imperatives of "social justice" and "equality". They need not be seen as antagonistic, and they are, in fact, aligned and mutually reinforcing. As the Supreme Court underlined in its recent judgment on subquotas for SCs and STs, the binary of merit vs reservation must be challenged in a country of great inequalities. Merit should be understood in terms of the social goods of equality and inclusivity — the conflict is between haves and have-nots, and not between merit and distributive justice.

In its third term, with a whitened down majority, the Modi government also needs to take another learning on board. It needs to respond to the voice of a stronger Opposition, and to talk to its own allies — and listen to them too. In the case of the proposed recruitments through lateral entry, it was voices from within — allies such as JD(U) and IJP — as much as the agitation of Rahul Gandhi-led Congress, who is trying to put his stamp on the caste issue, that made it retreat. The government needs to remember that the new numbers demand a new listening. In a diverse country, that also makes for better decisions and more responsive policies.

## A SILENCE IS BROKEN

Revelations of misogyny and abuse in Hema Committee report call for larger reckoning within Malayalam film industry

LATE-NIGHT KNOCKS ON the door and demands for sexual favours in exchange for work, lack of basic facilities like women's toilets and changing rooms, withholding of remuneration and threat of bans: The ugly reality of the Malayalam film industry stands revealed in the Justice Hema Committee report, a redacted version of which was made public on August 19, four years after it was submitted to the Kerala government. Following the sexual assault of an actor in February 2017, which led to widespread outrage, the Committee was set up to investigate the problems faced by women working in the state's film industry. The report — the first of its kind in India — reveals an industry tightly controlled by a powerful few, where a culture of silence has allowed misogyny to run rampant.

The public release of the report marks the end of one important task — of putting on record the deplorable conditions under which women work in the Malayalam film industry. It signals the start of another, more arduous, endeavour. Steps must now be taken for redress and reform. Some tentative steps have already been taken. In 2022, for example, in response to a petition by the Women in Cinema Collective, the Kerala High Court ruled that film production units were required to constitute Internal Complaints Committee as mandated by the POSH Act. The report recommends the enactment of a statute that addresses the specific problems encountered by women in the film industry, as well as constitution of a tribunal to look into their complaints. But where the problem stems from a deeply-entrenched and pervasive culture of sexism and where an outsized power asymmetry determines who is heard and who is silenced, court rulings and new statutes would have little impact unless there is a larger reckoning. An industry that is lauded for the progressive content of its films, must now ask how it can shed regressive attitudes and commit to creating a safe working environment for all.

In a 2018 TEDx Talk, actor Rima Kallingal framed the challenge before the Malayalam film industry: "It is not possible to turn a blind eye to the sexism, ageism and casteism that exist in our society and that is reflected in our cinema content. You cannot not be disturbed by the fact that an artist community is not trying to change that narrative." Even as the rape and murder of a woman doctor in Kolkata brings people out in protest, raising concerns over the safety of women, the Malayalam film industry has the opportunity for real change. It must not let it go.

## DREAM A LITTLE DREAM

There's something unsettling about projects to make the Sandman's domain 'productive'

A LOUD HUXLEY'S INJUNCTION to "dream in a pragmatic way" was meant as an aphorism. A pithy way, perhaps, of paraphrasing that much misunderstood warning at the Oracle's temple at Delphi — "Know Thyself". Perhaps it's just as well that 21st-century scientists are ignoring the calls from a 20th-century futurist to respect limits, to be pragmatic and even to leave some mysteries well enough alone. Companies out of California, including REMSpace, are trying to take advantage of "lucid dreaming" to enhance productivity. In essence, the most private and surreal of realms can be used to learn a skill, gain knowledge and even act as a sort of Bluetooth connection: Researchers envisage people being able to control computer screens and cars.

Lucid dreaming has a long history, perhaps as long as humanity itself. In essence, the dreamer is aware that they are dreaming and can, with some practice, guide the sleeping fantasy. The general consensus among sleep scientists is that about 50 per cent of humanity has had at least one lucid dream. That figure is greatly enhanced among young philosophy and psychology students. Through a laborious process of reality testing and journaling, many have tried to control their dreams to become more creative. And therapists from Freud onwards, like oracles and shamans, have parsed dreams for meaning.

There's something unsettling about the current projects to make the Sandman's domain "productive". First, because they reduce something that is mysterious to the mundane, the source of inspiration to an algorithm. In the 18th century, Coleridge woke up in the middle of the night with one of his greatest poems almost formed. He wrote down, what became "Kubla Khan: or A Vision in a Dream". Today, people can turn on a kettle.



RAJA MANDALA  
By C RAJA MOHAN

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI's visit to Poland and Ukraine this week marks the continuation of an under-appreciated effort in Delhi to raise Europe's profile in India's foreign policy over the last decade. Modi's visit will plug a missing link — Central Europe — in India's European policy at a time when Mittleuropa has returned to the centre stage of great power conflict.

The war for Ukraine, now in its third year, is emblematic of the new geopolitical churn in Central Europe that destabilises the entire world. As Halford Mackinder the British geopolitical thinker put it at the turn of the 20th century, "Who rules East Europe, commands the heartland; who rules the heartland, commands the world-island; who rules the world-island, commands the world."

Can India remain a passive bystander in this renewed struggle for Central and Eastern Europe? PM's visit to Poland and Ukraine this week signals that India's answer is a clear "no". This is the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Poland since 1979, when Morarji Desai travelled to Warsaw; no Indian prime minister had visited Kyiv since Ukraine emerged from Russia's womb amid the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also comes as Kyiv changes the line of military contact with its current offensive into Russian territory that is entering its third week.

Contrary to expectations, Modi's visit to Warsaw and Kyiv may be less about a new Indian peace initiative on Ukraine. Delhi can't see this historic visit as a one-time event; for India, this should be about setting the terms of a long-term engagement with Poland and Ukraine, and more broadly Central Europe. Delhi knows that Russia and Ukraine have a long and shared history and a common faith and know each other better than India and Pakistan. Moscow may not be looking for a peacemaker. President Vladimir Putin knows how to reach out to the US, which has the most leverage in the Ukraine war, and open negotiations when he finds it appropriate.

For Ukraine, the peace offensive is about winning friends to beef up its diplomatic position against Russia. Moscow and Kyiv are waiting for the US elections in November and



VRINDA SHUKLA

"I AM NOT Nirbhaya. Neither was she... We are scared of all men all the time," read a post on X, following the ghastly rape and murder of a young doctor in Kolkata.

Ever since the infamous gang rape that rocked the country in December 2012, much has been done to strengthen the laws on rape. Where then lies the malaise? Why is the law failing to act as a sufficient deterrent? One answer is that laws on rape cannot be examined in isolation and be expected to regulate men's mentality. Men's brutalising of women continues to be rampant because of the laxity in laws surrounding other equally heinous crimes, which warrant immediate and equal attention as rape.

As per the statistics of 2022, annual dowry deaths in India stand at 6,516 — claiming one victim every 90 minutes. A dowry death is the unnatural death of a married woman who is murdered or commits suicide because of continuous cruelty by the husband and his family. What is more distressing than the large number of victims is the pitifully low conviction rate in such cases due to the shocking norm of the accused paying "blood money" to the victim's family. Such "compromises" are routinely allowed by the police and the courts.

Domestic violence is undisputedly the most undernated crime perpetrated against women across all socio-economic strata. The relevant sections of the law prescribe a pun-

# Delhi to Kyiv via Warsaw

PM Modi's visits acknowledge Central, Eastern Europe's role in reshaping regional geopolitics

lockeering to improve their military position before the next administration takes charge in Washington. Other powers, including China and India, may have a role in promoting peace, but only on the margins.

The war in Ukraine today is a consequence of the breakdown of the post-Cold War political settlements between Russia and the West in Central and Eastern Europe. The nature of war termination in Ukraine will also define the framework for a new order in Europe. Whatever its nature, a rising Poland and the current European battlefield, Ukraine will have a prominent place in it. As India seeks to intensify her European engagement, Poland and Ukraine are bound to emerge as important long-term partners. India's outreach to Poland and Ukraine soon after the PM's visit to Russia underlines Delhi's conviction that it does not view the relationship with Moscow and Central Europe as a zero-sum game.

For decades after independence, Europe has remained a relatively low priority for Indian foreign policy. It was narrowly based on relations with Europe's big four — Russia, Germany, France, and Britain. Over the last decade, India has sought to widen this outreach to Europe. During his first two terms as PM, Modi travelled 27 times to Europe and received 37 European heads of state and government. In his first term as foreign minister, Sushant Kumar travelled to Europe 29 times and received 36 of his European counterparts.

The elevation of Europe in India's priorities was accompanied by an effort to fix some lingering problems with major partners like Italy (the Marines case), which had put a hold on annual summits between Delhi and Brussels. The Modi government revived the trade negotiations with EU, concluded a trade and investment agreement with EFTA group, established a trade and technology council with Europe, launched a technology security initiative with the UK, outlined a joint defence industrial roadmap with France, embarked on regional security cooperation with Europe in the Indo-Pacific, and unveiled the India-Middle East-Europe corridor (IMEC).

Supplementing major power relations, India has begun collective diplomacy with

many sub-regions of Europe, including the Nordics and Baltics. Connecting with Central Europe has been part of this plan. Modi's visit to Austria last month (the first in 41 years) and Poland and Ukraine this week are part of that strategy. A quick survey of Central Europe will point to the fact that Ukraine holds the largest territory in Europe after Russia. Poland and Ukraine are seventh and eighth in European population rankings (including Russia). Poland is the largest economy in Central Europe and ranks eighth in Europe.

Rapid economic growth over the last three decades, a large population base (38 million), its location at the heart of Europe, and massive spending (more than 4 per cent of GDP this year) have turned Poland into a force to reckon with. As it rises, Poland has adopted a foreign policy orientation imbued with a measure of strategic autonomy much like France, Germany, and Italy.

Ukraine's economy has been shattered by the war, but the prospect of its reconstruction after peace settlement has put it on the geo-economic drawing boards around the world. Ukraine, which inherited a significant part of the Soviet arms industry, is now looking to the US and Europe to expand and modernise its defence industry. Ukraine's natural strength as one of the world's granaries adds to its strategic salience in the years ahead.

For much of its recent history, Central and Eastern Europe have been victims of great power rivalry that repeatedly carved up its territories, rearranged borders, and forced the nations of the region into spheres of influence of the dominant powers. But unlike in the Mackinder era, Central and Eastern Europe now have greater agency in writing their own destiny and reshaping regional geopolitics. Modi's visit to Warsaw and Kyiv is about recognising that momentous change at the heart of Europe and deepening bilateral political, economic and security ties with the Central European states.

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## DESPITE THE LAWS

Lax implementation has fostered a culture of violence against women

It is no surprise, therefore, that the first accused apprehended in the Kolkata rape and murder case had a history of violent assault of his wife, including when she was three months pregnant. Yet, there was no appropriate legal response at the time despite two complaints. Condoning any act of violence against women or diluting its severity helps reinforce a culture where men are emboldened to believe they can get away with anything.

ishment of up to three years of imprisonment, rendering it nearly impossible for the police to arrest the accused. A victim oblivious to legal complexities will be dismayed to find the police or court release her tomorrow the same day, nonchalantly citing the threshold rule of bail not jail for offences that entail a punishment of less than seven years.

Similar is the case with other serious sister crimes like stalking or harassment. The lax bail norms pose a serious impediment to correcting and curbing the criminal instincts of the accused before they graduate to committing bigger crimes. Women complainants often narrate the common ridicule of their aggressors: "What can you do against me?"

It is no surprise, therefore, that the first accused apprehended in the Kolkata case had a history of violently assaulting his wife including when she was three months pregnant. Yet, there was no appropriate legal response at the time despite two complaints. Condoning any act of violence against women or diluting its severity helps reinforce a culture where men are emboldened to believe they can get away with anything.

A serious legal response to women's safety must entail a review of the complete spectrum of crimes against them in order to truly inculcate society's intolerance to any form of abuse. Graded penal provisions are required depending on the severity of the crime. Fostering a woman or stubbornly stalking her

with the intention of committing sexual assault cannot be dealt at par with milder versions of "harassment". The victim must not be made to wait for the potent penal sections to kick in till she is raped.

A liberal bail regime cannot be sustained independent of other judicial reform. Of the 3,440 cases of dowry death cases disposed off by the courts in 2022, 64 per cent were disposed of without a trial and only 35 per cent of the tried cases resulted in a conviction. Of the staggering 85,250 cases of cruelty by husbands pending trial, a mere 7.7 per cent were disposed off, of which 87 per cent were disposed of without a trial. Then we wonder why men have no fear of the law.

There is a crying need to develop a criminal justice system equipped to investigate and try cases of crimes against women in a fast-track mode. Where protracted trials remain a stubborn challenge, a long enough incarceration, depending on the severity of the particular crime, is the only available tool to instil a fear of the law. The Courts must crack down heavily on extra-judicial compromises forced upon victims because of the tedium of the legal process or a brazen socio-cultural sanction to the compounding of such cases. Until then, we will continue to harbour and embolden abusers.

The writer is an IPS officer serving as SP Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh. Views are personal

## AUGUST 21, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### NTR ALLEGES PLOT

THE AILING DISMISSED chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, N T Rama Rao, and the 167 MLAs supporting him arrived in the capital determined to demonstrate their majority. Their plan to meet the President, Zail Singh, was, however, frustrated by the late running of the train. Rama Rao said that he suspected that the bomb scare on his flight too had been "planned" deliberately to prevent him from attending the Opposition leaders' meeting.

### OPEN WITH TDP

ALL OPPOSITION PARTIES, except the

AIADMK, Muslim League and Akali Dal, urged President Zail Singh to remove the Andhra Pradesh Governor, Ram Lal, forthwith, dismiss the minority government of defectors installed by him and immediately reinstate NT Rama Rao as Chief Minister.

### RAMLAL IN HOT WATER

SCORES of CASES pertaining to illegal felling of trees and disturbing timber during the regime of the former chief minister and present Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Ram Lal — some involving his close relations — are to be filed in the courts shortly. These cases relate to the period from the time he engineered de-

fection of 26 legislators to form a government in 1980 till his ouster last April. Several of these cases under investigation will be filed before the beginning of the monsoon session.

### TROUBLE FOR PM

PM INDIRA GANDHI is finding herself caught in a cleft stick over the Andhra political crisis. Two developments appear to be worrying Mrs Gandhi and these two plan to alter political moves. One is the blow her image has suffered in the wake of the toppling of the NTR government, the other is the rallying point the dismissal of the NTR government has provided to the Opposition parties.





## OUR VIEW

## MY VIEW | ON THE OTHER HAND



## India has reason to be wary as China fumbles

*The troubles of its steel industry are evidence of an economic slowdown, posing external risks. India too faces spillover threats, although a pragmatic policy can help mitigate them*

Data sets emerging from China for the April-June quarter had observers sit up and take notice: on a net basis, foreign investors had pulled out a record \$15 billion, forcing stock exchanges to stop releasing data on foreign investment flows. This, in a way, further confirms apprehensions that growth in the Chinese economy, a critical engine for the world economy, has been sputtering due to slowing consumption demand and other structural problems. This has multiple implications for India. The slowdown is confirmed by the International Monetary Fund. In a report this month, it said that the Chinese economy, which grew 5.2% in 2023, will slow to 5% in 2024 and further to 3.3% by 2029. It internally faces stagnating consumption, with challenges arising from slackening real estate demand and high government debt. Additional headwinds are emerging from decelerating productivity and an ageing population. Externally, demand for Chinese goods and services is hitting a wall of tariff and non-tariff barriers, be it in the US or Europe.

China's problems in the domestic economy are best exemplified by the performance of its steel industry which has been weighed by the real estate downturn, spending squeeze by households and prohibitive duties on the country's exports, such as the countervailing duties imposed by the EU on Chinese electric vehicles. China is the world's largest steel manufacturer, with close to 500 production units and an annual manufacturing capacity of about 1.18 billion tonnes of different steel varieties. Steel prices this year have plunged to multi-year lows, with many mills reporting losses. This is fuelling problems of excess inventory and apprehensions of a wave of Chinese steel dumping across the globe, particu-

larly in the Asia-Pacific. Ripples emanating from the turmoil here have already washed up on Indian shores, with domestic steel prices falling to three-year lows. This is a deviation from the trend: the Indian steel industry has been reporting stellar growth over the past few quarters, with consumption growing by over 12% in 2023-24, catalysed by the government's front-loading of capital expenditure and a nascent private investment revival. The government's production-linked incentives for specialty steel had also crowded-in investments.

Moreover, there are broader repercussions of the slowdown in China for India. It will manifest not only by way of increased imports of subsidised Chinese steel but a rising flood of cheap Chinese manufactured goods, which will hurt sales and profitability of a wide swathe of Indian manufacturing businesses. India already has a big trade deficit with China, despite the government's high-decibel rhetoric, and there is potential of this widening further as the slowdown adversely affects demand for Indian goods and services. In addition, if speculation of Beijing planning a stimulus programme to catalyse household consumption materialises, the structure of the package might include inexpensive loans and subsidies for Chinese domestic manufacturers. This would hold out additional risks for the Indian economy. In this context, the Economic Survey's suggestion to welcome higher Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) merits a second look. This is not to suggest that geopolitical and security concerns associated with such investment should be disregarded. Instead, the government should craft a more nuanced China FDI policy that shuns dislodgement in favour of pragmatism and leverage the opportunity to resolve the border impasse.

## India might already be on the path to universal basic income

*The many cash transfer schemes show a recognition of the state of the poor and the need for support*



VIVEK KAULL  
is the author of 'Bad Money'.

The Maharashtra government has transferred the first two instalments of ₹1,500 each into the bank accounts of many beneficiaries of the Mukhya Mantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana. The scheme pays out that amount each month to women in the age group of 21 to 60 with an annual household income of less than ₹2.5 lakh. News reports suggest that 1.6 crore women have applied for the benefit. If all are paid, it will cost the state government around ₹29,000 crore annually. In fact, the scheme was proposed in late June after the Mahayuti alliance, which governs the state, won only 17 out of the state's 48 Lok Sabha seats.

On similar lines, the Jharkhand government has launched the Mukhya-mantri Maisha Samman Yojana under which women in the age group of 21-60 years will get ₹1,000 per month. Estimates suggest 48 lakh beneficiaries, costing around ₹5,800 crore annually. The state's ruling INDIA alliance, which is primarily made up of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the Congress, won 5 out of the state's 14 Lok Sabha seats. In Haryana, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has launched the Har Ghar Har Gharani Yojana, which caps the price of a cooking gas cylinder for families below the poverty line at ₹500. The difference between the price of the cylinder and ₹500 will be transferred into their bank accounts.

What explains this rush to launch cash transfer programmes? All the three states referred to have assembly elections scheduled this year. In fact, the Economic Survey of 2022-23 had pointed out that as of December 2022, there were more than 2,000 such schemes run by state governments. So, this is not a new trend. As the Economic Survey pointed out, technology has enabled the accurate identification and targeting of beneficiaries and curbed leaks in the benefit delivery processes.

Indeed, politicians have been quick to pick up on this. By launching cash transfer schemes, they have been able to build a personal connection with citizens. The best example of this is Madhya Pradesh, which has the Ladi Behna scheme, under which ₹1,250 per month is given to women from poor households. The scheme is believed to have dramatically improved the political prospects of the BJP in the state.

Of course, politicians also understand that people are experiencing economic distress, which the data may not always clearly show. Take the case of retail inflation in July. It stood at 3.5%, the lowest since August 2019. A lot of song and dance happened around this.

But what was ignored is that a fall in inflation does not mean a fall in prices. It just means that prices rose at a slower pace. Also, this was on account of a base effect or delivery in July 2023 being high. This effect will be seen in August too before it reverses in September.

Further, in the last five years, retail inflation was at 6% per year against 3.9% in the five years before that. In fact, in the last five years, food inflation, which forms around 40% of retail inflation, has stood at 7.3% per year against 2.7% per year in the five years before. Clearly, things have been difficult for the poorer section of the population, which spends more money on food, hurting their spending capacity. Of course, inflation is not the only reason.

As economists Nikhil Gupta and Tanisha Ladha of Mohit Oswal point

out, "Rural spending declined for the third successive quarter in April to June 2024, though the pace of contraction was slower." They further point out that urban spending grew the slowest in five-quarters.

Now, the cash transfer programmes of state governments, other than helping the cause of politicians, should hopefully address this consumption slowdown as well to some extent. But there's more to it than just this.

First, where will the money for these schemes come from? The total expenditure of state governments has increased from 17.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018-19 to 19.6% in 2023-24.

Suggestions have been made that state governments could move some of their other expenditure off the budget, as they have done in the past. Or bills can remain unpaid, moving the expenditure to future years. Further, there will be pressure on the Union government to earn higher taxes to be able to share more money with the states.

Second, what incentives does this create for politicians? As Raghuram G. Rajan and Rohit Lamba write in *Breaking the Mold—Reimagining India's Economic Future*: "The new Indian welfare state...aggravates political leaders more, and for this reason they may have an incentive to skip even more on the delivery of public services and tilt towards targeted benefits [like cash transfer]." For example, creating systems that deliver better education and health takes time, energy, empathy and understanding. It's just easier to transfer money into bank accounts. So, we will see more of those.

Finally, it raises the question of whether in this quick and disguised way, India is moving towards a universal basic income. The schemes referred to in this piece cover a large part of the respective state's population, though not all, making them very close to being universal basic income schemes. Indeed, universal basic income by any other name is just that.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

Basic income is not a utopia; it's a practical business plan for the next step of the human journey.

JEREMY RIFKIN

## MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

## Open Network courts can enable vast judicial reforms

RAHUL MATTHAN



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Last week, I had the privilege of attending the launch of ON Courts (Open Networked Courts) in Kerala, possibly the most creative re-imagining of the justice delivery system attempted in the country to date. Rather than merely adding new digital layers on top of existing non-digital workflows, this bold redesign of the judicial system re-examines how processes at the heart of the system ought to operate.

The animating philosophy behind this re-design is the notion that litigants should not have to re-orient their lives around how the justice system operates; they should not have to wait long hours for their hearings only to be subject to last minute re-scheduling requests, or to have to go to designated physical locations to file their documents and pay their fees, or follow processes so arcane that no-one remembers why they exist in the first place. Instead of making people come to the courts, we should take the courts to the people.

The only way to achieve an ambition so

bold is to rebuild existing judicial processes so that the system proactively addresses the needs of litigants in ways that account for their individual preferences and unique circumstances. With this in mind, each of the judicial workflows in the ON Courts have been re-imagined from the perspective of the relevant stakeholders.

For litigants, it has been designed to allow access from anywhere, allowing them to respond to summons, submit documents, reschedule hearings, and even appear from anywhere. It provides a full and complete view of their case, sending them proactive alerts of any actions they may need to take (file documents or pay court fees), allowing them to collect verifiable copies of all relevant applications, orders and judgements.

For lawyers, it allows them to better coordinate their schedule through a new smart calendaring solution that algorithmically identifies the most suitable time for future hearings. By offering digital filing and the facility to edit uploaded files in case of errors, it eliminates the need for physical files. By sending lawyers prompts throughout the life-cycle of the case, it ensures that they can take whatever action they need to in a timely manner.

For court staff, it does away with manual

data entry completely, offering instead a rule-based, case-specific e-filing workflow aimed at reducing the amount of manual scrutiny required. It also offers transcription tools for the drafting of orders and OCR systems for the scrutiny of documents.

As for judges, it helps them better optimise their time by separating the purely administrative functions from the judicial, so that they can spend their time on matters most deserving of their judicial attention. By offering tools like smart scheduling, assistive templates and voice-to-text transcription, it helps significantly improve their efficiency. This coupled with interactive dashboards that generate case level information and provide timely access to files and documents, judges will always know what to expect in each hearing, and have all the information they need to take considered decisions always at their fingertips.

What I found most interesting was the extent to which this system has incorporated

digital public infrastructure (DPI) thinking into its design. Instead of building a new, technically integrated solution, it has taken pains to integrate existing services into its new workflow. For instance, rather than building a brand new digital infrastructure for summons, it has integrated e-posts into the e-summons process.

Of the 45 million cases that are currently pending in the judicial system, 10% are matters brought under Section 138B of the Negotiable Instruments Act in respect of cheques that, when presented for payment, were returned either on account of insufficiency of funds or because the account had been closed. If we can re-think how these bounced cheque cases are disposed of, we will make significant progress in removing the cholesterol that clogs the arteries of our courts.

It is these cases that the ON Courts are focused on addressing to start with. That said, since it has been built as a set of modular, reusable building blocks, elements (like e-summons) can be re-used to contribute to

any other area of judicial sector reform.

As regular readers of this column will know by now, few things give me greater joy than seeing the policy reforms discussed in this column actually come to pass. When the government announced sweeping reforms to the mapping sector, I gleefully pointed out that this was something I had been calling for since the early days of this column. When the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the Aadhaar Act, I was quietly satisfied that they were concurring with my conviction (expressed in my very first Ex Machina article) as to the sufficiency of privacy protections in that law.

But the sector in which I have been most keen to see progress is in the functioning of the legal profession, and here I have, if anything, grown increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress. What I witnessed last Friday in Cochin restored my faith that this too shall come to pass. Not because the technology was simple yet effective or that the design was both intuitive and user friendly. But because the presentations were all made by the judges themselves, and it was clear that each of them not only understood the inner workings of the system, they were personally invested in its success.





## THEIR VIEW

## MINT CURATOR

# It makes most sense for farmers to keep growing rice and wheat

Their high yield per hectare and state purchases at assured prices make them commercially more profitable than other crops



MADAN SABNAVIS

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

The agricultural landscape in India is quite static. Farmers prefer to grow rice and wheat because of two reasons. The first is that some states subsidize power and water, which helps ensure large scale cultivation. Second, the Food Corporation of India, which is the procurement agency for the government, has an open-ended scheme under which it buys any amount of rice and wheat at the minimum support price (MSP). This MSP keeps increasing every year as it is based on a cost-plus formula. Therefore, there is a guaranteed return on capital, which does not hold for other crops since for them there is no assured buyback. The procurement is done of a fair average quality and hence there is less incentive to move to higher quality cereals. In fact, with the government's flip-flop policy on exports, sometimes allowing and at other times barring them, it makes sense to move to the lowest acceptable quality.

Successful governments make announcements on giving a thrust to oilseeds and pulses output. This is necessary because the country falls short of production very often. When it comes to oilseeds, the doors are still wide open for imports as India, even in normal times, imports almost 60% of its domestic requirements. In the case of pulses, it is *déjà vu* when output of tur and urad comes down. As this news spreads, potential exporters in Africa, Canada and Australia also raise their prices.

There is evidently a need for crop diversification given the limited quantity of arable land. Several schemes are announced and implemented for growing millets, oilseeds and pulses, but the progress has been limited. In this context, it is necessary to go back to the textbook and see if there is value to be had by the farmer in heeding to such advice. It could be a case that farmers may not be too eager to grow these crops.

Cultivation can be looked at as a pure commercial venture from the point of view of the farmer. Just as corporates work for profits, which is euphemistically called shareholder value, so do farmers who work to earn the highest possible income. Therefore, the price received at the time of harvest relative to its cost of cultivation matters.

Crops require different agroclimatic conditions but it is assumed here that a farmer can grow any crop on a particular piece of land. Data from the ministry of agriculture is taken for cost of cultivation as well as wholesale prices for an array of crops for the latest year. The yield per hectare is for 2022-23, costs are projections made by the ministry for 2024-25 and the prices are for 2023-24. This information is provided in the table.

From the table, it is clear that given *ceteris paribus* conditions, rice and wheat are the most lucrative crops for farmers. In terms of yield per hectare, wheat and rice are at the top. Maize has the highest



## Crop choice

Rice and wheat offer the highest income per hectare even though their net gain per kilogram of output is lower than many other crops.

Cost, price and income on various crops (in ₹)

Crop	Yield (kg/ha)	Cost/kg	Price/kg	Difference	Income per hectare
Rice	2,833	15.33	32.22	16.89	47,849
Wheat	3,520	11.28	23.92	12.64	44,493
Maize	3,544	14.47	20.35	5.88	20,839
Tur	814	47.61	87.46	39.85	32,438
Chana	1,171	34.00	57.65	23.65	27,694
Moong	662	57.88	79.74	21.86	14,471
Urad	675	48.83	79.54	30.71	20,729
Soybean	1,145	32.61	46.46	13.85	15,858
Groundnut	2,075	45.22	64.55	19.33	40,110
Mustard	1,428	28.55	51.61	23.06	32,930

Sources: CMIE based on government sources

SATISH KUMAR/MINT

yield per hectare but in terms of income, it ranks low. Its value is low since it is used mainly as animal and poultry feed and only a limited part of it goes for human consumption. While rice and wheat offer a low net gain of between ₹12-17/kg, the higher physical production enables the highest total income for a season.

Pulses offer the highest net gain with tur offering up to ₹40/kg and urad ₹30/kg. Moong is lower at ₹22/kg, which is still higher than that earned on wheat and rice. Among pulses, chana has the highest yield per hectare. But the net income earned is lower than that for tur. In case of oilseeds, groundnut can yield as much as ₹40,000/hectare but would still fall short of wheat by 10%. Growing groundnut is more lucrative than soybean.

Therefore, from a purely commercial perspective, it makes sense for farmers to grow more rice and wheat. It is because of soil and agroclimatic conditions that they cannot be grown in parts of the country other than the rice and wheat-growing belts. It can also be said that even if pulses, millets or oilseeds are cultivated in the rice and wheat grow-

ing belts, it would not make commercial sense.

The solution here is that the ecosystem that exists for rice and wheat needs to be replicated for other crops. This would mean having their procurement and distribution. However, there is no policy for stocking pulses and oilseeds or distributing them through fair price shops on a regular basis. Therefore, a procurement scheme can turn out to be expensive and inefficient as it may only serve the purpose of price stabilization when prices rise in the market.

The alternative is to remodel the MSP mechanism, which has long been dead. Having an open-ended procurement system is an anachronism in the current context. There is a need to filter out procurement only to small farmers and not the rich. Also, states need to fix their tolerance limits for subsidizing power and water to ensure that farmers look at other crop options. This is evidently not an easy task as withdrawing any benefit is tough. But a call needs to be taken at some point of time.

These are the author's personal views.

# Harris is walking a fine line on Gaza but so are the protesters

She's been tough with Israel but won't let herself be pushed around



PATRICIA LOPEZ

is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering politics and policy.



Palestine supporters must realize that Harris must win first to do anything

Pro-Palestinian organizers have vowed to flood the streets of Chicago with thousands of protesters during the Democratic National Convention, which began Monday. If successful, they will make headlines, but they also will almost certainly alienate allies as they attempt to box in Vice President Kamala Harris on Gaza.

Harris has already taken a firmer stand than President Joe Biden in demanding Israel focus its attacks on Hamas rather than the Palestinian people. She made a point of skipping Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's July address to a joint session of Congress. Later, after she met with him privately at the White House, she used tougher language than Biden had ever used when talking about the Israeli leader.

"We cannot allow ourselves to be numb to the suffering, and I will not be silent," Harris said. While Israel has a right to defend itself, "how it does so matters." Elanne Farhat, a senior adviser to the Uncommitted National Movement, told me she was encouraged by Harris' words. "I'm hearing a real shift in tone, a renewed commitment to a cease-fire in Gaza since she took over," Farhat said.

The uncommitted movement has evolved rapidly since it travelled to Detroit in February, where its forerunner, Listen to Michigan, was just starting to organize. Now active in nine states, Uncommitted will send 30 delegates to the convention. While that's a fraction of the nearly 5,000 convention delegates who will be in Chicago, it represents more than 650,000 voters nationwide. About half of those primary votes came from key swing states. In 2020, Biden beat Trump by just over 20,000 votes.

Since those heady days, little has happened to alter Biden administration policy or the trajectory of the war.

On 10 August, Israeli forces bombed a school being used as a shelter, killing more than 100 Palestinians, including children. The Israeli military said it was targeting Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants it claimed were operating in the school. [Last week], the Biden administration—of which Harris remains part—approved \$20 billion in arms sales to Israel that include fighter jets and advanced missiles.

Harris faces the same predicament that trapped Biden and split his base. On one side is a decades-long allyship with a nation that provides a strategic toehold in an often hostile region. On the other is a mounting humanitarian crisis in which

that ally has slaughtered tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians in its rush to destroy Hamas and seek vengeance for the brutal 7 October Hamas-led attack on Israel.

Yet Harris must somehow forge her own path. She has maintained ties with pro-Israel groups, but she also hired Nasrallah Bargazi, an Afghan American lawyer and refugee, to lead Muslim and Arab voter outreach for her campaign.

Harris has taken a tougher line with Netanyahu, but she has also shown that she won't be pushed around by protesters. When protesters disrupted a campaign rally in Detroit, Harris at first listened, noting that everyone's voice matters. But when they continued to disrupt her speech, Harris fired back, "If you want Donald Trump to win, then say that. Otherwise, I'm speaking."

The crowd erupted in cheers, which was the first serious indication that the protesters may have crossed the line with those whose sympathy they had hoped to earn. Democrats who are excited about a Black woman potentially becoming president, who eagerly want a new political chapter, and who fear a second Trump administration may be unwilling to risk it all by forcing Harris into an untenable position on Gaza.

Farhat and other organizers need that broader coalition to amplify their own voices. Polls have shown that most Americans are reevaluating the carnage and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. They favour a cease-fire and a return of the hostages. Are they willing to make a complete break with Israel over it? Unlikely.

Imam Mishaal Stewart Saadiq, who leads the Muslim Center mosque in Detroit, told me in February that he was "a big Biden guy" in 2020 and was proud to use his influence to turn out the vote. But he became disillusioned over Gaza. Now Saadiq tells me he is "truly excited about Kamala Harris becoming president."

Harris appears prepared to take a tougher stand with Netanyahu. Making weapons and other US support conditional on clear passage of humanitarian aid to the region would be a good start. But Palestinian supporters must recognize that to do anything at all, Harris must first win. **EBLOOMBERG**

## THEIR VIEW

# The East has a major role in India becoming developed

AMIT KAPOOR & SHEEN ZUTSHI



are, respectively, chair and research manager at the Institute for Competitiveness.

In many parts of the world, convergence theory is playing out, with developing economies experiencing faster growth and gradually catching up to their wealthier counterparts. As posited in growth theory, this convergence trend is not unique and usually applies to regions that typically begin with low-performance levels on an important outcome such as gross domestic product (GDP) or GDP per capita.

The global literature on convergence theory suggests that these regions should experience quicker growth on that outcome over time, helping catch up with regions that began with higher starting points. Beta convergence is a form of convergence that suggests that poorer regions are growing faster than richer ones. However, when we look at Indian states, especially those in the eastern region, we find that despite their vast mineral wealth and strategic locational advantages, they remain economically underdeveloped compared to other regions. This demands immediate attention. It further

underscores the urgent need for decisive state government intervention to stimulate economic growth in the lagging region.

In 2022-23, the combined GDP of the eastern region was about \$579 billion in exchange rate terms, compared to \$185 billion in 2011-12. The region's share has remained unchanged at about 17%. However, as the country moves toward becoming a developed economy by 2047, which translates to around \$30 trillion of GDP if it grows annually by around 9.6% nominally, it becomes imperative to examine what this region's growth will be and the significant role it can play in India's economic future.

Looking ahead to 2047, if the region grows every year at 9% and its share in India's GDP remains unchanged at 17%, its output could reach around \$5 trillion. This growth potential, if realized, could be a game-changer in India's journey to a developed economy status by 2047. The eastern region's growth is not just a possibility but necessity for India's economic future. However, if the region continues to grow at a more modest rate of 5%, its GDP would only be around \$1.8 trillion. This underscores the need for immediate policy changes to align the region's growth with the national goal. For the Indian economy to reach its goal

of \$30 trillion by 2047, the rest of the states in India have to grow at double-digit rates, or the eastern region needs to contribute more. The former seems unattainable given the regional disparities at the state, inter- and intra-distinct levels. States are at different stages of development, and prioritising growth without social progress is difficult. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the eastern region to grow around 9%. Ensuring solid and sustainable growth in this region is challenging, as the combined GDP of the states in the Eastern region has grown at a compounded average rate of about 5.5% in the last 11 years.

The lower social progress rankings for eastern states further underline the critical need for focused development strategies to address performance on socioeconomic indicators. The Social Progress Index (SPI) assesses the performance of states and Union territories on aspects of social development and ranks them relative to their performance with eco-

omic peers. Insights from SPI reveal that no state from the eastern region is among the high tiers of social progress i.e. Tier 1 and Tier 2. Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha rank slightly higher in tiers 4 and 5 of social progress i.e. lower middle and low social progress. Bihar and Jharkhand rank the lowest among all states and UTs. They are in Tier 6 of social progress i.e. very low performance. The poor performance of the Aspirational Districts on social progress in these states drives this. On further examining the performance of 112 Aspirational Districts, we found that most of the districts of Bihar and Jharkhand are in the bottom 20 districts across the country. These figures underscore persistent socioeconomic challenges in the states, revealing significant disparities with the eastern region.

Moreover, it is also crucial to address the labour market issues in these regions. Most states in the eastern areas had a labour force participation rate (LFPR) for the population

aged 15-59 in 2022-23 above 60%, except for Bihar, for which it stood at 50.3%, indicating relatively lower workforce engagement. However, any assessment of labour market dynamics is incomplete without an examination of the quality of the workforce. According to PLFS data for 2022-23, these states have over 63% of the workforce in the "semi-skilled" category, which indicates that the labour force predominantly possesses a low share of intermediate and high skills, ones that can drive productivity and labour mobilization. Bridging these gaps is essential to enable these regions to contribute more productively to India's goal of becoming a developed economy by 2047.

Achieving beta convergence in economic performance and human development is crucial for the eastern regions to realise their potential in a developed Indian economy. These states are plagued by lower performance in social progress, GDP per capita, the composition of their economy and weaker contribution to the skilled workforce. These underscore the urgent need for state governments to intensify their efforts to address regional disparities, particularly in states like Bihar and Jharkhand, thereby reduce inequalities and foster shared prosperity across the eastern part of the country.

Balanced and high growth in the region is a must to catch up to India's overall growth journey



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Take no chances!

Mpox is becoming a global concern. While there is no need to push the panic button yet, it is important to remain watchful

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is now facing another significant health challenge: Mpox, previously known as monkeypox. This viral disease, which has traditionally been confined to certain regions of Africa, has seen a disturbing rise in cases across the globe, prompting widespread concern and action from health authorities. Mpox is caused by the monkeypox virus, a member of the Orthopoxvirus genus, which also includes the smallpox virus. The good news is that it is not fatal in most cases and is curable. There is no specific treatment for mpox but most people recover in a few weeks. Supportive care and pain control can help people with good immune systems while those with low immunity can recover with medical treatment. While it is less deadly than smallpox, Mpox can still cause severe illness, especially in those with compromised immune systems. The virus is primarily transmitted to humans from animals, but human-to-human transmission can also occur, particularly through direct contact, bodily fluids, respiratory droplets, or contaminated materials like bedding. Mpox's symptoms include fever, headache, muscle aches, swollen lymph nodes, chills, and a distinctive rash that often starts on the face and spreads to other parts of the body.

As they say, once bitten twice shy, we have just wriggled out of corona pandemic and cannot afford to have another pandemic. It is not an epidemic but can become one if preventive measures are not taken. After a surge in Mpox cases globally Indian airports have ramped up surveillance and precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has issued a nationwide advisory, urging airports to intensify screening processes and ensure that protocols for identifying and isolating potential cases are strictly followed. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported an uptick in Mpox cases across several regions, with particular concern in areas where the virus had previously been under control. Travellers exhibiting symptoms such as fever, rash, or swollen lymph nodes are being referred for further medical evaluation. Major international airports in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru are at the forefront of these preventive measures. Special medical teams have been stationed at these hubs to conduct rapid assessments and ensure that any suspected cases of Mpox are swiftly isolated and treated. The focus is not just on inbound passengers; outbound travellers are also being advised to take precautions, particularly if they are heading to regions experiencing outbreaks. While India has not yet reported a significant number of Mpox cases, the proactive measures being implemented at airports are part of a broader strategy to prevent the virus from gaining a foothold in the country. Health experts emphasise that early detection and isolation are key to controlling the spread of Mpox, particularly in a densely populated country like India, where an outbreak could have severe consequences.

## PICTALK



Flowers in full bloom in Amrit Udyan at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi

RANJAN DIMRI

## Cyber security: Reducing attack surfaces in the digital age

As cyber threats become more sophisticated, cybersecurity requires a proactive approach. Advancing security practices through Zero Trust principles is key

As cyber threats continue to evolve, it's important to remember cybersecurity is not a one-time task but an ongoing process. Advancing cybersecurity and Zero Trust maturity starts by focusing on three core practice systems: reducing the attack surface, detecting and responding to cyber threats and recovering from a cyberattack throughout the infrastructure, including edge, core and cloud.

The attack surface refers to all potential areas in an environment that a cyber attacker can target or exploit. These points can include software vulnerabilities, misconfigurations, weak authentication mechanisms, unpatched systems, excessive user privileges, open network ports, poor physical security and more. This is achieved by minimizing the potential vulnerabilities and entry points that attackers can exploit to compromise a system, network or organization across various domains including the edge, the core or the cloud.

Some ways we can strengthen our security posture:

**Apply Zero Trust principles:** Zero Trust is a security



concept centred on the belief that organizations should not automatically trust anything inside or outside their perimeters and instead must verify everything trying to connect to their systems before granting access.

Organizations can achieve a Zero Trust model by incorporating solutions like micro-segmentation, identity and access management (IAM), multi-factor authentication (MFA) and security analytics, to name a few.

**Patch and update regularly:** Keeping operating systems, software and applications up to date with the latest security patches helps address known vulnerabilities and minimize the risk of exploitation.

**Ensure secure configuration:** Systems, networks and

devices need to be correctly configured with security best practices, such as disabling unnecessary services, using strong passwords and enforcing access controls, to reduce the potential attack surface. **Apply the principle of least privilege:** Limit user and system accounts to only have the minimum access rights necessary to perform their tasks.

**Use network segmentation:** Dividing a network into segments with different security levels helps contain an attack and prevents lateral movement of a cyber threat by isolating critical assets and limiting access between different parts of the network. **Ensure application security:** Implementing secure coding practices, conducting regular security testing and code reviews and using web application firewalls (WAFs) help protect against common application-level attacks and reduce the attack surface of web applications.

**Utilize AI/ML:** According to the Dell Technologies 2024 Innovation Catalyst report, 58% of Indian businesses feel GenAI will provide automation to help

with the efficiency and scale needed to deal with the influx of threats. We can leverage AI capabilities to help proactively identify and patch vulnerabilities, significantly shrinking the attack surface. **Work with suppliers who maintain a secure supply chain:** Ensure a trusted foundation with devices and infrastructure that are designed, manufactured and delivered with security in mind. Suppliers that provide a secure supply chain, secure development lifecycle and rigorous threat modeling keep you a step ahead of threat actors.

**Educate users and promote awareness:** By proactively implementing these measures, organizations can effectively reduce the attack surface, helping to mitigate risks and making it more challenging for adversaries to exploit vulnerabilities, enhancing the overall defence posture against new and emerging threats.

(The writer is Director and General Manager, Data Protection Solutions, Dell Technologies India; views are personal)



RIPU BAJWA

## CHANAKYA OF INDIAN POLITICS

Madam — As a doyen of literature and a great administrator, no one can come close to him for having used "Anna Aravaliyaam" as a treasure of knowledge center which paved the way for his glorious political career. The gesture from the Centre will be a welcome one for the DMK to feel warmth that a commemorative coin of Rs.100 has been released by the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at Chennai to mark the Birth Centenary of Kallaignar Dr. M. Karunanidhi.

As a prominent writer and politician, he served as the CM for over two decades. His tenure as CM was the longest in the State's history by the count of 6863 days. Whatever one can see as the light and shade in TN in state's progress, Karunanidhi was instrumental for the same. He has recorded 13 times unbroken in all the contested assembly elections. He repaid what he sowed and the tall leader deserves the coin as an honor for his contributions.

AP Thirupathi Chennai

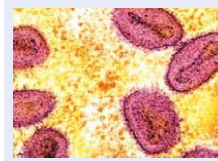
## DOCTORS' SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT

Madam — I strongly condemn the recent horrific incident in West Bengal involving the heinous crime against an innocent 31 year old junior trainee female doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. My heartfelt condolences go to the victim's family. As a matter of fact, it is not for the first time that such horrific incidents take place in one corner or the other across the country.

We have not forgotten the Nirbhaya case of Delhi. The other day, police have booked three persons, including two women, and detained two of them after a female doctor was allegedly assaulted at civic-run Sion hospital in the early hours of Sunday. Under the circumstances, resignations are not the solution and those who ask for resignation of the Chief Minister of West Bengal, will they ask for the resignation of the

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### M-pox is turning into a global threat



The risk of M-pox is turning as a global health emergency after its cases took a surge spike in the African continent particularly. The disease had reached western continent as well, recently Sweden too confirmed it's first ever Mpox infected case along with the USA. So far more than 1 lakh cases been reported from around 116 countries in total, however the ministry of health

and family welfare confirmed it's possible chances as low for India. But we just can't underestimate the risk from M-pox virus. Taking precautions from one's own self is the utmost way to avoid any disease coming to our body. Although there is no such designated cure and vaccine for it right now, but precautions like smallpox and cow pox can be adhered to it as well. The zoonotic diseases had turned common after their frequent transmission from the animals to the mankind, it is unfortunate that we our own self is responsible for creating this imbalance between us and animals habitat. Man is itself responsible for the tragic over exploitation of everything, the consequences are in front of us.

The virus disease from squirrel and monkeys are now emerged in human now, risk prevention and mitigation had to be implemented on early basis, to avoid another pandemic for the world.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Maharashtra Chief Minister for this incident or in Uttarakhand where two days back a similar incident had happened? Instead of asking resignations, the grim situation warrants the urgent need for enhanced safety measures for healthcare workers throughout the hospitals in the country.

S K Khosla | Chandigarh

### LATERAL ENTRY

Madam — The issue of lateral entry (Pioneer, 19th Aug, Pg. 4) in the Government services politically assailed as deprivation to the reserved cadres and through RSS instead of UPSC needs closer examination from administrative angle and technology gaps in the government services cadre. It is not a political issue.

Neither it forfeits the interests of reserved classes in the services nor it encroaches their recruitment in the civil or subordinate services. Already several government controlled services relating to digitisation, advanced technological projects etc. have been outsourced to the

companies and entities having desired skills and resources. The patterns of recruitment of civil and subordinate services in the Central and State governments lacks appointment and engagement of specialised and skilled cadres. Presently all government services are being operated digitally through applications and online mechanisms. The traditional government services are red taped and have colonial essence which are not public oriented. In fact, UPSC must reform its recruitment systems for various services to facilitate appointments of a strong and robust cadre of technocrats highly specialised in latest technologies like cyber security, fintech, block chain, metaverse, cloud, artificial intelligence etc. who can provide services to all government departments instead of lateral entries which will always be despised and envied within the government cadres.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

Send your feedback to: [lettersstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:lettersstopioneer@gmail.com)

## Another surprise regime change in neighbourhood



ASHOK K MEHTA

Amid economic distress and a coup, India's once strong alliance with Bangladesh teeters on uncertainty, as anti-India sentiment rises and strategic interests hang in the balance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned in his Independence Day speech that India is worried about developments in Bangladesh, especially about the safety of Hindus and other minorities there. Promptly Professor Yunus head of Caretaker Administration called Modi to reassure him of their safety. The soft coup in Dhaka, the fourth in 53 years is almost wholly student-driven following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina losing touch with her people and mounting economic distress. The killing of 200 and more protesters, many students, was the proverbial straw that broke the camels back. COAS Gen Waqar Uz Zaman was left with only one choice: order Hasina to flee giving her 45 minutes.

The General must have foreseen this contingency as "the day after" scenario. Otherwise, the peaceful and orderly nature of the transition could not have been possible. The sentiment on the street is anti-Hasina with the Sheikh Mujib legacy she nurtured of freedom from Pakistan through a liberation war aided by India would not have been so bitterly desecrated. Anti-India feelings largely stem not only from India's blind support for Hasina despite the loss of democratic credentials but also some grievances that Bangladesh has nursed like BSF firing on the border, not sharing Teesta waters and disallowing use of the Siliguri corridor.

Most of all, they were peeved by Home Minister Amit Shah calling Bangladeshis "insects" and loud advocacy of CAA/NRC. Giving refuge to Hasina indefinitely could increase the anger against India. Critical strategic interests are at stake. Much has been written about the events of July and August in Bangladesh. Astonishing is the importance attached to conspiracy theories: naming the US, and CIA coveting St Martin Island which is also claimed by Myanmar and other usual suspects, Pakistani, ISI and China. While some of these players will certainly fish in troubled water, it is the role of Islamists and jihadi organisations India must



fear. Even though a Nobel laureate, liberal democrat and regionalist, Mohammad Yunus is to lead the caretaker administration has said he will be guided by the students and their leaders Nahid Islam and Asif Mahmud. The mystery in this drama is the extent to which Gen Zaman, a relative of Sheikh Hasina, was involved in the coup. No regime change has occurred in Bangladesh without the Army either facilitating or executing it. Sheikh Hasina's greatest achievement was transforming Bangladesh once a basket case into the fastest-growing economy in South Asia with human development indices surpassing all regional countries except Sri Lanka. Its garment industry was world-class till periodic protests and strikes over wages and COVID began to wreck it. Bangladesh grew at a steady 6.5 per cent for two decades with a per capita income of USD 2600, much higher than India's. But its growth story ended after it sought IMF assistance of USD 4.7 bn and inflation crossed 10 per cent.

Trade with India had grown phenomenally to nearly USD 18 bn. An FTA in the works for a long, had it materialised, Bangladesh's exports would have risen 182 per cent. The largest tourist population comes from Bangladesh giving



INDIA IS FACED WITH A CHALLENGING CONUNDRUM IN THE COUNTRY IT HELPED IN ITS BIRTH. THE GOLDEN PERIOD IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WHEN INDIA'S INTERESTS WERE BEING SUITABLY ADDRESSED IS BOUND TO CHANGE

a fillip to medical tourism. Defence relations have enhanced miraculously: it is a story of turning foe into friend. This is quite extraordinary, given that Bangladesh used to portray India as an enemy in its war games. India has granted a \$500bn LoC for defence purchases but in Bangladesh's layered defence procurement system controlled by Armed Forces Division once led by Gen Zaman, India is at the lowest level for consideration for hardware with China topping the list at A level.

Aircraft, submarines, tanks, artillery and other equipment are mainly of Chinese origin. Bangladesh is a nation in disarray being led by student leaders whose wishes are being promulgated by the Caretaker Administration. India is faced with a challenging conundrum in the birth of Bangladesh in its birth. The golden period in bilateral relations when India's interests were being suitably addressed is bound to change given the fact that the new regime is targeting Sheikh Hasina and everyone associated with her or the Awami League.

That the Bangladesh Army will become the conduit for a near-normal relationship is what India must hope for. Geography and economic logic also suggest that for Bangladesh to meet the chal-

lenge of its economic distress India's assistance will be necessary. Dhaka will not forget how New Delhi bailed out Colombo after its default in 2022 and the student protest movement which could not transform Sri Lanka's polity. Former only Hindu Chief Justice of Bangladesh Surendra Kumar Sinha who was sacked by Hasina said last week that everything that has happened in Bangladesh in the last few days has been unconstitutional and he cited the various changes brought about by the Caretaker Administration. In a revolution or a coup the constitution is of several casualties. The Administration has said that institutional reforms will include reviewing the constitution before any election can take place. All this will take time. It is the early days of regime change with the future clouded with uncertainty. India's new geo-political challenge is shaping and it must now begin engaging relevant stakeholders. What it will do about Sheikh Hasina and Awami League will be one of many challenges.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)





## CONTRAPUNTO

Call a meeting, form a committee

-JASPAL BHATTI

## System In The Dock

Good that junior medics are calling off their stir. SC's committee on hospital safety mustn't have tunnel vision

Junior medics are rightly suspending, bit by bit, their stir engendered by the RG Kar hospital rape-murder. SC yesterday made hospital safety a national matter, instituting a nodal body tasked with framing protocols applicable countrywide. But, there are buts...

**System's broke** | Large govt hospitals like RG Kar are supposedly better off than smaller ones. In its Indiawide assessment of health-care facilities this June, National Health Mission reported that nearly 80% of India's public health facilities fail to meet Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS). NHM covers over 2L such facilities. As a new govt assumed office in June, GOI pledged to make 70k hospitals IPHS-compliant within its first 100 days. GOI must already have a road map similar to what SC seeks. Will these be reconciled?

**No quick fix** | The reason RG Kar medics' protest resonated beyond Bengal is because, clearly, system's broke in big hospitals too. But public health works in fits and starts, in silos. For instance, mere months ago, an NHM review was satisfied with infra in RG Kar's gynae-maternity wards. In general, standards are low, but public hospitals remain functional as medical colleges are the point of treatment available for most Indians. SC wants initial reports on Aug 22. But no magic wand can fix this. Will solving this particular case make corridors safer? No. Lighting, proper duty rooms might, for which no committee's required. Who'll fix administrative sloth? In July, Bengal govt gave RG Kar ₹18cr to start another campus. Why not fix the existing one first?

**No easy solves** | Pulling at any one thread will unravel the whole shebang. Misplaced security priorities, or suggestion of security guard apparatus, as in private hospitals, can become a new pain point. Unfettered access to patients' families in govt hospitals exists only because staffing is so abysmal that it's family that's doubling as ward boys and semi-nurses, running around following doctor's orders and nurse's directions.

**Safety for all** | What's left unsaid and invisibilised by hospitals are senior medics dealing peers or juniors, assaulting nurses or other staff — crimes seldom reported, tragically normalised. SC committee's/GOI's protocol must centre on making hospitals safe for all — patients, doctors, nurses and every staff member, and visitors.

## Collateral Exit

It's unfortunate that lateral entry into bureaucracy fell victim to political battles

GO asking UPSC to cancel its advertisement for lateral entry recruitments in bureaucracy is a demonstration of how good policies become collateral damage in political battles. Pressure from vocal Union partners and demands of competitive politics seem to have precipitated the U-turn. Opposition parties have been up in arms since Saturday calling lateral entries a ploy to deny disadvantaged groups reservation benefits. On Monday, BJP allies LJP and JDU too came out against it. Significantly, the withdrawal order mentions PM's commitment to principles of social justice. And it says absence of a provision for quotas in such appointments will be reviewed and reformed.

**LS results cast a shadow** | Pressure from coalition allies and attacks from opposition parties are par for the course in democratic politics. What's new here is BJP's assessment that the Constitution/reservation issue cost it substantially in 2024 LS elections. That opposition campaign-time charges of a BJP plan to scrap quotas hit home is evident from numbers. Of the 92 seats it lost from its 2019 tally of 303 seats, 29 were reserved constituencies. In UP, BJP lost 9 of 17 reserved seats. All this suggests reservations have become an electorally ultra-sensitive issue for this BJP govt. But, in policy-terms, this can mean an overemphasis on quotas impacting governance.

**No substitute for expertise** | For a bureaucratic system employing thousands, recruitment of 45 specialists was all UPSC set out to do on Saturday. This too was to be done for a limited period of three years. A fast-growing economy requires domain expertise in newer, developing fields. Bureaucrats, drawn from general streams, may not always be the best choice for such tasks. This is true even for developed countries like US and UK that regularly hire experts from outside govt. Lateral recruitment is recommended by Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Sixth Pay Commission and Niti Aayog. The first two bodies predate 2014. If quotas become a factor in lateral entry jobs where merit is critical, the purpose may be lost. The cause of social justice can surely survive 45 recruitments.

## Wealth and weather

Come deluge or drought, there's a lot of money to be made from climate change

Jug Surajaya



The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain... In Hertford, Hereford and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly begin, recited Audrey Hepburn, playing Eliza Doolittle in Hollywood's *My Fair Lady*, based on Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

Without knowing it, Audrey/Eliza was a prophetic weather vane for a highly lucrative business generated by the vagaries of climate change.

If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes for it to change, said Mark Twain, adding, "In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six different kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours."

Like his creation, Huckleberry Finn, Twain might have been given to elaborating on the truth. But the increasing changeability of climate has proved a huge windfall for Wall St in the form of hedge funds specialising in 'weather derivatives' and 'catastrophe bonds', shortened to 'cat bonds'.

Both are tradable financial instruments that can act as insurance against extreme weather events and the commercial and social upheavals these could bring in their turbulent wake.

The demand for such funds is said to have pole-vaulted by over 260% last year, resulting in a current total valuation of \$25bn.

As the founder and CEO of a climate insurance fund put it, "There's a heightened fragility from direct weather volatility, supply-chain issues, inflation, geopolitics. It means that weather can eat up a bigger part of the bottom line now."

Investors in climate funds include farmers, who want financial protection against droughts or floods that could damage their crops and result in a bitter harvest. Travel agents, tour operators, and others in the booming tourism industry are also buying into a market that they hope will safeguard them from too many rainy days, or other climatic deterrents to holiday-makers.

Just how chancy a gamble weather has become is underlined by an apology reportedly featured in a West Asian daily. We regret that today's weather report is not available due to the weather. Whether the weather report is available tomorrow will depend on the weather.

The job of climate insurers is to remove, or reduce, the whether in the weather.

## When Heroes Are Villains

Toxic male aggression is responsible for coercing sexual favours out of women in Kerala film industry, writes a woman filmmaker. Change won't happen unless the predators are punished

Geetha J



The 1929 kino-eye classic *Man with a Movie Camera* by Dziga Vertov was a complex experiment bringing into focus the grammar of cinematic means. It also showed the cameraman as a heroic figure striding into a new medium and participating in creating a new world. Such was the hope and joy it engendered.

Born and brought up in Kerala, I was not encouraged by any person or institution to make films. Still, Vertov inspired me. *Woman with a Video Camera* (2004) is my attempt to take Vertov's filmic experiment a step further. In 75 years, cinema had become a powerful industry. I knew as a film critic that the movie camera is not an innocent recorder, and as a woman that the movie camera is not even an innocent constructor of reality but part of a highly capitalistic, patriarchal and hierarchical film industry.

Kerala boasts high film literacy. And yet when I was filming in 2003, there were hardly any women filmmakers around. And yet I was hopeful. I saw myself as intervening in filmmaking.

Twenty years later, as I continue to struggle to make films, I hear the public

**Hema Committee also indicates how contracts & promised remunerations are empty words. Pay disparities are dreadful. Some of these problems affect men too. Many of the issues are outright criminal**

outcry that Kerala's film industry is rotten. But the hope lies in the fact that Kerala is the first in the country to bring out a report on the exploitation women face in the film industry. Despite legal stunts and delays and the "mafia sangham".

On Monday, the Hema Committee report, submitted in 2019 by retired Kerala HC Judge, Justice K Hema, actor T Sarada and former bureaucrat KB Valsakumari, was finally released. It was upon the demand of the Women in Cinema Collective that had formed this commission in 2017, to study the condition of women in the film industry. WCC itself was formed earlier that year, in response to the horrifying sexual attack on a famous female actor, in a moving vehicle near Kochi.

The harsh reality of violence pervades the entire report, even as it feels like it's repeating things that we always knew. Did we not know that sexual favours were

being coerced out of women, to get a chance to work in this industry? Did we not know that to speak up was to lose the chance to exist in the industry? But what could earlier be dismissed as gossip is now in a govt report, thanks to the women who deposited their very raw personal experiences before a govt committee.

For many of us who grew up hearing cautionary tales about the big bad world of films (and thus tried to keep ourselves away) but were proud to come from a land with a strong sense of

being shocked is the many basic human rights violations detailed in the report. From deplorable working conditions to lack of basic wages. The industry that everyone is lauding for racing towards the 200cr club should hang its head in shame.

The toxic male aggression that so-called associations and unions practise includes favouritism,

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## Why India Can Be The Perfect Peacemaker In Ukraine

This is Modi's chance to redefine Indian national interest and show global leadership, writes a British politician who advised Tony Blair &amp; ran New Labour's campaign

Peter Mandelson



PM Modi's visit to Ukraine represents a historical opportunity for India to step up, build on its non-aligned heritage and become a global peacemaker.

For the last two years, India and the West have had disagreements on how to deal with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While US, UK and EU have repeatedly asked India to condemn Russia and join Western sanctions, New Delhi has been keen to preserve both its security and economic relationship with Moscow.

New Delhi will inevitably defend what it regards as its own national interest. For a long time, it probably made more sense for India not to take too strong a stand on what it perceived as a faraway conflict. I have frequently heard friends in India explaining to me that the West rarely invests heavily in resolving conflicts in the Global South, so why should the Global South be involved in resolving conflicts in the West?

Two-and-a-half years after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, three paradigm shifts have occurred, which may have an impact on India's position and lead GOI to define India's national interest in a different way.

First, it has now become clear that despite what Moscow has been claiming, this is not a war between Russia and the West. This war, in reality, is a colonial war being waged by Russia on Ukraine. Moscow cannot countenance the idea that a territory once conquered, governed and coerced should have the right to exist as a free and independent state. One of Putin's slogans during this year's presidential elections was "Russia's

borders end nowhere." This reflects his Greater Russia imperialism.

Ukrainians want to live in a free, democratic and independent country, and not under a foreign authoritarian system that Moscow wants to impose on them. India, which successfully managed to gain its independence from the British Empire, should understand the determination for freedom better than anybody else. The Global South in general and India in particular have a leading role to play to ensure that imperialism

the same table, negotiates, and eventually find a peace deal. But this time will eventually come, and it is high time to start building this bridge.

Because of their stand, current political leaders from the West and China are not well placed to mediate a peace deal. This leaves three potential global actors: Modi, Erdogan of Turkey, or a retired high-standing politician specialising in mediation. Modi is certainly best placed because of India's size and influence, as well as the trust and personal relationships he has been able to build over time with international leaders.

The world would benefit immensely from the resolution of this war, and so would India. It would raise the world's largest democracy to a position of global influence. Over the last decade, we have seen a sharp increase in India's prosperity, international trade and economic and cultural attraction. For the first time in its modern history, India could also become a global peace-broker. It would undoubtedly be in India's national interest.

Modi has famously said, "This is not an era of war. But it is an era of dialogue and diplomacy." Now is the time for India to act to bring this vision to life. His visit to Ukraine could be a first step in this direction.

Second, the relationship between Russia and China has now evolved into a proper, "no limits" geopolitical and military alliance, supported by North Korea and Iran. These countries are forming a consolidated anti-democratic axis that is prepared to ignore the rule of law, human rights and the sanctity of international borders.

It is in India's strategic and geopolitical interest to ensure that such an alliance does not dominate the

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cynicism, banning, bullying, bantering and black-minting. Contracts and promised remunerations are empty words. Pay disparities are dreadful. Some of these problems affect men too. Many of the issues are outright criminal.

But perhaps what is most significant is that the report also pinpoints an unhealthy nexus of powerful male producers, directors and actors. Looks like the dream merchants have fulfilled their potential of becoming a mafia gang. Men and women are but pawns for them, and when the dreams are made the woman becomes the object of that desire. Sexualised objects not only on-screen but also off-screen.

It is ironic that the Hema Committee report opens with a caution: "Do not trust what you see." Unfortunately, we 'film people' are in the game of seeing. We belong to a medium where to borrow from Laura Mulvey, man is the bearer of the 'look' and woman is characterised by her 'look-at-ness'. This blurs the reel and the real. We find it difficult to break that gaze. Some get seduced by it, some are wounded by it. But you might be tolerated as long as you do not demand your rights.

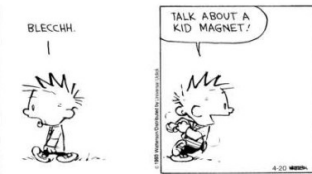
As a woman filmmaker, while I may not have experienced the ghastly experiences that other actors and technicians have, I have my own share of struggles. Suffice to say for now that when I made *Run Kalyani* (2019), my first feature fiction, and submitted it for most of the awards and festivals in Kerala, I felt I might as well have not made the film. I wondered what kind of erasure this was, especially when the film went on to receive international awards and warm reviews from across India.

Erasure is a weapon too, a subtle but highly damaging one against a person's sense of self. And men use it not just in domestic spaces. In fields that are highly competitive, the weapon is intended to keep women out.

Where can we go from here? Maybe govt will actually accept recommendations like the setting up of an independent tribunal to address women's grievances, mandatory contracts and gender training programmes. But only if exploiters are made accountable will there be change. Some problems can and should be dealt with swiftly like ensuring the basic safety and security of all film industry workers. Others are too deep-rooted to be solved without an ideological transformation.

The writer teaches Film Practice at Newcastle University, UK

## Calvin &amp; Hobbes



## Sacred space



## Who Is My Heart Waiting For...

Narayan Ganes

How often have we heard it said, "Follow your heart?" Then what becomes of the mind, the intellect, the fulcrum of all our thoughts and actions? The heart beats to pump blood throughout the body and works ceaselessly from beginning till the very end. It is said the mind, though arising out of brain function, does not reside in the brain, and so it may be possible to download the mind for future reference. But the heart, once it stops beating, ceases its function. Which is why when scientists explore the possibility of installing mind-reading robots, the heart dimension gets left out and to robotic becomes synonymous with being without feeling.

I thought that the Buddhist Heart Sutra was all about the heart. In fact, it talks of how form is shunyata, emptiness, and emptiness is form. That is, ultimately, all phenomena are shunyata. Known through and as the five aggregates of human existence — form, feeling, volitions, perceptions and consciousness. All of dependent origination, says Avalokiteshwara to Sariputra. Therefore, the heart here is a metaphor to indicate that the sutra contains the core philosophy of Buddhism, its insights

that are central to Buddha's teachings. That is why when we say, the heart of the matter, it means whatever is crucial to the matter at hand. No one says mind of the matter. In southern parts of India, especially in Tamil Nadu, the daily practice is to create an alpina in front of the home. A different design is drawn in front of the home altar, with the sacred Hridaya form is shunyata, emptiness, and emptiness is form. That is, ultimately, all phenomena are shunyata. Known through and as the five aggregates of human existence — form, feeling, volitions, perceptions and consciousness. All of dependent origination, says Avalokiteshwara to Sariputra. Therefore, the heart here is a metaphor to indicate that the sutra contains the core philosophy of Buddhism, its insights

important aspect of anything. And the heart is also seen as being the heart of emotions. A rational mind might not easily submit to love, but one who follows the heart can be said to be more romantically inclined, for logic and reason take a backseat when chemistry and emotions come into play. Love and emotion is



## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Policy missteps

Modi must practice consultative governance

THE recent series of policy reversals by the Modi government signals more than just missteps; it underscores the shifting sands beneath the once seemingly invincible throne of the BJP-led administration. In the past two weeks, the government has been compelled to withdraw the contentious Waqf Bill, refer the Broadcast Bill to a parliamentary panel for review, and most notably, backtrack on its lateral entry policy — moves that reflect a growing realisation that its governance is now bound by the constraints of coalition politics.

The first reversal came with the withdrawal of the Waqf Bill, which had sparked concern among minority communities and Opposition parties. Perceived as an attempt to centralise control over Waqf properties, it faced strong resistance, leading the Centre to pull it back to avoid further alienating its allies. Soon after, the Broadcast Bill, which aimed to regulate digital content and media, was criticised for its potential to curb press freedom. Sensing the growing unease among its partners and the media, the government chose a more cautious approach, opting for a review rather than a direct push. The most telling U-turn is on the lateral entry policy, designed to bring private sector experts into top government positions. Initially hailed as a move to infuse fresh talent into the bureaucracy, it faced a backlash over concerns of cronyism and a lack of transparency. Faced with mounting criticism and pressure from within its ranks, the government has now quietly shelved the plan.

This new reality calls for a more consultative approach to governance. The Modi-led government must shed its hubris and engage in genuine dialogue with all stakeholders before pushing through policies that have far-reaching consequences. The government's strength should lie not in imposing its will but in navigating the complexities of coalition politics with wisdom and humility.

## Righting a wrong

Supreme Court exposes HC overreach

THERE was an air of inevitability about the Supreme Court setting aside an order of the Calcutta High Court in which the latter had not only acquitted an accused in a sexual assault case but also advised adolescent girls to control their sexual urges. Having taken suo motu cognisance of the contentious verdict, the apex court had said in December last year that while writing a judgment, the judges were not expected to preach or express their personal views. The bottom line is that any ruling should be based on the merits of the case, not the prejudices and perceptions of the judges. After all, the Bench is not a pulpit and should not be treated as one.

It is appalling that a Division Bench of the high court chose to sermonise and went to the extent of saying that 'in the eyes of the society, she (every female adolescent) is the loser when she gives in to enjoy the sexual pleasure of hardly two minutes'. Reeking of insensitivity, this observation was no doubt objectionable as well as unwarranted. It seems that these judges were blissfully unaware of the Supreme Court's Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes, which was released in August last year. It offers much-needed guidance on how to avoid harmful gender stereotypes, particularly those about women, in judicial decision-making and writing. A bigger push by the SC is needed to ensure that this document is widely circulated and read by various stakeholders in courts across the country.

What's worrisome is that high courts continue to come up with outrageous statements despite being rapped by the topmost judiciary. In 2017, for instance, the Delhi High Court had shockingly observed that a woman's feeble 'no' may mean 'yes'. Judges who stoop so low are a disgrace to the judiciary. Amid its welcome intervention in the Kolkata rape-murder case, the SC would do well to lay greater emphasis on gender sensitisation.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, AUGUST 21, 1924

## Failure of dyarchy

AS an effective exposure of the 'reformed' regime, the highly interesting evidence given by CY Chintamani before the Reforms Enquiry Committee completes the process begun by the evidence of SM Chitnavis from the Central Provinces. Chintamani is the fourth ex-Minister examined by the Committee so far, and the story he tells is substantially identical with that told by the other three. Like each of the other three, he is able to make a special contribution of his own to the interesting volume of evidence bearing on the manner in which dyarchy has been worked. The veil which has hitherto shrouded the relations between the Ministers on the one hand and the Governor and his Executive Councillors on the other is at last torn asunder, and the public has a vision of the reality in all its nakedness. Chitnavis, as we have seen, complained of there being no ministry in the proper sense of the term, of a complete absence of corporate responsibility, of the Governor having far too excessive powers over the administration of the transferred subjects, powers greater than he possessed in relation to the Executive Councillors, of the existence of the official bloc, not only generally but in relation to the transferred subjects, and lastly and above all, of the severe and cramping restrictions imposed by the Finance Department. Mr Kelkar went a step further and complained that not only were the members of the Executive Council treated preferentially as compared with the Ministers, but even the departmental heads and Secretaries, who were the Minister's official subordinates, were so treated.

## Don't lower the bar in pursuit of excellence

Affirmative policies should be aimed at enabling the disadvantaged to achieve highest standards possible

SHYAM SARAN  
FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY

ONE of the most difficult challenges for any society, but especially a developing society, is achieving the right balance between the pursuit of excellence and the demand for equity and inclusion. The pursuit of excellence demands high standards and merit-based selection. A policy of inclusivity leads to affirmative action to elevate the opportunities for disadvantaged sections of society. Ideally, such affirmative policies should be aimed at enabling the disadvantaged to achieve the highest standards possible through preferential education, skilling and training support. This may be more challenging but in the longer run more rewarding both for society and the individuals concerned. This would also engender intangible gains in enabling these individuals and the communities they come from to enjoy enhanced respect and self-esteem.

The politically easier route to follow is to aim at greater inclusivity through lowering of entry standards in a wide range of professional institutions and activities, including those engaged in imparting education and capacity-building. This invariably sets in motion a cumulative downward dynamic of falling standards and lowered entry requirements at each successive stage. Since a modern economy with advancing technological imperatives cannot do without a highly qualified workforce, one ends up with establishing islands of excellence either exempt from the observance of affirmative policies or which have token representation of disadvantaged communities.



IMPETIVE: The age limit for civil services aspirants should revert to the 21-24 bracket, stook

Creating and running such islands of excellence may deliver good results in the short term, but they tend to remain islands, minus an ecosystem of high-quality education, training and skill acquisition. India's highly acclaimed space and nuclear programmes are zones of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. This may also be the fate of the currently celebrated Global Capability Centres mushrooming in India.

In India, affirmative policies are rightly the responsibility of the state. The private sector has so far been able to avoid having to follow similar policies. In the public sector, we have already witnessed the downward dynamic referred to earlier. When I joined the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 1970, the age requirement for entry was the 21-24 bracket, with two chances for appearing in the civil service examinations. The personal interview was given much greater weightage — 400 marks in the case of the IFS and 300 for the IAS. Even if a candidate passed with high marks in the written exams, a below-the-passing-grade in the interview for the IFS meant disqualification. For the reserved categories, the marking was separate from the general category. They did not compete with the latter. Currently, the age bracket in the

Thanks to the pragmatic policies it adopted, China today has a pool of talent and scholarship that is second only to the US. India has fallen behind.

general category is 21-32, with six attempts allowed within this limit. For the OBC category, the age limit goes up to 35 and with nine attempts allowed. For Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the upper age limit has been raised to 37, with unlimited attempts permitted.

The personal interview has lost its relevance since even a zero grade would not disqualify a candidate as long as he has sufficiently high grades in the written exams. There are no studies or data to show whether the progressive lowering of entry conditions, both for the general and reserved categories has served the objective of greater inclusion and social equity. Anecdotal evidence points to mounting economic and social

inequalities and persistent caste and gender discrimination. There has been a steady decline in the quality of state capacity and governance. A civil servant joining any of the All-India or Central Services at the age of 32 is unlikely to be moulded into the culture and ethos of the civil services. The wide age disparities among the entrants does not encourage the kind of bonding that the younger entrants developed while training together. What would a 21-year-old have in common with a 37-year-old colleague?

In the state civil service, the situation is worse. The age bracket is from 21 to the ripe old age of 40! The government and the public sector play the most critical role in managing a country of the complexity of India, facing challenges that demand exceptional skills and abilities. The current policies are neither delivering social justice nor good governance. That is short-changing the country and its people.

Human resource is the most important resource a country has. This is not a cliché. It is the only resource which grows as it is expended. During the turbulent Cultural Revolution (1966-76) in China, Mao encouraged the denigration of intellectuals, scientists and experts. It was 'better to

be Red than an Expert'. Educational institutions were closed and intellectuals and professionals and students were all sent down to the countryside to learn from the masses. An entire generation was lost to the country. One of the first reforms that Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping introduced when he assumed power in 1976 was to reopen educational institutions, rehabilitate intellectuals and professionals and begin sending thousands of Chinese youth, year after year, to the best universities in the West. China's own educational institutions eagerly sought the services of top foreign academics and teachers to educate the incoming generation of the Chinese. Several Indian-American scientists and academics were also invited to spend part of the academic year in China, paid generous compensation and enabled to carry out teaching and research in the manner they were accustomed to do in the US. In India, they are not particularly welcome. Thanks to the pragmatic policies it adopted, China today has a pool of talent and scholarship that is second only to the US. India has fallen behind.

So, what needs to be done? First, it is not enough to set up more universities, institutes of technology and centres of excellence. Greater effort is needed to provide universal high-quality primary and secondary education which will then feed into tertiary institutions.

Second, children entering the education stream need to have good nutrition and healthcare so that they are not stunted both physically and mentally. Without this strong base, the top-heavy structures we create will topple over eventually.

And three, the state sector must strive to be the most capable, dispensing high-quality governance through the best and the brightest the country has to offer. To begin with, the age limit for civil services aspirants should revert to the 21-24 bracket — before young minds get set in their ways.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The noblest search is the search for excellence. — Lyndon B Johnson

## When a woman doctor got instant justice

BRIG ADITYA MADAN (RETI)

ON a UN mission, I commanded a large contingent of 1,500 troops. The line from Shakespeare's play *Henry IV* couldn't have been more relevant for me: 'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown'. The battalion was not a homogenous entity, unlike a normal infantry unit. Instead, it was an integrated battalion group comprising officers and soldiers from various arms and services. The unit also included several women doctors and nursing officers. Considering myself responsible for their safety and security, I arranged separate accommodation for them. Hardly a month had elapsed when a female doctor approached me with a knotty problem. 'Sir, I find this piece of paper at the threshold of my room every morning. It has been happening for a few days now,' she said. I read the contents, which left me shell-shocked. The remarks about the doctor's looks were just not acceptable in the Army. I set out to catch this predator on the prowl. I didn't reveal the matter to anyone except my close confidant, the adjutant, to ensure the secrecy of the operation.

My adjutant's forensic abilities were on display as he tried to match the handwriting samples of several suspects without ruffling any feathers. The culprit seemed to be smarter than us. The note bore a different handwriting every night. During my evening stroll, I noticed an old tank permanently parked in the vicinity of that doctor's room. Reminded of the Trojan Horse, my plan of action was ready. I called for my most trusted havildar, a burly Sikh soldier. I ordered him to sit huddled in the tank while keeping a strict vigil from the driver's compartment every night.

Three nights passed without success. On the fourth night, the hawkish eyes of the soldier spotted someone emerging from the bushes in the dark and walking towards the doctor's room. The havildar silently lifted the cupola of the tank and pounced upon him, catching him by the scruff of the neck. The offender was brought to my room at 3 am on a pitch-dark night. The havildar lit up his face with a torch. I was dumbfounded. He turned out to be the cook of the headquarters company who had joined us from some other battalion. I got him marched up the very next day in full public view during the PT parade and made him apologise to the doctor. I gave him the stringent punishment of 28 days' rigorous imprisonment and packed him off back home to India, sending out a terse message to all.

Though the psychopaths involved in the Kolkata case deserve to be hanged for their gut-wrenching crime, the wheels of justice must move faster in a time-bound manner to send a chill down the spines of the criminal elements in society.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Ensure safety of health workers

Appropos of 'Doctors' strike', it is unfortunate that doctors often get shoddy treatment from patients and their kin. Worse yet, the government has long ignored the medical professionals' concerns about their safety. We cannot afford to let our health-care workers, who toil day and night to serve us, continue working in unsafe conditions. The onus is on the government to shield medical professionals from abuse and violence. Besides, the general masses must also act responsibly when dealing with health professionals.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWANA

## Don't ignore plight of doctors

The rape and murder of a young doctor in Kolkata have ignited a firestorm, and rightly so. It is unfortunate that our health-care workers have been compelled to strike work and take to the streets to call for justice, as the government continues to dither. It is a pity that our doctors, the very people who save lives, remain vulnerable to violence while on duty. Their demand for a safe working environment is legitimate. The authorities concerned cannot afford to ignore the medical professionals' plight anymore. It is time for swift, stringent action to set a strong precedent.

SEWA SINGH, AMRITSAR

## End crimes against women

The brutal rape-murder of a young doctor at a state-run hospital in Kolkata just days before the nation celebrated its 78th Independence Day is a disgrace. It must prompt us to ask ourselves: Why are the girls and women in this country still not safe? Probably, it is so because our laws are not stringent. Or maybe it is because the judiciary failed to make an example of those who committed such heinous acts in the past. But enough is enough. The government authorities and politicians must take concrete measures to end crimes against women.

MAIKEET KAUR, PATIALA

## Have no faith in politicians

The heinous Kolkata incident has rightly drawn condemnation from all quarters of

society. But make no mistake. Our politicians are least concerned about the safety of doctors or women. All they care about is securing votes and winning elections. Isn't it strange that the same politicians who want the perpetrator of the Kolkata horror brought to justice have no problem with Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeh Ram Rahim Singh, who has been convicted of raping two of his female disciples, being let out of jail ahead of elections in Haryana?

WG CDR JS MINHAS (RETI), MOHALI

## Modi's balancing act

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarks on a crucial visit to Ukraine, the stakes are high. Several Indian lives have already been lost in the ongoing conflict. The PM has done well to stress the importance of dialogue and diplomacy. But India's strategic autonomy and pro-Russia leanings have understandably raised eyebrows. By lamenting the civilian casualties in Kyiv while maintaining good ties with Moscow, Modi is walking a tightrope. It remains to be seen for how long the PM can perform this balancing act, as the Indian nationals recruited in the Russian army are yet to be discharged. Modi must exert pressure on Moscow to release them. This visit is an opportunity for India to assert its role as a peace broker. But delicate diplomacy is required to navigate the complex web of alliances and interests. Only time will tell if the PM's visit turns out to be a step towards peace or a misstep in the geopolitical minefield.

GURDEV SINGH, BY MAIL

## Check cyber trade of illegal arms

Refer to 'Online arsenal', cyber-savvy criminals tend to be a few steps ahead of law enforcement and probe agencies. It is high time that the government authorities took a serious view of the unchecked trade of illegal arms through the dark web. As border states, Punjab and Rajasthan can ill afford to ignore the risks associated with the rise of web-based apps and dark web marketplaces. Worryingly, it is not known how far and wide these criminals have spread their tentacles. The powers that be must act promptly to rein in the menace.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA



# Women's safety at workplace ignored for too long



**KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE**  
DEAN, JINDAL SCHOOL OF  
JOURNALISM & COMMUNICATION

INDIA reports 86 cases of sexual assault on women every day, according to government data. The actual figure could be much higher. And no one would dispute that sexual assault is an everyday occurrence in the country. The Kolkata rape-murder has triggered nationwide protests. PM Narendra Modi has appealed to the head of Bangladesh's interim government to ensure the safety of minorities there, but he is yet to make a direct comment on the Kolkata horror, despite doctors staying away from work and threatening to suspend emergency services and 71 Padma awardee doctors writing to him to seek his intervention. In his Independence Day speech, he had stressed the need to end atrocities against women in general.

Women make up around 30 per cent of the doctors and 80 per cent of the nursing staff in India. Though the Indian Medical Association has called for hospitals to be

declared safe zones with security measures akin to those at airports and courts, such steps may not be enough. After all, women are abused everywhere, from sports coaching centres to public transport and even in their own homes and at police stations.

'Reclaim the Night' had a spontaneous and emotive appeal. Kolkata had not experienced a telling moment like this in a long time. But going by the NCRB data, 85 other cases may have happened that day, August 9. The last few days alone have witnessed a series of crimes against women across the country. Anurse was allegedly raped and killed while returning home from work in Uttarakhand; her body was recovered last week. A teenage girl was allegedly gangraped and murdered in Bihar. Her mutilated body was found near a pond at a village in Muzaffarpur district. A 16-year-old girl was reportedly gangraped inside a bus in Dehradun. And a female doctor was assaulted at Mumbai's Sion Hospital by a mob stormed the hospital and his relatives.

We as a nation express selective rage and then quickly move on. We light candles on certain anniversaries and forget the rest. It is true that we cannot rest in protest 86 times a day. But certain tragic incidents become the tipping point. And the people in power, who



**UPROAR:** The Kolkata rape-murder has triggered nationwide protests. **PH**

are undeniably responsible for such crimes, have perfected the art of deflection. Ironically, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, who holds the Home and Health portfolios, has called for swift justice in the Kolkata case.

West Bengal has long perpetuated a culture of political mafia to terrorise the public. On the night of August 14, a mob stormed the hospital in Kolkata where the murder was committed, vandalising property and assaulting doctors and staff members. Many of the vandals arrested are said to be members and volunteers of the ruling party in the state.

Besides, we have seen men convicted of gangraping a pregnant woman. Bilkis

Rape has been an established weapon of patriarchal state violence in conflict zones in India and other countries.

Bano, and murdering her family members during the 2002 Gujarat riots walk out of jail on remission granted by the Gujarat Government and be greeted with garlands. The Supreme Court had to step in and restore the life sentences for them.

Wrestler Vinesh Phogat recently received a rousing welcome upon her return from Paris not only because of her performance on the mat (though she could not secure an Olympic medal) but also because of the larger battle waged by her and other ex-wrestlers against sexual harassment by former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and six-time BJP MP Brj Bhushan Sharan Singh. In an

expected development, despite international scrutiny, Brj Bhushan's rape had won the WFI elections last year. And he continues to call the shots.

Safety at the workplace or a public place is not something that India has ever taken seriously. Every safety mechanism here is broken. Some studies indicate that a mere 20 per cent of India's 46.5 crore-strong workforce is covered under the health and safety network. A study conducted by the British Safety Council says that 80 per cent of India's workforce is exposed to an unsafe work environment. According to a study by the International Labour Organisation, only 21 per cent of the factories in India have separate toilets for men and women. Facilities for menstrual hygiene are woefully inadequate. And the lack of arrangements for proper sanitation prevents women from fully participating in the workforce. While the employability of women stands at 51 per cent, their workforce participation is just 36 per cent.

India ranked 129th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2024. The country has been placed at the 142nd position in terms of economic participation and opportunities for women.

Employers are usually indifferent to the living conditions of employees. And there are no policies in government or corporate sectors

that measure employee satisfaction on their work and living conditions.

Rape has been an established weapon of patriarchal state violence in conflict zones in India and other countries. It has been 20 years since the gangrape and murder of Thangjam Manorama in Manipur by soldiers of the Assam Rifles. The incident had triggered mass protests. Twelve women had disrobed in front of the Assam Rifles headquarters in Imphal, forcing then PM Manmohan Singh to rush to the state and call for humane laws to replace the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which grants sweeping immunity to security forces. But not one person has been convicted so far. And the AFSPA remains in force. Three Kuki women were allegedly paraded naked and sexually assaulted by a Meitei mob last year. The matter is still being investigated. The survivors had sought police help, but they were left to face the mob.

In Mahasweta Devi's *Draupidi*, the protagonist refuses to put on her clothes after she is taken into custody and then raped by soldiers. 'What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you do me again? Are you a man?' she asks. From Hathras to Kolkata, the autonomy and independent agency of women are being stripped at every stage.

## Realism, strategic interests should dictate India-China ties



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

A realistic assessment of the current state of India-China relations is necessary amid the apparent orchestrated pleas urging India to ease travel and import restrictions on Chinese personnel and goods. Since its military adventure in Ladakh in April 2020, Beijing has consistently sought normalisation of relations, especially economic, setting aside the situation on the border. Over the past couple of months, various business sectors, reinforced by arguments advanced by some economists and media reports, have echoed China's demands.

There is a negligible prospect of an improvement in India-China relations in the near future. The absence of communication for over four years at the highest level and China's recent protest against economic assistance to projects in Arunachal Pradesh and other border regions — on the specious pretext that they are disputed —

are brazen examples. On the contrary, they point to China expanding the areas of pressure on India.

The bilateral relationship has been subjected to considerable strain ever since Beijing decided that it will attempt to forcibly take the territories it claims and compel India to acquiesce to China being the leading power in the region. China has simultaneously redoubled efforts to establish dominance over Asia. These developments have coincided with the view in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership that India has drawn uncomfortably close to the US. Additionally, Beijing sees India as adopting a tougher, unyielding stance, which includes building defences along the border as well as initiating steps to close off the burgeoning Indian market to China. Beijing views these as unwelcome steps, but considers that India does not yet pose a serious challenge.

The situation on the border has also not changed; 60,000-70,000 troops remain deployed on the front lines. The Chinese have built additional accommodation to billet reinforcements and new advanced weaponry and military units continue to be inducted. Border defence infrastructure is being built at a frenetic pace with plans to build 35 military or dual-use airports and major arterial railways and roads along



**LONG HAUL:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. There is a negligible prospect of an improvement in India-China relations in the near future. **ANI**

the border in Tibet. Chinese President Xi Jinping's attitude towards India, signalled on the opening day of the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, with the screening of a video of the fateful Galwan clash of June 2020, has not altered.

In a cosmetic attempt to show that China wants to improve ties but it's India that is playing spoilsport, Beijing claimed that it had sent Ambassador Xu Feihong, who arrived in India almost 20 months after his predecessor Sun Weidong departed, to enhance communication and improve bilateral ties. This has been echoed by many Indian journalists, academics and others. Since his arrival, Xu Feihong has virtually been

China is keen on maintaining commercial and economic access to India's market but has no intention of taking substantive steps to ease tensions on the border.

holding court, meeting Indian politicians, former diplomats, businessmen and others. China is keen on maintaining commercial and economic access to India's market but has no intention of taking substantive steps to ease tensions on the border. At the same time, it is determined to keep India under protracted and sustained pressure.

There are other signs of China's attitude and intentions. Xi has not initiated direct contact or meeting with Prime Minister Modi since April 2020, or even observed basic diplomatic niceties and congratulated him on his re-election. Chinese Premier Li Qiang did send a routine message of congratulations, but only

after Modi's swearing-in. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that it would have been 'premature' to convey greetings prior to the swearing-in. There was, however, no such hesitation in inviting Indonesia's President-elect on an official visit prior to his swearing-in. Whether this presages an effort to restrict China-India interaction at the level of the Chinese Premier is to be seen.

Xi also skipped the G-20 Summit and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meetings. A senior CCP cadre had divulged a couple of months prior to the G20 Summit that Xi would not attend the event and it would, therefore, be a failure. However, Xi's absence ensured there would be no distractions, the G20 communiqué was unanimously approved, and, importantly, India brought the Global South within the G20 fold.

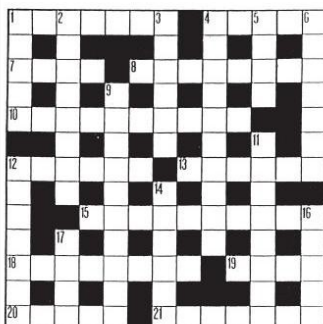
Another instance was China's prickly objection to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's congratulations to Prime Minister Modi.

China's real attitude towards India is now more clear. The Chinese foreign ministry's remarks on July 10 that 'South Tibet is China's territory' and India's development activities in the area are 'illegal and invalid' underscore its approach on border issues.

The same day, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also China's Special Representative for border talks, congratulated Ait Doal on his reappointment as National Security Adviser and Special Representative observing he is ready to 'properly handle' issues related to the situation on the ground in border areas. The use of the phrase 'properly handle' indicates that discussions would be in accordance with China's stated position on the border since April 2020.

Beijing's attitude towards India will undoubtedly colour its position on border and other negotiations. It will explore additional avenues for applying pressure on India, including through international financial organisations. India needs to take cognisance of this while examining proposals by Beijing and also consider whether to give China a free pass on issues like human rights, Tibet, Xinjiang, etc. Beijing will, meanwhile, continue to activate Indian businessmen and others to exert pressure on the government to facilitate the inflow of Chinese personnel and goods. Any travel and trade concessions would be at the cost of the public exchequer, further increasing the galloping trade deficit and with long-term deleterious effects severely undermining the 'Make in India' initiative.

### QUICK CROSSWORD



#### ACROSS

- Unquestionable (7)
- Less than (5)
- Long rambling tale (4)
- Gleaming (8)
- Occasionally (3,3,4)
- Middle East country (6)
- Dexterous (6)
- Prolific source of troubles (3,2,5)
- First showing of film (8)
- Pick out (4)
- Just claim (5)
- La Mer's composer (7)

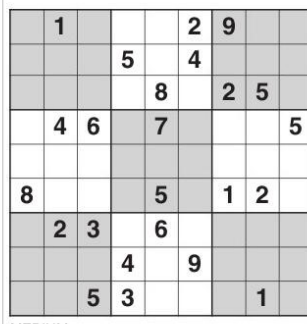
#### DOWN

- Senior member (5)
- Showing effects of worry (8)
- Cross out (6)
- Mired in difficulties (6,4)
- To spring (4)
- In the absence of (7)
- Singly (3,2,1,4)
- A group (8)
- Large accumulated prize (7)
- Very hot and dry (6)
- Series (5)
- Notable achievement (4)

#### Yesterday's solution

- Across:** 1 Clear the air, 9 Impiety, 10 Vista, 11 Even, 12 On target, 14 Racket, 16 Blithe, 18 Consider, 19 Crow, 22 Exalt, 23 Deliver, 24 In deep water.
- Down:** 2 Lapse, 3 Aged, 4 Trying, 5 Envious, 6 In sight, 7 Fire-cracker, 8 Earthenware, 13 Belittle, 15 Contain, 17 Send-up, 20 Revue, 21 Plea.

### SU DO KU



#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

#### CALENDAR

AUGUST 21, 2024, WEDNESDAY	
Shaka Samvat	1946
Shravan Shaka	30
Bhadrapad Purnima	6
Vijay	1446
Krishna Paksha Tithi 2	up to 5.07 pm
Sukama Yoga	up to 5.01 pm
Purnabhadra Nakshatra	up to 12.34 am
Moon enters Pisces sign	7.12 pm

### FORECAST

SUNSET: WEDNESDAY 18:57 HRS	
SUNRISE: THURSDAY 05:54 HRS	
CITY	MAX MIN
Chandigarh	34 26
New Delhi	33 25
Amritsar	33 27
Bathinda	36 29
Jalandhar	33 25
Ludhiana	32 27
Bhiwani	33 27
Hisar	33 26
Sirsa	37 29
Dharamsala	27 19
Manali	24 17
Shimla	23 15
Srinagar	30 19
Jammu	34 23
Kargil	33 15
Leh	31 12
Dehradun	31 22
Mussoorie	20 16

MEDIUM

EXPRESS IN VC