Text&Context

THEMOMHINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of fatalities in the Coast Guard chopper crash

Three crew members were killed after a helicopter of the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) crashed during landing at the Porbandar airport in Gujarat on Sunday afternoon, police said. The incident took place at 12.10 pm, Porbandar Superintendent of Police Bhagirathsinh Jadeia said. m

Chickens culled in Japan due to a bird flu outbreak

50,000 these birds were culled by Japanese authorities after a bird flu outbreak at a farm in the northern lwate region. It is the took birds Iwate region. It is the 19th bird flu outbreak of the season in Japan, the agriculture ministry said. Are

Number of Myanmar migrants turned away by Malaysia

Malaysia's coasa guard escorted away from its waters two boats carrying almost 300 undocumented Myanmar migrants found in a state of exhaustion from lack of food and water The coast guard did not say if the migrants were Rohingya people. 12

Instant loan limit for the MSME sector by Punjab & Sind Bank

In ₹ lakh. State-owned Punjab & Sind Bank plans to launch an instant loan scheme up to ₹25 lakh for the MSME sector as part of its initiative to push credit through its digital platform. The bank has introduced digital home loan schemes under which approval is given within 15 minutes. Pro

The increase in Karnataka public transport bus fares

In per cent. Union Minister H. D. Kumaraswarny accused the Congress government of finding ways to discontinue its flagship guarantee schemes, while "burdening" people with increased costs such as the recent 15% hike in public transport bus fares. COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Implications of China's mega-dam project

Do all riparian countries have major water infrastructure projects planned in the river basin of the Brahmaputra? What are China's and India's plans and how will they affect communities living alongside the river basin? How important are Tibet's river systems to the Himalayan bioregion?

EXPLAINER

Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman

The story so far: he ambitious plan to build a he ambitious pair to come mega-hydropower dam across the Brahmaputra at the Great Bend region of the Medog county in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) in China, has been in the negion (TAK) in Cunia, has been in the drawing boards of Chinese hydrocracy for decades. The clearest signalling to this effect happened in 2020 when this project was included in China's 14th Five-Year Plan. Its approval was granted on December 25, 2024. India, Bhutan and Bangladesh will have serious downstream implications of this 60 GW hyper-dam built upstream by China.

Where is this project?
The Brahmaputra is a transboundary Himalayan river basin spanning four riparian countries. China is the uppermost riparian nation with the river system originating in the TAR, where it is known as the Yarlung Zangbo (or Tsangpo). India and Bhutan are lower riparian nations in relation to China and middle riparian countries in relation to Bangladesh. It is from Bangladesh, which is the lowermost riparian nation, that the is the lowermost riparian nation, that the river drains into the Bay of Bengal. All riparian countries have major v infrastructure projects planned in the river basin, such as hydropower dams, embankments meant for river control, irrigation dams and barrages.

Is the Brahmaputra river basin trapped within nation-states? Transboundary river systems are often likened by nation-states to 'taps', which they think can be closed or opened through hydraulic interventions such as dams within their respective nation-states. The Brahmaputra river tanis within their respective mation-states. The Brahmaputra river system has been the site of planned and ongoing mega-dams projects by China, India and Bhutan, all contributing to an intense geopolitical power projection in the river basih. Mega-dams on rivers systems are seen as important sovereignty markers; symbols of nation-state control over natural features. Highly dramatised terms such as 'water wars' are part of the geopolitical vocabulary and upstream hydropower dams are viewed as 'water bomb's by lower riparian nations, as in the case of the Medog dam project. China sits pretty at the top of Asia's water tower, with complete control over Tibet's rivers and significant material, technological and discursive capabilities to deploy and discursive capabilities to deploy unilateral hydropower development. The Chinese hydrocracy has gone

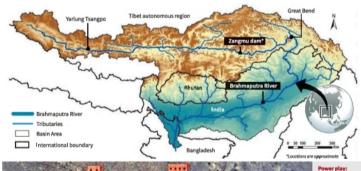
forward with mega-hydropower developments such as the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze river and the Zangmu Dam on the Yarlung Zangbo, commissioned in 2015, with its top political leadership firmly backing these interventions as state symbols.

What are the risks for communities inhabiting the Brahmaputra river basin?

basin?
The communities living along the river system have adapted as the river has shaped and shifted over centuries.
However, with interventions such as mega-hydropower dams by China, India and Bhutan, communities cannot use their traditional knowledge about the river system meaningfully, as the pace and occurrence of disasters have magnified. The upstream communities in Tibet as well as the downstream communities in India, Bhutan and

Taming the 'rogue' river

The Brahmaputra is a transboundary Himalayan river basin spanning four riparian countries. This map shows its flow from the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China through Bhutan and India into Bangladesh.



1 7 7 old bank

Bangladesh have to live under the shadow of mega-hydropower dams with adverse consequences to their traditional lands and livelihood. The perennial flow of the Brahmaputra in downstream areas in India and Bangladesh depends on the India and Bangladesh depends on the flow of the Yarlung Zangbo. The blocking of that perennial flow, in order to maintain headwaters to operate a mega-hydropower dam of the magnitude that China is planning at the Great Bend, will have catastrophic consequences on surface water levels, and to overall monsoon patterns and groundwater surrace water levels, and to overall monsoon patterns and groundwater systems of the river basin. This will affect downstream agrarian communities and the sensitive ecology of the overall Himalayan bioregion/ecoregion.

Himalayan bioregion/ecoregion.

What explains the hydropower dam-building race in the Brahmaputra river basin?
There is a face-off between China and India on the Yarlung
Zangho-Brahmaputra river course. China has announced the biggest hydropower project at the Great Bend while India has announced its largest dam project, at Upper Slang. Bhutan has been planning and building several medium to small dams, which have raised concerns in downstream India and Bangladesh. None of the riparian countries of the Brahmaputra river basin have signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 2014, and hence first useer-rights on river systems are non-enforceable. China and India have an Expert Level Mechanism (ELM) since

2006, to discuss outstanding issues and share hydrological data, but do not have a comprehensive bilateral treaty to govern shared transboundary rivers. The outstanding land boundary dispute between China and India is weaved into the intense securitisation of the Brahmaputra river basin, which makes it an active site for strategic posturing by both countries.

A bioregional/ecoregional frame of protecting the Himalayas may help desecuritise Brahmaputra river basin.

What next? A recent academic book by some Australian researchers titled Rivers of the Asian Highlands: from Deep Time to the Asian inginanas; from Deep Time to the Climate Crisis, puts forward important deep time (deep time means geological time; billions of years) perspectives to Himalayan river systems. The book juxtaposes a wider planetary thinking to emerge against the backforp of narrow technocratic decision-making to build mega-dams within nation-states

mega-dams within nation-states.

Tible's river systems are important to the Earth's cryosphere, comprising permafrost and glaciers, and major climate systems directing climate and precipitation pathways such as the monsoon. Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOPs) have increased in the Himalayas with climate change events, exemplified by the Chungthang Dam collapse in Sikkim during October 2023, which caused widespread devastation to life and property to downstream communities. The dams across the Himalayas aim at territorialising river systems, breaking

their natural life cycles. This affects agro-pastoral communities, biodiversity, living biota in rivers and wetland systems. The Brahmaputra river basin will turn into an active risk-scape if all these planned dams are built eventually. An accurate sense of history will help contextualise the site of the Medog dam being built by China. One of the greatest earthquakes of modern times, the 1950 Medog Earthquake, which transformed the riparian landscape, had its epicenter at Medog in Tible. The earthquake had disastrous effects downstream in Assam and Bangladesh, with the landscape until now trapped in an unending cycle of now trapped in an unending cycle of annual catastrophic floods. Philip Ball in his book titled Water

Kingdom: A Secret History of China describes the Yarlung Zangbo being viewed in Chinese history as a 'river gone rogue' as it turns sharply from its west to rogue' as it turns sharply from its west to east route at the Great Bend, to turn south to enter India, with other major rivers in China running from west to east. While China is going ahead with building mega-dams in Tibet to correct this geographical anomaly by disciplining a 'rogue river', India can assume an important riparian leadership role for regional river systems by not mirroring what China does. A dam for a dam will make the entire Himalayan riparian/climatic systems run dry and turn it into a disaster-scape for its communities.

communities. Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman is a Visiti Associate Fellow at the Institute of Cl Studies, Delhi, India.

THE GIST

The Brahmaputra is a transboundary Himalayan river basin spanning four riparian countries. China is the uppermost riparian nation with the river system originating in the TAR, where it is known as the Yarlung Zangbo.

There is a face-off between China and India on the Yarlung Zangbo-Brahmaputra river course. China has announced the biggest hydropower project at the Great Bend while India has announced its largest dam project, at Upper Siang.

Himalayas aim at territorialising river systems breaking their natural life cycles. This affects agro-pastoral communities, odiversity, living biota in vers and wetland systems

CM C

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FROM THE ARCHIVES



Empower the guardians of the earth, do not rob them

A unilateral decision to establish three wildlife sanctuaries in southern Nicobar will deprive the indigenous peoples of their ancestral territories. For millennia, these historically isolated indigenes have relied on these islands as resource reservoirs for sustenance and protected them

Ajay Saini Manish Cha

The ₹72,000-crore mega infrastructure project on Great Nicobar will now also have an international cruise terminal and a shipbreaking yard, as proposed by the Union Shipping Ministry. In this article, dated April 22, 2024, Ajay Saini and Manish Chandi talk about the rights of the indigenous communities over the little islands of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago and how they have been able to protect and preserve the area's ecological balance.

In the southern expanse of the

n the southern expanse of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago off the shores of Little Nicobar, lie seven tiny islands. Classified as "uninhabited" in the government's records, these islets are nonetheless records, these issets are nonetheless integral to the indigenous communities of the region. Two, officially called Meroë and Menchal, are known as Piruii and Plingaeyak, respectively, to the Payuh, the indigenous southern Nicobarese peoples, who hold traditional rights over these and other islers.

other islets.

For millennia, these historically isolated indigenes have relied on these islands as resource reservoirs for sustenance and protected them. Menchal is revered, used, and protected under the spiritual realm called Pingaeyak (a spirit that is believed to reside on the island), prohibiting the overexploitation of resources or any undue harm to its resources or any undue harm to its ecosystem. Similarly, Meroë is believed to be the abode of a legendary islander community. Here, too, spiritual belief systems influence how the islanders use

and protect natural resources. Meroë and Menchal are managed by community elders as guardians a

specific individual caretakers. They ensure the protection of the island's resources and sustainability. In today's world, this phenomenon goes by the name of "conservation" and "sustainable use", among other terms and phrases.

Conservation colonialism

management systems, the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) administration issued three public notices, announcing its intention to create three wildlife sanctuaries: a coral sanctuary at Meroë Island, a megapode sanctuary at Menchal Island, and a leatherback turtle sanctuary on Little Nicobar Island.

on Little Nicobar Island. In mid-July, the A&N administration issued an order asserting that it did not receive any claims or objections from any srace another asserting that at our any individual regarding the land and marine areas within the three proposed sanctuaries; that no individual enjoys any rights within the boundaries of the proposed sanctuaries. And, that there will be "restriction on the people of neighbouring area to enter into these islands... in the national interest." Approximately 1,200 southern Nicobarese inhabit Patai Takaru (Great Nicobar Island), and Patai Takaru (Great Nicobar Island), holding traditional rights over both inhabited and ostensibly "uninhabited" islands. Yet, the A&N administration neither consulted nor informed the southern Nicobarese of its plans.

Despite verbal supplications and a letter in August 2022 from the Little & Great Nicobar Tribal Council that expressed the community's concerns to the A&N administration and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate

Change, the A&N administration proceeded to issue official notifications in October 2022, designating the whole of Meroë (2.73 square kilometres, including the surrounding marine area) and Menchal (1.29 sq. km.) along with a 13.75 sq. km area (including 6.67 sq. km. of water area within the baseline system) on Lirtle Nicobar (140 sq. km.), as wildlife sanctuaries.

Masking an ecological disaster The selection of Meroë and Mench

Islands as conservation reserves for coral reefs and Megapode birds is arbitrary. Menchal does not have more than a pair or two of the endemic Megapode birds Similarly, questions arise regarding the actual diversity and abundance of corals

Notably, the announcement of wildlife

Notably, the announcement of wildlife sanctuaries coincided with growing scrutiny and criticism from experts over the denotification of the Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary for a 72,000-crore mega project on Great Nicobar, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Establishing exclusionary conservation areas in a region, which is already a paradise for biodiversity, stems from the fact that the champions of the mega project are aware of the extensive environmental and social damage that the project will entail. It will devastate about eight to 10 lakh evergreen forest trees, smother and gouge out scores of coral reefs found along Galathea Bay, destroy reefs found along Galathea Bay, destroy the nesting site for the globally endangered Leatherback sea turtle species, devastate hundreds of nesting mounds of Nicobar Megapodes, and kill

as many crocodiles.
Furthermore, it will prevent the indigenous Great Nicobar islanders from

returning to their pre-tsunami homeland where they husbanded pigs and chicken, cultivated occomut and betel nut trees, and lived simple and gregarious lives. Most importantly, it will uproot three or more settlements of the Shompen (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group') and permanently destroy their foraging and hunting grounds.

The unilateral decision to establish wildlife sanctuaries disregards the island wildlife sanctuaries disregards the island

wildlife sanctuaries disregards the islands profound significance to the indigenous

population.
Their ancestral lands are unjustly
perceived as "no-man's land" to appease
conservationists, investors, public opinion, and more

Support earth's guardians Globally, governments blatantly violate indigenous people's rights by evicting indigenous people's rights by evicting them from their ancestral lands, often under the guise of development, national interest, conservation projects, among others. Approximately 476 million indigenous peoples, constitute about 6% of the global population. Indigenous territories cover roughly 22% of the planet's land surface and harbour 80% of its biodiversity. Indigenous peoples are the original guardians of our earth. The world must learn from their wisdom. Reason and justice dictate that in southern Nicobar, we should support and empower the islanders to continue to steward their ancestral territories, rather than robbing them of their lands, resources, lifeways, and worldviews.

Ajay Saini teaches at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. Manish Chandi is an independent researcher with over two decades of research experience in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Shall I give give dancing a whirl?

The priest's magniloquent speeches are very boring. I almost fell asleep yesterday

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of the What is the meaning of the expression 'give something a whirl' (Rajni Gupta, Madina, Haryana) The 'h' in 'whirl' is not pronounced; the word rhymes with 'curl', 'pearl' and 'girl'. One of the meanings of 'whirl' is to move One of the meanings of 'whirl' is to move round and round rapidly. If you decide to give skydving a whirl, what it means is that you are going to give the activity a shot. Skydwing is something you have never done before, but are now willing to try it. You do not know if you will enjoy the experience or not, but you are willing to jump out of a plane — for the first time in your life.

If it hadn't been for Ramdas, I don't think I would have given tennis a whirl.

Rama decided to give the recommended ayurveda treatment a whirl.

How is the word 'magniloquent' pronounced' (R. Ramachandran, Tiruvannamalai) The word consists of four syllables. The

first rhymes with 'tag', 'bag' and 'lag', while the vowel in the second, sounds like the 'i' in 'hill', 'chill' and 'bill'. The following 'o' and 'ue' sound like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'mag-NIL-e-kwent' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin 'magnus' meaning 'great' and 'loqui' meaning speak. When someone is meaning speak. When someone is 'magniloquem' in his speech, he uses big words. The individual uses flowery language, not in order to communicate with the listence, but merely to impress. There is very little substance in what he has to say. Another word which has more or less the same meaning is 'grandiloquem'. According to scholars, 'grandiloquem' is the older of the two. His own party members were getting tired of his magniloquem; speeches.

Get to the point. Don't try to impress me with your magniloquemes.

Is it okay to wish someone 'Good morning' at 3:00 PM? (Sai Kumar

Warrangal)
Very often, in our country, when you run into someone at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, they greet you by saying 'Good morning'. When you remind them of the time, they respond by saying, "I know it's three o'clock. But since this is the first time I'm seeing you today, it's okay if I say, 'Good morning'!" This, however, is not Good morning!" This, however, is not true. How you greet an individual is determined by what time of day it is — it does not matter if you are seeing the person for the first time. You can wish someone 'Good morning' till 11:59 AM. Between noon and 4:00 PM (sometimes 5), 'Good afternoon' is used. Any time after that, the normal greeting is 'Good evening'. If you meet someone at II PM, you will greet him with a 'Good evening'. The only time, you'll say 'Good night' is when you take leave of a person in the evening and are sure that you will not be seeing the individual till the next day. upendrankye@gmall.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Quiz yourself on two iconic Indians — cricket legend Kapil Dev and maestro A.R. Rahman — who celebrate their birthday on January 6

QUESTION 1

name of A.R. Rahman and the full name of Kapil?

QUESTION 2

Kapil's first Test victim, who was his last and record-setting 434th scalp?

QUESTION 3

Rahman has won seven National Film awards of which two are for Best Background Score. Name the two flicks.

ich ground did Kapil CM (score the historic unbeaten 175 during the 1983 Prudential World Cup?

QUESTION 5

It is well-known that Rahman won an Oscar, Grammy, and BAFTA for his work in 'Slumdog Millionaire'. For which 2011 film was he nominated for the bove honours but did not get ny of them?

QUESTION 6

What is the latest autobiography of Kapil titled?

QUESTION 7

Name the musical that Rahman created in collaboration with the legendary Andrew Lloyd Webber in 2002.



ed by the super group that had Mick Jagger, Joss Stone, Dave Stewart, and A.R. Rahman.

Questions and Answers to the January 3 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The official name of the Khel Ratna award. Ans: Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award 2. The name of the award before it was changed in this year. Ans: Rajly Gandhi Khel Ratna Award; 2021
3. The first recipient of this award and the youngest recipient of this award. Ans: Viswanathan Anand; Abhinav Bindra (before Gukesh Dommaraju)
4. This award is considered as India's

- 4. This award is considered as India's second highest sporting honour. Ans: Arjuna Award
- 5. The person who got the award despite Paralympic athlete Girisha Nagarajegowda's
- Paratympic attriete Ginsha Nagaraegowda's Court case. Ans: Sania Mirza 6. The number of cricket players who have received the award till now. Ans: Five Visual: Identify the player. Ans: Geet Sethi Early Birds: Aman Krishnan | Rajmohan Walaudhan | Abhimyuterayarael

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Word of the day

Addlepated:

Synonyms: addlebrained, muddleheaded

Usage: The blow made me addlepated and

Pronunciation: newsth.live/



Moving away from coal a must: South African court upholds 'Cancel Coal' case

The court ruled the energy minister and the national energy regulator couldn't provide enough evidence to show that the ill effects of coal power on the environment and the health of the people, especially children, had been considered, suggesting they didn't comply with their constitutional obligations

Privali Prakash

ivil society organisations claimed a landmark victory claimed a landmark victory against fossil fuel power in South Africa on December 4 when the High Court in Pretoria turned down the national government's plan to add more coal-fired power stations to the country's power grid. According to the court, the government's plan was "inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa" and thus Republic of South Africa" and thus

The 'Cancel Coal' case

The 'Cancel Coal' case
In its Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), the
government of South Africa announced in
October 2019 that it plans to add 1,500
MW of coal power to the country's
national grid - 750 MW by 2023 and
another 750 MW by 2023.
The Minister of Mineral Resources and
Energy and the National Energy Regulator
of South Africa in 2020 backed the
announcement.

announcement.
In 2021, youth-led civil organisations including the African Climate Alliance, the Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action, and the Groundwork Trust, represented by the Centre for Environmental Rights, brought Centre for Environmental Rights, brought the case against the government's plan. The group alleged that the plan would harm the environment and cause health issues, especially among children. The case soon acquired the popular monicker "Cancel Coal."

ith Africa's energy mix

Like most economically developing nations, South Africa is heavily dependent

nations, South Africa is heavily dependent on coal for its energy needs. According to estimates by the International Energy Agency, almost 71% of the country's total energy supply came from coal power in 2022. According to an analysis of global emissions through history by Climate Watch, South Africa is the world's 16th largest emitter of greenhouse gases. South Africa has ratified the Paris Agreement, which means it is legally bound to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to mitigating global warming.

warming. According to the Nationally Determined Contributions South Africa Determined Controlutions South Africa submitted in 2021, the country plans to cut 350-420 million tonnes of carbon-dioxide-equivalent (MtCO2e) of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. It has also committed to reaching net-zero by 2020

2050. In July 2024, the country's President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the Climate Change Act into law, which includes a clause to reduce greenhouse gas



emissions.

Details of the judgement

Civil society organisations contended that the government's plan to add more coal power didn't consider the rights of children as granted by the Constitution of South Africa.

South Africa.

According to the Constitution, South
African citizens have the right "to have
the environment protected, for the
benefit of present and future
generations." This is to be ensured through measures that "prevent pollution and ecological degradation, promote conservation, secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social

justifiable economic and social development."

The court ruled that the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and the National Energy Regulator couldn't provide enough evidence to show that the ill effects of the coal power on the environment and the health of the people, especially children, had been considered, suggesting they didn't "comply with their constitutional obligations."

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Ritwick Dutta, Speaking to The Hindu, Ritwick Dutta, environmental justice lavyer and associate at Doughty Street Chambers U.K., said the order is a significant development in the field of climate litigation. "Although, at the core, the judgment still follows the basic principles of administrative law – duty to give reasons and non-application of mind to relevant consideration – what is however

South Africa is heavily dependent on coal for energy. Almost 71% of the country's total energy supply came from coal in 2022. According to an analysis by Climate Watch, South Africa is the world's 16th largest emitter of

ignificant is the fact that the court held that the minister, while according approval, did not take into account the interest of the future generations or the

unborn generations."

He also highlighted the fact that "since unborn generations."

He also highlighted the fact that "since the Court relied on Section 28 of the South African Constitution, which requires the state to protect the child against 'neglect and degradation' to hold that the governments/minsters decision was not in the 'best interest of the child'. The implication of this judgment as I see it is the requirement that a minister/government decision must not be based on the immediate short-term need but must consider a long-term hollstic view," Mr. Dutta said.

A 2019 study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health reviewed epidemiological literature to understand the impact of coal-fired power plant emissions on children's health. It concluded that they affect children negatively due to their 'developing physiology, anatomy, metabolism, and health behaviours." The review also observed that children who lived near a

THE CIST

In 2021, civil organisations represented by the Centre for Environmental Rights sued the government over plans to start more coal fired plants

South Africa has ratified the Paris Agreement, which means it is legally bound to cut its emissions. It plans to cut 350-420 million tonnes by 2030. In 2024 President Ramaphosa also signed the Climate Change Act into law

A 2019 study concluded that A 2019 study concluded that children's physiology, anatomy, and metabolism were negatively affected by plant emissions. The review observed that children who lived near a coal-fired plant exhibited more asthma and respiratory-related conditions

coal-fired plant exhibited more asthma and respiratory-related conditions.

Environmental justice

Environmental justice
The case is also an example of
environmental justice in the context of
transitioning away from coal worldwide.
"Even in India, for the first time three
ministries – Ministry of Power, Ministry of
Environment, Forest and Climate Change
and the Ministry of New and Renewable
Energy – jointly filed an affidavit before
the Supreme Court in the case of M.K
Ranjitsingh versus Union of India that
India will have to move from polluting
coal to wind and solar not only to ensure
cleaner air but also to meet its cleaner air but also to meet its commitment under the Paris Agreement," Mr. Dutta said. "Coal will continue to Mr. Dutta said. "Coal will continue to meet the energy requirement in the short run, but it is now accepted that transition is a must if the world has to slow down climate change. The fact that courts globally are recognising this reality is ... only natura!"

The lawyer also said that even though this case is limited to coal power, combating climate crisis goes beyond it. "Judicial decisions on climate change are a recognition of both the urgency to deal

"Judicial decisions on climate change are a recognition of both the urgency to deal with climate crisis and the fact that civil society groups and citizens have an important role to play in tackling the crisis. It should not be forgotten that the South African Judgement is an outcome of litigation undertaken by three civil society groups. It is therefore crucial that the state and the judiciary are more open and receptive towards divergent views on dealing with a crisis of an unparalleled nature," he added.

BIG SHOT



This handout image received on December 26, 2024, from the State Control Centre of the Victoria Emergency Services shows a bushfire in the Grampians National Park in Australia's Victoria state. The country's southeast is sweltering in a heatwave that has raised the risk of bushfires. The nation's weather forecaster said temperatures would to 14 degrees C above average in some areas. AFP

WHAT IS IT?

Dinosaur highway: where dinos walked

Vasudevan Mukunth

limestone quarry in limestone quarry in Oxfordshire in the UK has come to be called a "dinosaur highway" for the number of footprints of the long-lost giants scientists have discovered there. In 1997, workers at the Dewars Farm Quarry revealed more than two score dinosaur footprints, some of them extending for more than 180 metres. Further

them extending for more than 180 metres. Further studies revealed the footprints were from the Jurassic period. Recently, on January 4, a team of more than a hundred scientists from the University of Birmingham and the University of Oxford announced the discovery of more than 200 footprints in the same quarry. In June last year, a quarry worker had year, a quarry worker had stumbled upon "unusual bumps," as he called them, when he was digging for clay. After he reported them, the scientists got together and found that the footprints were from 166 million year – the Middle Juras

The team found five



An artist's impression of sauropod dinosaurs on the Isle of Skye in this undated handout photo provided by the University of Edinburgh, December 2015. REUTERS

four were created by sauropods (long-necked herbivores) called cetiosaurus and one by a carnivore called megalosaurus. Analysis by the team suggested all the animals had been walking, not running, at the (possibly different) tiener the prices were made. times the prints were made. The megalosaurus footprint is particularly serendipitous because 2024 was the 100th year of its study. In 1824, a megalosaurus fossil became the first dinosaur fossil to be unearthed and examined in detail by the British theologian and geologist William Buckland.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'



S ND-NDE

India's digital future: A citizen-centric approach to data protection

ASHWINI VAISHNAW

Then we talk about the global future, then human-centricap-proaches should be foremost. These words from Prime Minister Nar-endra Modi at the recent United Nations Summit of the Future-reflect India's vision of putting people first. This philosophy has guided India's efforts in shaping the draft Digital Personal Data Protection (OPDP) Rules, 2025. The rules, after being finalised, would operationalise the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, bringing to life India's commitment to safeguarding citizens' right to personal data protection.

A new era of empowerment

The Indian citizen lies at the heart of the DPDP Rules, 2025. In a world increasing-ly dominated by data, we believe it is im-perative to place individuals at the heart

of the governance framework. These rules empower citizens with rights such as informed consent, data erasure, and the ability to appoint digital nominees. Citizens will no longer feel helpless in the face of breaches or unauthorised data user. They will have tools to protect and manage their digital identities effectively. The rules are designed with simplicity and clarity, ensuring that every Indian, regardless of their technical knowhow, can understand and exercise their rights. From ensuring consent its ought in clear terms to mandating that information be provided to the citizens in English or any of the 22 Indian languages listed in the Gonstitution, the framework reflects the government's commitment. From ensuring consent is sought in clear terms to expense the second of the constitution, the framework reflects the government's commitment. From ensuring consent is sought in clear terms to governments commitment. From en-suring consent is sought in clear terms to mandating that information be provided to the citizens in English or any of the 22 In-dian languages listed in the Constitution, the framework reflects the government's

Safeguarding children
Children require special care in the digital age. Recognising this, the rules mandate verifiable parental or guardian consent for processing the personal data of minors. Additional safeguards ensure that children are shielded from exploitation, unauthorised profiling, and other digital harms. These provisions reflect the government's dedication to creating a safer digital space for the future generation. India's digital economy has been a global success story, and we are determined to keep this momentum alive. Our framework ensures present and the digital coconny. Unlike some international models that lean beavily towards regulation, India's approach is pragmaticand growth-oriented. This balance ensures that citizens are protected without stifling the innovative spirit

that drives our startups and businesses.

Small businesses and startups will face lower compliance burdens. The rules accepted the designed with graded responsibilities, taking into account the varying capacities of stakeholders. Larger companies, based on assessment of data faluciaries, will have higher obligations, ensuring accountability without disrupting growth.

A digital-first philosophy
At the core of these rules is a "digital by
design" philosophy. The Data Protection
Board, tasked with resolving grievances
and enforcing compliance, will function predominantly as a digital office. By leveraging
technology, we ensure efficiency, transparency, and speed. Citizens can flee complaints,
trackprogress, and seek resolutions without
unnecessary publical interactions.

unnecessary physical interactions.

This digital-first approach extends to consent mechanisms and data management workflows. By streamlining pro-

cesses, we make it easier for fiduciaries to comply and for citizenstoerigage, fostering trust in the system.

The journey to these rules has been as inclusive as their intent. Grounded in the principles of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, the draft rules are a product of wide-ranging inputs gathered from various stakeholders and a study of global best practices. We have opened a 45-day public consultation period, inviting feedback and suggestions from citizens, businesses, and civil society. This engagement is a testament to our belief in collective wisdom and the importance of participatory policymaking while ensuring that the framework is not onlyrobust but also adaptable to the unique challenges of coursocie economic landscape.

To ensure citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities, widespread awareness initiatives will be undertaken to educate the citizens about their rights

regarding their personal data.

Aswe unveil these rules, we are not mereby addressing present challenges but laying
the groundwork for a secure and innovative
digital future. The Draft Digital Personal
Data Protection Rules, R. 225, reflect India's
digital future. The Draft Digital Personal
Data Protection Rules, R. 225, reflect India's
leadership in shaping global data governance norms. By placing citizens at the centre and fostering a conducive environment
for innovation, we are setting a precedent
for the world to follow.

Our commitment is clear to protect, empower, and enable every Indian in this digital
age. Iencourage every citizen, business, and
civil society group to participate in this dialogacely sharing comments and suggestions
during the consultation period. Together, let
us refine these rules to create a framework
at truly represents the aspirations of a
secure, inclusive, and thriving digital India.

(The writer is the Union Minister for
Electronics and Information Technology,
Information & Broadcasting, and Railways)

Modern religious leaders are experimenting with AI just as earlier generations examined radio, television and the Internet

o members of his synagogue, the voice that played over the speakers of Congregation Emanu El in Houston sound-edjust like Rabbi Josh Fixder's. The sound is the same steady rhythm the songeregation had grown used to, the voice delivered a sermon about what it meant to be a neighbour in the age of artificial intelligence. Then, Fixder took to the bimah himself.

"The audioysuheard amomentagomay have sounded like my words," he said. "But they werent."

The audioysuheard amomentagomay have sounded like my words, he said. "But they weren't." Therecording was created by what Fisler called "Rabbi Bot," an Alchatbot trained on his old sermons. The chatbot, created with the help of a data scientist, wrote the sermon, even delivering ith an Al version of his voice. During the rest of the service, Folder intermittently asked Rabbi Bot questions aloud, which it would promptly answer. Fisder is among a growing number of religious leaders experimenting with Al in their work, spuring an industry of faith-based tech companies that offer Al I on their work, spuring an industry of faith-based tech companies that offer Al tools, from assistants that can do theological research to chatbots that can help write-sermons.

For centuries, new technologies have changed the ways people worship, from

For centuries, new technologies have changed the ways people worship, from the radio in the 1920s to television sets in the 1950s and the Internet in the 1990s. Some proponents of Al in religious space es have gone back even further, compar-ing Al's potential — and fears of it — to the invention of the printing press in the 15th century.

the invention of the printing press in the Ish century. Religious leaders have used AI to translate their livestreamed sermons into differ-ent languages in real time, blasting them out to international audiences. Others have compared charbots trained on tens of thousands of pages of Scripture to a fleet of newly trained seminary students, able to pull excepts about certain topics nearly instantaneously.

But the ethical questions around using generative AI for religious tasks have become more complicated as the technology has improved, religious leaders say. While most agree that using AI for tasks like research or marketing is acceptable, other uses for the technology, like-sermon writing, are seen by some as a step too far.

are seen by some as a step too far:

Jay Cooper, a pestor in Austin, Texas,
used OpenAI's ChatGPT to generate an
entire service for his church as an experiment in 2023. He marketed it using posters of robots, and the service drew in some
curious new attendees — "gamer types,"
Cooper said — who had never before been
to his congregation.

The thermatic prompt he gave ChatGPT
to generate various parts of the service was:
"How can we recognise truth in a world
where AI blurs the truth?" ChatGPT came
up with a welcome message, a sermon, a

where Al blurs the truth?" ChatGPT came up with a welcome message, a sermon, a children's programme and even a four-verse song, which was the biggest his of the bunch. Cooper said. The song went. As algorithms up in webs of lice! We lift our gaze to the endless skee! Where Christ steachings illuminate our way! Dispelling jabehoosts with the light of Jalay.

Cooper has not sine west the technology to help write sermons, preferring to draw

Cooper hashocistic used the technology to help write sermons, preferring to draw instead from his own experiences. But the presence of Alin faith-based spaces, he said, poses a larger question: Can God speak through Al?

rough Al? "That's a question a lot of Christians on-



Can God speak to us through AI?

line do not like at all because it brings up somefear "Cooper said." It may be for good reason. But think it's aworth guestion."

The impact of AI on religion and ethics has been a touch point for Pupe Prancis on several occasions, though he has not direct paddressed using AI to help write sermons. Phil EuBank, a pastor at Menlo Church in Menlo Park, California, compared AI to a "bionic arm" that could supercharge his work. But when it comes to sermon writing, "there's that Uncanny Valley territory," he said, "where it may get you really close, but really close can be really weird."

Fixler agreed. He recalled being taken aback when Rabbi Botasked him to include in his AI sermon, a one time experiment, a

Fixier agreed. He recalled being taken aback when Rabbi Bot asked himto include in his Al sermon, a one-time experiment, a line about itse and the service of the registron as ourselves." Rabbi Bot said, "can we also extend this love and empathy to the Al entities weersate?" Rabbis have historically been early adopters of new technologies, especially for printed books in the 15th century. But the divinity of those books was in the spiritual relationship that their readers had with god, said Rabbi Oren Hayon, who is also part of Congregation Emanu El.

To assist his research, Hayon regularly uses a custom chatbot trained on 20 years of his own writings. But he has never used Al to write portions of sermons.

"Our job is not just to put pretty sentence—"

Alt owrite portions of sermons.

"Our job is not just to put pretty sentences together," Hayon said. "It's to hopefully write something that's lyrical and moving and articulate, but also responds to the uniquely human hungers and pains and losses that we're aware of because we are

inhuman communities with other people."
Headded, Ttean't be automated.
Kenny Jahng, a tech entrepreneur, believes that fears about ministers' using generative AI are overblown, and that leaning into the technology may even be necessary to appeal to a new generation of young, tech-savy churchgoers when church attendance across the country is in decline.

Jahng, the editor-in-chief of a faith- and Janing, the editor-in-chief of a faith- and tech-focused media company and founder of an Al education platform, has travelled the country in the last year to speak at conferences and promote faith-based Al products. He also runs a Facebook group for tech-curious church leaders with over

107 terretained and the control of t

aid. "It's this perfect storm."

As of now, a majority of faith-based AI ompanies cater to Christians and Jews, but ustom chatbots for Muslims and Buddhists xist as well.

e churches have already started to subtly infuse their services and websites

with Al.

The chatbot on the website of the Father's House, a church in Leesburg, Florida, for instance, appears to offer standard customer service. Among its recommended questions: "What time are your services?"
The next suggestion is more complex. "Why are my prayers not answered?"
The chatbot was created by Pastors ai, a startup founded by Joe Suh, a techentre-

preneur and attendee of EuBank's church in Silicon Valley.
Critics of Al use by religious leaders have pointed to the issue of hallucinations—times when charbots make stuffup. While harmless in certain situations, faith-based Al tools that fabricate religious scripture present a serious problem. In Rabbi Bot's sermon, for instance, the Al invented a quote from Jewish philosopher Maimonides that would have pussed as authentic to the casual listener. e casual listener.

recasual instener.
For other religious leaders, the issue of AI
a simpler one: How can sermon writers
one their craft without doing it entirely
iemselves?

themselves? "Iworry for pastors, in some ways, that it won't help them stretch their sermon writingsmuscles, which is where I think somuch of our great theology and great sermons come from, years and years of preaching," said Thomas Costello, a pastor at New Hope Hawaii Kai in Honolulu.

salar inomiss Costeno, appearer arever rioge Hawaii Kaiin Hornotulu. On a recent afternoon at his synagogue, Hayon recalled tading a picture of his book-shelf and asking his AI assistant which of the books he had not quoted in his recent sermons. Before AI, he would have pulled down the titles themselves, taking the time to read through their indexes, carefully checking them against his own work. "I was a little said to miss that part of the process that is so fruitful and so joyful and rich and enlightening, that gives fuel to the life of the Spirit, 'Hayon said. 'Us-ing AI does get you to an answer quicker,

ing Al does get you to an answer quicker, but you've certainly lost something along

Way. New York Times

Return of Rushdie's *Verses* a win for freedom of ideas

t is heartening to learn that Salman Rushdie's contro-versial book *The Satanic*

Verses and oxion year. Statistics of the bookshops in India—the land of his birth. John Milton aptly said, "He who destroys a good book, "Rils reason itself." While it's debatable whether Rushies work qualifies as a "good book," the fact remains: censorship is the child of lear and the father of gnorance.

The decision to ban the book 36 years ago by then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, perhaps without reading it, exemplifies the shallow basis of most such prohibitions. In fact, most of the banned and burned books are often not read by those protesting them. The act of banning is frequently moted in perceived public sentiment rather than an informed evaluation of the work. In this context, the freedom of expression becomes anisomore because, assome argue, what is freedom of expression without the free dom to offend? Author Margaret Atwood described book bars as a sign of trolliarianism, emphasising that books, by spreading ideas, achieve an indestructible legacy. Ellen Hopkins poignantly captured this inher words: "Torchevery book. Char every page. Burn every word to ash. Ideas are incombustible. And therein lessyour real fear."

incombustible. And therein lies your real fear. In a free should be banned or burnt. Dearly the banned banned banned of the banned of the banned bann

to be readand discussed for its profound insights. Similarly, Dr B R Ambedkar's The Riddes in Hindukar was frowned upon, but it has been widely read and remains influential. Literature challenges authority and fosters critical thinking, providing readers the courage to confront injustice. Books unite people, spark conversations, and inspire action. They allow us to explore different works, and inspire action, They allow us to explore different works, and find common ground, enabling collective progress.

I gnorance is the enemy of I gnorance is the enemy of

mon ground, enabling collective progress.

Ignorance is the enemy of progress. When individuals close themselves off to new idea, they perpendide candstagnation. Learning and open-mindedness, on the other hand, drive innovation, empathy, and societal advancement. Censorship, driven by prudery, political expediency, or outdated moral standards, has repeatedly suppressed literature and ideas. For example, Rajiv Gandhi's Congress evinced great alacrity in bunning Bushde's The Standie's The

banning Rushdie's The Satanic
Verse because Congress didn't
want to antagonise people of a
particular faith.

DH Lawrence's Lady Chatstreigy's Lower was banned in
India under obscenity laws,
as well as in the United Kingdom, where it became a historic trial. The victory of its
publisher marked a turning
point for freedom of expression. Similarly, Bengali noveliest Samresh Basvis Bibar and
Praipapat faced allegations of
obscenity, but spirited defence
by the author eventually led to
the bans being overturned by
the Suppreme Court of India.
Rushdie's The Stanic Verserarguably one of his less accomplished works—became
famous (or infamous?) because
of its Dataphemous content.
Vet, as Rushdie himself noted.
"Respect for religion has become a code phrase meaning
'fear of religion's. Religions,
like all other ideas, deserve
criticism, satire, and, yes, our
fear fess disrespect."
It's time for readers in India

criticism, satire, and, yes, our fearless disrespect."
It's time for readers in India to have access to a wide spectrum of books without interference from the State. Morality and conscience are personal domains, and the government should not dictate them. The recent availability of The Satunic Verses, even if through a bureaucratic loophole, is a welcome step.

welcome step.
(The writer is an advanced research scholar of Semitic languages, civilisations and cultures)

OUR PAGES 45 OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 1975

LN Mishra dies of bomb blast injuries

Patna, January 3
Railway Minister Lalit Narain Mishra, who was injured in a homb explosion at Samastipur yesterdus, died in the Danaspur Railway Hospital, near here, early this morning after an emergency operation lasting several hours. He was 52, Nasionwide mourning skerned hours. He was 52, Nasionwide mourning has been declared tomorrow when he will be given a State funeral in his native village. Dectors said the death was due to "perforation of the intestines" leading to cardiac arrest. He was declared dead at around 9-30 a.m.

25 YEARS AGO: JANUARY 2000

India rules out US role in resolving disputes with Pak

resofving disputes with Pak
New Delhi, Jan
New Delhi, Jan
The United States has no role in resolving Indo-Pakista an problems not with
standing convergence of views between
New Delhi and Washington on the issue
of combating terrorism, a spokesiman
of the External Affairs Ministry today
said. He was responding to queries on
President Bill Clinton's report to the US
Congress wherein he is reported to have
stated that easing Indo-Pak tensions
would be one of his administration's top
priorities over the concluding war of his
term in the White House.

OASIS | ROHINI S MURTHY

Joy beyond darkness

In July 1 who and I recently visited a blind school near my house in Bengaluru. This is the same school where I volunteered as a reader three decades ago. Maruti Moger, who was my student back then, is now a teacher there. Meeting him not only helps me revisit the good old earefree days of my youth but it encourages me to ount my blessings. During his visit, I noticed a bunch of teenage boys playing cricket with a ball that made a jingling sound. Most of the boys were partially blind, but the jingling no sie helped them hit boundaries and sixes much the chagrin of the bowler. Their joy and camaraderie filled the air while my son

kept Maruti engaged in a tête-à-tête.
A cousin who teaches in the same school kept me updated about the various activities while her students, who were passing by, exchanged pleasantries. One boy walked past us without uttering a word. Sensing my curiosity, she said. "He is like Helen Keller. He can neither speak, hear, nor see, but the is very good at doing tailoring work like sitiching a button or sewing a torn shirt." Visiting a blind school did open our eyes to the limitles blessings God has showered on us. My son and I barely

spent an hour, but some of the impor

spent an hour, but some of the impor-tant life lessons we learnt will stay with us forever. For instance, their curiosity to explore and celebrate small joys of life is quite contagious, be it playing cricket or trying a new gadget that can assist them in their daily chores. They seldom shy away from them in their daily chores.
They seldom shy away from
seeking help as they believe in
facing life's challenges instead
of avoiding them. Their uncanny
knack of using their strengths instead of bemoaning their shortcomings
is a valuable lesson in trading expectations for acceptance. Last but certainly
not the least is what Helen Keller has

beautifully summed up: 'You will su

beautifully summed up: You will succeed if you persever, and you will find yoy in overcoming obstacles.

Over the years, I have noticed that most of the visually impaired people defity embrace positivity and patience in realising their dream. While Maruti excels in penning short stories and poems in Kannada, a 6th standard girl amazed us with her talent in mental math and singing. Navigating life is undoubtedly very tough, especially in a world that tacks inclusive practices, but in many ways, they are conveying Helen Keller's pearls of wisdom to us. All the world is full of suffering, It is also full of overcoming.

India needs to prioritise preventive care

ndia is facing a healthcare crisis that is growing both in scope and cost. We face an alarming dichotomy today: while life expectancy of Indians is expected to increase further, many are facing disease burden earlier. As the country sees an alarming rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer, the financial burden on individuals and the healthcare system continues to escalate.

NCDs accounted for about 65% of all deaths in 2022, up from about 50% in 2010-13, as per the

about 50% in 2010-13, as per the National Family Health Survey-5. The prevalence of risk factors for NCDs is worryingly high. One in four adult men are hypertensive. One in eight are diabetic. Further, breast, lung, and cervical cancer are on the rise, with the median

are on the rise, with the median age of diagnosis occurring earlier than global averages.

Millions of people who are facing these conditions could have been managed better, at often lower costs, had they been diagnosed earlier. In this context, shifting the focus from reactive treatment to proactive prevention is crucial, not only to improve health outcomes but also to control the ever-increasing healthcare expenses.

healthcare expenses.

A growing economic burden
The Union Budget for 2024
allocated '87,657 crore to the
Ministry of Health and Family
Welfare, marking a 13% increase
from the previous year. While this
is a step forward, experts agree
that this allocation remains
insufficient given the scale of
India's health challenges.
The National Health Accounts
show the total current health
expenditure estimate in 2021-22 as
fy?9 lakh crore, growing at a rate
more than overall inflation. The
share of household health
expenditure, including insurance
contributions, while decreasing
over time, still drives nearly 50%of the spend. This remains one of
the highest globally.



Sathya R. Sriran



By prioritising preventive care treatments,

India can pave the way for a healthier and more economically resilient future.

The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that the economic burden of NCDs in India will surpass 2280 lakh crore by 2030 – a cost equivalent to 22 lakh per household. This escalating cost, driven by rising healthcare expenses and productivity losses, poses a severe threat to financial stability, particularly for middle and lower-income families. Regular screenings, especially for high-risk individuals, could significantly reduce the incidence of serious, life-threatening and debilitating conditions and its resultant cascading economic and social effects. In a large hospital social effects. In a large hospital network, for every 1,000 people screened, at least three people are identified for pre-emptive cardiac

or cancer interventions. Targeted but periodic screening investigations for individuals such as mammograms for breast cancer, pap smears for cervical cancer, X-ray or low-dose computed tomography for lung cancer, ultrasound for liver disease, echo cardiography and treadmill stress test for heart disease beyond the physical vitals and blood tests enable early intervention.

Unfortunately, comprehensive health checks (which can cost anywhere between ₹8,000 and ₹15,000 in metro cities today) are tl5,000 in metro cities today) are perceived as expensive. If the government were to enable a step change in preventive health services adoption, it could significantly reduce the overall financial burden on individuals and the healthcare system. Tax incentives, subsidised

Tax incentives, subsidised screenings, and public awareness are key policy tools that can enable this. As part of the Finance Act, 2013, the Union government made efforts to encourage preventive healthcare by offering a \$5,000 tax deduction under Section 800 of the Income Tax Act for health checks. However, this amount has remained stagnant for the last decade, despite the 12-14% estimated healthcare inflation rate and the rising cost of healthcare services. Thus, it would be

prudent for our policymakers to consider revising the tax deduction limit to a least ₹15,000 in the Union Budget for 2025-26. This would incentivise more individuals to undergo preventive health checks, potentially saving the nation several thousand of crores ifn uture healthcare costs. The incremental tax foregone to the exchequer from such a measure is estimated to be less than ₹5,000 crore, a worthy than ₹5,000 crore, a worthy investment towards improving the health of the nation.

The path forward

We need to prioritise preventive care to mitigate the increasing economic and financial burden of chronic diseases. A three-pronged approach can potentially drive a change in the adoption of preventive health services.

First, we need to strengthen early intervention capabilities through the Ayushman Health Wellness Centres, including an Health and capturing trends effectively and enabling risk-driven targeted screening using AI-enabled imaging modalities to offer lower cost screenings at-scale

Second, we need to improve the adoption of screening at private centres by encouraging insurers and private health providers to offer a subsidised insurers and private health providers to offer a subsidised minimum screening programme for every individual between 40-60 years. For example, for women after the age of 40, a mammogram is necessary annually or once in two years, based on her risk factors. Exploring part funding through allocations from proceeds from the healthcare cess or the proposed 35% GST slab on tobacco and sugar products can help reduce funding needs. Finally, the increase in tax deduction limit can further incentivise people to complete comprehensive health checks. By prioritising preventive care over reactive treatments, India can pave the way for a healthier and more economically resilient future.

A stampede, a rift, and a thaw

The tragedy exposes the fraught relationship between industry and government

R. Ravikanth Reddy

he stampede at a spe-cial screening of the film, *Pushpa 2: The* ule, at Hyderabad's Sandhya Theatre in early December 2024 following actor Allu Ar-jun's "surprise entry" and the events that followed it caused a rift between the Telangana government and sections of the Telugu film industry. On December 4, a family of

four – M. Revathi, her hus-band M. Bhaskar, and their son and daughter – had gone for the screening at the single screen theatre. When the actor entered the premises, a stampede broke out and Re-vathi died. Her son is battling for life in hospital. Soon after the incident, a case was filed against Sandhya Theatre, Allu Arjun, and his security team. At an event to celebrate the

film's success on December 7, Allu Arjun thanked the Telan-gana and Andhra Pradesh go vernments for hiking the prices of tickets and said he was es of tickets and distressed by Revathi's death. On December 13, the Telanga-arrested the actor. The next day, the Telangana High Court granted him inte

High Court granted him inte-rim bail.

Many believe that the arrest was an act of political vendet-ta as Allu Arjun appeared to have forgotten Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's name at the event and mentioned it only after the audience shouted it out. It was this momentary lapse that landed him to jail, they allege.

Some Congress leaders be-

some Congress leaders be-lieve that this was a deliberate act to undermine the Chief Mi-nister's importance, especial-by since the actor had extend-ed a special note of thanks to



the Andhra Pradesh Chief Mi-

mister, Chandral viades.

Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS)

working president K.T. Rama

Rao added fuel to the fire by
saying film stars who have taken concessions from the government cannot even recognise Mr. Reddy as the Chief

Mister A. Fanily member of Minister. A family member of Allu Arjun's revealed that Mr. Rama Rao's comments wor-sened matters and said that he should have refrained from using this episode to settle polit-ical scores.

In the Telangana Assembly, Mr. Reddy was forceful, assert-ing that the law applied equally to all citizens, irrespective of their status. He added that the law would take its course. He also said that the actor be-haved irresponsibly when the police tried to arrest him. Mr. Reddy then lambasted the film police tried to arrest him. Mr. Reddy then lambasted the film industry for not responding to the woman's death, implying that the film industry and the Opposition appeared more sympathetic towards the actor than the woman's family.

Allu Arjun denied these alegations and said this was an instance of "character assassination". He added that he had not been informed by the police about Revathi's death.

With claims and counter claims liying thick and fast, and in order to debunk the actor's allegations, Hyderabad Police Commissioner C.V. Anand released a video of the police escorting the actor out of the theatre.

The Telangana government then announced that it would no longer allow special shows that provide a windfall to the producers. The decision, which caused concern among industry heads as many big-budget movies are awaiting release, further widened the rift between the State government and the film industry. In the midst of this saga, Dil Raju, who was appointed Film Development. Corporation

Development Corporation chairman, said that he would bridge the gap between the in-dustry and the government. The relationship between

the industry and political par-ties in Telangana is complicat-ed. It goes back to the days of the agitation for Statehood when the BRS (then called the TRS) allegedly threatened the industry saying it would not allow professionals from Andhra Pradesh to operate freely in the new State. Later, the inin the new State. Later, the in-dustry grew close to the BRS, especially with Mr. Rama Rao, say senior Ministers. This ap-parently angered the Con-gress, which had given land and tax incentives to the film industry soon after it had moved from Madras.

industry soon after it had moved from Madras.

The first signs of a thaw were seen at a meeting between film industry heads and the Chief Minister on December 26. Mr. Reddy said the government stood with the film industry. He also said there would be no compromise on law and order and that celebrities are responsible for controlling fans. Meanwhile, Mr. Dil Raju dismissed the issue of special screenings as trivial and said that Mr. Reddy harbours a dream of making Hyderabad an international destination for film shootings.

While working on fulfilling that dream, the industry and the government must together ensure that no more lives are lost in incidents like these.

Sharp fall in Madrasa and unrecognised school enrolments

Officials attribute overall enrolment decline to deduplication, but disproportionate drops in certain schools need scrutiny

DATA POINT

nbavi Parthasarathy

he number of students en-rolled in Indian schools in 2023-24 declined by 1.22 crore compared with 2018-19, show data. Officials argue that show data. Officials argue that Aadhaar numbers and unique stu-dent IDs have been used to identi-fy beneficiaries of educational schemes and, in the process, du-plicate entries and ghost entries have been weeded out. However, Unified District Infor-mation System For Education Plus (INSE).

have been weeded out.

However, Unified District Information System For Education Plus (UDISE) data show that this new method of data collection has had a disproportionate impact on Madrasas – both recognised and unrecognised – and other unrecognised schools. Unrecognised schools don't have a license to function and don't meet many of the criteria set by the government in terms of infrastructure, class size, etc. There was a sharp drop in school enrolments among recognised Madrasas and the number of teachers working in them increased.

Chart 1 shows the absolute mumber of students enrolled in government, government aided, when the solution in 2008.

vernment, government-aided private, and other schools in 2018 19 and 2023-24. Other schools in-clude unrecognised schools and Madrasas (recognised and unrecognised). Student enrolments dropped from 13.1 crore to 12.7 crore in government schools, 2.7 crore to 2.5 crore in government-aided schools, 9.2 crore to 9 crore in private schools, and 90 lakh to 49 lakh in other schools. Chart 2 shows the absolute

drop in the number of students en-rolled in 2023-24 compared with 2018-19 across school types. Enrol-ments dropped by 36 lakh in go-vernment schools, 24 lakh in government-aided schools, 21 lakh in private schools, and more than 40 lakh in other schools. and 2 show that the number of stu-dents in other schools only formed around 2% to 4% of the total enrol ments in both the years (Chart 1), but formed over 33% of the decline in total enrolments (Chart 2). Calculating the decline in enrol-

calculating the decline in enrol-ments in percentage terms brings out the disparity further. Chart 3 shows the percentage drop in stu-dent enrolments in 2023-24 com-pared with 2018-19 across school types. Enrolments declined by 2.8% in government schools, 8.7% in government-aided schools, 2.3% private schools and 44.8% in her schools.

other schools.

Chart 4 shows a break-up of student enrolments in other schools — separately for recognised Madrasas, unrecognised Madrasas, and other unrecognised Madrasas, and other unrecognised Madrasas, and 2018-19.

Enrolments dropped from 30 lakh to 25 lakh (16% decline) in recognised Madrasas, and 53 lakh to 23.5 lakh (56% decline) in unrecognised Madrasas, and 53 lakh to 23.5 lakh (56% decline) in other unrecognised schools.

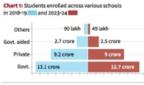
Charts 5 and 6 show the about the unrecognised Madrasas and other unrecognised Madrasas and other unrecognised Madrasas and other unrecognised Schools, the number of schools and teachers for school types presented in chart 4 for 2023-24 and 2018-19. In unrecognised Madrasas and other unrecognised schools, the number of schools and teachers has sharply reduced, which also explains the drop in students in them. However, the number of recognised Madrasas schools have increased by 7%, and the number of teachers in those schools have increased by 7%, and the number of teachers in those schools have increased by 13%. Chart 4 shows a break-up of

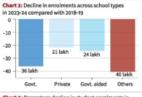
7%, and the number of teachers in those schools have risen by 13% even though the student share has

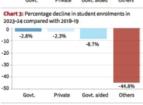
decreased by 16%. So, there has been a dispropor tionate decrease in enrolments in Madrasas and unrecognised schools. Is this because duplicate entries and ghost entries were re-moved or was there an actual drop in students? It is important to ex-plore this further especially since recognised Madrasas and the number of teachers working in them has increased despite a drop in student enroln

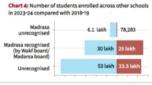
The case of missing students















FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Man Thindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 6, 1975

A new health problem for Bombay?

New Delhi, Jan. 5: Urbanisation in Bombay has exposed the metropolis to the risk of plague, according to the World Health Organisation's Export Committee on Plague.

Export Committee on Plague.

Dr. P.J. Boroas told the Indian Science
Congress to-day that field rats once confined to
the fields had started invading the city because
the fields were taken for buildings.
He warned that field rats not only caused
more damage but could also spread plague. The
house rat was resistant to plague.

Dr. Deoras, who was formerly Assistant

house rat was resistant to plague.

Dr. Beoras, who was formerly Assistant
Director of Haffkine Institute in Bombay, said
that some years ago the field rat formed only
one per cent of the total rat population in the
heart of Bombay. "As the city has been
urbanised, the population of field rats has
increased by 45 per cent," he said. He worried
that the probable change in rat population might
give rise to a new health problem.

A member of Maharashtra State's
Environment Committee, Dr. Deoras also
warned against the export of frog legs. This
would lead to import of more insecticides and,
therefore, to more pollution, he said.

Frogs ate insects which damaged paddy crop,
Dr. Deoras said. A frog weighing one kilogram
ate 600 grams, or some 10,000 paddy pests, he
added. "We are unfortunately killing the frog for
export of legs and trying to control the insects
with endrin which further kills frogs, fishes,
birds and other animals," he said.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 6, 1925

Price of tea

London, Jan. 3: The "Evening Standard" says that with the resumption of sales in tea market this week a big effort will be made to defeat brokers whose operations are alleged to have brought the market to confusion. Minicing Lane is preparing for the biggest battle the tea trade has ever witnessed. The paper adds that the recent enormous speculative purchases of tea for resale by bidders who have been able to outbid competitors has had the effect of steadily raising the market price by at least six pence per pound. In the event of efforts to defeat brokers being successful, there is every prospect of substantial reduction in retail prices. The Royal Commission on food prices has had its attention London, Jan. 3: The "Evening Standard" says Commission on food prices has had its attention drawn to the position.





THE IDEAS PAGE

A happy new year to farmers

PM Modi wants to make India 'viksit' by 2047. But this goal cannot be achieved unless farmers' and farm workers' incomes improve appreciably



BY ASHOK GULATI

A VERY HAPPY, peaceful, and prosperous new year to readers of this column. What could I wish for Indian agriculture, a subject that has been my lifelong passion and commitment? My dream would be to see vibrant and sustainable agriculture, which is climate resilient, increases produc-tivity brigge receptive for the many and most which is climate resilient, increases produc-tivity, brings prosperity to farmers, and most of all, improves the real wages of farm work-ers, who are at the bottom of the economic pyramid, it is only by raising productivity that India can rein in food inflation, which has been playing spoilsport of late. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been literally hum-bled by veggies inflation at 29 per cent (and potato inflation at 67 per cent) in November 2024. They have not allowed the Bank to re-duce the rore on sec. That is signed to the

potato inflation at 67 per cent jin November 2024. They have not allowed the Bank to reduce the repo rate. That is simply tragic. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has made it clear that 2024 was the warmest year since 1901, and that temperatures have been 0.9 degrees Celsius higher in 2024 compared to the Long Period Average. Earlier, studies by scientists of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research had predicted that an increase in temperature by one degree Celsius runs the risk of reducing wheat output by the per cent. Wheat is likely to be most impacted by heat spikes in February when grain formation happens. Although Prime Minister Narendra Modi has released 109 varieties of various crops (including wheat) that are supposed to be climate resilient, the challenge of taking them from labs to farmers' lands remains daunting. This is so because the government's agri-extension network is the weak-earling.

sion network is the weakest link in the system.

est link in the system.
Agri-R&D as well as agri-extension need a major boost in the coming budget if Indian agriculture has to be climate resilient. In this context, it may be noted that in the last three years or so, there has been a wide gap between the government's estimates of wheat production and that of the private trader. No wonder wheat prices have been under pressure and government stocks are meagre. The government is trying to suppress wheat prices by releasing wheat at about Rs. 2,300/quintal in the open market while the minimum support price (MSP) for the forthcoming season is Rs. 2,450/quintal and the conning season is Rs. 2,450/quintal and the teaminimum support price (MSP) for the forthcoming season is Rs. 2,450/quintal and the call. This is simply dumping and anti-farmer. PM Modi wants to make India visits by 2047. But this goal cannot be achieved unless farmers' and farm workers' incomes improve appreciably. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLS) shows that real wages in rural areas (including farm wages) have stagnated and even marginally declined in the last five years. This should have been the primary topic for constructive discussion in Parliament and the mainstream media, as it impacts the lives of millions. Unfortunately, in the last session of Parliament, the issue Agri-R&D as well as agri-extens



scarcely received attention.

If India has to realise the dream of Viksis Bharat, we need to find business models that make development processes more inclusive. So far, we have not been very successful in that. And when we failt to do it, we lean towards the reveliculture of freebies. This culture runs through all roblitical parties be it in

wards the revid culture of freebies. This culture runs through all political parties, be it in the name of Ladili Behna Vojana in Madhya Pradesh or Ladiki Bahin Vojana in Madhya Pradesh or Ladiki Bahin Vojana in Maharashtra's recent assembly elections or now Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) promise to give Rs 18,000/month to pujaris and granthis, if it is voted back to office in Delhi. India cannot progress with such doles. As honest taxpayers, we wonder how our money is being frittered away. I wonder why the Election Commission is silent on such fulcirous promises. Will the Supreme Court step in to bring some order among political parties on election promises that are damaging our democracy? Most of these are simply bribes for votes, and waste of taxpayers' money. The taxpayer feels totally helpless and cheated.

Coming back to reforming agriculture, po-

and cheated.

Coming back to reforming agriculture, politically, for the Modi government, 2025 seems a golden chance as parliamentary elections are far away. The big expenditures in rural areas, including agriculture are from the Central budget. The food and fertiliser subsidies, for instance. Together, they are likely to cross Rs 41alk crore. Add to it the PM-KISAM and MGNREGA programmes and the expenditure would easily cross Rs 5 lalk crore out of a budget of about Rs 45 lalk crore (FY25).

Spending needs to be rationalised. At least Rs 1 labk crore can be saved and invested back in agriculture and rural areas. They can be used to build basic infrastructure from rural roads to water harvesting structures to upgrading agri-mandis and rural haots.

But how do we rationalise these mega subsidies and the so-called welfare programmes? Fertiliser subsidy needs to be merged with PAM-KISAN and given to farmers directly on a per hectare basis while fertiliser prices need to be de-regulated and freed. Micro-managing prices for each urea plant, and then informally controlling even DAP prices, when in theory they are relatively free, reminds one of the socialist era. That urea prices have not been revised since 2012, while all other commodity prices have gradually risen, reflects the timidity of the government. This is neither helping farmers increase productivity nor is it beneficial to the planet — the subsidies only encourage inefficient use and massive diversions. Similarly, flood subsidy has to be targeted and given in the form of digital coupons to be spent on say 20 nutritious food items. The MG/NECGA scheme needs to be synced with agri-work and PM-Avaxa Yojana.

The system needs a major overhaul, It can be done if the Modi government is bold and remains focused, Else, I am afraid, India will keep Ilmping with occasional falls and in-juries in its journey to Viksit Bharat by 2047.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"In Nepal, where guardians often scrutinise young people's lives, the internet offers them the freedom rarely available offline. The young can be whoever they wantabuild a community, or find love. Yet the internets accessibility makes it vulnetable to being used in ways that could harm them."

— THEKATHMANDU POST

Moving past uncertainty

The challenge for 2025 is to steen towards progress, stability and sustainability



HISTORIANS MAY DUB 2024 "the polycriti

HISTORIANS MAY DUB 2024 "the polycritical year" or "the year of uncertainty". Tolycyrist' is a buzzword first coined by a French philosopher to describe a situation in which the collective impact of distinct but interrelated threats is so overwhelming that its not possible to identify the precise cause of the crists and, therefore, provide a solution. The year ended with the world at the junction of multiple crossmads—geopolitics, geocomorpus, spotenty and sustainability. The chiler is progress, stability, and sustainability. The challenge for 2025 is to resolve uncertainties and steer the world in the latter direction.

Seventy countries went to the polis in

the latter direction.

Seventy countries went to the polls in 2024. One thread linked the results of all the elections. The electrate voted against the incumbent leadership. In some countries, notably the USA and the UK, the ruling party was turfed out of office. In others like France and Japan, the leadership returned to powe with a reduced mandate. Many commenta

and Japan, the leadership returned to power with a reduced mandate. Many comments to share provided an explanation for this wave of anti-incumbency. Some have adduced conomic slowdown, others inflation, still others social media-induced polarisation and public anger. They are all cornect. The explanation lies in a mix of these factors capture fully the drivers behind this public reaction. Is this mood change an "aberrant moment intime" (President Joe Biden's comment regards President Trump's first term) or something structural and longer-lasting? On the international front, the rules of engagement defined by the West after World Warl I are in tatters. This is manifest in the resurgence of pseudo-imperial and territorial atavism. President Trump's Rus', the kingdom of East Slavie states united by King wants to recreate "Imperia Rus", the kingdom of East Slavie states united by King Wants to recreate "Imperia Rus", the kingdom of East Slavie states united by King Vadimir of Kile vin the 10th century. President XJ Jinging appears not to be interested in China talking "centre stage" as the Middle (Ringdom, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is manic about the idea of "Greater Israel" in which there is no place for a Palestinian state. President Eriogoa, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Assad dynasty in Syria, is rumoured to harbour ambitions of extending Turkey's regional sphere of influence — a la the Ottoman Empire — and President-elect Trump wants to "make America Great again".

What does all this augur? A return to

and President-elect Trump wants to "make America Great again". What does all this augur? A return to modemist feudalism, the resurgence of Cold War antagonisms albeit with an espanded cast of adversaries? A step-by-step, unin-tended but potentially catastrophic conjoin-ing of loosely connected ambitions to create the perfect storm of a global conflict? The global economy is shrouded in similar uncertainty. The year ended with slowing growth rates, increased protectionism, ris-

growth rates, increased protectionism, ris-ing public debt, erratic monetary policy and Trump's predictably unpredictable pro-nouncements on trade, taxes, technology,

payment systems, alliances and immigra-tion. The question is which button will be push. The answer must await the settling down of his administration but even then the direction of change will most likely be un-clear. As will the ramifications.

The Green Energy transition has ac The Green Energy transition has ac-quired significance because of global warm-ing. The word "transition" can, however, be misleading. It signals the substitution of one embedded energy system with another. History would suggest, however, that this is an elusive objective.

an elusive objective.

The world has undergone two energy transitions — wood to coal in the 18th century and coal to oil in the 20th, Both were

transitions — wood to coal in the 18th century and coal to oil in the 20th. Both were
driven by technology, competitiveness and
convenience. Neither ded to the displacement
of one energy source by another. What did
happen was all pin market shares. Cold is
placed wood in the 19th century and oil displaced wood in the 19th century and oil displaced wood in the 19th century and oil displaced wood in the 20th as the dominant orgry source. The "transitions" were, in other
words, "additive "not substitutive".
Technology has made renewable energy
competitive and accessible and brought about the necessary conditions for increasing
the market share of solar and wind in thenenergy consumption basket. It has not, however, removed the blockers to ensure their
dominance. Three blockers create uncertainty about the pace and extent of the green
energy transition. First, structural. The shift
from an embedded energy system built
around flossification. First, structural. The shift
from an embedded energy system built
around flossification is rest, structural. The shift
from an embedded energy system built
from an embedded of finance the resources needed to finance this redesign;
built min into trillions of dodars. No one and
probabild — and decades. Second, finance. The
resources needed to finance this redesign;
built min into trillions of dodars. No one gry
these amounts can be mobilised is through
the conjoint working of public, private and
multilateral institutions to devise innovative
funding mechanisms. And three, politics. The
phasing down, let alone the phasing out, of
solid self-swife integer economic and social phasing down, let alone the phasing out, o fossil fuels will trigger economic and social consequences. Elected leaders are, therefore,

consequences. Bected leaders are, therefore, wary of treading down this path. Global warming requires the current transition to be "substitutive" not "additive". The uncertainty is whether this is feasible. And if not, what would be the consequences? Technology presents possibly the most worrying uncertainty, Few challenge the assertion that red-mological innovation has radically altered our lives. Few wish to place a block on further technological properses. That said, there are questions, Might the creator of "human competitive intelligence" lose control over his creation? What protocols should be put in place to safeguard against such (imagined? JissS2 What are the ethi-cal /human ramifications of Al /AlG, robot-ics, quantum computing and genetic engicat /human ramifications of Al /AIC., robot-ics, quantum computing and genetic engi-neering? How should the lines of accountability be defined? The best and

accountability be defined? The best and brightest are regaged in a vibrant debate but as yet there is no darity. Polycritical uncertainties require global polycentric institutions. This is a heavy ask. But as the Greek philosopher Epictetus software with the control of the co

The writer is chairman and Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress

Imagine a trust-based society

Fertiliser subsidy needs to be merged with PM-Kisan and given to farmers directly on a per hectare basis while fertiliser prices need to be de-regulated and freed. Micromanaging prices for each urea plant, and then informally

controlling even DAP prices when in theory they are relatively free, reminds one of

the socialist era. That urea prices have not been revised since 2012, while all other

commodity prices have gradually risen, reflects the timidity of the government.

It will unlock so many possibilities and efficiencies

MEETA RAIIVLOCHAN AND M RAIIVLOCHAN

WITH A POSSIBLE trade war looming over the horizon, a move to inward-looking economies and conservative governments across the world, it is a good time to re-examine some fundamental assumptions we tend to make about the economy. It has been traditionally believed that greater capital inflows, production incentives to industry and cleaning up NPAs in the banking system is a good recipe to sustain high levels of growth. It is so much easier to focus on tangible factors like land, labour, capital and law, after all, governments can make policies about what is tangible. Yet we suggest that it is the intangible factors in this equation that may well be the necessary catalyst to growth.

One of the intangible factors that is seri-

equation that may well be the necessary catalyst to growth. One of the intangible factors that is seri-ously wanting in Indian society, is the marked absence of trust. There is a lack of marked absence of trust. There is a lack of trust between businesses, between business and government, between business and government, between business and consumers. We tend to be so caught up in our daily lives that we forget the huge stresses that lack of trust creates for us. Businesses, especially small ones, spend so much time and energy on working to see that their payments come on time, in dealing with corrupt taxmen, in worrying whether land titles are safe. Cases of bounced cheques clog up the justice system. The majority of entrepreneurs in India today do not come from business families; there is no risk cushion to fall back upon. If only the stresses created by uncertainty over timely payments, land titles, corrupt officials were minimal, many more young

people could either move into business or scale-up their enterprise. Lack of trust increases the costs of doing business and the stresses involved, exponentially.

Trust is what distinguishes modern societies. Hundreds of years ago, the circle of trust was limited only to family and friends. The growth of modern society has hinged on expanding the circle of trust beyond those whom we know personally.

Scientists have discovered that human beings are hard-wired to live in small communities of 150-200 people. The only means to move beyond this small size — to scale up society, to live together and work effectively — is to be able to find mechanisms that allow us to trust each other.

Today people expect that when they go out for work or to the market, they can do so safely. When we buy food, we trust that the quality of food is good, that milk is safe to drink, that the vegetables are safe to consume. We trust that our money is safe in banks. Trust underlies nearly all social transactions in modern society. Today people undertake big financial transactions on e-commerce websites with vendors whom they do not know. They do so because such websites have been able to build trust in a way that allows people to use payment gateways and complete transactions. Even a small school-level project depends on trust. Different people have to work together to make a design; to find parts for the project; learn how to integrate those parts together.

On the other hand, think about the costs imposed by a lack of trust. Think about the matter of securing your own home. When we goout, we shut the doors and windows. Some people install special locks and bars; some install CCTV cameras. All of this costs a lot of money to install and maintain. Think about an alternate situation. About a local-

about an alternate situation. About a local-ity os asfe that no such need arises.

That automatically removes a lot of pressure from everyone's mind. It allows citizens to move around rather than stay home and guard their house. It saves citizens' money and provides them with peace of mind. It allows them time to ex-plore more meaningful activities, for work or leisure.

Now imagine a situation in which it is

or iesture.

Now imagine a situation in which it is not just the locality but the whole city that is safe. Think of the amount of time and money saved. Now scale this up to a whole society. And you can imagine the tremendous possibilities that we can unlock. As a thought experiment, let us see if an enterprise like building greenfield cities could be achieved not by investing huge capital but by building trust. Building greenfield urban spaces that India needs urgently, is about trust between government and landholders, developers, private investors. Investible resources in the shape of Iand and money exist; finding those resources depends on building trust with those who own the land and the money. Building trust is about truitiding robust and predictable institutional mechanisms and about honouring contracts.

It has been estimated that to build a greenfield city, 2,500–3,000 hectares of land and nearly one lahk crore rupees in hard cash would be needed. Such a city could support a population of roughly five lakh people. It is not necessary for government to provide the cash; it is possible to find indi-vidual investors, But to find those investors, vidual investors. But to find those investors, we need to build institutional mechanisms and draw up contracts that generate trust. The role of the government is not to offer viability gap funding but to help the owners of the land negotiate a deal with the investors, and further to help the owners to enforce the contract. India does not really have a shortage of capital but there is indeed a vast lack of trust.

On a busy road, we have to follow road.

nave a snortage or capital but there is in-deed a vast lack of trust.

On a busy road, we have to follow road rules to regulate movement. If each com-muter were to move or stop as per their own convenience, there would be chaos, So, all decide to follow signals. That is how thousands of cars and trucks and scooters are able to navigate the roads. Societies that have high levels of trust have lower costs of doing business. If we can create institutional systems that inspire trust between people, we can be so much more effective, prosperous, efficient. Let us think about how to build a society where we can trust each other. That is the future to look forward to.

Meeta Rajivlochan is secretary, Youth ffairs, Government of India. Views are personal. Rajivlochan is a historian based in New Chandigarh

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ONE STEP FORWARD

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, The hottest year' (IE, January 3). The government's plan for weather preparedness is wel-come. Investing in RBI's Climate Risk Information System to predict heavy come. Investing in RBI's Climate Risk Information System to predict heavy downpours and heat spells will minimise the loss of lives from landslide Moderney and the set of loss of lives from landslide admape at the loss of lives from landslide admape at the local level, where climate disturbances cause disruption that disproportionately affects the lower socioeconomic class. Climate change hurts CDP infrastructure and agriculture output. The simple fact remains that humans can survive only by living in harmony with nature — and the world climate change reports suggest the same.

LR Murmu, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, The hottest year' (IE, January 3). Climate change has already started chipping away at India's once-healthy ecosystem: Extreme heat spells have become worse, spreading to new areas and setting new highs on the west coast and southern india; there has west coast and southern India; there has been a change in rainfall patterns with a stark decline in monsoon rains post-1950s and an increase in the frequency of heavy rains; increased droughts post-1970s have affected India's crop production endangering India's food security; and glacier melt in the Himalayan region

has impacted millions in the Gange has impacted millions in the Ganges basin. Urban planning to miligate the ef-fects of urban heat islands, technologi-cal advancements including lydro-me-teorological systems, R&D for drought-resistant crops, efficient inriga-tion and use of groundwater resources, and coastal embaniments among other measures need to be implemented at the earliest to avoid any further destruction. Valbhaw Goyal, Chondigurh

PRIORITISE DIALOGUE

PRIORITISE DIALOGUE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Playing with spectres" (IE, January 4). West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee"s recent remarks against the Border Security Force (BSF), accusing it of 'sending goons and murderers across the border," should raise eyebrows. At an Official meeting, she alleged that the BSF was executing an "inside job" to facilitate infiltration from Bangladesh, While lapses may occur along the porous boried the order of the top long the profus boried the top the proposition of the programment of the work of the programment of the programm credible information on BSF inefficiency, it should have been shared through of-ficial channels rather than aired publicly. Constructive dialogue and coordinates between state agencies and the BSF would serve West Bengal's interests bet-ter than public blame games. Khokan Das, Kolkota



New pain points on China border

Mega dam on Brahmaputra and new counties in occupied Ladakh can adversely affect relations

ndia's decision to proceed cautiously in efforts to normalise ties with China is understandable in the light of recent worrisome developments, including Beijing's green-lighting of what will become the world's largest hydropower dam on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra, and the creation of two counties in occupied regions of the Union territory of Ladakh. Both moves come a little more than two months after Delhi and Beijing reached an understanding on the disengagement of forces along the Line of Actual Control as part of the process of ending the military Control as part of the process of ending the military standoff that began early 2020. Throughout this process, the Chinese side has sought to create an impression that things are back to normal between the two countries and the border issue should be put in its "appropriate place" while relations are taken forward in other spheres, primarily trade and business.

The Indian side contends that the resolution of the face-off in the Ladakh sector remains a "work in progress" and China's recent process may only

progress", and China's recent moves may only complicate this process. China's plan to build a \$137-billion dam on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo in the ecologically fragile Tibetan plateau is certain to have tremendous implications for millions of people in the lower riparian States of Bangladesh and India. This is why New Delhi emphasised the need for transparency and consultations with downstream countries while conveying its concerns over the dam project to Beijing. It isn't enough for a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson to claim the project won't negatively impact other regions, especially at a time when ecological experts have questioned the viability and impact of such massive dams and the climate crisis has impacted flows of cross-border rivers.

chas has impacted hows of cross-border rivers.

India's protest over the two new counties created by China that include occupied regions of Ladakh is linked to lingering concerns about the resolution of the overall border issue. The two sides have failed to make major progress in the Ladakh sector after decades of negotiations and the Chinese side still doesn't seem to negotiatoris and the Chinese side still doesn't seem to be showing appreciation for India's sensitivities. All of these moves come against the backdrop of China's unrelenting military modernisation, including the launch of a new naval assault vessel and new steath combat jets. India must remain as clear-eyed as it is being in its approach to the rapprochement with China and proceed with abundant caution while deciding on the next steps in the bilateral relationship.

Ridding campuses of caste discrimination

he Supreme Court's directive asking the UGC to notify within six weeks new regulations to fight caste-based discrimination and suicides in higher education institutions (HEIs) has come not a moment too soon. Since the tragic suicide of the University of Hyderabad doctoral student Rohith Vernula amid allegations of caste-based bias by university authorities. in January 2016, it has been clear that despite their lofty goals, India's premier campuses are riven by persistent discriminatory attitudes that hurt young students from marginalised communities. At a time when people from diverse backgrounds are entering universities in numbers larger than ever before, the bias hurts not just

numbers larger than ever before, the bals hurs not used individual but collective and national progress.

Over the past few decades, HEIs have grown in number and stature, and the importance of a higher-education degree has zoomed. Unfortunately, this expansion has not prompted an expulsion of discriminatory attitudes among a section of the student group, professors and administration staff. Students from poorer families, marginalised castes and first-generation learner backgrounds often find it and insegeneration learner backgrounds orten and it difficult to survive on campuses — not only because they fail to get adequate help but also due to hostility. The death of medical student Payal Tadvi in 2019 due to caste-based bullying in a Maharashtra medical college was evidence that bias can't be removed by short-term

was evidence that bias can't be removed by short-term responses or stop-gap solutions.

Can the regulations work? A lot will depend on systematic and thoughtful implementation. The top court is right in stressing that the rules must be more than symbolic gestures and also in asserting that the judges would scrutinise the practical effectiveness of rules that the UGC started drafting in 2023 but has not yet put into action. It was only fitting that the mothers of Vemula and Tadvi were the main petitioners in the case. The least our education system can ensure is the case. The least our education system can ensure is their tragedies are not repeated.

[STRAIGHTFORWARD]



Challenges the world must confront in 2025

Global leaders will need to address questions arising from wars, the climate crisis, and evolution of Artificial

Intelligence

et's look at some of New Year's Day headlines. In New Orleans in the United States (US), a terroit simple of the New Orleans in the United States (US), a terroit simple of the New Orleans in the United States (US), a terroit of the orleans of the New Orleans in the Orleans of the New Orleans incident of the New Orleans incident of the New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded in Las Vegus. An Interesting feet is the Use New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded in Las Vegus. An Interesting feet is the Use New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Las Vegus. An Interesting feet is the Use New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Las Vegus. An Interesting feet is the Use State of the New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Las Vegus. An Interesting feet is the Use New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Las Vegus. An Interesting feet is the Guest of the New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Case of the New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Case of the New Orleans incident, at ruck exploded the Case of the New Orleans incident at Public Case of the New Orleans incident at Public Case of the New Orleans incident of th

borough of New York. A shootout in a nightelub left II people injured. Both these incidents are being investigated. Till the time of writing this article, police in the US had not declared them as clear acts of terror, again brought to light the growing uncase in American society.

Apart from these three incidents in the US, two more developments that unfolded in other parts of the globe have the potential for long-term adverse consequences for the world. On New Year's night, I srael conducted an air raid on Gazz killing 12 people. In the second incident, Ukraine took control of a gas pipeline and stopped the supply of gas from Russia to the rest of Europe. It will have consequences for the Russian conomy, of course. But what about the impact it could have on Europe, which faces bone-chilling cold at this time of the year?

What do the beneadlines suggest?

What do the beneadlines suggest?

What do the headlines suggest?

What do the President Trump will have to contend with challenges in the international as well as domestic areass. New Orleans, New York, and Las Vegas have once again made it amply clear that the veneer of US invincibility can be breached from within. In such a scenario, how will Trump be able to satisfactorily

restove Israei Hamas and the Russia-Ukraine conflict?

The Russia-Ukraine conflict, about to enter its fourth year, is raising doubts about Russian military might and superiority. The last three years have shown that strongman Vladimir Putils too has chinks in his armour. Cracks are appearing in his fearsome image and the reputation he had so assiduously built over the years. History is testimony to the fears that a declining autocrat tries every trick in the trade to destroy offers. Since the gain pipeline incessed in the state of the strong of the state of the strong of the strong



New Orleans, New York, and Las Vegas have once again made it amply clear that the veneer of US invincibility can be breached from within.

lations are rife that the challenges for a consensus on climate actions are going to intensify in the years ahead. The early onset of record-breaking winters is also an indication of the same. Trump's win is going to weaken the effort to tackle this challenge further. His extreme views on the climate reisis are known to all. Another issue that has piqued our interest and attention is Artificial Intelligence (Al). Debates are raging globally about its strengths and pitfalis. Yuval Noah Harari, a popular writer and professor at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, has raised some pertinent questions. He insists that Al can lie. Harari gives the example that when Open Al Jaunched CAPTCHA to text its efficacy. CAPTCHA, It was later given access to a web page called taskrabbit. ChatGPT4 outsourced the task of cracking the CAPTCHA telling the service provider that it was blind. The engineers who created the algorithms were stunned to tell lies.

This is the reason that Harari and other public intellectuals are questioning he role of At. They insist that At will be lethal as this is the first tool created by humans that can think and make decisions on its own.

There's no doubt that propple with malicious intentions will misuse At. At the beginning of the year 2024 on January Zt. At was used to clone the voice of the US president Joe Biden and it was employed to make thousands of automated calls to the voice of the reason of the public properties of automated calls to the voice of the think they are the public properties of the public properties of the public properties. sands of automated calls to the vot-ers in New Hampshire state in the US. The company, Lingo Telecom, that undertook the operation was later fined \$1 million. In India, too, we have the case of actor Rashmika Mandana, whose image was mor-phed. The question is: Has science created a Frankenstein for the burnan need:

human race?
Will the year 2025 be able to create a consensus on the three challenges threatening humanity — wars, the climate crisis, and Ai?

Ensuring Digital India is safe, secure and inclusive

hen we talk about the global future, then human-centric approaches should be foremost. These words by Prime Minister Nareada Modi at the recent United Nations Summit of the Future reflect India's vision of putting people first. This philosophy has guided our efforts in shaping the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025. The rules, after being finalised, would operationalise the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, bringing to life our commitment to safeguarding citizens' right to personal data protection.

brights in life our commitment to safeguarding citizens' right to personal data proterior of our powerment. The Indian cittizen is at the heart of the DPDP Bules, 2025.
In a word increasingly dominated by data,
we believe it is imperative to place individuals at the heart of the governance framework. These rules empower citizens
with rights such as informed consent, data erasure, and the ability to
appoint digital nominees. Citizens
will no longer feel helpless in the
face of breaches or unauthorised
data usage. They will have tools to
protect and manage their digital
identifies effectively.

The rules are designed with simplicity and clarity, ensuring that
protect and manage their digital
identifies effectively.

The rules are designed with simplicity and clarity, ensuring that
eventual and exercise their rights.
From ensuring that consent is sought in
clear terms to mandating that information
be provided to the citizens in Brighish or any
of the 22 Indian languages listed in the Constitution, the framework reflects our commitment to inclusivity.

Safeguarding children: Children require
special care in the digital age. Recognising
this, the rules mandate verifiately
and atto finions. Additional safeguards ensure
that children are shelded from exploitation,
unauthorised profiling, and other digital
harms. These provisions reflect our dedication to creating a safer digital space for
increasing a safer digital space for
digital economy has been a global success
story, and we are determined to keep this
momentum allow. Our framework ensures
personal data protection for citizens while



ens now won't feel helpless in the face caches or unauthorised data usage.

enabling innovation in the digital economy.

Unlike some international models that lean heavily towards regulation, our approach is pragmatic and growth-oriented. This balance ensures that citizens are protected without stiffing the innovative spirit that drives our startups and businesses. Small businesses and startups will face lower compliance burdens.

The rules are designed with graded responsibilities, tailong into account the varying capacities of stakeholders. Larger companies, based on assessment of data fludcaires, will have higher obligations, ensuring accountability without disrupting growth. A digital-first philosophy: At the core of these rules is a "digital by design" philosophy. The Data Protection Board, tasked with resolving grievances and enforcing compliance, will function predominantly as a digital office. By leveraging technology, we ensure efficiency, transparency, and speed. Citizens can file complaints, track progress, and seek resolutions without unnecessary physical interactions.

actions.

This digital-first approach extends to consent mechanisms and data management workflows. By streamlining processes, we make it easier for fiduciaries to comply, and for citizens to engage, fostering trust

easet or neucotares to compy, and in the system.

In the system.

Inclusive approach: The journey to the framing of these rules has been as inclusive as their intent. Grounded in the principles of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, the draft rules are a product of videranging inputs from various stakeholders and the study of global best practices.

We have opened a 36-day public consultation period, inviting feedback and suggester, and the study of global best practices, but the production of the p

initiatives will be undertaken to educate the citizens about their rights on their personal data.

A vision for the future: As we unveil these rules, we are not merely addressing present challenges but laying the groundwork for a secure and innovative digital future. The Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules. 2025, reflect india's leadership in shaping global data governance norms. By placing citizens at the centre and fostering a conductive environment for innovation, we are setting a precedent for the world to follow.

Our commitment is clear? Protect, empower, and enable every Indian in this digital age. I encourage every citizen, business, and civil society group to participate in this dialogue by sharing comments and suggestions during the consultation period. Together, let us reflen these rules to create a framework that truly represents the aspirations of a secure, inclusive, and thriving digital india.

Ashutel Nathonavis the minister for

Ashwini Vaishnaw is the minister for ectronics and information technology, mation & broadcasting, and railways. The views expressed are persona

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY) PRESIDENT, UKRAINE

The more gas from Europe's true partners is available on the market, the sooner the last negative fallout of European energy dependence on Russia will be overcome

Roping in universities for a sustainable future

Mamidala

Joins also led to irreversible consequences because of their impact on the environment. Multiple actors must play their role in mitigating these consequences.

First, higher education institutes (HEIs) through their knowledge creation must prepare students for a sustainable thature. Second, industries must develop pechnologies that are low-carbon and clean. Third, society must have more awareness of its responsibility in adopting sustainable practices.

Indian HEIs can play as important role in Indian HEIs can play as important role in Indian HEIs can play as important role in Indian HEIs can play as interest to the Indian HEIs can play as Indian HEIs can play as Indian HEIs can be added to the Indian HEIs can her added the Indi

students and the use of this knowledge by local communities and governments. It is crucial to have the local community's willingness to accept the consequences of new knowledge created in HEIs regarding sustainable practices. This also entails the HEIs converging the local community's concerns into their research. One of the effective ways in which HEIs can scale sustainability initiatives is to narraer with communities amount their camaraer.

local community's concerns into their research. One of the effective ways in which HEIs can scale sustainability initiatives is to partner with communities around their campuses and educate both students and local communities on sustainability practices. Such collaborations will be valuable learning opportunities for students to gain practical insights into real-world sustainability challenges. The undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum frameworks issued by the University Grants Commission (UCG) allow sudents to carn credits from such community outcomes and the control of the contr

Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar is chairman, UGC and former vice-chancellor, JNU. The views expressed are persona

Pakistan punishes Taliban for TTP attacks



YOGESH GUPTA

Pakistan (TTP) in the Paktia hideouts in the Paktia province of Afghanistan, killing dozens of people, mostly women and chilmostly women and chil-dren. This was in response to the TTP's raids against Pakistani security forces on December 21 in south Waziristan, which resulted in the killing of 16 Pak-istan soldiers. As US-made weapons seized during the Taliban takeover of Mehanistan in

takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 became available to the TTP it increased its attacks inside Pakistan its attacks inside Pakistan in 2024, killing 1,612 securi-ty personnel and others in 444 terrorist attacks. Last year was the deadliest in terms of terror attacks, as nor Pakistan secures.

Pakistan's reading of the Taliban — whom it reared and supported for more than ades against the US led international security es in the expectations of having a friendly regime in Kabul, which would provide has turned out to be com-pletely wrong. The Taliban has accused Islamabad of pocketing much of the inter-national aid it got from the US and other countries in the name of Afghanistan. The two countries have also dif-fered on the installation of a fered on the installation of a fence by Pakistan in the bor-dering areas as Afghanistan does not accept the Durand Line marking the border, claiming that it was an artifi-cial line dividing the Pash-ture unfaithern both wides. tuns unfairly on both sides. In 2021, the then Imm

Khan government of Pakistan engaged in peace talks with the TTP, which were facilitated by the Taliban. The facilitated by the Taliban. The year-long negotiations, which included a brief ceasefire, failed without the ceasing of statacks by the TTP According to some Pukistanis, these talks provided useful time to the TTP to regroup and boost its strength. Pukistan has given except warning set the Try. en several warnings to the Taliban at the highest levels, but the latter has shown no seri-ous intent to control the TTP.

ous intent to control the TTP.

The Taliban and TTP share ethnic ties and have fought together against the West for years. The Taliban has ideological sympathy with the TTP's objective of establishing a Shara state in the taling a Sharia state in the tribreas of Pakistan and uses TTP's militant activities to pressure Pakistan whenever it wants. Also, if the Taliban were to take harsh action against the TTP, the latter's fighters could defect to the



GER: As US-made er of Afghanistan became

Pakistan will

brunt of TTP

and such militant

groups seldom

abandon their

ideological beliefs.

Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK), an offshoot of ISIS, with whom they share jihadist beliefs and deep-rooted bonds and which is active in several parts of eastern and north-western Afghanistan. It would, thus, weaken the Taliban and

strengthen its enemy.
At present, the Taliban has given a decisive blow to the ISK, killing several of its senior commanders and keeping the group's terror activities under check.
The TTP attacks have increased destabilisation and insecurity in Pakistan and

insecurity in Pakistan and encouraged other dissident groups, such as the Balochs and Pashtuns, to fight against the Pakistani state. Pak-istan's hopes of attracting

foreign investment from Sau-di Arabia and the UAE have not borne fruit. China, which is Pakistan's "iron brother" is unhappy about inadequate ecurity arrangements for its 1,200 workers who are buildng critical infrastructure in Pakistan as the TTP and Baloch separatists have tar-geted Chinese experts in sev-Baloch separatists have to geted Chinese experts in se eral attacks. With Pakista unable to pay China's loa and provide foolproof secu ty to its personnel, China h continue to face the attacks, as the latter's crusade is religious

stalled work on most projects. The TTP attacks leave Pakistan with few viable options. Pakistan has no desire to mount a full-scale war - which it is unlikely to win — against the Taliban. It has seen how the Afghans have fought valiantly

against the Soviets and Americans in the last four decades. The Taliban may not have a big army like Pak-istan, but it has a brilliant record of mounting guerrilla operations, with its human suicide bombers and hit-and-run attacks. Even Pakand-run attacks. Even Pak-istan's allies like China and the US would not favour that option for their own reasons. The US would not like the Taliban to be distracted from its fight against the ISK. Chi-na nurtures the ambition to extend its Belt and Road Ini-tiative to Afrannistan and tiative to Afghanistan and carry out projects in mining. oil exploration and infra structure sectors. Also, then the Taliban will not be able

the Taliban will not be able to control the China-centric terror group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, in Afghanistan. The deterioration in Pakistan's relations with the Taliban has allowed India to reassess its policy towards the Taliban, reopen its embassy and provide emergency assisvide tance to the Afghan people tance to the Afghan people and consider resuming work on its economic proj-ects in Afghanistan. The Afghan Embassy in New Delhi is now being run by the representatives of the Tabliban government. Taliban government.

Pakistan has taken a few steps to increase the cost for the Taliban in allowing the TTP These include the repa-triation of about 8,00,000 Afghan refugees and disrup-tion of Afghanistan's land that the Taliban was already facing a grim humanitarian situation, with a shortage of food, energy and other essential items, and was hardly in a position to look after so

a position to look after so many more people. The Taliban has also not relented in any of its policies about broad-basing its gov-ernment, allowing education to women beyond the middle school or other human rights desnife facing severe sanodespite facing severe sanctions and near-total isolation on the world stage. It has enforced its religious codes of conduct in an authoritarian manner, oblivious of the glob-

manner, oblivious of the glob-al public opinion.

It has become clear that the Taliban regime is not collapsing or being thrown out of power. More sanctions on the Taliban will only com-pound the misery of the Afghan record. Afghan people.

Afghan people.

Pakistan is continuing its dialogue with the Taliban on the cessation of TTP attacks. The Taliban has asked Pak-istanto allow trade to resume istan to allow trade to resume and assured it that it would shift the TTP elements away from the border. It is doubt-ful that the Taliban will keep this promise and change course. Given the experi-ence, it is likely that Pak-idan will keep istan will continue to face the brunt of TTP attacks, as the latter's crusade is reli-gious and such militant groups seldom abandon groups seldom aban their ideological beliefs.

Balancing privacy rights and investigative powers



Court recently upheld a high court order quash ing the arr ing the arrest of former Haryana MLA Suren-der Panwar in a money-laun-dering case, while terming his 15-hour-long interrogation by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) as 'high-handedness' and 'inhuman conduct. and 'inhuman conduct'.

In another case, or December 13, 2024, an interim order of the SC drew the red line for the ED ov red line for the ED over access to and copying the content stored in computers and mobile phones seized from Santiago Martin, the 'lottery king', and his asso-ciates. The court did not pre-scribe any date for lifting the ban in the Santiago case. It ordered that the matter be It ordered that the matter be heard along with other co ected cases in which the ED's demand to the appli-ED's demand to the appli-cants to produce electronic devices had been chal-lenged and guidelines were sought for such seizures. If the interim order in the case becomes a precedent, it would have serious conse-quences on the powers of the

(LEAs). However, at the same time, it would be a welsame time, it would be a wel-come reminder to the citi-zens that their fundamental right to life, including right to privacy, and the constitu-tional guarantee against self-incrimination are sacrosanct and that 'fishing expedi-tions' by the LEAs under the cover of investigations the cover of investigations

are not to be allowed. Justice Felix Frankfurter, in Nardone vs United States in Nardone vs United States (1939), gave the "exclusion-ary rule of evidence" and stamped the "doctrine of fruits of the poisonous tree". It postulates that ille-gally procured evidence becomes inadmissible in court proceedings; if the source of evidence or the evidence itself is tainted, anything agined from it is anything gained from it is also tainted and cannot be

also tainted and cannot be used against the accused. Evidence collected by questionable means, like by using unauthorised phone-tapping or recording without the knowledge of the subject, accessing private information and personal secrets contained in electronic gadgets, conducting illegal and unwarranted searches and conducting illegal and unwarranted searches and recording events using a recording events using secret cameras, etc, certainly fall in the category of tainted evi-dence. Indiscriminate confis-cation of personal laptops and mobile phones by the LEAs and accessing the con-tents stored therein also run the risk of intruding into pri-



UNDER SC LENS: The issue of law enforcement agencies' investigation powers is contentious. FILE PHOTO

vacy, compromising business secrets and fishing into pri-vate affairs of individuals; at times, even bringing their personal and business activities to a halt.

On the other hand, tracing the digital footprint and filter-ing the electronic record of ing the electronic record of suspects have become a necessity in almost all heinous crimes, including crimes against women, finan-cial scams, money-launder-ing, drug trafficking and offences against the state and national security, etc. Perhaps, this is the reason the legislature, hitherto, has refrained from subscribing to the doc trine of "fruits of the poison

trine of "fruits of the poison-ous tree" in Indian laws. Accordingly, the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA), which prescribe srules of evidence, is silent on the admissibility of illegally pro-cured evidence, although it declares confession caused

Denying ED access to computers and

mobile phones of

memory.

offenders needs to be examined as electronic and digital devices have almost become an extension of human

by inducement, coercion, threat or promise irrelevant in criminal proceedings. Even the SC, in RM Malkani vs State of Maha-rushtra (1972), has validated the admissibility of illegally tape-recorded evidence. In the case of Umesh Kumar vs State of AP (2013), the court has observed: "Even if a doc-

has observed: "Even if a doc-ument is procured through unlaw ful means, its admissi-bility would not be barred if it it is relevant and genuine." In fact, Indian laws put the relevancy of evidence on a higher pedestal than the source of its procurement. Illegally collected evidence Illegally collected evidence admissible even after the is admissible even after the right to privacy has been recognised as a Fundamental Right by the Supreme Court in Justice KS Puttasucamy (retd) vs Union of India and Others (2017). In fact, in our constitutional scheme, no right,

including the right to life, is absolute and may be curtailed in accordance with the procedure established by law. Under Section 349 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), the court can force a suspect to give his handwriting and voice sample; Section 53 of the BNSS allows even the BNSS allows even the extraction of body fluids from an accused person by force to meet the demand

including the right to life.

force to meet the demand of investigations.
Electronic and digital devices have almost become an extension of human memory for a majority of the people nowadays. In Selvi and Others vs State of Karnataka (2010, the Constitutional Bench of the Sephson of the Sep tional Bench of the SC allowed the recovery of infor-mation from the mind of an accused after obtaining his informed consent before the informed consent before the court by resorting to 'narco-analysis', 'brain-mapping' and 'lie detection test', as an aid to investigation. Denying ED access to the computers and mobile phones of offenders needs to be examined in this back-

be examined in this back-drop, too. The interim order in the case should also be viewed in light of the fact that electronic and digital records electronic and digital records are included in the definition of 'document', as contained in the BSA, and Sections 94 to 97 of the BNSS empowers the LEAs to summon, under-take searches and seize docu-ments during investigations. The order has the implication

The order has the implication of taking away this power from the LEAs and may halt investigations in those cases where digital and electronic evidence are crucial.

The investigation needs of the LEAs and yardsticks to judge the admissibility of evidence in courts are two separate domains. Whereas a strict law of evidence needs to be applied during needs to be applied during needs to be applied during the trial, the LEAs deserve freedom, under strict vigi-lance of the court, to find out lance of the court, to find out and present the truth before the courts. The protection of citizenry from overzealous law enforcers, though, is equally important. Unarguably, the issues at hand in the case are con-

hand in the case are con-tentious. Finding a balance between the contrary demands of the LEAs for demands of the LEAs for just investigations and safeguarding the constitutional rights of the people, both at the same time, is a tightrope walk. It is, however, a given that any blanket prohibition on the powers of the LEAs would not augur well for public safety and national security. Every case needs to be decided on its own merit. decided on its own merit.

The recommendation of 94th Law Commission of 94th Law Commission of India to give discretion to the trial courts to apply the exclusionary rule of evidence if such evidence tends to bring the administration of justice into disrepute appears to be a prudent alternative.

MIN

03

-07

Mussoorie

QUICK CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
 1 Bird's resting place (5)
 4 Enchant (7)
 8 Torn piece of fabric (3)
 9 Indifference (9)
 10 Apparition (7)
 11 Much overweight (5)
 13 Receptacle for animal feed (6)
 15 Set free from captivity (6)
- 15 Set free from captivity (6) 18 Set of beliefs (5) 19 The lilac (7) 21 Double meaning (9) 23 Tedious routine (3) 24 Relate (7) 25 Providential (5)

- bridge (7)
 2 Lengthy complicated procedure (9)
 3 Place much frequented (5)
 4 Look well on (6)
 5 Attractive (7)
 6 Equality of score (3)
 7 Accordingly (5)

- Accordingly (5) Odd (9)
- 12 Odd (9)
 14 Country on Black Sea (7)
 16 Quite so (7)
 17 Allot as share (6)
 18 Embrace (5)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Dutch uncle, 8 Ideal, 9 Stutter, 10 Derange, 11 Train, 12 Aghast, 14 Preach, 17 Cycle, 19 Art deco, 21 Reading, 22 Union,

witt 2 Unearth, 3 Colon, 4 Unseen, 5 Clutter, 6 Extra, 7 French ern, 8 Indian corn, 13 Special, 15 Atelier, 16 Ganges, 18 Cramp,

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

su do ku SATURDAY'S SOLUTION СПҮ MAX New Delhi Ludhiana Sirsa JANUARY 6, 2025, MONDAY Manali Shukla Paksha Tithi 7, up to 6.24 pm Parigha Yoga up to 2.05 am Utrabhadrapad Nakshatra up to 7.07 pm Moon in Pisces sign Kargil Shri Guru Gobind Singh Jyanti 16

■ Gandmoola start 7.07 pm



CONTRAPUNTO

The amount of hassle involved in travel can be overwhelming

- PAUL THEROUX

Ugly Is Official

Monuments to museums, India does a generally poor, sometimes shoddy, job of preserving things of beauty

This is peak tourist season. Indians are in travel-mode. But travel is not without its headaches. Winter fog, for example, can be sorrowful. An Agra story has further underlined how grinchy touristing in India can be. Encroachments are of course dime a dozen. But the way in which Mubarak Manzil was razed even as UP's archaeological department issued it a protection notice and officials from Lucknow visited it to start preservation efforts, is particularly ugly. It is credible that the demolition was in connivance with notice and administrative officials. This story resonates with police and administrative officials. This story resonates widely because it is so familiar – various petty interests weigh down



widely because it is so familiar—various petty interests weigh down Indian tourism everywhere.

Last year, Supreme Court found itself "amazed at the audacity" with which over 6,000 trees were cut down inside Jim Corbett National Park. It is a fact that few countries can offer the bouquet of tourist delights India can, from tiger safaris and living root bridges and 43 Unesco World Heritage Sites to palace hotels, spiritual wellsprings, and a dazzling variety of glorious cuisines. But tiny Dubai gets more foreign tourists, many of them Indian. That Indians finally have the leisure and incomes to start seeing the world bigtime is a welcome trend. May it go from strength to strength, Question is, don't they deserve to see home wonders maintained at the to see home wonders maintained at the same standard that they encounter abroad?

same standard that they encounter abroad?

Everything that discourages international tourists, is a pain for Indians too. Those who post a photo of themselves from Kolkata's Victoria Memorial or Ajmer's Ana Sagar Lake have to first undertake untold contortions, to make sure the cobwebs and the garbage, respectively, don't steal the show. Priceless artworks made shabby by yellowing notes and dingy tubelights tell visitors across the tountry's museums: stay away Baroda to Santiniketan, are budding museologists being trained to truly take on this key challenge? The kind of autonomy enjoyed by, say, London's British Museum is unthinkable here. Politicians and administrators find it impossible not to interfere.

And then there are the mountain and beach towns that have been miserably over-touristed. These are crying for a breather. Back to Agra, another reason its story resonates is because there is a feeling that if India's top tourist destination, barring Ayodhya now, fixes its problems, the rest can also hope for the same.

Uniformly Merited

GOI's merit-based promotion for Lt-Gens must have transparent criteria to avoid charges of political subjectivity

In a big move for the army, a new promotion policy is being rolled out for lieutenant generals that will be based on merit traher than seniority. The new system comes into force from Mar 31 and will be applicable for selection of serving Lt-Gens for top-level appointments in the impending integrated theatre commands and tri-service establishments. Joint theatre commands are a much-needed reform of the Indian military that needs to be responsive to 21st century security challenges. Therefore, a promotion policy that helps operationalise this change is welcome. There can be no arguments against promoting meritocracy in senior ranks of the army. But where there is a niggle is that measuring meritocracy in the forces can be a politically subjective exercise. This is not a small concern that can be ignored.

It still not clear whether the new promotion policy will also be applicable to the selection of the army vice-chief and seven commandersin-chief; this would be logical. As per existing policy promotion to commander-in-chief level is based purely on seniority. The argument against the new policy is that officers who become Lt-Gens are assessed on merit every step of the way. Therefore, a three-star general already possesses all the credentials to take on the highest responsibilities within the army. Going by seniority at this stage insulates promotions from external interference and adheres to the professional ethos of the army.

But that doesn't mean Lt-Gens can't be promoted on merit. As long as the executive remembers that the army's high professional stan-

ference and adheres to the professional ethos of the army. But that doesn't mean Lt-Gens can't be promoted on merit. As long as the executive remembers that the army's high professional standards were hard-won going back to the days of Gen Cariappa, who worked hard to insulate the army from external interference under the Nehru era. Thus, a way forward must be found by eliminating subjectivity in the meritocratic promotions of serving Lt-Gens. Absolute transparency and accountability are a must as the army transitions to a new-age fighting machine facing a potential three-front (Pakistan, China, Bangladesh) security challenge.

GRAP trap

To tackle the problem of pollution, authorities might need to learn the ABC of AQI



As the new year dawns NCR continues to GRAPple with the deady bane of pollution – a recent proposal being a Supreme Court order to impose a year-round ban on fireworks in Delhi-authorities entrusted with the task of curbing the menace face a semantic challenge.

GRAP of Graded Response Action Plan, to tackle pollution comes in four stages, depending on the numeric evaluations of AQI, Air Quality Index. When AQI reaches a level designated as Poor, GRAP II comes into play and so on to Severe, and Very Severe, where Ho GRAP IV is rolled out, with schools partially or wholly shut, office staff urged to work from home, and construction activity brough to a halt.

The problem is that with AQI termed Poor having become the new Normal, successive ratings have in the public mind been correspondingly downgraded, with Very Severe losing the Very and becoming Merely Severe. What happens if the situation was sension of GRAP Vor seven GRAP VD in seven GRAP VD in the to be implemented.

A new set of adjectival AQI terminology has to be formulated to meter the occasion. In order to do this the authorities might do worse than to go back to their ABCs.

Secondopinion:

Secondopinion:

than to go back to their ABCs.

Starting with A, if AQI reaches a new high it might be labelled Alarming, Appalling, or even Apocalyptic.

B may prove problematic AQI wise. Benighted could be a possibility, though admittedly a weak candidate. And Bloody Hell might be ruled out as being epithetical and unparliamentary. However, as though to make up for B's verbal shortcomings, C comes with an embarrassment of riches. There's Catastrophic, and Calamitous, and Catacitysmic, and even Catatonic.

Dean provide Desperate, Disastrous, Devastating, Despairing, and Doomsday. Then we come to B and (Editor's note: The blank space left at the bottom of the column suggests that the writer has, literally, run out of words to describe the ever-worsening levels of AQI. that the write levels of AQI)

Guns, Trucks & Shoulder Shrugs

While it's impossible to prevent all mass violence, US stands out among rich countries in failing to even try. What psychologists call learned helplessness is everywhere, from New Orleans to Las Vegas



Columnist based

Column

learned to avoid the pain by going to the other side of the cage. The dogs who didn't have the levers just laid down and whimpered. It's not just that US policy-makers aren't trying to fix the violence: the public has learned that there's nothing they can do, and isn't even trying any more.

For many, the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012 were the breaking point. If the murder of



20 young children couldn't spur govt into action, the nothing could. Despite efforts from then-Presiden Obama, Republicans in House and Senate were able to ock even modest gun control measures—like requiring ckground checks for all purchases—from moving to law. States where Democrats had control were more into law States where Democrats had control were more successful in passing some laws to try and prevent mass shootings, but even these have been largely rolled back by recent Supreme Court decisions. In addition to legal barriers, rising levels of conspi-racism have complicated govt responses. Just as many

Om New Orleans to Las Vegas

Americans refused Covid vaccines because of the belief that the vaccines contained secret computer chips that would work with new 5G cell phone towers to track or control them, about a quarter of Americans say that the Sandy Hook shootings never even happened.

Rather than passing stronger laws to mitigate the likelihood of mass violence, in recent years, many states in US have eased them. As of 2021, for instance, Texas followed laws passed in Iowa, Tennesseo, Utah and other states in allowing residents to openly carry guns in public without having to go through any training, or getting a permit.

Proponents say that such laws could allow "good guys with gune" to stop violence before police arrive; police departments have generally opposed them. In New Orleans, the attacker hit revellers with a rented truck; states like Florida and Oklahoma have made i legal to run over protesters under certain circumstances.

made it legal to run over protesters under certain circumstances.

Of course, it would be impossible to prevent all mass violence. The bomber in Las Vegas apparently used propane tanks and fireworks. The attacker in New Orleans used a large truck, and was killed by police before he could shoot anyone. No one in US is going to seriously consider bans on propane or on the increasingly large trucks that populate our roads.

seriously consider bans on propane or on the increasingly large trucks that populate our roads.

But that doesn't mean that the likelihood of these attacks can't be reduced. States that have tough gun control laws have fewer deaths from the control state of the sta

'Digital arrests are an effective scam globally; people need to know their info is widely available online & harvested at scale'

Increasing number of Indians are becoming cictims of digital arrest; a cyber-endoled scam. A recent analysis by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (SE Asia and the Pacific) shows that these types of cyber-enabled fraud are now run as a professionalised industry, mostly from SE Asia. A new model of crime as a service, he use of SE Asia. A new model of crime as a service, he use of SE Asia. A new model of crime as a service, he use of helping, these operations scale up, says UNDIC Regional Analyst John Wojcik in a conversation with Indulekha Aravind:



Hotulekha Aracitid:

How did Southeast Asia become a hub for these transnational cyber scams?

In many cases, what's taking place is a spillover of criminal groups largely from outside the region moving into some of the most moving into some of the moving int

There are also differences in enforcement capacities and corruption plays a role. At the same time, SR Asia is experiencing a digital revolution and conditions for these cyber-enabled fraud syndicates are very attractive. When you look at the top 20 countries as far as cryptocurrency adoption is concerned, many are in the region. But the regulatory frameworks needed to securities the broader crypto industry are not really present. Transnational organised crime syndicates are agile, sophisticated entities that are well aware of those gaps.

Is this why these scamoperations have taken on industrial

roportions?
I'd add that this is all taking place against the back-trop of a separate sort of revolution in underground nline markets, specifically those on Telegram and, off

the back of that, a very powerful model of 'crime as a service' -from malware as a service to money laundering, malicious software development and deepfake software as a service, which target scam organisations and are used by them. Ultimately, Telegram is a place where criminals are able to setablish centralised market-places to convene, communicate and fundamentally engage in Illiet commerce together.

This is a very conducive business environment that has emerged in the region in ways we haven't seen before. It's also accelerating and scaling faster than



ever before. We're also seeing the integration of AI-driven solutions for engaging victims, which is getting increasingly convincing.

These syndicates initially targeted China. Why did they start diversifying to countries like India?

At one point, this was very much considered a Chinese organised crime issue affecting China more than anyone else. Chinese govt made it very clear that the current state of play will not continue. They have been extremely aggressive and successful in disrupting these criminal groups. That said, the industry and the market for this activity, which has provon extremely profitable, had been developed. So to fill the void, other

groups have stepped in. We're talking about Japanese organised crime, the Yakuza, and Korean criminal groups moving in and partnerships between certain entities in the region, specifically Chinese groups and criminal groups or individuals in South Asia. There have been more and more links to the compounds in Southeast Asia, which unfortunately have impacted lives and caused inancial losses in India and other South Asian countries. Recently, Sri Lanka executed a massive joint operation, arresting over 230 individuals, mostly Chinese nationals. We refer to this asjurisdiction shopping – as law enforcement cracks down in one place, they simply pack up and move.

own in one place, they simply pack up and move.

In india digital arrest scams are on the rise - is it a common tactic globally?

It's become more prevalent over the last year and a half. It's among the most popular scams and it's quite effective. You end up facing a dectored but very authentic-looking arrest warrant or investigative document or some evidence that typically tends to imply that your bank account - which can be matched to you via stolen data - has been used in some sort of money laundering and that you're under investigation. The criminal syndicate plays the role of the investigating officer. It's all very convincing: they have some insider information about who you are, about your past bank accounts. But all of this can be purchased for very little money online.

Why is this so successful?

Why is this so successful?

If I seems like a genuine police officer with a genuine warrant is contacting me and saying I have to turn myself in, IT probably freak out, right, especially if they've got some information on me.

This is also about cyber awareness. People need to know that their information is widely available on the internet, is being harvested at an industrial scale and is increasingly accessible to anyone. We're moving into a post-privacy ge where what was previously sensitive information is perhaps not so sensitive anymore. With deepfakes etc. we're approaching the end of all content-based verification. It's going to be very difficult to verify anything.

Calvin & Hobbes











chiefly mental. Mere abstiner

Death Adds Poetry To Symphony Of Life

Pogi Balkrishna

Pryan Johnson, techpreneur, has plunged into an exorbitant experiment to reverse ageing and experiment to reverse ageing and sevend human life indefinitely. Spending millions annually on his health negimen, Johnson adheres to a rigorous lifestyle, including advanced modesper insental therapies. While the selforts may yield advancements in these efforts may yield advancements in fraught with philosophical and spiritual contradictions.

The Indian spiritual tradition has long critiqued such endeavours. According to an assu, demon. The etymlogical root of the term – assist mande lit assurah, suggests on who revels solely in prana, life force, without transcending it. This

fixation on the transient body, a mere vessel of existence, underscores a fundamental misalignment with the eternal truths of life and consciousness. Interestingly, modern science aligns with spiritual wisdom in rejecting the concept of annihilation at a fundament level. The law of conservation of matter and energy states that neither can be created nor destroyed. This principle underscores continuity and the universe. Gross matter and subtle energy undergo perpetual cycles of assembly and disassembly, but their essence remains indestructible. Extending this logic to the spiritual domain, the subtler dimension of

existence, consciousness must also transcend mortality. Consciousness, as the shaper, user, and enjoyer of both matter and energy, operates at a level far

It is a more pervasive and subtler than either cross with the stockness, which the stockness (see ealigns) electing the fundamental of the stockness (see ealigns) electing the stockness (see ea

do so is akin to seeking permanence in a shadow rather than in the object casting it. The body, remarkable as it is, serves as a vehicle for experience, growth, and transcendence—not as an end in itself. Indie philosophy teaches that clinging to the body as locus of permanence is avidya, isporance that leads to suffering. True immortality is not in preserving the form but in realising the formless, eternal essence that animates it. Bryan Johnson's pioneering experiments may indeed unlock paths to healthie, longer lives, profoundly shaping human lives.

Phenomenon of death adds poetry

Phenomenon of death adds poetry and profundity to the symphony of life. Imagine a garden without autumn, where flowers never fade, fruits never ripen, and leaves never fall—a static, lifeless existence. Death lends the garden of life its vibrancy, a reminder that endings are as sacred as beginnings in the eternal cycle of existence.

OUR VIEW



Public debt: Do not let it eclipse the fiscal deficit

The Centre's plan to adopt debt as its new focus for budget prudence after 2025-26 does hold merit but we must not lose track of the fiscal gap. It'll remain a valuable economic indicator

n a 2020 address to the nation soon after the outbreak of covid, Prime Minister Narendra Modi cited age-old wisdom that advised against losing control of three things: fire, debt and disease. To cushion India's economy from the pandemic's shock, though, government spending had to vastly exceed its inflows, taking its fiscal deficit to 9% plus of GDP in 2020-21. The reversal of this debt-raising fiscal expansion since then has followed a glide path with 4.5% as the fisc's aim, to be achieved by the next Union budget— for 2025-26. As no further target for it has been set, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Man-agement (FRBM) Act's goal of 3% looks likely to keep gathering dust. Signalling a shift in approach, the last budget revealed an intent to target the level of public debt, rather than the annual fisc, in subsequent years as a way to keep overspending in check. This conforms with the PM's prudent advice of 2020, but what exactly does it imply?

Official data on the Centre's debt burden, available till end-September, would place it about halfway between 55% and 60% of GDP. well above the FRBM ask of 40%. To North Block, the appeal of going by this metric might be its utility in keeping public debt within a safety limit, one that keeps the risk of a debt trap at bay. Now, so long as the rate of nominal GDP growth—not adjusted for inflation, i.e. exceeds the rate of interest paid on debt, the debt-to-GDP ratio will decline (if there's no gan between revenues and non-interest spending). It's the GDP effect: In a fast-growing economy, an administration with access to affordable credit can borrow and spend that much more, although fiscal restraint is still needed to prevent the deficit from overdoing that leeway. In

any case, the aim should be to reduce the public debt ratio, not just keep it from rising, given how interest payments at its current level eat up such a bulky chunk of funds, depriving the budget of money that could be spent usefully.

Debt that has piled up over the years can also be inflated away by the expedient ploy of letting price levels soar, as inflation reduces the real burden of debt. But this is plainly unfair to the country. This is also a reason a hawk's eye will always need to be kept on the fiscal deficit. If there exist short-run capacity constraints, a splurge of funds by the state could overheat the economy and make prices flare up. Keynes had proposed fiscal stimulus only as a device to res-cue output and jobs from a demand slump (like cue output and jobs from a demand stilling lisk the pandemic's). Else, fiscal over-reach can be inflationary. Had India's recovery in demand been broader, a 4.5% gap may have been a big worry for the central bank, whose job is to retain the rupee's real value even if a fiscal pump makes rupee supply spurt. The trend of deficits also shows which way the carve-up of a country's credit pie is going. This helps assess the relative share of the state-versus marketin the allocation of an economy's resources. A fiscal bloat involves borrowing that may crowd out loans to the private sector, an effect usually seen in rising bond yields and capital costs. Admittedly, this has not been the post-2020 case in India. Private investment has seen only a partial revival, with the state playing the role of big-spender to drive GDP growth. The idea was to 'crowd in' private players, but hefty central outlays on capex now seem like the new normal. Yet, for faster growth, we still need a broad revival of 'animal spirits.' And the fiscal deficit will remain a useful economic indicator that must not get eclipsed by a focus on public debt

GUEST VIEW

Get public-private partnerships right for target-oriented growth

The UKs new government should engage the private sector with deals that achieve public objectives



be UK's Labour government has given serious thought to the public investment needed to get the austerity, neglect of social infrastructure and capital flight triggered by Brexit and economic uncertainty. The situation demands a new strategy to tackle big problems like child poverty, health inequities, a weak industrial base and struggling public infrastructure. What should this look like? The UK department for business and trade's he UK's Labour government ha

department for business and trade's 'green paper' titled 'Invest 2035' is a omising start. In my own response during the public consultation period, I stressed that an industrial strategy should be oriented around key m like achieving net-zero emissions, rather than specific sectors, as London appears to be doing; while it has set itself five 'missions,' they seem more like goals with some targets, rather than

like goals with some targets, rather than being central to the way government and industry work together. For Labour to deliver on its agenda, it must get its public-private partnerships (PPPs right. Past collaborations in the UK had the state overpaying and private sector under-delivering. After the Brexit referendum, for example, the government gave Nissan £Gi million to make cars in the UK. But Nissan still abandoned a planned expansion at its Sunderland plant and the promised jobs

never materialized.

Likewise, under the failed 'private finance initiative' schemes of the 1990s, the state would pay inflated sums to private contractors to operate public services like prisons, schools and hospitals before handing them back to the state, often in poor condition and without any clear improvement. This approach was widely used for National Health Service hospitals, with the first 15 contracts generating 245 million in fees (some 4% of the capital value of the deals for advisors across the public and private sector. AUK Treasury analysis laters showed how costly it was.

Fortunately, many PPPs globally have had more positive results. Germany's national development bank, fW, offers low-interest loans to firms that agree to decarbonize. The French government's covid ballout of Air France was conditional on the carrier curbing emissions per passenger and reducing domestic flights; by contrast, the UK bailed out Easy, Jet with no strings attached. In the US, the CHIPS and Science Act required firms that benefit from public funds to commit to climate and workforce development plans, provide childcare and

commit to climate and workforce devel opment plans, provide childcare and pay a living wage. Preference is also pay a riving wage, Freterence is also given to companies that reinvest profits instead of using share buybacks, The UK does have some experience

in shaping markets around clear goals. In developing the Oxford-AstraZeneca covid vaccine, London used a risk- and reward-sharing model in which it pro-vided 95% of the funding in exchange

vided 95% of the funding in exchange for commitments. AstraZeneca would provide the first 100 million doses to the UK and allow the government to donate and reassign surphus vaccines. Similarly, Octopus Energy's acquisition of energy supplier Buth allowed the UK government to reap £1.5 billion in profit as it repaid the public support it had got through a profit-sharing deal. This agreement safeguarded jobs and kept consumers costs contained.

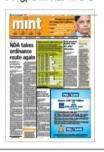
With a mission-oriented strategy, the UK could scale up and systematize this

type of public-private engagement. Rather than being "unreservedly probusiness," as it claims to be in its green paper, it should ensure that public investment targets clear objectives: to crowd in private capital, create new markets and increase competitiveness. Consider the UK's net-zero-emissions target. The state has a crucial role to play as a first-mover, shaping markets so that private incentives are aligned with public goods. Yet, recent moves appear to fall short. Prime Minister Kestone and others raised more than £60 billion without setting clear, outcomeoriented expectations or ensuring that both risks and rewards are shared. The government's support of carbon capture and storage allows funds to flow to digiants without holding them accountable in the green transition.

These deals are structured to achieve growth at any cost, when what the UK needs is growth that is inclusive and sustainable. That requires better corporate governance. Growth listelf is not a mission; it is the result of public and private investment, and good growth needs to growthered to achieve the directed. If the UK's climate transition is going to deliver for people

needs to be directed. If the Un's climate transition is going to deliver for people and planet, engagement with the pri-vate sector must reflect confidence, not capitulation. Start by deploying existing tools. The new National Wealth Fund (KWF) and Great British Energy could wake a difference if policymphors are if (NWF) and Great British Energy could make a difference if policymakers get it right. The NWF should use conditionalities for public investments, provide public access to intellectual property and patents for research, create subsidies and other incentives for missionaligned investments and use loan guarantees and ballouts to move firms toward decarbonization, improved work conditions and fewer share buybacks. The UK must shift from a sectoral approach to a mission-oriented one that embraces an outcomes-oriented form of PPP, incentivizing the private sector to do its part. Labour's approach needs rework.

10 DEARS AGO



TEDUCET A TEUL

A budget tells us what we can't afford, but it doesn't keep us from buying it.

WILLIAM FEATHER

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Longevity is usually a reward for being unspectacular

MANU JOSEPH



n the end, what many tributes to Dr. Man-mohan Singh tried to say, shorn of frills, was that the economist survived long in politics because he posed no political threat to his party's true power centre. He was so reassuring, he even lost the only Lok Sabha election he contested.

For a man who was said to be incapable o subterfuge or even office politics, a skill in which Indians excel, Dr. Singh thrived in public office. He had been governor of the Reserve Bank of India and our most famous finance minister before he became one of finance minister before he became one of India's longest-serving prime ministers. And he could achieve all this not only because he had an economic vision, but chiefly because he was not politically extraordinary. His source of power was assured that he would never develop another source. Often, endurance is nature's reward to a person whose presence is not spectacular. This phenomenon can be seen in almost everything humans do.

This is why corporate bosses, even when they claim, "I only hire people who are smarter than me," typically don't do that at all, especially when that fact is too evident in the 'smarter' candidate. A nerd with narrow the smarter' candidate. A nerd with narrow genius and no managerial prospects might fare well, but people whose presence or role is spectacular in a broad way do not go very far up the tapering hierarchy. Founders and entrepreneurs always pounce on super tal-entas they are at no threat of being eclipsed, but in a typical office, the calibre of a boss is often the women limit for talcut in his team.

but in a typical office, the calipre of a bossis often the upper limit for talent in his team. The spectacular have to, sooner or later, quit the safety of their salaried jobs and take their chances in entrepreneurship, where they are dependent on 'clients,' who are usually salaried executives.

The way people celebrate the spectacular, it would appear as though they are wired to back the extraordinary. But the fact is they make life difficult for those who are special and cannot be tamed. What the world celebrates is success, asthoughit has a grudging admiration for the spectacular who managed to make it despite everything the ordinary threw at them. Usually, most spectacular people don't make it very far.

When Manmohan Singh's political career strayed into the spectacular, it created an

environment where he could continue to lead the nation. He had unexpectedly trumped all the politicking satraps of the Congress party to become prime minister, not once, but twice. The satraps had had enough. His second term was tormented by the politicking of those who thought they deserved to be in his seat.

Not just that, the Indian middle class when they

middle class, whose hero he had been for two dec ades, whom he had directly enriched, seemed to turn against him. They found tiring the very calm things that they had once found appealing. Particularly amusing was their lament that he did not stand up to party bosses. But then, that was probably their nature too, for that is the nature of

too, for that is the nature of the average person. That is how the ordinary survive and even thrive, by not taking on the bosses whose power favours them. At least Singh had the courage to pick his battles. In the end, he had sur-vived in politics for so long that he became formidable whether he liked to be so or not. And he was assailed by his own party.

Even in cricket, nature rewards the ordinary through a long career. Athletes like
Sachin Tendular are are. They endured for
long in spite of their spectacular brilliance.
Usually, people at that level shine bright for
a few years and vanish, developing an injury
or losing control of unhealthy habits. In
cricket, they survive
rs that
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survive are they were the survive
through the hyperbole of
captaincy, which is the traditional refuge of middling
batsmen or great batsmen
who are past their prime.
Mostly, the sort of batsmen
who endre, who last long,

Careers that endure are typically not who endure, who last long, are Test plodders—who do not take risks, who do not spectacular. This is so in have too many strokes in them to increase their chance of getting out. As in most of life, so in cricket, politics as well as other fields

the ordinary endure. Even the former greats endure the former greats endure through ordinariness. Endurance is greatness for ordinary peo-ple; it is compensation for ordinariness. Can it be that companies or professions where people can endure for long are usually spheres in decay? Like, say, the bureaucracy, where people last even beyond retirement? reward for not being spectacular. Animals in the zoo, for instance, outlive their feral relatives. Humans too have begun to endure because we do not have to do any-

thing spectacular anymore.

Once, being a spectacular human was to be a warrior or an athlete who took many risks. Now, the spectacular person is some-one who wishes to enjoy the material life Those who live less interesting lives are destined to endure.

Even in recreational running, the trick to seep at it well into old age is to maintain a owaverage beart rate, done by mixing runs with short walks. While great sprinters eventually stop, steady-paced runners can

teep going for years. Current Prime Minister Narendra Modi Current Prime Minister Narendra Modi hau sued his popular charisma to strengthen his hold. And he, too, has endured. Though his case is as rare as Tendulkar's. Before him, the last prime minister whose leadership was spectacular was Indira Gandhi, but in a time that was more conductive to her less of such leaders. An important quality, though, of modern spectacular leaders is that when they started off their careers, they were not so spectacular; or never showed that side.



INFRA PROWESS

Vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar

India is no longer a nation with a potential. It is a nation rising with unmatched infrastructure growth, just to illustrate, four airports and one metro system every year for the last few years

Many hits, a few misses

DPDP Rules signal MeitY's balanced approach, but some concerns still need to be addressed

HE GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH towards implementing the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act broadly reflects a pragmatic and balanced strategy, considering the complexities of transitioning industries to a newlegal framework. One of the most commendable steps is the 45-day window provided for public consultation. This time frame, coupled with the decision to release the draft rules after the Christmas and New Year holidays, allows key stakeholders, particularly global technology firms often operating with reduced capac-tites during this period, an adequate opportunity to participate mean-ingfully in the feedback process.

ingfully in the feedback process.

The government's nuanced stance on data localisation is another sensible measure. Rather than imposing blanket restrictions, a government-appointed committee will evaluate localisation requirements on a sectoral basis, ensuring that critical personal data remains within the country's borders only when absolutely necessary. This selective approach balances the need for safeguarding sensitive information with the operational realities of global businesses. For example, if the health ministry is of the view that health record of citizens should not go out of the country, the suggestion will be reviewed through consultations before implementations in the support of the country of the support of the country.

try, the suggestion will be reviewed infougations unattained sectore impar-mentation, mitigating the risk of disruptions to cross-border data flows. Equally prudent is the Act's provision for parental consent in processing children's data. By requiring data fluciaries to verify parental consent for minors under 18 through digital tokens, the government addresses the vul-nerabilities children face in the digital world. This model strikes a balance between safeguarding children's privacy and allowing access to digital plat-forms. It is a more practical alternative to Australia's restrictive approach, where children up to a certain age are barred from accessing social media. The DPDP Act also incorporates mechanisms to ensure transparency and The DPDPAct also incorporates mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. Provisions for rovoluntary disclosure of data breaches incen-tivise organisations to proactively report incidents, fostering trust in the data protection ecosystem. Simultaneously, significant penalties for non-compliance underscore the seriousness of safeguarding personal data. Addi-tionally, the thought that a two-year transition period should be given to businesses to comply with the Act reflects the government's commitment to ensuring a smooth shift to the new framework. Electronics and information technology (IT) minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has clarified in the past that the DPDP Act adheres to the principles

naw has clarified in the past that the DPDP Act adheres to the principles established by the Puttaswamy judgment, which upholds the balance between privacy and transparency. Existing laws mandating disclosure of public servants' information will remain unaffected, addressing fears of diminished accountability. It's a fact that by fostering collaboration with stakeholders, prioritising sectoral needs, and adopting practical measures like parental consent mechanisms, the ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY) has taken a significant step toward ensuring robust data protection while minimising disruptions to industry.

But there is a flip side as well. Retention of broad discretionary powers under the quieblines leads to nolicy suprendictability, leaving too much

But there is a missioe as well. Retention or prota discretionary powers under the guidelines leads to policy unpredictability, leaving too much room for the government to act on a case-by-case basis. This could hamper compliance efforts, as stakeholders struggle with unclear rules and incon-sistent enforcement. The ambiguity and potential legal challenges may benefit law firms, while businesses and stakeholders face heightened compliance costs and regulatory unpredictability. Also, the entire process can be time-consuming, while data protection has become an urgent need for the citizens. Overall, such debates are inevitable and healthy, and the government would do well to fine-tune the new rules further after extensive discussions with stakeholders. After all, a lot is at stake as the new rules will

Musk, critics both wrong about free speech on X

ELON MUSK IS in a free-speech fight over his decision to demonetise the content of some far-right Make America Great Again (MAGA) critics who disagreed with his immigration views on his social media platform X: What is most remarkable about the argument is that both sides fall to acknowledge the simple truth of how speech, free or otherwise, works on social media. It's worth taking a moment to clarify what free speech means in the context of those platforms.

The most fundamental fact about speech on social media is that it takes two to tango: the user and the platform. You, the user, produce the content — commonly described in the industry as UCC, for user-generated content. The platform takes that content and, using its algorithm, sends it out to other users, your audience. Both actors are essential, and both are necessarily working in tandem. Nothing would be said on social media without the user to produce content. No one would knowwhat you said without the platform to publish the content. Hence, every act on a platform combines your speech with the platform's choice of what to distribute. As a matter of black-letter, First Amendment constitutional law, I am in this column exercising my free-speech rights — and so is Bloomberg. That means the government could not censor rous column without violating my First Amendment rights and Bloomberg's. Similarly, the government was established last June by the Supreme Court in the landmark Moodyn. NetChoice case.)

So, when the MAGA folks calim that X has violated their free speech rights by taking away their ability to monetise their cornett.



NOAH
FELDMAN
So, when the MAGA folks claim that X has violated their free speech rights by taking away their ability to monetise their content, they arent using the concept of free speech in the content, they arent using the concept of free speech in a constitutionally accurate way. They don't have a constitutional free way that the content has a constitution and they couldn't invoke the First Amendment toget back on the platform. Indeed, if the government tried to say that X had to re-platform them, the iffort would violate Xs First Amendment rights. The MAGA users can plausibly say to Musk that by taking away their ability to monetise their content, he is violating a non-legally bloiding commitment he made tallow users to express any point of view on the platform with censorship. To the extent that Musk promised that sort of non-legal, non-constitutional 'free speech', nor, X, he's broken the rules. Musk, for his part, has no legt gost and on when he says that "the First Amendment (which it sin's, and the First Amendment applied to it (which it doesn't), the government would not be allowed to punish some speakers by taking away an opportunity—like monetisation — based on the speakers' point of view. Imposing such a punishment would count as an unconstitutional condition on free speech, of course, Musk sin on applying First Amendment free speech principles to his platform. If he wants to allow diverse viewpoints on X, that's fine — and it's his platform. If he wants to allow diverse viewpoints on X, that's fine — and it's his platform. If he wants to allow diverse viewpoints on X, that's fine — and it's his platform. If he wants to allow diverse viewpoints on X, that's fine — and it's his platform. If he wants to allow diverse viewpoints on X, that's fine — and it's his base he highly restrictive rules that twould app

that free speech on social media means the First Amendment right of users a platform to speak jointly and without government censorship. Beyond that, plat-forms that want to allow for a wide range of perspectives should be clear about what rules they use to moderate speech. Otherwise, we may forget how the new free speech really works — and lose the very First Amendment rights we all hold dear.

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

2025 OFFERS A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY POLITICALLY FOR THE MODI GOVT TO OVERHAUL THE SYSTEM

Reform agriculture

ET ME START by wishing read ers of this column a ver happy, peaceful, and prosper

ETME START by wishing readers of this column a very happy, peaceful, and prosperious newyear.

What could I wish for Indian agriculture, a subject that has been my lifelong passion and commitment? My dream would be to see tibrant and sustainable agriculture which is climate-resilient, increases productivity, brings prosperity to peasants, and, above all, improves the real wages of farm workers who are literally at the bottom of the economic pyramid. It is only by raising productivity that India can rein in food inflation, which has been playing spoilsport lately. Vegetable inflation, at 29% (and potato inflation of 67%) in November 2024, has humbled the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), not allowing it to reduce the reporate. That is simply tragic.

The India Meteorological Department has made it clear that 2024 was the warmest year since 1901, and the temperatures were 0.9°C higher in 2024 than the long period average. Earlier studies by scientists of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research predicted that an increase in temperature by 1°C ran the risk of reducing wheat output by 5%. Wheat is likely to be the most impacted by heat spikes in February when grain formation is taking place.

Although the Prime Minister released 109 varieties of various crops (including wheat) that are supposed including wheat) that are supposed formal ands remains daunting. This is because the government's agri-extension network is the weakest link in the production system.

Agri-R&D as well as agri-extension need a major boost in the coming Budgett findian agriculture is to be climate-resilient, the challenge of taking them from the scientists' labs to decifinate-resilient, the challenge of taking them from the scientists' labs to eclimate-resilient, the challenge of taking them from the scientists' labs to eclimate-resilient, the challenge of taking them from the scientists' labs to eclimate-resilient, the challenge of taking them from the scientists' labs to eclimate-resilient, the challenge of taking them from the scientists' la

get if Indian agriculture is to be climate-resilient. In this context, it may be noted

ASHOK GULATI Distinguished professor, ICRIEF

that in the last three years or so, there is that in the last three years or so, there is avide gap in the government estimates of wheat production and what the private trade believes. No wonder wheat prices have been under pressure, and government is trying to supress prices by releasing wheat at about ₹2,300/quintalin the open market operations, while the minimum support price for the forthcoming season is ₹2,450/quintal, and the economic cost to the Food Corporation of India is about

and the economic cost to to poration of India is about ₹2,800/quintal. This is simply dumping and anti-farmer.

PM Narendra Modi wants to transform India into Viksit Bharat by 2047, but this cannot be achieved unless farmers' and farm workers' incomes improve significantly. We cannot have India sprinting when its fee

cantly. We cannot have India sprinting when its feet are made of clay. The Periodic Labour Force Survey clearly shows that the real wages in rural areas (including farm wages) have stag-nated and even marginally declined in the last fiveyears. This should have been the primary topic of constructive dis-cussion in Parliament and mainstream media as it impacts the lives of millions. Instead, our Parliament was paralysed over a remark on Ambedkar. What a pityl If India wants to realise the dream of

If India wants to realise the di Viksit Bharat, we need to find business models that make our development process more inclusive. So fat, we have not been very successful in that. And when we fall tool oft, we lean towards the revdi culture of freebies, which runs through all political parties — bet in the name of fadli behna or ladil ladil, as was the case in Mahrasahtra's recent Assembly elections. Even now, the Aam Aadmil Party is promising to give 718,000 a month to pujaris and granthis if they are voted back to power in Delhi. India cambridge of the control of the progress with such

realise the dream of Viksit Bharat, we need to find business models that make our development process more inclusive

month to pularis and granthis if they are voted back to power in Delhi. India cannot progress with such doles, nay bribes, for otes. As honest taxpayers, we wonder how our money is being frittered away. I wonder why our Election Commission is silent on such ludicrous promises. Will the Supreme Court step into bring some order among political parties on election promises that are damaging our democracy? Most of these are a waste of taxpayers' money, who feel helpless and cheated having paid their due.

Coming back to reforming agriculture, politically, for the Modi government at the Centre, 2025 seems a golden chance as the parliamentary elections are far away. The big expenditures in rural areas, including agriculture, are going from the central Budget. Look at food and fertilliers subscidies, Both together are likely to cross sidies. Both together are likely to cross

₹4 lakh crore. Add to it the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) and Mahatma Gandhi Nationa Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and one would easily cross ₹5 lakh crore out of a Budget of about ₹45 lakh crore (FY25). All these need to be rationalised, and one can easily save at least ₹1 lakh crore that an be invested back in agriculture and can be invested back in agriculture and rural areas for building basic infra-

can be invested back in agriculture and rural areas for building basic infrastructure, ranging from roads and water harvesting to upgrading agri-mandis and rural heats.

But how do we rationalise these mega subsidies and so-called welfare programmes? The fertiliser subsidy needs to be merged with PM-Kisan and given to farmers directly on a per hectare basis, while fertiliser prices need to be deregulated and freed. Micro-managing prices for each urea plant, and then informally controlling even di-ammonium phosphate prices, when in theory they are relatively free, is reminiscent of the socialist era of the USSR. The timidity of successive governments is reflected in the fact that urea prices have not been revised since prices have gradually risen. This is not helping either the peasantry, productivity, or the planet, as it is leading to inefficient use and massive diversions.

Similarly, food subsidy must be targeted and given in the form of digital coupons to be spent on, say, 20 nutri-tious food items. The MCNREGA needs to be dovetailed with agri-work and PM-Awas Vojana. The whole system needs an overhaul. It can be done lifthe Modi government is bold and remains focused in the form of the case of the control of the control of the control of the control of the main in focus of the first that the control of the control

A step forward, but not without concerns

enforcing, and strengthening data protection norms in India



ARUN PRABHU ARYA TRIPATHY

implementation of India's maider data protection law, the governmen has released the draft Digital Persona Data Protection Rules, 2025, for pub-lic consultation

lic consultation.

The rules make an earnest attempt to bring procedural clarity on some building locks like notice to seek consent, consent managers, retention periods for certain businesses, certain data principal rights, and breach notification, but not without keeping alive concerns around verifiable parental consent, obligations of significant data fiduciaries, exemptions, and implementation timelines, and reviving some issues which we had hoped were put to rest, such as cross-horder data transfers, and use of algorithms.

The long-awaltet rules, published following much discussion and inter-ministry consultation, will be open for public comments for at least 45 days. Once finalised, certain parts of the rules (largely, dealingwith the Data Trotection Board or DPB) and corresponding parts of the DPA, will come into force upon their publication. The rest of the rules will come into force upon their publication. The rest of the rules will come into force on a later date, to be specified in the final rules.

The Rules require that notice for The rules make an earnest attempt to

The Rules require that notice for The Rules require that notice for consent be for specified purposes through a distinct document that is easily understandable. This notice must, at the least, provide descriptions of personal data, the specified purpose of processing, list goods or services and use cases to be enabled through processing, and provide clear means for exercising data principal rights. While this emphasis on itemised details may help transparency and accountability, it will mean that businesses have to satisfy a demanding, rigid, and expensive consent regime. Given this background, entities may be well advised nine their existing notices, griev ance redress and data principal right mechanisms to meet timelines for imple-

mechanisms to meet timelines for implementation.

Substantial details about qualifications, functions, and obligations of consent managers, who will be a very important part of India's new data ecosystem, have been provided in the rules. Entities must be incorporated in India, have a minimum net worth, and a suitable technology platform to apply for registration as consent managers. The religious data fall duclaries who are onboarded with consent managers. They are required to act on

managers. They are required to act on behalf of individuals and help exercise data protection rights, while avoiding any conflict of interest. Defaults by con-sent managers could result in cancellasent managers could result in cancella-tion or suspension of registrations, in addition to the fines under the DPA. The details provided are timely, but kick-starting consent activities will continue to depend on interoperability standards that are imminent. Underlining the importance of imple-

require businesses to make expensive adjustments

The draft rules of the data protection law, if retained

as is, could present hurdles for implementation,

menting reasonable security measures for preventing data breach, the rules spec-ify a list of "minimum" safeguards includ-ing access control, log reports, deploy-ment of encryption tools, tokenisation, masking, and requiring fiduciaries to contractually obligate processors to ensure data security. ensure data security.

ensure data security:

The rules prescribe a demanding,

"one-size-fits-all" requirement for reporting data breaches to the DPB and data principals, without regard to the harms resulting from breach. The reporting is required to be done promptly and supplemented with averydetalled report

1 72 hours. Given this background, businesses an awayeed to revisit the sufficiency of their existing it steep The release of the draft rules marks an important step towards recognising,

marks an tastep in the comment of th

Significant data fiduciaries, to be identified by officers who will be appointed for this purpose, are required to meet much higher requirements. These include annual impact assessments and audits, with key findings rejent the DPS.

ments and audits, with key findings going to the DPB.

Much more conventingly, the rules seem to risk reviving two key concerns which manyhad felt were put to rest. For significant fluciarise, the government may require identified data to be kept in India. The rules also provide for additional rules to be specified for additional rules to be specified for all entities in relation to cross-border data transfers. These (currently open-ended) requirements can have a mammoth impact on the operations of several platforms. Perhaps even more concerningly, the rules also prescribe open-ended "additional

ments can have a mammoth impact on the operations of several platforms. Perhaps even more concerningly, the rules also prescribe open-ended "additional due diligence" for the use of "algorithmic software" by significant data fiduciaries. Greater clarity on each of the above, during the consultation process on the rules, will be very helpful.

The release of the draft rules marks an important step towards recognising, enforcing, and strengthening data protection norms in India. Where retained as is, they could potentially present hurdles for implementation, require businesses to make expensive adjustments, and may also result in consent fatigue data principals. Given this background, effective public consultation and dialogue is critical, and businesses should use the period leading up to implementation of the rules wisely, both to provide their comments and to prepare for the implementation of the final rules.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Alternate avenues for a familiar issue

LAITHILIEF ISSUE
Apropos of "Preparing for Trump
2.0" (FE, January A), India must adopt
multifaceted strategies to face
President-leet Donald Trump's
threats of imposing 100% tariff on
Indian exports and a tough stance on
H-18 visas. India should clear his
dissatisfaction over India's high tariff
on American exports as he thinks that
India indulges in de-dollarisation

endeavours with BRICS members.
Hence, India must impose moderate tariffs on American exports and improve its bilateral ties with the US to focus new avenues for expansion. Further, India should diversify its tech and energy partnership, fortifying ties with other global players to reduce dependence on the US. India could willies Timmics rouge to not the US. India could willies Timmics rouge to not the US. utilise Trump's move to put China under control and mitigate its domination over the South China Sea. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

India's nuclear pioneer

The passing of Rajagopala Chidambaram, a distinguished physicist and key architect behind India's nuclear programs, marks the end of an era in India's scientific and strategic landscape. His contributions, particularly in the 1974 and 1998 unclear tests. bave left an indelible nuclear tests, have left an indelible mark on the nation's defense and technological advancement. He was an instrumental figure in India's

nuclear journey. As the Chief Controller of the Defence Research and Development Organisation, he played a pivotal role in shaping the nuclear tests of 1974, dubbed Smillin Buddha. In 1998, his leadership and vision were critical to the successful execution of the Pokhran-II tests, cementing India's place as a clohal cementing India's place as a global nuclear player. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



MY VIEW | ECONOMIC GRAVITY

Budget: It must aim to engineer India's economic transformation

The target of Viksit Bharat by 2047 requires the budget to balance immediate challenges with long-term development goals



is professor of economics at Ashoka University nd director and head of Ashoka Isaac Centr for Public Policy

hile annual budgets are hile annual budgets are routine affairs in advanced economies, they hold special significance in emerging markets, particularly in India. This colonial-era leg-

markets, particularly in India. This colonial-era legacy has evolved from a mere accounting exercise to become a crucial platform for articulating the government's economic vision. As India approaches its budget for fiscal 2025-26, the stakes are particularly high, given the complex global and domestic challenges at hand. The international landscape presents multiple challenges, Ongoing geopolitical tensions from the Russia-Ultrane conflict, West Asian developments, recent US election outcomes and China's domestic issues all contribute to global economic uncertainty. These external factors can significantly influence India's economic planning and policy decisions.

At the same time, India's domestic economy faces several pressing issues. Economic growth has shown concerning signs, with the second quarter of 2024-25 recording a seven-quarter low off.5.4%. This solwdown prompted the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to reduce its 2024-25 growth forecast downward by 60 basis points to 6.6%. Simultaneously, persistent inflationary pressures, particularly in food categories, have led to an upward revision of its inflation projection by 90 basis points to 4.5%. The situation is further complicated by the rupee's depreciation to historic lows, substantial equily market outflows and volatile oil markets. RBI's recent adjustments to CRR (cash reserve RBI's recent adjustments to CRR (cash reserve ratio) requirements reflect its efforts to manage

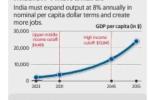
tightening liquidity conditions.
Against this backdrop, the 2025-26 budget must address three critical pillars that will shape India's journey towards developed-nation statu

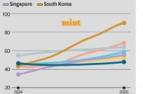
journey towards developed-nation status, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities that demand careful policy calibration. First, India would need to maintain an 8% growth rate in nominal per capita dollar terms to achieve 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, a target that requires a sustained fees beyond short term occ requires a sustained focus beyond short-term eco-nomic fluctuations. This growth trajectory would enable the country to reach upper middle-income status by 2031 and high-income status by 2045. status by 2031 and high-income status by 2045.
Assuming about 1% population growth, 2-3% depreciation, this would be equivalent to 11-12% nominal GDP growth. While this target aligns with India's average growth over the past two docades, sustaining such rates for another 20 years presents a significant middle-income-trap challenge.

Second, on employment, there is an often-over-looked connection between India's labour market challenges and its international trade position. India is a labour-abundant country, and is still expanding its productive cohorts while advanced economies and other emerging markets are contracting. Yet, India's production and exports are











*This refers to people aged up to 14 and 65 or above for every

surces: Haver Analytics, World Economic Outlook, IMF, UN, asuring Productivity at the Industry Level—The India KLEMS Database and 'Has India's Growth Story Withered?', EPW.

uccoming increasingly specialized in capital-in-tensive industries, seemingly contradicting the basic yet powerful principle of comparative advantage. 'According to this principle, a labour-abundant country must specialize and export goods in labour-intensive industries, and impor-tantly also import goods which it can produce only at comparatively high 'opportunity cost.' The solution to this paradox would be essential

to generate high-quality employment opportunities. We could benefit from a strategic focus on
sectors that combine strong export potential with
significant job creation capabilities, particularly
in the textile industry, and in high value agricultural production.

The assembly sector presents a significant
opportunity too, despite concerns about low
domestic value addition. If India can achieve scale
in assembly operations, the total domestic value
added and employment benefits could be substantial. Success in this area requires establishing
stable positions in global value chains.

Finally, India's public finances warrant ongoing
monitoring. Despite the government's laudable
efforts at fiscal consolidation and implementation
of transparent and prudent budgetary frameworks, the country's debt-io-GDP ratio continues
to exceed that of comparable economies. The
Centre currently allocates close to -40% of its revenues to debt servicing, significantly above the
emerging market average of 10%. This situation
necessitates careful deleveraging, which can also
improve sovereign ratings and create more fiscal
space for development initiatives.

The time may also be right to consider establishing an independent Fiscal Council as recom-

The time may also be right to consider establish ing an independent Fiscal Council, as recoming an independent riscal council, as recom-mended by the FRBM Review Committee and the 15th Finance Commission. Such a body could complement government efforts by providing inde pendent forecasts of key macroeconomic variables and by monitoring fiscal developments, enhancing

the credibility of India's fiscal framework. Overall, the 2025-26 budget represents a crucial the credibility of India's fiscal framework.

Overall, the 2025-26 budget represents a crucial opportunity to signal India's economic direction and vision. Achieving developed-economy status is possible through sustained macroeconomic and political stability, coupled with continued investment in physical and digital infrastructure. However, success will ultimately depend on effective implementation of policy decisions.

The budget must balance immediate economic challenges with long-term development goals. While maintaining fiscal prudence, it needs to create conditions for sustainable growth, employment generation and structural transformation. Most importantly, the focus must be on swift and effective implementation of policies and reforms. The decisions made in this budget can significantly influence India's development trajectory over the next two decades. As India aspiries to become a developed nation, the mantra must be 'implement, implement, implement, furning vision into reality through decisive action and efficient execution. Best wishes for 2025 to all Economic Gravity readers.

These are the author's personal views.

MINT CURATOR

The 'Asian Aunty' is smashing ageist and gender stereotypes

'Aunty' leaders are tackling a widely normalized form of 'othering'



ia politics with a special focus on China.



The Asian aunty has a lot to teach us about gendered stereotypes and how to fight them. The term, often used as a sign of respect, has also become a way to indicate that a woman is past her prime. It isn't unusual to hear younger men and women call their older female colleagues or friends "aunties" as a put-down, only half in jest. But now some Asian women are challenging that narrative, and offering alternative models of ageing.

Politically, these women are important: They vote in greater numbers than before. Parties from India to Indonesia are now targeting female voters. Governments around the region should take note. It makes economic sense to do this. By 2050, the number of people aged 60 or older will reach 2.1 billion globally, mostly women. They play a pivotal role in society, as providers of child care, elder care and domestic labour. This unpaid or underpaid work allows families to work and sawe more, indirectly contributing to GDP growth. Yet they are too often economically excluded and socially marginalized, and vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Ageing can be grim. Put aside the physical and mental deterioration, perhaps one of the most insulting aspects is discrimination. One in two people may harbour ageist attitudes, according to the 2021 World Health Organization's Global Report on Ageism. It's the most socially mormalized prejudice, and like many others, relies on the concept of 'of thering', where we see

prejudice, and like many others, relies on the concept of 'othering,' where we see a group of people as being unlike ourselves The irony of course, is that most of us grow old sooner or later.

on sooner or later. The bias is particularly acute for women who experience both ageism and sexism. who experience both ageism and sexism, highlighting how we are underrepresented in media and often ignored in consumer, social and public spaces. We are also 'grandmotherized,' and assumed to be incompetent, as this study notes. It can be even more of an issue in Asian

It can be even more of an issue in Asian cultures, as Geetanjial Shree writes in Tomb of Sand, which won the 2002 Booker Prize. Her work explores themes of invisibility among Indian women, often considered a natural state, where despite much progress, men are still the priority in families and society. Shree's observations of the inner lives of women are strewn through her books. 'We always Isnew mother had a weak spine,' her debut novel Mai begins. 'Those who constantly bend get this problem.'

Increasingly though, older Asian women are refusing to be invisible. Zeenat Aman, a Bollywood star from the 70s, has found a new life for herself on social media as she



Geetanjali Shree's literary work is a

inspiration to many. rn
ages. "Which genius decided that 'aumy' is
a derogatory term?" she wrote on Instagram, calling out the prejudice against
older women. "In an aumy, and proud."
Addressing the taboo of ageing was also
the thinking behind Lisa Ray's content on
social media. The actor, author and entrepreneur has refashioned herself in her
early fifties, breaking negative stereotypes
about women "of a certain age."
"Extreme ageism in India exists," she
tells me from Dubai, where she now lives.
"Comments on line say things like 'old
aunty, why are you wearing this?" That is
the general attitude. Women of a certain
age are expected to present themselves in
a certain way, know their place and follow
the script. Society doesn't like it when they
are different."

Older people used to be respected in
wisdom cultures like India's, Ray adds, but
that's not the case anymore. Women were

wisdom cultures like india's, Ray adds, but that's not the case anymore. Women were released from their responsibilities by that point and could help to pass down life les-sons to the next generation. "Instead, you now have the archetypal image of the crone, in place of awise woman," she adds. Ray is not alone. An anonymous Singa-toeren util this ower the young vincenum.

porean artist who uses the name 'niceaun ties' is using AI to create a virtual "aunty sphere" to turn the stereotype on its head 'I guess the point is to do whatever the hell you want," she said in a recent podcast. That to me is really being an auntie.

Hyper-sexualization of younger wom combined with an antiquated view of older temales, is deeply rooted in our youth-ob-sessed culture. This can make the entire experience of growing older an exercise in humiliation, compounded by a lack of visi-bility in the workplace and public eye. For the vast majority of Asian women, particu-

the vast majority of Asian women, particu-larly in emerging economies with large populations like India's and Indonesla's, most will never get a chance to rise up. It's a privilege for a select few, with the means and education to express themselves. Still, women like Aman and Ray are help-ing to craft a fresh narrative for a new cohort of older Asian women, one that say tentent with fading into the background. So in 2025, I'd like to suggest that if you're an aunty like me, then wear that title proudly, be whoever you please and refuse to comply with stereotypes. The next generation will thank us for it.

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

The Digital Data Protection rules have hits and misses

RAHUL MATTHAN



The draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules are finally with us and the long wait has for the most part been worth it. There is enough detail in the rules to give businesses the darity they need, but not so much that compliance becomes cumbersome. That said, there are two areas—data breaches and the obligations of significant data fluduciaries. Any of the dark of the properties of the properties of the properties. Rule 6 provides a definition of the term "reasonable security measures" mentioned in Section 86 of the DPDP Act. As a result, data fluduciaries now have to put in place at least seven distinct types of measures to safeguard against data breaches. While I have no argument with as many measures are necessary to protect data, why all data fluduciaries must implement these seven measures is beyond me. Section 8 only required data fluduciaries to take reasonable security safeguards. The government should have left

aries to determine what is reasonable in their own context. By insisting that everyone has to put in place all these measures, it is disproportionately increasing the burden on small data fiduciaries.

disproportionately increasing the burden on small data fiduciaries.

Also of concern is the manner in which the rules have extended the data breach the rules have extended the data breach to tilication obligations. While the Act requires data fiduciaries to provide notice "in the event of" a personal breach, the rules state that intimation must be made "as soon as the Data Fiduciary becomes aware of it." As anyone who's been involved in a breach incident will tell you, knowledge accumulates incrementally during such situations, and while it is easy to identify that something is going wrong, it is usually hard to tell whether this is because a hacker has broken into the system or on account of some other malfunction. Even after it is clear that it's a breach, it is hard to say with certainty precisely which data principals have been affected. If data fiduciaries have to notify a breach as soon as they become aware of it, most of them will over-report rather than risk being found non-compliant. This sort of reporting could cause panic among data fiduciaries who will have been fold their data was com-

this happens, the less likely they are to pay heed, as they may assume after a point that all notifications are false alarms. What's worse is that the Data Protection Board will

board that its made matters worse.

This brings us to Rule 12(4) and the sneady way in which it is bringing data localization back into consideration. Ever since Justice Srikirishna first included the concept in the 2018 draft of India's data protection law, I have argued against this insistence on the physical storage of data in India. Thankfully, each subsequent draft of the law has diluted this concept, and the DPDP Act all but idd away with it. With Rule 12(4) suggesting that significant

categories of personal data, it feels like the government is sneaking in a provision that we all believed we'd seen the back off. We tend to conflate location with access—

worse is that the Data Protection Board will be so immudated with breach notifications that it will simply not be able to take action where required. The government had an opportunity to reframe how a data breach could be handled. Not only has it squandered that opportunity, it has placed such a bureling in the board that its made matters worse.

Some provisions can set a global example for age-gating but others would the provision of the size of of the ign jurisdiction, Indian law enforcement authorities will never be able to access to it. Rather than requiring businesses to incurthe considerable cost of building domestic data centres, the government would be well advised to negotiate treaties with as many jurisdictions as it can to secure faster and more effective data access. After all, no matter what laws we put in place, it is likely that some data we really need will be lying somewhere outside our grasp.

Despite these concerns, the rules have shone alight on many aspects of the DPDP Act. There was confusion over what consent others would overburden data fiduciaries

been defined in the law, but details were scant. The rules now make it clear that this term has been introduced to align with the country's data empowerment and protect

term has been introduced to align with the country's data empowerment and protection architecture, and consent managers should be treated as such.

Similarly, we now have much-needed clarity on age-gating and how the obligations under the law can be met. Regular readers know that I've been making a case for age tokens. If coupled with privacy-preserving techniques (such as zero-knowledge-proof), this will allow data fluticaries to comply with the requirements under Section 9 of the Act without having to process personal information. Rule IO has provided a legal basis for just such a framework, and I am glad to see that data fluticaries on own reference virtual tokens mapped to identity and age.

All we need is for some entity (like the Unique Identification Authority of India't to issue age tokens, and data fluticaries will be able to use those to ensure they only process the personal data of a child with parental consent. This is one of the most advanced concepts proposed in the rules. If implemented, this could become the age-gating example for the rest of the world to adopt.



Some concerns in upbeat RBI report

he Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Financial Stabil The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Financial Stability Report has presented a healthy picture of the Indian banking system. It has noted the improved performance of banks in various segments and on several parameters, especially asset quality. Bad loans fell to a 12-year low of 2.0% in September 2024. The net non-performing assets were at 0.6% of the book. For years, Indian banks, especially the ones in the public sector, had suffered from poor and declining asset quality, requiring fresh capital infusion and writing off of bad loans. So the latest disclosures are welcome. Banks have also shown an increase in profitability. Most banks will remain well capitalised and healthy even if the macroeconomic environment worsens.

ronment worsens.

While this is a positive, there is cause for concern in some areas. The unsecured retail loan book has shown weakness, with an increase in write-offs. The RBI said weakness, with an increase in write-offs. The RBI said this could be because of asset quality degradation in the segment and a dilution of underwriting standards. The unsecured loan book has accounted for a large part of the new loans in the retail segment. The microfinance sector, which tends to cater to low income households, has seen weakness. There is high in-

debtedness among borrowers with multiple loans. Consumer credit below a particular threshold and below a particular threshold and gold loans showed stress. What is clear from all this is that the part of the economy that consists of small borrowers is not doing well. So the report is as much a comment about the financial status of ordinary persons as about the banks that deal with them. This should be seen with the first that bull cone aroung large. with them. This should be seen with
the fact that had loans among large
borrowers have shown a declining
trend, which shows that the economically better segments of society are
not experiencing as much stress as the weaker sections.
The report has forecast a GDP growth of 6.6% in 202425. the work it had research (Ednes 5.6.40.7). Then is how

Profitability of Indian banks is on the rise, but borrowers are under

25, though it had recently fallen to 5.4%. There is hope that an increase in rural consumption, higher government consumption, and savingsand strongservices exports will support better growth. Inflation may become moderate, but how much support monetary policy cangive to growth will continue to be a question. It expects the investment scene to be better, with corporates reporting better results. But the vulnerabilities arising from stretched equity valuations and irrational exuberance of market participants exist. India should also be prepared for adverse goo-political situations, and protective trade and industrial policies as pursued by other governments. The report sounds a warning about rising global public debt which can pose a risk to the international financial system. 25, though it had recently fallen to 5.4%. There is hope

Payheed to ASHA workers' demands

er 42,000 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Ac ver 42,000 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Ac-tivisty workers in Karnataka will goon an indefinite strike from January 7 to demand fixed and better wages and recognition for their efforts in healthcare delivery. As a crucial part of the National Health Mission, ASHA workers bridge the gap between people and the healthcare system, especially in rural areas. Although classified as volunteers, they are, in reality, the backbone of various government campaigns covering immunisation, maternal health, sanitation, and disease prevention. Their responsibilities include promoting safe childbirth, conducting health education programmes, and facilitating access to healthcare for marginalised communities. Often working in remote areas, they act as lifelines for people with limited access to medical facilities.

Despite their significant contributions, ASHA workers are not recognised as employees, which is at the core of their current demands. Their compensation is based on task-based incentives, which means they are paid for the work they do, but get no fixed salary. The paltry honorarium they receive barely covers their essential expenses, leaving them in a precarious financial situation. The workers are seeking a fixed classified as volunteers, they are, in reality, the backbone

tion. The workers are seeking a fixed monthly honorarium of Rs 15,000, monthly nonorarium of its 15,000, with an additional Rs 2,000 for city-based workers to meet higher living costs, and recognition as formal employees with benefits such as gratuity, provident fund and Employees State Insurance (ESI). In addition,

They deliver especially in the villages, and deserve

State Insurance (ESI). In addition, they are seeking pending payments, annual health check-ups, and free treatment for severe illnesses. They are also demanding the withdrawal of a new directive that mandates the use of smartphones for their duties. The insistence on digital tools, without considering the financial constraints of these workers, mostly from low-income families, highlights the broader issue of neglect and divergard for their basic needs. The government's inaction on these pressing concerns not only disempowers the workers, but also imperiis the quality of rural healthcare. ASHA workers are the front-line warriors in the fight against diseases, malnutrition, and maternal and child mortality. Without their support, public health campaigns would crumble, and the health outcomes for vulnerable populations would worsen. Given their invaluable contribution to the healthcare system, it is imperative that the government acknowledge and en their invaluable contribution to the healthcaresystem, it is imperative that the government acknowledge and address their legitimate demands. Their role in ensuing last-mile healthcare is critical and their rights deserve priority. The proposed strike is more than a protest for better wages and benefits; it is a call for dignity, justice and recognition of their indispensable role in the health of the matter.

Will multilateralism survive?

Flawed but essential, multilateral forums require cooperative frameworks if they must result in global stability

ΚΑΝΙζΑ ΒΑΚΗΒΑ

As the new year dawns, optimism often fills the air. People set new goals, embrace fresh opportunities and look forward to growth. But this spirit of renewal and progress is not mirrored in the state of global diplomacy. In fact, the multilateral world finds itself at a crossroads, struggling to remain relevant and effective. The crisis facing multilateralism has been years in the malking. Critics of the system argue that multilateral engagement is often a distraction, an ineffective process that dilutes meaningful action. They champion bilateralism or direct negotiations between two nations as a more pragmatic approach to solving problems. Multilateral forums are accused of fostering stagmation, pro-

negotiations between two nations as a more pragmatic approach to solving problems. Multilateral forums are accused of fostering stagnation, producing watered-down resolutions and failing to make significant strides on core global issues. And while some of these critiques carry weight, they miss an important point: multilateralism, despite in falso, remains indispensable. The East Asian Summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings continue to serve scritical platforms for regional cooperation. ANTO summits, the G20 presidency and other multilateral venues still command global attention.

The problem is not the existence of these forums but rather the way they operate. The negotiation of vague language, the expansion of mandates and the dulution of focus in many groupings all hinder progress and fail to address the urgent challenges facing the world. A glaring example of these systemic theorems was the summit of the Future held in September 2024. This exert, which was billed as a major opportunity, included discussions or critical issues such as climate change, development, peace and security and the sustainable development geals. Despite the significance of these global issues, the UN's skewed decision-making processes were not adequately addressed. Reforming the UN system, especially to ensure a more inclusive and less power-concentrated structure, remains a critical need that has been largely ignored by those in these power centires.

Historically, the five permanent

has been largely ignored by subset in these power centres. Historically, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the P5)—the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United King-dom—have been reluctant to support meaningful reforms to the multilateral system. These powers built the current

world order and have a vested interest in maintaining it.
Yet, since 2020, several countries have begun to call for change. Notali discussions include: "Upholding the UN Charter," initiated by Vietnam or January 2020, "Upholding Multilateralism and the UN-Centred International System" convened by China on May 7, 2021; "New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism" organised by India on December 14, 2022, and "Effective Multilateralism through Defence of the Principles of the UN Charter," convened by Russia on April 24, 2023.
Of these visions, China chooses to focus on the centrality of the UN system as it stands today, referring to the continued relevance of the P5. The Russian



Federation differs alittle from its global east neighbour, stating that while the principles of the UN charter need to be adhered to, there is a yawning again the system that requires urgent attention and necessary change.

The Indian version comes closer to the Russian one, which states that the normative process of engagement is necessary but systemic change is equally important if the multilateral world would want progress in its engagements.

While there is agrudging acceptance of the need for change, even among the Western states, on-ground action in terms of working towards an alternative mechanism is lacking from them. There are also civil society actors who demand change while continuing to uphold the UN system at its core and would be interested in keeping the UN system in the current structure.

This inconsistency and a lack of

current structure.

This inconsistency and a lack of action from major powers is a critical obstacle to achieving a more functional and representative multilateral system.

obstacle to accussing and representative multilateral system. New initiatives, such as China's Global Security Initiative and Global Development Initiative, show that states are beginning to focus more on norm development and its implications for regional

Reformed Multilateralism" (NORMS) further signals the desire for a fresh approach to global cooperation. However, as new multilateral groupings, like the G20, BRICS and the Quad emerge, they often do so in a piecemeal and temporary fashion, carving out niches that fall to address the larger structural issues plaguing the multilateral farmework. These smaller groupings, though important, cannot replace a unified, comprehensive multilateral farmework. Whether it's the US, China, India, or Russia, each power has its own vision of what multilateral farmework whether it's the US, China, India, or Russia, each power has its own vision of what multilateral farmework as these visions collide, the world risks fragmenting into competing spheresof influence, with no clear path forward.

The success of multilateral farmework was not the companion of the more conomically unstable, and global cooperation was often seen as a means to secure a better tomorrow. Today, however, State actors are more focused on short-term strategic gains, and the prospect of a better, more unified future seems distant. Yet, the truth remains if nations continue to prioritise narrownational interests over collective global wefare, the consequences will be felt by all.

Despite the many challenges, there is still hope. Countries must recognise that the future of multilateralism is not about preserving the status quo but about evolving to meet the needs of a rapidly dynanging world. Improving international norms and creating frameworks for cooperation that extend beyond strategic alliances will also create a more stable and equitable global order.

However, achieving this vision will not be easy Geooplitelaterisions such

also create a more stable and equitable global order.
However, achieving this vision will not be easy, Geopolitical tensions, such as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israe-Palestine situation, have further complicated multilateral discussions. The return of Donald Trump to US politics could add another layer of uncertainty.
Yet, these challenges should not determations from working tracerber. Trans-

ts engagements. While there is a grudging acceptance of the need for change, even among the Western states, on-ground action in incoms of working towards an alternative nechanism is leaking from them. There exheat heating from them. There are also evil society actors who demand hange while continuing to uphold off understructure. This inconsistency and a lack of uction from major powers is a critical obstacle toachieving a more functional not proven the current structure. New initiative, such as China's Global Tese and the support of the coming year, world leaders face a stark choice: continue down the face a stark choice continue down the part of the coming year, world leaders face a stark choice continue down the part of the coming year, world leaders face a stark choice continue down the part of the coming year, world leaders face a stark choice continue down the part of the coming year, world leaders the complete of the coming year, world leaders a leader of the coming year, and demission and the proposed of the coming year, and the sum of the coming year, and the sum of uncertainty. These challenges should not deter nations from working together. Transmissions in such cannot a change with their states partners but also with their atdversaries. The coming year, world leaders face a stark choice: continue down the face at stark choice continue down the stakes have never been higher. Multiple of the proposed of the partners of the coming year, and the proposed of the partners of the coming year, and the proposed of the partners of the coming year, and the proposed of the partners of the coming year, and the proposed of the proposed of the partners of the partners

SPEAK OUT

Opposition parties' job is not just to make accusations. Allegations should be made with documents and allegations should be proved. Baseless allegations should not be made.

There is one rule for politicians all over the world: Don't say in power what you say in opposition; if you do, you only have to carry out what the other fellows have found impossible.

Siddaramaiah, Karnataka CM

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

Decoding PM's Christmas overture

Narendra Modi's presence at the bishops' meet is laudable, but his

silence on attacks on Christians has drawn criticism

STANLEY CARVALHO

The Christmas event host-ed by the Catholic Bish-ops Conference of India (CBCI), where Prime Minister Modi was the chief guest, has caused the usual flutter in the dovecotes as violence against dovecores as violence against. Christians continues unabated. While Modi's presence at the CBC lheadquarters in New Delhi, where he highlighted love, peace, and harmony—central to Jesus Christ's teaching—was a laudable gesture, his silence and imaction against attacks on Christians in India have invited flax. This is the first time an Indian prime minister has attended an event at the CBCI headquarters.

dian prime minister has attended an event at the CBCI
headquarters.
In his speech, Modi referencel past tragedies including
the recent Christmas market
attack in Germany and the
2019 Easter bombings in Sit
Lanka, urging for collective
action to combat such threats.
However, there was no word
about the persecution of Christians and minorities in India
nor about Manipur where
Christmas celebrations are
overshadowed by the ongoing ethnic violence that has
gripped the state for months.
Unsurprisingly, some 200
prominent Christains in India,
in a pressrelease, have said that
inviting Modi to a Christmas
reception ignores the plight of
persecuted Christians in the
country. Tit's surprising that
despite the growing persecution of Christians, prominent
members of the Christian in
herarchyhave chosen to engage
with Prime Minister Mod, who

members of the Christian hi-erarchy have chosen to engage with Prime Minister Modi, who has been criticised for his inac-tion in protecting the rights of Christians," the release said, adding that until November this year, India recorded 745 incidents of Christian citizens attacked for their faith. "One of the main reasons at-tibuted to this leave in or inci-

"One of the main reasons at-tributed to this alarming rise in tributed to this alarming rise in persecution is the resurgence of Hindutva nationalism, which has led to an increase in anti-minorities sentiment, spe-cially targeting Christians and Muslims, "the release stated. The statement added that

symbolic gestures do little to address the hatred generated against the community and the resultant targeted vio-lence, arrests and incidents of ostracisation in several parts of

ostracisation in several parts of the country.
Separately, a senior bishop of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in Kerala denounced Modi's participation in CBCT's Christmas event. "There the bishops are being honoured and he is bowing before the Christmas crib. And here the Christmas crib is being destroyed," Bishop Youhanon Mar Meletius said in a social media post that was

reported widely by the media.
The comment followed the disruption of Christmas cele-brations at a school allegedly by local activists of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the vandalising of a symbolic crib created by children in another school in Palakkad district.

created by enkiren in anoth-er school in Palakkad district. The incidents triggered wide-spread protests across Keralia. However, the CBC held that it was important to build dia-logue with the Hindu majority of the nation, and welcomed Modi's visit to the bishops'

of the nation, and welcomed Modi's visit to the bishops' conference headquarters to honour Christmas. This is a beautiful event organised by the CBCI, the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows his concern towards the minority communities," said Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai. Coincidentally, the Archbishop of Bengaluru, Peter Machado, who abstained from the event, called for five 'gifs' to Christians from Modi. In a statement two days before Christmas, Machado urged for an end to the covert harassment of Christians, particularly through the controversial anti-conversion bills being brought in 12 states. Another 'giff', hesaid, was resolving the Manipur issue where Christmas have received a raw deal since the onset of the conflict, lamenting the prime minister had yet to visit the region despite his reputation for mediating peace in conflict zones globally.

Among other 'gifts' were constitutional recognition for 'gift' were constitutional recognition for reconstitutional recognition for reconstitutional recognition for reconstitutional recognition for constitutional recognition for reconstitutional reco

arting peace in conflict zones juboally.

Among other 'gifte' were constitutional recognition for Christians from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled These origin, putting an end to attack the constitutional constitution and the constitution of the co

Christians.
It is imperative that the powers that be reciprocate and ensure that minorities in India are protected. Modicited what happened in Germany and Sri Lanka in his address, ignoring anti-Christian violence in seven parts of our country, parent parts.

anti-Christian violence in several parts of our country, particularly the Manipur riots in Maywhere over 200 churches were destroyed and several lixes were lot. Doesn't charity begin at home? It is high time the authorities stop ignoring the atrocities against Christians in India, rightly condemn these acts, and ensure the perpetrators are booked. Unless this normalisation of violence ends. are booked. Unless this nor-malisation of violence ends, the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and the idea of a secular India will lose their meaning. (The writer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The waiting game

Kindness may be misused, but it still proves to be the best choice

SRINIVASAN HARIRAM

The clock ticked steadily as I sat in the waiting room, my book open on my Jap. I had arrived early for my doctor's appointment, wary of the city's unpredictable traffic. Dr Mehta was known for his punctuality, and I didn't want to risk being late.

I had just lost myself in the gripping twists of my mystery novel when the receptionist's voice broke the quiet. The doctor has been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances. Those unable to wait may reschedule their appointments. I sighed, resigned to the delay Having come this far, leaving seemed points. I slighed, resigned to the delay Having come this far, leaving seemed points. I slighed back to my book, hoping the wait wouldn't be too long. A soft he clock ticked steadily as I sat in

moan interrupted my reading. Across her room, a young woman cradled her baby, trying to comfort the restless child. Her face was etched with worry as she whispered soothing words.

"He has arrash," she said, noticing me looking. The baby's cheeks were red and inflamed, and he squirmed in her arms. "It's spreading, and he's so uncomfortable." She hesiated before continuing. "Ilive far away, and it's getting late. What time is your appointment?" "Earlier thanyours," I replied, feeling a twing of unesses. "Would you mind exchanging appointments?" she asked, hope flickering in her eyes. "It's for the baby."

Her words tugged at my heart. I hesitated, unsure. "I'll need to ask the doctor," I said cautiously, It felt courteous, though I doubted Dr Mehta would object to such a request.

When my turn came, lexplained the situation. Dr Metta frowned, his usual warmth replaced by irritation. "This in 'tthe first time," he said. "She's asked

for early slots twice before. Both times, I adjusted my schedule, and she didn't show up."
His words surprised me, but I reasoned that the baby's visible condition justified compassion. After a pause, he reluctantly agreed. I returned to the waiting area, feeling uneasy. Was her story genuine, or had I been too trusting? When I finally saw Dr Mehta, his irritation lingered. "I agreed only because of the baby," he said cut wo. an and her baby were gone. A sinking feeling took hold as I realised the truths he had likely fabricated the urgency to cut ahead in line. I mulled over the inches the control of the sinking that is a discovered to the control of the sinking that is a discovered to the control of the sinking that is a discovered to the control of the sinking that is a discovered to the sinking that is a discovered to the sinking that is a discovered to the sinking that is a si

Compassion might sometimes lead todisappointment, but I reminded my-self that choosing to care was always better than indifference, even when the outcome stung.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Enact a law to regulate election promises

Freebies announced during elections cost crores, straining Freebies announced during elections cost crores, straining government budgets and leading to reallocation of funds or increased fiscal deficits. Commitments made by one government can burden subsequent ones, creating structural imbalances. Many freebies lack sustainable income-generation mechanisms, relying on borrowing or fund diversion. A law should be enacted to limit the financial impact of election promises to the tenure of the government making them. This would ensure expenses are tied to the period of governance. Any promise involving significant expenditure should be accompanied by a

detailed income proposal. Stricter fiscal responsibility legislation is also necessary to keep governments within budgetary constraints. Public funds should be used prudently for long-term development, not for short-term political gains. Political parties must publish the financial implications of their election promises and funding plans. Awareness campaigns can promote the value of investing in infrastructure, education, and healthcare over short-term handouts. This approach balances fulfilling electoral promises with maintaining fiscal responsibility.

T Vidyadhar, Mangaluru

Protect whistle-blowers

Mukesh Chandrakar of Bastar has joined the list of 31 journalists who have lost their lives fighting for freedom of expression. His murder, allegedly for exposing corruption in road construction in Chhattiggarh, is a shocking blow to freedom of expression. The state government's failure to protect the whistleblower is alarming. The contractor should be arrested immediately, and stern action taken. The Home Minister

must take moral responsibility for this failure and step down. The central and state governments must acknowledge the threat to freedom of expression and take action.

Apropos 'Govt says no cause for alarm on HMPV' (Jan 4), while there may be no immediate threats, India should closely monitor the spread of the disease in neighbour-

ing countries. The government must intensify public awareness cam-paigns and ensure hospitals are pre-pared for a potential public health crisis. India must use the learnings from the Covid pandemic to avoid costly mistakes. This is no time to be complacent. A K Shariff, Mysuru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.co.in (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted) All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

WORDLY WISE

ECONOMY DOES NOT CONSIST IN SAVING THE COAL, BUT IN USING THE TIME WHILE IT BURNS.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Indian **EXPRESS**

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

BEHIND JOBS DATA

Minister Mandaviya has flagged overall improvements. But they don't tell the whole employment story

AST WEEK UNION Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya sought to highlight the NDA government's job creation, drawing a comparison with the record on employment of the Congress-led UPA government. The total number of employed people in India increased from 47 crore in 2014-15 to 64 crore by the end of 2023-24, the minister said. That's an increase of 17 crore (or 36 per cent.) — far in excess of the 2.9 crore new jobs (signifying an increase of just 7 per cent) during the preceding decade, 2004 to 2014, under UPA rule. He underlined that since 2017-18, the unemployment rate has fallen while the employment rate (or worker population ratio or WPR) as well as labour force participation rate have risen steadily. Minister Mandaviya has flagged overall improvements, and yet there are persisting reasons for disquiet. It is true that India had more people with jobs in the decade 2014-2024 than between

2004-2014. But since absolute numbers must be read against total population size, it is best to look at the employment rate or WPR; the WPR for 15 years and above in this case is the percentage of people employed as a proportion of the total population. Here's how India's WPR moved over the past two decades: It was 62.2 per cent in 2004-05, which was the first WPR moved over the past two decades: It was 62.2 per cent in 2004-05, which was the first full year under UPA rule. Since then, despite unprecedented rates of CDP growth, if ell to 55.9 per cent in 2009-10 and 54.7 per cent in 2011-12. The WPR continued to fall well into the first four years of the decade under the NDA to hit a low of 46.8 per cent in 2017-18, It is from this low level that the WPR started its steady upward climb and by the end of 2023-24 (July to June year), rose to 58.2 per cent. In other words, the dip and recovery in employment rate does not follow the neat political divide. Similarly, data on the labour force participation rate also shows a secular decline from 63.7 per cent in 2004-05 to 49.8 per cent in 2017-18. We superior the tredfined as the in 2017-18, reversing the trend thereafter. Data on the unemployment rate (defined as the percentage of persons unemployed among persons in the labour force) shows that it actu-ally fell between 2004-05 and 2011-12 before rising to a 45-year high in 2017-18. Most notably, perhaps, the recent improvement in India's labour statistics hides the

poor quality of the new jobs being created in the economy. For instance, the minister highlighted the fact that employment in India's agriculture sector had declined by 16 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under the UPA whereas it had grown by 19 per cent between 2014-2023 in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first two terms. The increase in farm em-2014-2023 in trime funitaria winds related a wood in the contraction that the contraction that the contraction that the contraction that the contraction in the structural transformation India has been trying to achieve since Independence. Similarly, the fact that most of the new jobs are in the low-paying "self-employment" category — especially as "unpaid helpers in household enterprises" — actually suggests deepening economic distress.

OLD AND NEW

As Biden Administration makes way for Team Trump, Delhi-Washington ties are likely to be an area of continuity

HE VISIT OF US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan to India this week is an occasion to celebrate the extraordinary progress in India-US relations during the last four years under President Joe Biden. It is also an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a smooth transition of the bilateral relationship to the next Administration. The significant continuity in US foreign policy between the first Trump Administration (2017-21) and the Biden years (2021-25) is worth noting. Whether it is the commitment to restore US manufacturing capacity, determination to counter China's expansionism, focus on reclaiming US technological leadership, or rear-

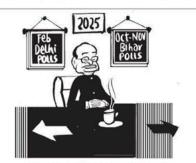
ranging the global economic order, Trump and Biden have been on the same page. An important common thread between the two administrations has been the US pol-icy to strengthen the strategic partnership with India. Trump's articulation of a new Indo-Pacific framework provided, for the first time, a solid regional anchor for India-US cooperation. The Biden Administration doubled down on the Indo-Pacific strategy and the centrality of India's role in securing a regional balance of power in Asia and its waters. The Trump years saw the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Forum — which brings the US together with Australia, India, and Japan — and framed it as the institutional anchor for the new Indo-Pacific region. Biden elevated the Quad to summit level and frequent meetings have provided a solid basis for expanding regional security cooperation between the four nations. Finally, if Trump responded positively to Indian requests for liberalisation of advanced technology transfers to India, Biden constructed a comprehensive bilateral Initiative on Critical and

Emerging Technologies (ICET) in January 2023.

Sullivan will review the progress under the ICET in his meetings with National Security
Adviser Ajit Doval and focus on tying up loose ends, for example, on the transfer of fighter jet engine technology from the American company General Electric to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. Sullivan will also meet External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to dis-cuss progress on several bilateral fronts, including the planned India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, and the emerging dynamic in US and Indian relations with China and Russia, Jaishankar, who was in Washington late last month, had a chance to meet with Sullivan, the incoming NSA Michael Waltz, and the Secretary of State, Antony Blinken. These bilateral conversations during the final days of the transition between two administrations in Washington underline a growing strategic congruence. The mutual trust be tween Delhi and Washington has helped the two sides overcome the turbulence trig-gered by several issues, including India's ties to Russia, the ldilling of an American citizen Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, and America's presumed role in the coup against Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh. There will be issues in Trump's second term, but they are unlikely to derail the positive trajectory in the strategic partnership.

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



Farm Minister & Madhya Pradesh veteran Chouhanji has enough madhya pradesh

A journey to visibility



Initiatives like e-Shram portal are welcome, But more needs to be done for inclusion of migrant workers

S IRUDAYA RAJAN AND KULDEEPSINGH RAJPUT

THE MINISTRY OF Labour & Employment (Mol&E) recently claimed that, with over 300 million workers registered, the e-Shram portal is the largest database of unorganised workers in the world. In view of the pathetic condition and eodus of migrant workers during the pandemic, the Supreme Court of India had directed the Union government to build a national database of workers. Subsequently, the e-Shram Portal was started by the Mol&E in May 2021 with the objective of creating a national database of this ive of creating a national database of this

by the MoL&E in May 2021 with the objective of creating a national database of this labour force.

However, the need to maintain the data of migrants and unorganised workers was identified and recommended much earlier. For instance, the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act (1979) mandated that every labour contractor obtain a licence from the specified authority and provide the particulars of interstate workers employed to the authorities. In 2007, the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector insisted upon a uni-versal registration system for migrant workers. The Unorganised Workers Scala Security Act (2008) also had a provision for registering workers and issuing an identify card to them. Unfortunately, these recommendations and legal provisions never received adequate attention and for years, migrants and workers remained largely invisible.

Due to distress-driven high mobility, these precarious migrants—mainly seasonal and circular workers—face unique and intense challenges such as disenfranchisement, stiems trafficient lack for linguistation monther.

tense challenges such as disenfranchisement, stigma, trafficking, lack of unionisation, poor access to public services, etc. This makes mi-grants the most vulnerable segment among the unorganised workforce, in urgent need the unorganised workforce, in urgent need of social protection. However, since its launch, the e-Shram portal has functioned merely as a "registration drive" for migrants and workers and has been surprisingly silent on their inclusion in social security. Not all e-Shram portal registrant workers receive social security benefits and entitlements. Last year, of 286 million registrants, 80 million migrant workers were excluded from ration cards and food security.

From the filed references on e-Shram registration, it was realised that many migrant unorganised workers face eligibility exclusion due to inadequate documentation and identity proofs. Some migrant workers don't even have an Aadhaar card or ration card. Some don't have permanent mobile phones, others lack permanent numbers, and sometimes the mobile number is not linked to their Aadhaar card. They remain non-eligible to register even at the e-Shram portal. In the absence of identity documents, the institutional mechanism of social security keeps them excluded. This is a significant barrier to the universalisation of access to social security.

In this regard, the MoL&E recently launched the 'One-Stop Solution' (OSS) to provide seamless access to different social security schemes to e-Stram registrant mi-grants and workers. At the time of the launch in October, Mansuluh I. Mandauya (Cabinet Minister, MoL&E) had stated that the OSS platform would function as a bridge, connecting unorganised workers and migrants, making the registration process more accessible and transparent, and connecting them to a wide range of social security and wellto a wide range of social security and wel-fare initiatives. This will integrate crucial doto a wide range of social security and wel-fare initiatives. This will integrate crucial do-mains such as pension, insurance, credit, health, skill development, housing, and food security. As a part of the OSS, key welfare schemes such as One Nation One Ration Card, MCNRECA, National Social Assistance Programme, National Career Service, PM Shram Yogi Maandhan, etc., have been inte-grated with e-Shram. Other welfare schemes such as PM Martu Vandana Yojana, Shramik Suraksha Yojana of the Postal Department, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National, Urban Livelihoods Mission, etc. will be linked soon as well. It is noteworthy that for the first time, the Gol and the concerned ministry seem serious about protecting the rights of unor-ganised workers and migrants and appear to be taking strategic steps. The OSS has an integrated approach to ensuring social se-curity for millions of scattered and frag-mented migrants and workers. However,

ed migrants and workers. However

there are specific concerns. From the filed references on e-Shram reg. From the filed references on e-Shram reg-istration, it was realised that many migrant unorganised workers face eligibility exclu-sion due to inadequate documentation and identity proofs. Some migrant workers don't even have an Aadhaar card or ration card. Some don't have permanent mobile phones, others lack permanent numbers, and some-times the mobile number is not linked to their Aadhaar card. They remain non-eligible to register even at the e-Shram portal. In the ab-sence of identity documents, the institutional mechanism of social security keeps them ex-cluded. This is a significant barrier to the uni-

versalisation of access to social security.

According to recent data, female workers comprise 53.59 per cent of all registered workers on the - Shram platform. This trend is a positive sign, given the labour market has deep-rooted, gendered structural in-equalities. This demands specific steps to-wards bringing a gender-sensitive approach to social security programmes. A large proportion of unorganised workers are interstate migrants. Their entitlements need to be protected and transferred across local. be protected and transferred across loca-tions and states. Therefore, the MoL&E mus look at the portability of welfare schemes through e-Shram and OSS. In this context the role of the Code on Social Security mus

Migrant workers are not a homogeneous category — there is substantial socio-cultural, regional, demographic, and economic diversity, It is essential to map out migrants' profiles in detail. Non-profit organisations and policymakers have repeatedly recommended disaggregating migration and worker data to frame comprehensive and equitable inclusion policies. However, the Mol&Ei silent on this aspect. Another concern is that e-Shram should not be a freebeir and 'subsidy burden'. Migrants and workers must be seen as "assets" and flours should be given more no "assets" and flours should be given more no "assets" and focus should be given more or human development outcomes by carefully

human development outcomes by carefully designing every scheme. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states that poorly governed migration can negatively impact develop-ment. Migrants and unorganised workers are the fuel of the Indian economy, awaiting are the rule of the Indian economy, awaiting their due recognition and rights. The goal of Viksit Bharat cannot be achieved without well-designed social protection systems for the meaningful inclusion of the unorganised and migrant workforce. The e-Shram and OSS are steps towards this, but there is still a long way to go.

Rajan is chair and Rajput is post-doctoral fellow at the International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD) in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

THE VIOLENCE OF WORDS

Kerala CM must revisit state's past to understand Sanatana Dharma, Narayana Guru

GURU PRAKASH

"NO DOUBT THE communists get quick re-sults because when you adopt the means of annihilating a man, they do not remain to oppose you. Humanity does not only want economic values; it also wants spiritual val-ues to be retained. Permanent communist dictatorship has paid no attention to spiri-tual values and does not seem to intend to. The means adopted by the communists are equally clear, short and swift; one is violence and second is dictatorship of the proletariat." These are the words of Babasaheb B R Ambedkarin his famous speech, Buddhaor Karl Marx?. In it, he minces no words to bring out the real face of communism. In India's history, Dalits have frequently

bring out the real race of communism.

In India's history, Dalits have frequently been at the receiving end of violent massacres. The Marichjhapi killings in West Bengal in 1979 under the Jyoti Basu-led Left Front government is a prime example. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's re-cent remarks on Hindu culture and

cent remarks on Hindu culture and Narayana Gururekot the same communist duplicity and disregard for facts, it is violence by words — it depicts cluelessness about Indian Dalit and subaltern history.

It is true that Narayana Guru paved the way for the cohesion of the social milieu of Kerala but to turn around and tarnish Hindu religion and culture using this as a pretext is unforgivable on the part of an elected chief minister.

Fact one: Narayana Guru, without doubt, remains a tall and oppular figure who has enabled Hindu thought, religion, and culture to reinvent themselves, He is, there-

Sanatana Dharma has stood the test of time, serving mankind and enabling people to realise their full potential for thousands of years. We have had several advocates of Sanatana Dharma who have enabled our religion to get rid of aberrations, whenever and wherever they have arisen. We must work to contemporise their teachings, words and writings. Communists in this country

should be the last to lecture our subaltern brethren.

fore, a popular advocate of Sanatana Dharma. Fact two: Hindu culture has been shaped by Dalits in Indian history and I am proud of this. Narayana Guru is not alone. An integral figure in the Dalit movement in Kerala often missed by historians and politicians is Ayyankali, a dynamic advocate of Sanatana Dharma. In the Indian Dalit movement and vis-a-vis reforms in Hindu culture, Ayyankali's contribution remains monumental. Ayyankali, a revolutionary social reformer, laid out principles that subalterns need to follow to succeed. These included faith in god, modern dressing, cleanliness, obedience and discipline. Ayyankali worked in concert with Hindu organisations like the Arya Samaj, Hindu organisations like the Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, and the Kerala Hindu Mission to bring forth necessary reforms. He was deeply influenced by saints like Swami Sadananda. Much like Narayana Guru,

Sadananda. Much like Narayana Guru, Ayyankali stood for eliminating discriminatory practices in Hinduism. Be it Narayana Guru or Ayyankali, both contributed massively in enabling social cohesion, and in the making of modern India and were important advocates of Sanatana Dharma.

Kerala has given India hugely popular advocates of Sanatana Dharma.

Kerala has given India hugely popular advocates of Sanatana Dharma.

These figures stayed within the folds of Hinduism and constantly affirmed to reformit from within. Its important to note here that Ambedkar dedicated his first book on Dalist to three Hindu saints — Guru Ravidas, Chokhamela and Nandanar. Reading about their lives can pro-

vide a view of how much they strove to reform Hindu culture from within. Even Ambedkar sought the annihilation of caste and not the annihilation of legion. Another important figure is Dalsshayani Velayudhan, a name that means Dunga in Hindu culture. The sole Dalit woman representative in the Constituent Assembly also hailed from Kerala. Sanatana Dharma has stood the test of time, serving mankind and enabling people to realise their full potential for thousands of years. We have had several advocates of Sanatana Dharma who have enabled our religion to get in dof aberrations, whenever and wherever they have arisen. We must work to contemporise their teachings, words and writings. Communists in this country should be the last to lecture our subaltern breibren. Constructive criticism is a laten breibren. Constructive criticism is altern brethren. Constructive criticism is al ways welcome, but to pass hurtful remarks about faith itself is unwelcome. Disrespec

about faith itself is unwelcome. Disrespect for any faith or religion is unbecoming of anyone, let alone an elected leader to a constitutional office.

Kerala's CM ought to revisit Kerala's history, His words are not just baseless but illfounded. It has become fashionable to make ill-founded remarks on Hindu culture for public consumption. It is important to be cognisant of the violent communist ideology that Vijayan espouses that the father of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar, thoroughly despised.

The writer is national spokesperson, BJP, and an academic

JANUARY 6, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON PUNJAB ISSUE

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi reiterated PRINE MINISTER KOJIV GARDII PETERAECH that his government would prioritise the problem of Punjab. In his first address to the nation after his electoral triumph, Gandhi pointed out that a Cabinet committee had been set up to study the problem and to con-sider alternatives for "a peaceful settlement within a specified time frame."

PM-NTR TALKS ANDHRA PRADESH CHIEF Minister N T Rama Rao was assured by Prime Minister a policy of confrontation with the state, Rao as also offered full cooperation from the was also offered that cooperation from the Centre for the development of the state. On his part, Rao also pledged wholehearted co-operation to the Centre towards national re-construction and development.

ASSAM ELECTIONS THE PROSPECTS OF early elections in 14 Lok I'll: PROSPECTS OF early elections in 14 Los. Sabha constituencies in Assam appear remote because of the elaborate procedure involved in completing the intensive revision of elec-toral rolls in the state. The Election Commission has completed the first phase of the process, anneals house-trackurse enumeration of weers, but complex aspects like inviting claims and objections and deciding the ticklish question of citizenship, are yet to begin.

LETTERS TO LEADERS

THE PRIME MINISTER has written letters to THE PRIME MINISTER has written letters to world leaders — including US President Ronald Reagan, Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Tikhonov, Pakistan President Jaz-ul-Haq and Sri Lankan President Jayewardene, expressing the government's desire to improve relations with their countries. In his letter to Reagan, Rajiv Gandhi expressed hope that Indo-US ties would be strengthened further in the ware a head

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Parental approval

Towards a safer digital world for kids

HE digital age has revolutionised childhood, with social media becoming an integral part of how young people connect and communicate. Yet, this evolution brings significant risks that demand urgent action. India's draft rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) man-dating consent of parents/guardians for minors to open social media accounts are a commendable step in safe-guarding children. Globally, similar regulations are already in place. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires parental consent for users under 16, while the US Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) enforces stringent rules for users under 13. These measures aim to protect minors from cyberbullying, exploitation and privacy violations. The issues have also been addressed in India's draft rules. The urgency of these guardrafts is underscored by alarming statistics: 58 per cent of teenagers globally are

daily users of platforms like TikTok, with significant seposure to harmful content. In 2023, a Delhi man exploited Snapchat to blackmail over 700 women, high-lighting wulnerabilities in unregulated digital space. Similarly, a UK teenager's tragic suicide after Insta-

Similarly, a UK eenager's trage suicide after insta-gram-fuelled bullying reveals the psychological impact of unchecked social media exposure. India's proposed rules make social media companies accountable for verifying parental consent through robust measures, empowering the guardians to guide their wards' online interactions. To refine these rules, additional measures like Al-driven age verification, digital literacy workshops and transparent complaint mechanisms are essential. Regular audits, stakeholder feedback and alignessential. Regular audits, statecholder feedback and augi-ment with global standards will further enhance the framework. By adopting these rules, India contributes to a global effort to create a safer online environment for chil-dren. In a world where digital engagement is unavoidable, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the youngest users is not merely a responsibility but also an ethical imperative. Building collaboration among parents, educators and social media platforms is crucial for lasting change.

Unsafe food

Haryana should prioritise quality control

ARYANA direly needs to set its house in order as far as food safety is concerned. Regular inspections by the state's Food and Drugs Administration have found blatant violation of rules and regulations particularly in the case of milk and milk products like butter, ghee, paneer, khoya and ice cream. Of the 104 milk samples collected between January and October 2024, over 46 per cent failed the quality test. Among milk products, 30 per cent of the samples were declared unsafe, sub uces, so per cens or me samples were decased unisse, sub-standard or misbranded. The quality of sweets, cereals, pulses, spices and edible oils has also come under a cloud. That sums up the plight of the consumer, who unsuspect-ingly buys foodstuffs from the neighbourhood kirana

ingly buys foodstuffs from the neighbourhood kirana store or mithai shop, or relies on apps for his daily needs. Food safety is an issue that doesn't crop up during any election, unless a large number of people fall ill or lose their lives. There is generally no hue and cry by political leaders over the adulterated products that we eat or drink as a matter of routine. Raids are conduct-ed, fines imposed and cases registered, yet things are back to square one once the dust settles. The intensi-ty of monitoring during the festive season is not repli-cated during the rest of the year. Unscrupulous ele-

ty of monitoring during the festive season is not repli-cated during the rest of the year. Unscrupulous ele-ments resume their business whenever the authorities take their foot off the pedal.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India offers financial and technical support to states/UTs for improving the food testing ecosystem, but much depends on how seriously the state authorities take their job. It is critical that no one should go hungry, at the same time, no one's health should be compromised by the consumption of unsafe food.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 1925

Pandit Motilal Nehru's leadership

THERE is no one among the political leaders of India at the present time whose leadership is more inspired by a due measure of idealism and a due sense of what is attainable thanthat of Pandit which lall Nehru. The interview he gave to an Associated Press representative at Bornbay on his way back from Belgaum, and of which a belegraphic account appeared in our last issue, will take nothing from his reputation in this respect. On all three important points affecting his party and his country, on which the interviewer sought his opinion, he had something both definite and profitable to say. On the question of the Swarqists accepting office, he made two interesting statements; first, that the Swarqi party in the Central Provinces, or for that matter in any other province, could not possibly take office without the express permission of the central organisation and that no such permission had been given; secondly, that so far as he was aware, no occasion had arisen to recondly, that so far as he was aware, no occasion had arisen to recondly, that so far as he was aware, no occasion had arisen to recondity. ondly, that so far as he was aware, no occasion had arisen to reconsider the question of accepting office. This settles the immediate issue. The one point on which it throws no light is whether the matissue Theonepoint on which it throws no light is whether the mat-ter is going to be considered at the Nagpur conference and any hypothetical conclusions arrived with regard to it. To us it is not clear that even the central organisation of the party is by itself morally competent to arrive at a decision in this matter. As far as our recollection goes, the leaders of the party gave the country to understand on the eve of the election that so long as the demands of the country in the matter of self-government were not substan-tially conceded, the non-acceptance of office was to be a part of their fundamental policy.

Reforms must give us a cutting edge

Structural constraints and legacy issues related to India's defence R&D need to be addressed



CUDAY BHASKAR ECTOR, SOCIETY FOR POLICY STUDIES

NDIA's composite defence and military cosystem is critical for ensuring that national security and sovereignty are not endangered. This domain has been accorded priority by Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he assumed office in 2014.

The need for a holistic review and necessary reforms was long acknowledged — an issue that the late Dr Marumohan Singhoften flagged in his interaction with the military top brass — but the institution remained reluctant to go down this path. NDIA's composite and military

the institution remained reluctant to go down this path.

During his second term, PM
Modi announced the creation of the post of Chief of Defence
Staff. However, the task of initiating defence reforms is mammoth, and it remains a work in progress. The entire organisation that is the responsibility of the Defence Minister is like an octopus, whose many tentacles — some going back to the colonial period (ordnance factories, for example) — are insular, for example) — are insular, prickly and tenaciously resistant to change. This, incidentally, is not an Indian trait. Most militaries the world over are steeped in tradition and slow to adapt to change — this is part of the institutional DNA.

Thus, it is encouraging to note that in PM Modi's third term, 2025 that in PM Modi's third term, 2025 has been designated as the Year of Reforms'. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh highlighted this move at the 67th Foundation Day of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)lastweck. He dwelfon the crucial role the organisation could play in realising the objectives of



In a nutshell, the core objectives of India's defence reform are: One, to move the needle of national combat readiness, as national combat readiness, as warranted by national security and shaped by contemporary techno-strategic and geopolitical compulsions; and two, to reduce dependency on external sources that provide critical platforms/inventory items/technat provide critical platforms/inventory items/tech-nology. The DRDO and the larg-er national scientific and manuer national scientific and manu facturing ecosystem have a major role in this endeavour. Rajnath Singh exhorted scien tists to improve their core com

petencies and set an ambitious benchmark. He added, 'The DRDO should aim to become one of the strongest research and development organisations in the world." He also comin the world." He also commended the design team that enabled the success of the Long-Range Hypersonic Antibip Missile, which is the most recent feather in the sparsely burnished DRDO cap. However, the structural constraints and legacy issues related to India's defence R&D and manufacturing need to be addressed if the stated objective is to be realised. India does not

It is encouraging that 2025 has been designated as the Year of Reforms

figure among the top R&D nations of the world, and the defence sub-sector has a relatively modest record in terms of investments and scientific output over the decades, barring a few islands of innovation.

few islands of innovation.

In September last year, DRDO
Chairman Samir V Kamat pointed out that India spent only 0,65
per cent of the national GDP on
R&D. The contrast with other
nations is striking. Their respective R&D Spending as a percentage of the GDP is: the US, 283;
China, 2,14; France, 2,19; and
South Korea, 4.8. Kamat added
that the government was aware

over the next few years, during Modi 3.0, this modest figure will hopefully rise to 1 per cent of the GDP and be doubled to 2 per cent GDP and be doubled to 2 percent by 2685. But on current evidence, this is a low-probability exigency and may need a major political intervention, especially since the whole defence budget just touches 2 per cent of the GDP.

The legacy challenge for the DRDO and the extended defence-military ecosystem is that India continues to have high dependency on foreign imports to maintain its minimum combat readiness. In the

mum combat readiness. In the decade from FY 2012-13 to 2021-22, as per a report of the Parlia-mentary Standing Committee on Defence, India's capital expenditure for military inventory acquisitions and moderni-

tory acquisitions and moderni-sation in foreign exchange was above 35 per cent; it hit 49 per cent in one year.
This proportion blunts India's claim to credible strategis autonomy. PM Mod's prioriti-sation of 'atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) over the past decade is laudable, but the gestation peri-ods are very long and a broad-bush review of the DRDO and defence public sector undertak-

ings (DPSU) indicates a pattern

ings (DPSU) indicates a pattern that needs a review. Over the past seven decades since its founding, the DRDO, along with other organisations, has achieved commendable suc-cess in the strategic domain of military capability (nuclear weapons, missiles, nuclear weapons, missiles, nuclear propulsion) despite India being under US-led technology sanc-tions for three decades. However, the track record in major conventional platforms has been below par. Whether it's the main

below par Whether it's the main battle tank, fighter aircraft or submarines, the DRDO-DPSU team has not enhanced the country's combat capability in a significant manner. The current focus on government-private sector-academia cooperation is welcome, but the procedures and timelines are yet to attain necessary traction. The biggest weakness for India that despite other indicators, such as a large GDP, a substantial HR gene pool and a viable tial HR gene pool and a viable higher education network, original design of military equipment has largely been missing. Despite limited success with the Despite limited success with the Ishapper rife and the HF24 Marut fighter aircraft in the 1960s, India is yet to acquire credible indigenous military design capability. (Warship design is an exception, but that is not under the DRDO umbrela). Consequently, even personal weapons for soldiers are imported. This is incongruous for anation that is missile-capable. Specific to the DRDO, while well-coming this emphasis on reforms,

coming this emphasis on reforms, what would be desirable is a deep and objective techno-strategic audit of the organisation over the past five decades by a blue-ribbon team offindependent espects. Their findings may provide a being findings may provide a bedowna ron-productive path in relation to national combat efficiency. PS: Can the current prioritisation of producing chariots by the DRDO and erecting of statues by the Indian 'fauj' be reviewed as part of the reforms? and objective techno-strategic

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it. - Antoinede Saint Exapery

Styles of dealing with files

TROM the clerk at the lowest rung of the administration to the Prime Minister, everyone has to deal with files. How efficiently one handles them often separates a good func-

the Prime Minister, everyone has to deal with files. How efficiently one handles them often separates a good functionary from the average one.

Early in my practical training as an IPS officer, a collector, a promotee from the state civil service cadne, gave me this lesson, "Never dispose of a file in the first instance. Return it with a query at least three times so that no one can accuse you of 'non-application of mind'.

Other than that, no one taught me how to deal with file work. To my suprise, I found that even for such uninteresting and routine work, bosses had their unique styles from which one learnt both the do's and don'ts.

A senior officer was not good at clearing files but left his desk clean every evening by simply asking his PA to send all files back and put them up again the next day. So, files kept moving without actually 'moving'.

A boss had difficulty in taking decisions. His office used to be littered with bundles of files. If I took a file to him with a request to dear it, he would say, 'tust look around and see how busy I am. Please leave it. I will see it." And so another file would be added to the pile.

I was working as DCP (Administration) in Vadodara in 1990 when I had to process loads of files daily, but my boss—a popular commissioner of police—had little time for them. He remained busy meeting visitors. The file work suffered, and it impacted administration.

One day, I broached the matter with him. He said, "What can I do'! I have worked in Wadodara for three tenues. I know people for donkey's years. If they come to see me, I cannot say no. Do one thing. When you find me free, bring files to me and I will clear them." And that's how it went.

His successor was different. On joining the post, he called all senior officers and said, "I had so going to trust you all as long as you keep it up." Then, he issued an order delegating moir of files going up to him. But there was

the power of transferring subordinate ranks, which few seniors are ready to part with.

It reduced the flow of files going up to him. But there was more to learn from him. He did not clear any file without reading it completely. He was a fast reader and decision-maker. His orders or instructions were always crisp and clear and his desk used to be mostly clean. He spent much of his time reading either a book or his favourite magazines—Time and Neusstreek.

I wasn't a fast reader like him but found his approach worth following. I did not have a "file-free" desk at the end of each day but used weekends to finish pending file work so that on most Monday mornings, a clean desk greeted me in the office.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Connect with our cultural history Refer to "Two museums and a visitor" (The Great Game), the writer seems to be a conneisseur of air and culture. It is quite sensible to encourage peo-ple to visit museums and art galleries that house me paintings and ancient sculptures. These help us connect with our rich cultural history. People desend siet in sell-mental processors. abroad visit well-maintained museums and art galleries every year. In Chandigath, such places remain rarely visited. We must find a way to get people back into cultural spaces, as suggested in the article. Without the public's active interest and participation, we won't be able to do justice to our glorious cultural herita

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Art deserves an audience

Art deserves an audience
Apropos of "Noo museums and a visitor';
Chandigarh's museums hold treasures that
remain tragically unappreciated. The Government Museum houses Gandhara sculptures,
Pahari paintings and Corbusier's architectural
marvels. Yet, the silence in these ant galleries is
deafening — a stark contrast to the bustling
malls in the city. One wonders why these cultunal jewels are ignored. The answer lies in neglect, outdated brochures and inaccessible
spaces. A few steps in the right direction would
rekindle the youth's interest in our cultural
history. A vibrant city like Chandigarh
deserves museums that inspire, not stagnate.
To truly embrace its 'City Beautiful' title, the
authorities must reinvigionate these spaces for
all. Art deserves an audience.

**SARGUNPREET KAUR, MOHALI
**SARGUNPREET KAUR, MO an audience.

SARGUNPREET KAUR, MOHALI

A clarion call for change

With reference to 'Two museums and a visitor'; the article rekindles fond memories of school excursions to Chandigarh's Government Muse-um and Art Gallery. These trips offered us a change to great with history. chance to engage with history through captivat-ing murals, taking us back to bygone eras. The writer's demand to dismantle the culture" is a clarion call for change. Chandigarh is more than a mere tourist or shopping destina tion; its cultural heritage warrants renewed attention. With collaborative efforts from paracteriors. With collaborative errors from par-ents, teachers and policymakers, museums can reclaim their significance, turning the city into a cultural and educational hub.

VIAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Need decentralisation of power

Apropos of Policing integrity; the zero-toler-ance approach reflects the commitment of the Punjab and Haryana police towards uproot-ing corruption within the law enforcement agency. Some officers tend to take their posi-tion for granted. The corrupt practices of these officers have jeopardised the empowerment of the nation. Their modus operandi must be scrutinised and the nexus of the cops with triminals kept under surveillance. Besides criminals kept under surveillance. Besides suspension, the decentralisation of power and authority can serve as a game-changer. The tainted officers who evade accountability must be dealt with strictly.

ARVIND SHARMA, BY MAIL

Assertive policing
Refer to Policing integrity; recent actions in
Punjab and Haryana, where officers were dismissed for missonduch tightight a critical juneture in policing. The Punjab DSP's facilitation of
a gangster's interviewwas anew low Haryana's
response to negligence in a triple murder case
also shows commitment to accountability. These
incidents bowsers reveal deep seated commialso shows commitment to accountability. These incidents, however, reveal deep seated corruption within our police forces. With over 30 officers arrested in Punjab for graft and a third of Haryana's trap cases involving cops, systemic reform is essential. Enhanced accountability transparent investigations and independent oversight are impensitive to restore public trust in the police force and uphold the law's sanctity.

GURDEY SINGH, MOHALI

Anti-racism movement needed
With reference to 'A case for Make America &
India Great Again'; the group claiming that
American greatness is directly linked to
American whiteness is driven by resentment
towards other races, particularly from India.
Evidence of this is found in numerous posts
on X that express hostility and hitterness on X that express hostility and bitterness towards Indians. This has escalated to the point that Indians often face ridicule and point that Indians often face ridicule and stereotypical remarks by Americans. One rea-son for this is the lack of an anti-racist senti-ment among Indians. Another contributing factor is our tendency to overfook racist com-ments. Such developments must be closely examined and met with strong criticism. YUGAMDEEPTIWANA, BY MAIL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters⊕tribunemail.com

Editorial



No secret affair

Deliberations on draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules must be open

Data Protection Rules must be open

The draft Digital Personal Data Protection
Rules, 2025, is a long overdue advance in
the direction of enforcing the fundamental right to informational privacy for Indias, affirmed by the Supreme Court of India in the landmark case, Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of
India (2017). The Digital Personal Data Protection
Act, which these draft rules seek to enforce, was
passed in Parliament over a year ago. This sevenyear wait has most likely not been without costs
for the privacy of the data of Indians, as it coincided with a period that saw a rapid growth in
digitisation. The proposed rules offer direction
on how online services will be required to: comnumicate the purposes of their data collection to
users; safeguard children's data online; establish
the Data Protection Board of India (DPBI); set the
standards for government agencies to follow to

users; safeguard children's data online; establish the Data Protection Board of India (DPBI); set the standards for government agencies to follow to be exempt from the Act's provisions, and spell out the procedures to be observed if personal data is breached by a data fiduciary. The concerns regarding the proposed DPBI's institutional design have not been resolved by these proposed Rules, and it may not be realistic to expect such an outcome from subordinate legislation. It is regertable that the government continues to cloak the rule-making process of a critical policy such as this in secrecy. Since the Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee was convened to draft the first Bill for data protection, the government has consistently declined to place recommendations from stakeholders in the public domain, and has foreclosed such disclosure for these draft rules as well. For legislation where the stakes are high for individual users as well as for large technology firms, an open deliberative process is essential. It can only be facilitated when industry associations and the general public can find equal footing by being equal participants with transparency into each other's viewpoints during the cy into each other's viewpoints during the consultation process. In the short and medium term, it is essential for the government to proterm, it is essential for the government to pro-ceed with these principles in mind, while never leparting from the key aims of any data protec-tion law: minimising data collection, promoting disclosures, penalising neglect in protecting user data, and discouraging surveillance practices, both by the private sector and the government. This process must also play out in a timely fash-ion, as Indians have been waiting far too long to finally obtain the rights that were affirmed for them in 2017. Else, people's confidence in the go-vernment's seriousness about protecting their data from government agencies as well as private enterprises would be shaken.

The outlook for India in the year ahead

ndia is at a pivotal moment in its history. It is among the leading nations in the world when it comes to economic growth and political stability. India today projects an atmosphere of peace, which is seemingly out of place in a world that is undergoing a profound shift in its economic and geo-political landscape. India is today privy to the rise of new economic and political groupings.

The year 2024 was a period of pronounced political uncertainty across the globe. Much of the world was a mute witness to the multiple and concurrent conflicts that threaten peace and stability today. This is specially true of Europe and West Asia.

One major tragedy still unfolding is Gaza, which has few parallels, while the ongoing Ukraine conflict contains the seeds of a much wider conflict in the future. India has, however, managed to steer itself successfully within this geo-political landscape.

geo-political landscape.

A year of new troubles

A year of new troubles
This may, however, be too good to last. The year
2025 seems poised to bring in a host of fresh
troubles that will require deft handling on the
part of India's policymakers. At this time, it
might, hence, be wise for India's leaders to heed
the message contained in an ancient Chinese
saying that says 'the wind sweeping through the
tower heralds a rising storm in the mountain'.
I begin by assessing the situation with India's
largest neighbour, China. Much is being made of
the recent border negotiations and an apparent
disengagement at the Line of Actual Control in
Ladakh. This was followed by the first formal
meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi
and China's President XI Jinping meeting in five
years, as well as the resumption of the Special
Representatives' talks on border issues. Wiser
heads would know that disengagement does not
mean 'dispute resolution'. The border conflict
still remains alive and unchanged. Far more
needs to be done to reach any kind of detente.
India, hence, cannot afford to 'take its eye off the
ball'.

Meanwhile, China has, of late, taken a series of steps to strengthen security cooperation with nations of the Global South, which are aimed at outflanking India. It recently facilitated reconciliation talks that were held in Beijing reconciliation talks that were held in Beijing among various Palestine factions. In September last year, China and African nations Jointly agreed to progress the China-sponsored Global Security Initiative (GSI) and deepen cooperation in areas such as counter terrorism, disaster management and public health. China also managed to steal a march over India during the Shanghal Gooperation Organisation Summit held in Pakistan in October. It took full



M.K. Narayanan

a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

Minister at the Summit to mute India's voice at a forum that is perceived as being anti-West. Mr. Xi again took full advantage of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, in Peru in November, to strengthen ties with 'traditional enemy', Japan.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has since agreed with Mr. Xi to promote a 'mutually beneficial relationship ...based on common strategic interests'.

The churn in South and West Asia
It is in India's traditional area of influence, viz.,
South Asia, however, that the biggest churn is
taking place — or has already taken place.
Questions have been raised after the ouster of the
Sheikh Hasina regime in Bangladesh as to
whether India indeed has a proper
'neighbourhood policy'. Today, India appears
almost isolated in the region and with the eclipse ost isolated in the region and with the eclipse of Ms. Hasina and the emergence of a caretaker regime (which is openly hostile to India), India appears friendless.

Both Nepal and Sri Lanka today appear to look

like 'fair weather friends' – at least in so far as the present is concerned. Where the Maldives stands, is indeed a subject to debate. Pakistan has always is indeed a subject to debate. Pakistan has always been inimical to India, and Afghanistan today does not seem to figure prominently in India's calculations. Bhutan, under the present King, does not display the same warmth towards India, appearing more intent on balancing relations with China. Across the South Asia region, therefore, how the roll of the dice would turn out is a matter of speculation.

Far more problematic though could well be the impact of the current churn in West Asia, more specifically, the developments in Syria of Jate. The ouster of the Assad regime in Syria is certain to have a catackysmic impact on that part of the world. In turn, it will have relevance for countries in the wider region as well, including India. How India deals with the situation resulting from the

in the wider region as well, including lindla. How India deals with the situation resulting from the collapse of the erstwhile Bashar al-Assad regime, and the takeover of the reins by a Sunni group. the 'Hayat Tahir al Shams (HTS)' is unclear. Its leader, who carried the nom-de-guerre Abu Mohammed al Julani, has since reverted to his real name, Ahmed Hussain al Sharaa. The HTS leader was previously linked to al Qaeda, and even briefly flirted with the Islamic State (SIS), but is today displaying a more moderate outhook. It may, however, be too early to determine what the outhook for Syria is, and for the region as a whole under the new dispensation.

The HTS was able to wage a successful offensive against the Assad regime largely because it could identify with the Sunni majority in Syria, in contrast to the Assad regime that had, Mohammed al Julani, has since reverted to his

modified 747, the battered space veteran taking a final victory jaunt [after finishing its useful life] before landing at Dulles International Airport... There were costumes, there were cheers and, of course, there were tears. "That "hypast' was symbolic of national pride in the leadership position of the American space programme. Sometimes, leaders remind themselves of the import of their position. U.S. President Harry S. Truman had a table placard that read, "The Buck Stops Here'. And, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had the famous lines of 'Stopping by

Nehru had the famous lines of 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Fros

his table: "The woods are lovely dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep."

of late, become more reliant on Russia and Iran to maintain its hold over the country. From India's viewpoint, the Assad family (belonging to Syria's Alawite group, a minority sect of Shia Islam) was initially viewed as a stabilising force in the Gulf region, especially during the difficult days that rocked parts of West Asia in the wake of the Arab Spring. India, home to a Shia and Sunni population, had greatly welcomed this. More recently, many of these perceptions had altered. The implications of a Sunni regme in Syria are certain to be widespread. One by one, elements of the so-called 'axis of resistance' are being dismantled. On the other hand Israel, despite its pogrom in Gaza, seems to be gaining the upper hand in West Asia. Which side has gained the most, given recent developments in Syria, is not yet fully clear, but quite evidently, Iran has been a loser – and it might well result in Iran's influence across West Asia declining, It may also no longer be the same revolutionary force in West Asia, that be the same revolutionary force in West Asia, that it was perceived to be following the 1979 revolution in Iran. The Ayatollahs in Iran are also set to face a major setback, and a major churn in Iran cannot be ruled out. The Shia world as a whole would, thus, be the overall loser, and militias such as the Hezbollah could well be cut to

size.

Implicitly, the pro-Palestine movement would be adversely affected and Palestine may not persist as a live issue. Global jihad could also face a deathblow.

The biggest gainers will in all likelihood be Israel and Türklye. Russia's influence has suffered with the fall of the Assad regime. But given Russia's relations with Türklye's strongman, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the pragmatic approach taken by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia could well retrieve the situation.

Do not rule out the digital threat

no not rule out the digital threat In conclusion, it needs to be mentioned that notwithstanding the developments in the geo-political arena, it is the digital threat that is set to achieve a quantum leap during 2025. The situation warrants careful assessment and sending out of a dire warning about the dangers present in the digital arena. Some of this was present in the digital areha. Some of this was evident during the latter part of 2024, but this is likely to grow exponentially during 2025. Convergence among technologies is threatening Convergence among technologies is threatening national infrastructure in a manner that had never previously been envisaged. According to data available with Agencies, there was a dramatic rise in cyber attacks occurring in India in the recent period. Almost all major companies and Government institutions were hit by denial of service and ransomware attacks. All this is set to increase in geometrical progression during 2025 and the following years.

Nothing alarming

Reports of many HMPV cases in China reflect heightened surveillance

ive years after the SARS-CoV2 virus over-whelmed hospitals in Wuhan, China, acute respiratory diseases caused by virus-es including the human metapneumovirus (HMPV) in children and the elderly, and influenza es including the human metapneumovirus (HMPV) in children and the elderly, and influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are increasing in the country, especially in its northern provinces. However, the sharp rise in acute respiratory diseases is not unusual during this time of the year, and as per a Chinese official, the overall number of cases in 2024 would be "smaller" than in 2023. Surprisingly, while the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have not raised a red flag so far and there is almost nil reporting in the international media, the Indian media is awash with reports of an IfMPV "outbreak" in China. A recent meeting of the Joint Monitoring Group under the aegis of the Union Health Ministry noted that the situation in China is "not unusual in view of the ongoing flu season", and the "usual pathogens that are expected during the season" are causing the present surge in respiratory diseases. The HMPV virus was first identified in children in 2001 in the Netherlands. Infection with IMPV usually occurs by the age of five years with reinfection occurring throughout life as immune protection induced by the virus is too weak to prevent repeated infections. The virus causes upper and/or lower respiratory tract infections, with vent repeated infections. The virus causes upper and/or lower respiratory tract infections, with lower respiratory tract infections being among common. While the virus ofte n causes only mild disease, it can lead to severe illness re-quiring hospitalisation in children, immunocom-

omised populations and the elderly. Globally, 3%-10% of hospital admi: Globally, 3%-10% of hospital admissions and 1% of acute lower respiratory infection-related deaths in children under age five in 2018 are attributed to HMPV, as per a 2021 paper. The study also found that children younger than six months, especially those in low- and lower-middle-income countries, are at greater risk of death caused by the HMPV virus. Detection of a large number of HMPV cases among children aged less than 14 years in China is a reflection of the heightened surveillance and testing for the virus. On the contrary, India does not have any approved inexpensive tests that are widely available for diagnosing the virus. When testing for HMPV in patients with acute respiratory disease should be routtine, as acute respiratory disease should be routine, as the virus has been in circulation for years global-ly, including India, and fatality is 1% in young chilly, including India, and fatality is 1% in young chil-dren, India is only now expanding the number of laboratories testing for HMPV beyond the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) network due to the spike in HMPV cases in China. What is also urgently needed is a regulatory framework that facilitates a rapid approval of diagnostic tests in the context of local and global outbreaks of novel and less known pathogens.

Symbolism must not become misplaced showmanship

ymbols have an intangible value as they represent some important facets of life. Leaders use the resulting symbolism smartly to message their views. It is for this reason that the recent removal of a painting, a symbol of an iconic moment in modern India's military history, from the Indian Army Chief's office complex, in New Delhi, generated a pationwide sure of emotions.

nationwide surge of emotions.

The painting, of the surrender of the Pakistani
Army to India in the 1971 war, has been relocated
to a conference centre named after Field Marshal
Sam Manekshaw. But the incident highlights the Sam Manekshaw. But the incident highlights the importance of valuing symbols for their quality and effect; this is vital, considering the ongoing 'drive' in the military to induct-in learnings that are connected to a distant past. In this drive it must be remembered that history is truth, taken as a whole, and any segmented adoption will lead to skewed learning.

s a whole, and any segmented adoption will lev o skewed learning.

As the dust settles on the angst raised by the emoval of the painting, some facets of symbols and the associated symbolism need evaluation. five important ones stand out – identity, eadership, direction, faith and competency. A ew examples would suffice.

Other examples When Israel was established, the swearing in of when israet was estationance, inc. swearing in military recruits took place, after a gruelling desert march to Fort Masada where they took a vow to protect their country. It symbolised a 'never give in' attitude born from the spirit of a group of 960 Jews who, in 73 CE, fought to the end against the Romans. 'Masada' has become a symbol of the identity of an Israeli soldier. On April 17, 2012, *The Washington Post* wrote:

"An aerial art show pulled thousands of Washingtonians out of their offices, vehicles and homes on Tuesday morning [April 17] as NASA'S space shuttle Discovery blew into town atop a



While 2024 saw

political uncertainty across the globe, 2025 will require deft handling by India's policymakers

Air Vice Marshal Manmohan Bahadur (retired)

The controversy

over the removal of the

iconic 1971 war

painting highlights the

importance of

and effect

valuing symbols for their quality

before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.

They were reminders to the two heads of state but, symbolically, had another purpose — the 'knowledge' of the positioning of these placards on the leader's doesk was a subtle direction to their countrymen of their duty too.

Duty is visible, in a unique way, at the Base Camp of Slachen Glacier (the highest battlefield in the world) where there is a shrine of 'OP Baba'. Who O.P. Baba was is not known but the tale of him beating back the enemy, single handed, at Malaum post is legendary. The battalion moving up the Glacier reports to the Baba and seeks his blessings for a safe time on the treacherous glacier.

biessings or a significant property to this de-induction, the battalion reports to thim again and thanks him, O.P. Baba, thus, is a symbol of faith in the almighty by soldiers of all religions and a conviction that all will be well.

The importance of 1971 In independent India's history, December 16, 1971 is a red-letter day when India won a resounding victory against Pakistan. Measured against any parameter, the painting of the surrender ceremony is iconic and has come to represent the pinnacle of India's military and political competency. For sure all services were deeply involved but it was the Army jawan who led the foray, resulting in the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers. The iconic scene is seared in the memories of all indians – and, rightly so, a huge blow-up adorned a room in the Army Chief's office complex. It is where the Army Chief meets heads of forcein armed forces and meets heads of foreign armed forces and dignitaries and the message each one of them would have carried would have been of India's, and the Indian Army's, finest hour. The replacement painting (whose quality is debatable) is touted to represent the future vision of the Indian Army – in a way it is a toss-up between a subtle communication of a spectacular politico-military success and that of an imagined future.

Which is more suited to be in the Indian Arms Chief's office? Well, one cannot dictate how someone furnishes his office – one can only have an opinion. But would the painting have a view? Alas, if only it could speak.

Alas, nony it could speak.

The statue in Ladakh
The post script. Even as the controversy over the removal of the painting seemed to ebb there is another one now, raised by the recent installation of Shivaji's statue on the shores of the frigid Pangong Tso (lake) in Eastern Ladakh. There have been disapproving views, including those by the local councillor, of an inappropriate choice having been made. Having operated extensively in the area, one cannot but rue the fact that if any symbol was required to link valour with local history, it should have been that of Zorawar Singh, the legendary Dogra general, whose forays took him deep into Tibet. Symbolism is about linking the viewer to a 'feef' that he can connect with in his surroundings. Else, it is misplaced with in his surroundings. Else, it is misplaced showmanship.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mega project for Nicobar

Mega project for Nicobar
The report, "Cruise treobar
Inproposed for Great Nicobar
Island" (January 5), was
disturbing to read. The
ecologically super-sensitive
islands will be subject to
destruction. The endemic
flora and fauna can never
get replaced. The island is
of strategic importance in
terms of our maritime
security. Hence, the security. Hence, the activities here should only be for those that concern our defence forces. There seem to be overenthusiastic

officials in Delhi who should heed the word of caution and the points being raised by the local senior officials. B. Sundar Raman, Coimbarce

The shady manner in which the central government is attempting to implement its much-trumpeted ₹72,000 crore mega-infrastructre project' will result in catastrophic consequences. It is hoped that the National Green Tribunal will deter the government from

implementing the project.
This is a moment for environmentalists, scientists and environmental advocates to come together, make this issue a rallying point, and thwart the government's attempt by government's attempt by launching a "Save Nicobar" mass movement. T.N. Venugopalan,

Meet farmers, start talks The farmers' protest has rekindled memories of the year-long agitation, during 2020-21, near Delhi's borders. The protest now is for the legitimate demand by farmers on MSP and a waiver of loans. The government should begin talks with representatives of all kieson propagations to all kisan organisations to resolve their long-pending demands. S.K. Khosla,

The MSP for key agricultural commodities has been a persistent sticking point in the negotiations between

...

the government and the farmers. Indian farmers' problems have worsened as farm incomes have been squeezed by slower output growth, higher costs and increased vulnerability to climate change. There is basically a lack of understanding of what agriculture needs. Above all, there is a lack of political remunerative prices to

R. Sivaku Chennai

In Sydney
The Border-Gavaskar
Trophy lived up to its name.
The two powerhouses in
the game fought hard and,
the better team won. This
series will mark the end of
many eras and also the many eras and also the start of new ones. The record attendance during the matches ensures that Test cricket lives on.

Subash Balakrishnan, Mississauga, Ontario, Car

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FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS THE SOLE CONTROLLER

Logic, practicality and experience point to the necessity of a singular, omnipotent force governing all



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

nagine there being more than one controller of the Creation. They disagree on some matters and are not able to resolve them. What kind of chaos will result? Therefore, there being more than one controller is illogical, impractical and unimaginable. And this reality rules out all small controllers, as we imagine ourselves to be. Don't we all feel that we control something or another? Do we? These examples should provide the answer. There is a huge corporation, which employs thousands of people worldwide. Its owner has a say over who is used and at what level.

This is fine till something like a COVID-19 pandernic hits. There are lockdowns, quarantines and other social restrictions. This affects the working of the corporation. What about the so-called controller? He is under quarantine. Another example is of a president of a big coun-try, He is puffed up by the power he enjoys. Unfortunately, he is assas-sinated. The assassin had control over his life, and this assassin was hanged. Who controlled what?

Let me take a common household. The man of the house making most Let me take a common household. The man of the house making most decisions about the household may feet that he is a controller. What happens when the lady of the house opposes him on some issue? Where did the control go? We must understand that making decisions is not controlling anything because that would require controlling results. A team leader can make decisions on behalf of his team but he, himself, is controlled by circumstances. The only entity, who can ensure some result every time is God only, and no one else, now or ever. Having understood that God is the whole and sole controller, let us



understand how He manages it. The control is exercised through the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is just and according to the highest reli-gious principles ('with - the Bhagavad Geeta 18.78), which is 'dhar-ma'. Briefly, it is 'what you sow is what you reap.' Isn't that fair? No one can complain, and no one escapes punishment either, death notwithstanding.

notwithstanding.

Many engage in wrongful acts hoping to get away from punishment from man-made laws, but in God's control, no one does. Similarly, rewards are forever coming, as decided by the Divine Authority, which works under the superintendence of God. Similarly, God has empowered the material nature to give birth to the world along with moving and stationary objects. And on account of this, the world goes on. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Questions are raised about God's fairness and the System set by Hirn not being just. It is not true, which will be clear from the following examples. How was Hiroshima wiped out? Why were so many women and children killed or maimed? Surely, many must have been innocent.

The answer is very simple. All those born there were destined to be hurt in that fashion. Only those, who had bad karmapahalas coming to fruition were born there. Doesn't the divine authority have control over who would be born where? They have complete control and they also know the future.

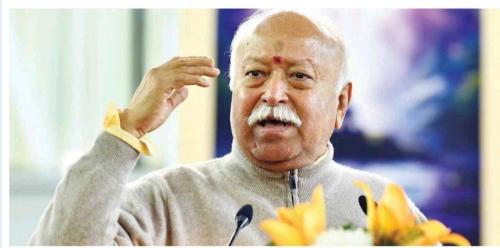
Accordingly, they manage the Creation. Another instance could be of an infant dying soon after birth. Could we know that this soul had punishment coming for the heinous crime he had committed in his previous life; he had forced his wife to abort because the child was a girl? I am speculating, but that could be a reason. All souls are relo-cated after death. Where they will go will depend on many factors.

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

Bhagwat champions unity as the path to India's Vishavguru vision



Highlighting the risks posed by divisive narratives such as 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes, Mohan Bhagwat stresses the importance of embracing India's pluralistic identity



elivering a Sahjeevan Vyakhyanmala series lecture on the topic, India—the Vishavguru, the RSS chief his concern over the recent upsurge of 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and pointed out: 'After Ram Mandir, some think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places'. Rejecting the practice, he said, 'This is not acceptable.' Echoing his comment on Gyanvapi Masjid that "We look for a Shivling beneath every mosque,' implying that we

practice, ne said, 'Inis is not acceptable.' Echoing his comment on Gyanvapi Masjid that "We look for a Shivling beneath every mosque,' implying that we should not, he cautioned: "The days of hegemony are gone," and that now "People choose their representatives, who run the government.' Questioning the "language of dominance," he acknowledged the pluralistic nature of Indian society, where 'tradition' allows people to live in harmony while following their respective faiths. Drawing a comparison of India with the world, where similarity is the principle of unity, for India, he said, 'Diversity is an ornament of unity, and we should respect and accept it." Rejecting hatred, malice, enmity, and suspicion daily under the burden of the past, he ruled out the 'majority-minority' binary and emphasised, "Everyone is equal here." To be a Vishavguru, India should be a nation of people who can rise above caste and religious differences. By what he has said, Bhagwat has targeted more than one point while acknowledging the reality of about 200 million Muslims besides the Christians, Sikhs, and others in India, on the one hand, and the goopolitical realities, on the other. If that is so, then the word 'Hindu' needs to be accepted as an Arabic-Persian cognate of the Sanskrit 'Sindu' and Hindustan' as a reference to the land of Hindus, i.e., the people living beyond the river Sindu, but not a place of and for the people of a specific religion. The historical chronicles state that the river 'Sindu' as pronounced as 'Indus' by the Greeks'

nd 'Al-Hind,' which later became linds' or 'Hindus' by the Arabic

'Hinds' or 'Hindus' by the Arabic Iranians.
The Greeks called 'the land of Indus' India, while the Arabic-speaking people called the region 'Hindustan'. It was a reference to the geographical region of old Punjab. The land of Hindus i.e. the people of river Sindu, called Hindustan or India in the above sense, is a land of several religious faiths, such as Shaivism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, besides the principles of ancient Vedas and Puranas, and the word 'Hindu' has been a geographic THE INDIAN

THE IN

PEOPLE AS A tion.

HINDU NATIONAL RELIGIOUS H tonly acted as an identifying communicative sign; for co

DIVIDING THE

BY A STATE THE STATE T

the early twentieth century in opposition to the colonial rule and in reaction to the Khilafat Movement by the Muslims in support of the Turkish Ottoman Sultan during the freedom movement of India.

The Indian national identity was codified by a section of grouple as codified by a section of grouple as

Sultan during the freedom movement of India.

The Indian national identity was codified by a section of people as a Hindu national religious identity and an Islamic national identity and the properties of the partition of India. Since 1947, free India has been a sovereign state nation, though it should have been a state of cultural nations politically united as a federal political state, settling the issue of religious nations forever. Yet India has stood the test of its unity in diversity with some collisions on the sidelines.

The internal dynamism of society and state is its continued collision and cohesion in their weaving: the more complex a society or a state is, the higher its level of collision, choesion dynamics. For the well-being of the land and its population, the political drivers must turn the power to strengthen diversity' against the 'forced homogeneity' as a principle of organisation. But with the rising assertion of Hindu religious identives and Hindu nation-state over Hindu geographic-cultural identity juxtaposing with the recent upsurge in 'Mandir-Masjid' controversies, rightly perceived by Mohan Bhagwat, the danger to the unity and cohesion is more imminent than not.

The sooner the ideologues of identities understand it, the better it is for the people living

together for centuries. Mohan Bhagwat seems to have realized it, and rightly so, he has underplayed the slogan—one nation, one people'—stating, "Without Muslims, Hindutava is incomplete': Hindus and Muslims are different but complementary. Hindustan, or India, or Bharat, is a land of diversities, and only by choice of the ideology and practice of inclusion, it can become Vishavguru. To be the Vishavguru is to experience and accommodate more diversity. The Vishav, i.e., the universe, is organized into networks verse, is organized into networks of similarities and differences, yet the precursor of life on earth is the 'difference' that engenders

the 'difference' that engenders diversity.

Mohan Bhagwat's nuanced remarks underscore the importance of unity amidst diversity in India's journey toward becoming a Vishayguru. Acknowledging India's pluralistic fabric, he emphasised harmony over divisive narratives like 'Mandirsive narratives like 'Mandirsive narratives like 'Mandirsive highest particular divisive narratives like 'Mandirsive haspid' disputes and rejected notions of religious hegemony. Bhagwat traced the historical and cultural origins of terms like 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan', advocating for their geographic and cultural significance rather than a singular religious identity. He urged political and social leaders to strengthen diversity as a founurged political and social leaders to strengthen diversity as a foundation for national cohesion. By embracing inclusion and mutual respect, India can truly embody the universal ideals required to be a global guide and leader. (The writer is Professor (Reta), Guru Narnak Dev University, Amritsar, Vice-Chairman, Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

The Bhagavad Gita: A blueprint for resilience, holistic health and leadership

From inspiring modern management practices to enriching prenatal care, the Gita's teachings resonate deeply in today's fast-paced world

The Bhagavad Gita is revered as a profound source of resilience, wisdom, and ethical guidance, often referred to as the essence of the Upanishads. Known as Brahmavidya. Or "Superior Knowledge," it offers timeless insights into life, existence, and cosmic truths. Despite being composed millennia ago, the Gita remains relevant today, providing practical teachings for navigating the complexities of modern life. Its wisdom extends across diverse fields such as management, leadership, psychology, and medicine. For example, many prestigi
The Relevance of Beeja Sanskara and Garbha Sanskara

Sanskara A lesser-known yet signifi



cant aspect of the Gita is its emphasis on Beeja Sanskara (pre-conception practices) and Garbha Sanskara (pre-conception practices). Through the concept of Atmaja Bhava, it highlights the importance of establishing a deep connection with the unborn child. These practices, rooted in Ayurveda and

Yoga, nurture wisdom, emo-tional stability, and virtuous qualities in the foetus, foster-ing holistic development. The scripture also underscores seripture also underscores the importance of Satvika Ahara—a pure, balanced diet. During pregnancy, this diet to unit only supports the physical health of the mother and foctus but also nurtures emotional and spiritual harmony, laying the foundation for a well-rounded individual. Resilience, Energy and Cosmic Balance Rather than considering the Gitta as the book of any person, caste, creed, country or religion, it is a guide to one's own personal, mental, social, and spiritual resilience and adaptability. Its teachings on perseverance, balance, and inner

strength resonate deeply with those facing modern chal-lenges. The Gita's perspective on energy and cosmic balance aligns with contemporary scientific principles.

Ayurvedic Insights on Foetal

Development

The Gitas teachings influence

The Gifa's teachings influence Ayurvedic principles, particularly in prenatal care. It identifies six essential Bhavas contributing to foetal development: Matruja Bhava (father's qualities) Pitruja Bhava (father's qualities) Pitruja Bhava (father's qualities) Atmaja Bhava (soul connection) Satmyaja Bhava (nutrition) Satvaja Bhava (nutrition) Satvaja Bhava (mental stability)
These emphasise the importance of parental health, nutrition, emotional well-being, and spiritual align-

nutrition, emotional well-being, and spiritual align-



ment in shaping the child's future. Such principles form the core of Garbha Sanskara practices, increasingly recog-nised in modern prenatal care for their holistic approach. The Balanced Mind: Shitapraina

The Balanced Mind: Sthitaprajna One of the Gita's most pro-found teachings is the con-cept of Sthitaprajna. This idea of remaining unaffected

by success or failure, challenges or triumphs, is partic-ularly relevant in today's fast-paced world. Cultivating such resilience and emotional sta-bility, enabling individuals to navigate life's ups and

to navigate life's ups and downs with composure. Holistic Health Through Integration The Gita advocates an integrated approach to Ahar (diet), Vihar (lifestyle), Nidra (sleep), Achar (conduct), and Vichar (thoughts). These elements must work cohesively to promote comprehensive health and wellness. This holistic philosophy supports inter-science and intra-science integration in medicine. Intra-science integration ensures that all aspects of a medical system

work together to manage chronic conditions effectivework to chronic conditions effective ly, while inter-science integra-tion leverages the strengths of multiple systems for optimal care. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing both acute and

addressing both acute and chronic conditions. Holistic Development and Liberation: The Gita offers a roadmap for holistic self-development, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritu-al growth. Its teachings on Dharma (duty), Karma (action), and Bhakti (devotion) provide practical guidance for leading a purposeful and ethical life.Moreover, the Gita pro-vides insights into personal-ity development, emotional mastery, and the attainment of Mokshu (liberation).

Its universal principles res-onate across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and leadership, offering a framework for self-realisa-tion and collective well-being. In conclusion, the enduring relevance of the Bhagawad Gita lies in its universal mesrelevance of the Bhagavad
Gita lies in its universal message of harmony, balance,
and self-awareness. It inspires
individuals and societies
towards holistic growth and
ethical living.
Whether guiding inner conflicts or addressing societal
complexities, the Gita
termains an effective tool for
achieving balance, resilience,
and self-mastery in an everchanging world.
(The author is Director of
the Morarij Desai National
Institute of Yoga; views are
personal)

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

Why 1978 'anti-conversion' law in Arunachal could now be enforced

SUKRITA BARUAH

THE ARUNACHAL PRADESH government is working to bring a 1978 law against "force-ful" conversion out of cold storage by fram-ing rules for its implementation, 46 years af-ter it was enacted.

What is the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom

The law, enacted by the then Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh's first gislative Assembly, prohibits religious con-sion "by use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means". It entails punishment of imprisonment for up to two years and a fine of up to Rs 10,000 for the offence of "convert-ing or attempting to convert" forcefully "from

ing or attempting to convert" forcefully "from one religious faith to another faith." The Act also requires that every act of conversion be reported to the Deputy Commissioner of the district concerned, and

sion for failure to do so. Since it was enacted in 1978, successive governments have not framed the rules for its implementation, because of which it lay dormant for nearly

Why was the Act introduced? Arunachal Pradesh is home to a number of different small ethnic communities with an array of different beliefs and practices. The Monpas and Sherdukpens of West Arunachal Pradesh bordering Tibet and Bhutan practise Mahayana Buddhism, while the Khamptis and Singphos in Eastern Arunachal practise Theravada Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism.

Many other tribes engage in polytheistic nature and ancestor worship. Of these, the worship of Donyi Polo in particular – practised by the Tani group of tribes comprising the Nyishis, Adis, apatanis, Calos, Misings and Tagins – has taken an institutionalised form over the years.

Unlike other hilly North Eastern states

like Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, Christianity entered Arunachal only in the 1950s.

Missionary efforts in the

roads in the 1950s. The first church in Arunachal was set up in 1957 at Rayang vil-lage in the present-day district of East Siang, close to Assam's Dhemaji district. In the coming decades, census data indicated a steady

ing decades, census odat indicated a steady growth in the number of people identifying as Christians – from 0.79% of the population in 1971 to 4.32% in 1981. Communities such as the Padam, Adi, Nocte and Nyishi, located near the foothill missions, in particular witnessed massive change, which triggered "debates about the

like Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, christianity entered Arunachal only in the 1950s.

This was not just due to the difficult ter-rain, but also the colonial policy of isolating the "frontier regions", which included re-strictions on the entry of missionaries. These restrictions continued after independence via the Inner Line system.

Missionary efforts in the feotbil leave of Assam Metion.

demanded "protection indigenous religions and cultures".

Why has the Act remained dormant? The Act was contested in Arunachal and beyond even before it received Presidential ent, The Arunachal Christian Forum was assent. The You arter it was enacted, its cur-formed the year after it was enacted, its cur-rent president Tarh Miri says, to push for the repeal of the Art. It continues to lead the push against the Art, which Miri called an "anti-Christian law" that can be "misused by the district administration or police". The number of Christians in Avuhachai has grown rapidly over the years. Christians constituted 30.26% of the population in the last census of 2011, making plhristianity the largest religion in the state. It is because of these numbers and vocal opposition by Christian groups that "no Chief Minister has moved to implement [the Act] so far," Mini said.

He added, however, that there are now chances of "interference by external forces", referring to the BJP government in the state, and the RSS and its affiliates, who view the state's "indigenous faiths" as part of "San-atana Dharma".

Why is the Act back now? In 2022, advocate Tambo Tamin, who is a former general secretary of the Indigenous Faiths and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IPCSAP), had filed a PIL in the Itanagar Bench of the Gauhati High Court ap-pealing for the court to intervene over the "failure" of the state government to frame

rules for the Act.

On September 30 this year, after the Advocate General of Arunachal Pradesh told the court that the finalisation of the draft rules would take another six months, the court closed the petition stating that "we expect the concerned authorities to be mindful of their obligations and the draft rules would be finalised within a period of six months from today." m today

Maya Murtem, General Secretary of the IFCSAP, said that the implementation of the Act would be an "armour... with the rate at which conversions are happening" in the state. "Many of the people who have con-verted are moving away from their tradi-tional practices, calling them 'alien' and 'evil. So this Act is urgent to preserve our culture,"

So this Act is urgent to preserve the said.

Murtern said that the activities of the RSS and its affiliates in the state are not seen with similar concern. "The RSS doesn't convert us but they have guided us in institutionalising and documenting our faith," she said.

EXPLAINED HEALTH

WHAT US SURGEON GENERAL SAYS ABOUT DRINKING AND CANCER RISK

ALCOHOL IS the third leading preventa-ble cause of cancer in the United States after tobacco and obesity, according to a new report by the US Surgon General. The advisory, released last week, also said all alcoholic drinds — whether beer, wine or spirits — should carry a label warning umers about their cancer risks, like packs of cigarettes do.

According to the report, alcohol use ontributes to 100,000 cancer cases and

contributes to 100,000 cancer cases and 20,000 related deaths each year. The report is also a blow to those, in-cluding alcohol companies, who have been advocating that moderate drinking can help prevent heart attacks and street, see, Growing research has shown that even one drink per day can increase the risk of certain cancers such as breast, mouth, and throat cancers.

How does alcohol lead to cancer?

According to the report, there are four

ways, These are: DNA DAMAGE: The body process DNA DAMAGE: The body processes alcohol into acetaledhyde, a chemical compound that can damage DNA and prevent cells from repairing the damage. This can raise the chances of mutations and uncontrolled cell growth, which play a part in the formation of turnours.

OXIDATION & INFLAMMATION.

Acetaldehyde is converted into acetate in

aldehyde is converted into acetate i ocess that involves oxidation, produc ing dangerous unstable oxygen-contain ing molecules that damage cells and con

RAISING KISK FROM TOBACCA. Carcinagens from other sources, espe-cially particles of tobacco smoke, can dis-solve in alcohol, making it easier for them to be absorbed into the body. HORMONE PRODUCTION: Alcohol consumption increases levels of some hor-mones, including estrogen, which can in-crease risks for breast and ovarian cancers.

What types of cancers have been linked with alcohol use?

According to the report, alcohol use increases the risk for breast, colon and

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rectum, esophagus, liver, mouth, throat, and larynx cancers.
"The risk for cancers of the breast, the mouth and the throat may rise with consumption of as little as one drink aday, or even less," the US Surgeon General Dr Vivek Murthy said, according to a report in The New York Times.

The report highlighted that alcoholinitates and damages the protective mucosal lining — the moist, inner lining found in the mouth, nose, lungs, and stomach—that usually guards cells from carcinogens.

What about likelihood?

What about likelihood?
The report said that an alcohol-related cancer will develop in about 10 of every 100 men who consume less than ord drink per week, 11 of every 100 who average one drink daily, and 13 of every 100 who consume two drinks daily. Higher alcohol consumption in-cases hearst cancer iskin winnen from

(ENS WITH INPUTS FROM REUTERS)



Higher alcohol consumption in-creases breast cancer riskin women from roughly 11 cases in every 100 of those who consume less than one drink per week, to 13 cases in every 100 who con-sume one drink per day and 15 in every 100 who consume two drinks per day, ac-cording to the report. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines one alcoholic bev-

and Prevention defines one alcoholic bev-erage as 1.5 ounces of 80-proof liquor, 5 ounces of wine with 12% alcohol, or 12 ounces of beer with 5% alcohol,

VAJIRAM & RAVI



Platform sharing, with tweaks

Badge engineering refers to the sharing of a platform or an entire vehicle by different car manufacturers, with at least one of them not needing to design or engineer a new model from scratch.

Thus, two differently branded cars can share the same platform, broad design cues, and the engine or parts of it, with perhaps some of the aesthetics tweaked to align with the design characteristics of the individual brands.

There are differences in aims and deg or so, rebadging could produce completely different cars from the same platform, or maybe just swap badges with little else done to give each car a different or distinctive look.

For a century, from GM to Tata

For a century, from GM to Tata
One of the first documented cases of
badge engineering dates back to 1909, when
General Motors started sharing its chassis
and platforms with all its different brands.
So GMC, which was traditionally identified as a truck builder, began to offer its products with Chevrolet bending on the hood –
and vehicle platforms were progressively
shared with the other GM brands including
Oakland, Oldsmobile, Buick, and Cadillac,
Exterior anosearances were upraded and in-

Oakland, Oldsmobile, Buick, and Cadillac, Exterior appearances were upgraded and in-teriors were spruced up for the premium brands such as Buick and Cadillac. In India, the Hindustan Motors Amb-assador was probably the earliest successful badge-engineered product, with a produc-tion life from 1957 to 2014. At its core, the good old Ambassador was a rebadged Series Ill Morris Coford. III Morris Oxford.

The Rover CityRover, marketed by the for-er British manufacturer MG Rover under the Rover marque from 2003-05, was a re-badged version of the Tata Indica.





The Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara (right) and Toyota Urban Cruiser Hyryder are siblings that were developed on the same platform, look alike, and share most of their features.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

Different cars, same look

Automakers are turning 'badge engineering', essentially a cost-cutting technique, into a winning strategy. The Toyota and Maruti Suzuki twins on Indian roads are the most visible examples of this

THE TOYOTA-MARUTI SUZUKI TWINS

TOYOTA GLANZA is essentially a rebadged Maruti Suzuki Baleno, Toyota Taisor is the Suzuki Fronx, the Toyota Rumion is the Suzuki

GRAND VITARA and Hyryder were developed jointly; Maruti Suzuki did eveloped jointly; Maruti Suzuki did lost of the design work, and the ompanies leveraged their respective

strengths in the two powertrains — mild hybrid tech (Maruti Suzuki) and strong hybrid (Toyota), Both models are manufactured at Toyota's plant in Bidadi, Karnataka.

HYCROSS-INVICTO and Hyryder-Grand Vitara are almost exactly the Grand Vitara are almost exactly same car, unmistakably twins in

the souped-up Rover version was pum-melled in the United Kingdom as a crude at-tempt to keep MG Rover out of bankruptcy.

The costs and the benefits

The auto industry is highly capital intensive, and economies of scale matter. By producing more of the same, companies can share costs and increase volumes, while keeping overheads low by spreading investments across models. ments across models.

While most consumers know the cars are While most consumers know the cars are similar, they can base their buying decision on factors such as familiarity with a particular brand, the warranty on offer, or convenience of reaching a dealership, And carmakers can position themselves as builders of a premium product that costs more than the models they are generally associated with. Companies also get the opportunity to widen their customer base in both directions—thus, Manuti Suzuki can reach the upward end of consumer segments, and Toyota Kirokskar can tap consumers at the lower end. Maruti Suzuki can reach the word consumer segments, and Toyota Kirokskar can tap consumers at the lower end.

ity vehicle — a rebadged Toyota Innova Hycross — which allows it to retain customers even as they move up the price bracket. For Toyota, there is the option of offering customers multiple options in the lower-end segment, where it has traditionally struggled in India. With the Taisor and Glanza in Toyota showrooms, a Fortuner owner now has the option to buy a smaller second car.

The partnership also enables Toyota to offer cars kitted with the CNG option, a big draw in the utility vehicle segment.

While the Toyota-Maruti Suzuki tvins are practically the same cars, the Toyota vera repractically the same cars, the Toyota vera

While the Toyota-Maruff Suzuki twins are practically the same cars, the Toyota versions tend to be slightly more expensive. For instance, the Taisor is about Rs 22,000-25,000 costler than the Fronx variants with the 12-litre petrol engine. The trims with the more premium 10-litre turbocharged engine are almost identically priced, however. In the case of the Grand Vitara, Maruti sells more of the lower-priced mild hybrid variants, while Toyota sells higher volumes of the strong hybrids. Executives in both companies say this is not the result of a deliberate strategy, but is related more to the companies.

ate strategy, but is related more to the con-sumer-pull effect.

Collaborating, not twinning

Collaborating, not twinning
The other type of cross-brand partnership involves collaboration at the platform level, when the cars are being developed. In the Indian market, the Hyundai Creta and Kia Seltos have pretty close underpinnings, although they're not as alike as the Hyyndei and Grand Vitara. The other example is the Hyundai -Ka cars have some similarities in their basic platforms and share some engines and garrbox options, but much of this collaboration is seeded at, and limited to, the early development stages. Thereafter, the two South Korean companies – Kia is a subsidiary of Hyundai – Hercely compete in the markets they are sold in. Germany's Volliswagen and its Czech group subsidiary Skoda have had a similar partnership, visible in case of the WM Taigun and Skoda Kushaq, or VW Virtus and Skoda Slavia, In these models, while the basic platform may be shared or broadly similar, there are marked differences in parameters such as appearance, ground clearance, or the engines and gearbox options.

Limits and some lessons

Limits and some lessons

While Toyota and Maruti Suzuki's brand engineering partnership has been a winner, others have struggled with it. Renault and Nissan tried it, with the

Renault and Nissan tried it, with the Ternan being offered as hadge-engineered Duster, and the Japanese company offering its Sunny as the Renault Scala. Both the Nissan Ternano and the Renault Scala Both the Nissan Ternano and the Renault Scala Bropped. Some flagship models have been kept out of bounds — for instance, Suzuki has not shared the Swift or Jimny with Toyota, and the latter has not offered the Innova Crysta "Estimper in Fauther."

shared the Swift or Jimmy with Toyota, and the latter has not offered the Innova Crysta or Fortuner to its partner.

Badge engineering has been tried out across price segments as well.

The iconic British sports car maker Aston Martin put Toyota's city car i/Q on the road in 2011. The Aston Martin Cygner was a Toyota i/Q with more bells and whistles, some cosmetic restyling, and a big jump in the price tag. Autocar UK recorded that the car sold very poorly, and Aston Martin has not atempted anything similar since.

The Audi 50 — the smallest Audi ever — was actually the first-generation VW Polo, which was interestingly launched even before the Polo's production had commenced.

The Polo went on to win over customers across markets, while the Audi 50 was soon

across markets, while the Audi 50 was sooi

Rahul Gandhi, others wear blue to House: the colour's links to Ambedkar, Dalits

ARJUN SENGUPTA

RAHUL GANDHI and other Opposition lead-ers, during the last parliamentary session, turned up in Parliament wearing blue to protest Union Home Minister Amit Shah al-legedly insulting Dr B R Ambedkar, Blue has long been a symbolic colour for Dalits, as sociated with Babasaheb and his politics.

Inspired by Ambedkar's suit

For at least the last three to four decades of his life — Ambedkar passed away in 1956 — Babasaheb was almost always seen in public wearing an immaculate three-piece suit. Historian Ramachandra Guha has writ-

ten that the suit symbolised the fact that Ambedkar escaped the fate that millions of his Dalit brethren continued to endure "By the canons of tradition and history this

man was not supposed to wear a suit, blue or otherwise. That he did was a consequence of his extraordinary personal achievements: a

law degree from Lincoln's Inn, a Ph D from America and another one from England, the drafting of the Constitution of India. By memorialising him in a suit, the Dalits were celebrating his successful storming of an up-per caste citadel, "Guha wrote.

ceicorating ins successitus atorming of an up-per caste citade. Catha wrote. Anthropologist Emma Tarlo, in Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India (1996), contrasted Ambedkar's choice of clothing with Mahatma Gandhis. "It is no coincidence that while Gandhi, who came from the Vaniya [Bania] caste, chose to represent the Harijans [Dalits] by dressing as a poor man in the deshi style, Ambedkar, himself a Harijan, chose to rep-resent them by wearing a full set of Eu-ropean clothes. Coming from a Harijan background, and having felt the full weight of social prejudice, he needed to break with tradition and had no nostalgia for the deshi past which summed up centuries of past which summed up centuries of poverty and degradation," she wrote.

Today, Ambedkar is popularly memori-alised in a blue suit. This is one of the main reasons for the adoption of blue as a symbol of Dalit consciousness and resistance.



Rahul Gandhi wearing blue during the recent Parliamentary session. X/@RahulGandhi

Significance of blue

It is possible that Ambedkar's choice of a blue suit was simply guided by contem-porary fashion trends in the West, Afterall, he spent multiple years in New York and London in the 1910s and 1920s, an era when

attire — this is the context in which the term 'Navy Blue' was coined in the 19th century). Many Ambedkarite scholars, however, often emphasise on the "ontological dimen-sions of the colour blue" as well, "One in-terpretation is that blue refers to the sky

terpretation is that blue refers to the sky which denotes equality. There is no dominance under the sky, everyone is equal." point in the sky correction of Ambedkar's Philosophy (2024), said. "The colour blue draws upon meanings that are enshrined in folklore around the world to denote a very specific form of struggle — struggle for equality in an unequal, hierarchial world, he told The Indian Express.

Some scholars also point to the association of the colour blue with some strands of baltime the properties of the colour blue with some strands of baltime the properties of the colour blue with some strands of baltime the properties of the colour blue with some strands of ways emple

Buddhism, the religion Ambedkar adopted. It is a prominent colour in the Buddhist flag symbolising "the spirit of Universal Compassion for all beings", and the Buddha and other Buddhist figures are often de-

This is perhaps why Ambedkar chos the colour for the flag of the Schedule Caste Federation in 1942. Many Amb edkari tance of blue in the Dalit context to this de

Lastly, blue is also the colour of the Lastly, blue is also the colour of the working classes, and those performing manual labour — the so-called blue-collar workers. Ambedkar's scholarship and pol-tics specifically spoke to this specifically spoke to this section of society. "Ambetakar's work recognises a cleavage between the industrial proletariat — low level workers, often belonging to the depressed classes — and capitalists," Rodrigues said.

'Symbol of Dalit agenda'

Dalit movements in the past did not al-ays employ the colour blue. For instance, the Ad Dharm Movement that swept across Punjab in the 1920s-30s was associated with a shade of deep red. Similarly, most people associate social reformer Jyotirao

For Ambedkar, however, it was crucial to pick a colour that did not have any other overt political association. He chose blue for

over political association. He chose blue for the SCF flag to represent an "autonomous Dalit political agenda", "Ambedkar wanted to paint a contrast with the communists (associated with red), the Hindus (saffron), and Muslims (green). blue represented a distinct vision of where the nation should head to, from the perspective of Ambedkar and the Dalits," Rodrigues said.

The present day pre-eminence of the colour blue in the Dalit context "is a product of the association with Ambedkar. It has only become stronger over time," Rodrigues said, Kanshii Ram, for instance, drew heavily from the iconography of the Republican m the iconography of the Republican Party of India, the post-Independence suc-cessor to the SCF, when deciding the colours

and symbol of his Bahujan Samaj Party. As Rodrigues put it, "The colour blue is a construct by which a shared bond between Dalits is created and enforced".

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Vision for rural India

PM Modi hails rural resilience at Grameen Bharat Mahotsav; says rural prosperity is essential for national growth

ime Minister Narendra Modi delivered an inspiring address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, held in New Delhi, highlighting the transformative strides made in rural development. The event celebrated the resilience and progress of rural India under the theme "Building a Resilient Rural India for Viksit Bharat 2047"—a vision to make India a developed nation by its centenary year of independence. PM Modi emphasised that the government's intentions, policies and decisions are invigorating rural Índia with newfound energy. He highlighted significant achievements in healthcare, agriculture and basic infrastructure that have elevated the quality of life in villages and driven economic growth. Reflecting on India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he proudly noted how Indian villages defied global doubts by ensuring vaccine access to the last mile. He attributed this success to inclusive economic policies that cater to every section of society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025 highlighted significant achievements in rural devel-



opment, painting an optimistic picture of progress. While these strides are commendable, a closer examination reveals underlying challenges that must be addressed to ensure holistic and sustainable rural trans-formation. PM Modi emphasised healthcare advancements, noting the establishment of over 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and the growing reach of telemedicine in rural areas. These initiatives reflect substantial progress; however, challenges such as a short-age of trained healthcare professionals, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent internet access in remote

villages continue to hinder equitable healthcare delivery. Agriculture has been a central focus of rural development efforts, with financial assistance under PM-KISAN and a significant increase in agricultural loans helping farmers enhance productivity. Yet, structural problems persist in the agrarian sector, including reliance on unpredictable monsoon, insufficient crop diversification and market volatility. The protests against contentious agricultural reforms also highlight the need for more inclusive policy-making and effective stakeholder engagement. The Prime Minister highlighted the sharp reduction in rural poverty, which has reportedly fallen below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. While this represents significant progress, the persistence of rural inequality and exclusion of marginalised communities from development initiatives cannot be ignored. Poverty metrics alone do not capture the broader challenges of deprivation, including limited access to quality education, healthcare and social mobility. Infrastructure gaps, such as unreliable road connectivity, inadequate digital networks, and inconsistent electricity supply, limit the potential of rural economies. Furthermore, rural India's heavy dependence on agriculture underscores the urgent need for economic diversification and the creation of jobs in manufacturing and services. Prime Minister's ision is indeed laudable but a lot needs to be done for upliftment of rural masses.



Harmony: A prerequisite for national unity

पस्त्रापितं क्या एकर

The resurgence of communal discord calls for urgent reflection and action. It is time to expose the forces that exploit differences for personal gain

he global communal ccosphere is showing change for the worse. The word communal here connotes and covers ethnic, racial, religious and sectarian communities. The last seven decades since 1950 have not seen very many episodes of communal conflict or conflagration in the global society. After the terbile death and destruction wrought by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the horrible communal riots following the partition of India into two independent states, episodes of communal violence have been conflicted that the carlier periods of world history. Of late, the world is riven by acrimony and wars at multiple locations and communally divise sentiments across global societies he global communal mony and wars at multiple loca-tions and communally divisive sentiments across global societies appear to be rising again. It seems that during the above period, the sentiments of mutu-al hatred and antipathy among certain global communities remained suppressed, only to resurface now.

certain global communities remained suppressed, only to resurface now.

It is time to review and relook at the elements that go into building and strengthening communal harmony. With the world in the terrible throes of wars at several locations, it is perhaps time to strengthen communal harmony and amity globally, particularly in our society and not to allow it to be undermined. History has been written largely by the conquerors of countries and the governing elite. We often do not have true accounts of history do not read true history or otherwise are inclined to interpret facts wrongly, driven by our deep-seated prejudices.

ly, driven by our deep-seated prej-udices.

If we look closely at the picture and analyse it dispassionately, we shall find that it is generally the politicians and rulers who incit-ed communal violence for their own selfish needs or vile vested interests. Often, these acts of incitement are obscured through disinformation campaigns. There are cultural and ideologi-cal differences between commu-

cal differences between commu-nities. What to talk of mainstream religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, there are major and minor variants of these religions and sub-ideolog-ical sects whose number touch-



es almost three thousand.
They all have major or minor ideological differences.
Notwithstanding the many differing and dissonant injunctions of their scriptural texts, peace and harmony are basic to the progress and prosperity of citizens in every country, and every society and they are dear to all human individuals. That is why there are constitutions, laws and regulations in every country for proper governance that incorporates the functional upholding of universal peace promoting human values of justice and equality-lience, we need to expose the machinations of the political elite to strengthen communal harmony in today's world. In the context of the current global scenario, the incidence of violence against Hindus in Pakistan or Bangladesh is more because of mischief and misdeeds of the ruling elite. During the colonial period in India, communal riots were frequently triggered by politicians or the governing elite. In our country with a population of 145 crore, nearly 21 crore are Muslims. They have been a part and parcel of our society for ages. We need to better integrate them, not appease them for petry political gains. The need of the hour is ideological realignment.

And we should quickly brace ourselves for it. Let us not allow the demoliton or destruction

where, but build monuments of universal, secular and humanistic culture to promote communal harmony, Let us build buildings and institutions that bind humans on ot separate them. Let us educate global humans on the eternal metaphysical truths that apply to all, everywhere. Let us awaken humanity to the threads of universal knowledge about the Creator, creation and their relationship. **DURING THE** COLONIAL PERIOD IN INDIA,

COMMUNAL RIOTS WERE FREQUENTLY TRIGGERED BY **POLITICIANS** OR THE GOVERNING FLITE THIS HAPPENS WHEN

threads of universal knowledge about the Creator, creation and their relationship. Bharat has been the cradle of human civilisation because the divine knowledge emanating from the one Creator was revealed in this land to sages at the dawn of civilization. That core knowledge enshrined in the divine scriptures Vedas and ideology based on that needs resurrection today. Humans can live sensibly and peacefully for ages if they wish to. Only they need to be aligned with universal Dharma. Manade sects separate universal Dharma (righteousness) unites—because the later comes from the omniscient Creator of all humans. When we talk of Sanatan as the religion of the inhabitants of Bharat, we refer to the above said broad-based, universal and eternal religion of humanity that transcends caste, creed, ethnicity and sect. Sanatan Dharma is the prescribed code of living handed down to the

Let us strengthen adherence that eternal code of liv that eternal code of living expected from humans by the one master of the Universe whose subjects we all are. Let us focus on the common, positive strands of ideology that exist in various mainstream religions and let us deliberate on the ideological strands that are dissonant with the universal Sanatan Dharma. Let us not mix religions and let us deliberate on the ideological strands that Let us not mix religions.

sal Sanatan Dharma.
Let us not mix religion with politics; rather let us give politics a more humanistic complexion. That is what is required today. We Indians are in the process of nation rebuilding after centuries of lying low due to depredation by foreign invaders. Now is the time for fast track progress and we must beware of nefarious designs of foreign powers to we must beware of nefarious designs of foreign powers to create impediments to our

create impediments to our progress.

We should try to reform our political and legal institutions to make them truly secular and democratic. Let us make our national fabric strong, placing it above caste, creed, faith or religion. At the same time, we should strive to dissolve our ideological differences in the bright shining light of Sanatan Vedic Dharma which has been the beacon of guiding light of all humanity for come since the dawn of civilisation.

(The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RELIGION AS A PRACTICE OF FAITH IS GIVEN A POLITICAL

COLOURING

Embracing your unique journey to success



ASHA IYER KUMAR

This year, let's shift our focus inward, honour our unique paths and recognise the triumphs that shape who we are

wo often have you beaten yourself up saving you don't measure up to others in terms of skillsets and success? How often have you undervalued your accomplishments with a desultory wave of hand accompanied by a 'Oh, this is something everyone does' or "I haven't done anything great"? Chances are that we have done it a greater number of times than what is good for our self-esteem and confidence.

A student of mine recently approached me for a review of her college admission essay wherein she had not highlighted many of her strengths that could catch the attention of the admission officer. "Oh, mainn, these are things everyone in our school does. This isn't anything extraordinary,'s he said. I sat her down and explained: "We aren't worried about what others are doing. Our focus should be on what we have done so far and how it has been of consequence to us and others."

The biggest reason for our disenchantment with our lives in this pacy world is we often undermine our capabilities by trying to match them with

others and trying to be one up

others and trying to be one up over the rest.

As long as we keep looking at others, we shall never be able to make the cut, which is completing a task to the best of our abilities, putting forth the best of our abilities, putting forth the best of our ideas as they emerge in our intellect and assessing their value not in terms of where you stand or what your ranking is in com-parison, but giving ourselves due credit for the distance we have come given our specif-ic challenges in life. No victo-ry is small.

ic challenges in IIIE. NO VICCO-ry is small.

To the little boy participating in a sack race at school, win-ning it or making it to the other end without stumbling should be an accomplish-ment. To a student who suc-cessfully makes a presentation in class, the comfort that she feels standing in front of a class and speaking about what she believes in is a success. To

a speaker on the stage, the mere fact that she is doing something that many people dread to do and evokes a standing ovation is a matter of great pride. Every little step that takes us forward is signif-icant, not when we think if we are unique by contrast with are unique by contrast with another, but by how far we have come from where we

another, but by how far we began.

True growth is not a race gauged by how others are performing but by the milestones, we cross on our journeys. Our fixation with comparison often blinds us to our progress. The yardstick of success is never universal—what feels ordinary to one could be an extraordinary triumph for another. Yet, we diminish our efforts simply because they don't mirror someone elsek. We forget that personal achievements, how-ever models they seem, are stepping stones to greater accomplishments. The courage someone musters to speak in public for the first time, or the quiet resilience it takes to rise from personal setbacks—these are victories. They may not be headlineworthy, but they carry profound significance in shaping

our character and our path forward. The mistake we often make is believing that success has a standard template. It doesn't As we step into a new year, let us make a conscious choice—to shift the gaze inward, to honour our unique journeys, and to celebrate the progress we've made, however small it may appear. Let us define success not by comparisons but by the courage to keep going, the strength to rise after a fall, and the grace to applaud ourselves for showing up. You are enough. Your story matters. And your victories, no mater how quiet, deserve recognition. Here's to a year where we measure success by our growth, not by how we compare to others. Let those who conquer mountains do so with pride and let those who conduct the summation of the summits. And for those who can climb neither—whether by circum-stance or choice—let their strength shine in being the cheerleaders who uplift others on their journeys. (The author is a Dubaibased columnist, and writing coach and has published six books. Views are personal)

ISRO EMBARKS BOCKING MISSION

Madam — On December 30, ISRO has embarked on another mission that has vast application in future exploratory missions. In fact, the space docking experiments or SpaDex mission are linked to the plan for setting up India's own space station named the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035 to carry out spacewalks and research in microgravity conditions. This mission also carries the PS4 orbital experiment module 4 or POEM 4, using the spent fourth stage of PSLV C 60 which otherwise would have ended as space debris carrying 24 payloads. Autonomous orbited docking is a sophisticated manoeuvre mastered by a few elite nations like the USA, China and Russia and India too is set to join this group. Docking is indispensable for missions that require heavy spacecraft and equipment that cannot be launched in one go. viz the International Space Station for instance. viz the International Space Station for

viz the International Space Station for instance.

A manned foray to the moon and the operation of the country's first space station is not possible without it. It could also open up opportunities for India's space research agency to collaborate with global missions that require docking facilities. The success of missions like Chandrayana 3 and Aditya 1 in 2023 followed by the setting up of the first space observatory to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays in 2024, to the recent Cabinet approval in Sept 2024 of Venus Orbital Mission to study the different aspects of Venus, clearly showcases that it has enough expertise to contribute to the divergent facets of planetary research. This mission is the handlwork of collaboration between public and private enterprises and underscores not just its technical prowess but also lays a solid foundation for future endeavours that will shape the global space landscape.

Vija Ysingh Adhikari | Nainital RELIEF FOR BHOPAL RESIDENTS

RELIEF FOR BHOPAL RESIDENTS Madam—It is really sad that it took four decades to remove the toxic waste from

HMPV virus outbreaks spark panic



n China, the spread of viruses causing respiratory illnesses like Influenza-A, HMPV, Mycoplasma Pneumonia, and COVID-19 has increased. This spread is affecting children's health significantly, leading to a rise in hospital admissions. These viruses exhibit symptoms similar to other respiratory infections, such as devastation caused by COVID-19, trusting the Chinese Dragon's seems difficult. Five years ago, Wuhan's coronavirus outbreak wreaked

Wuhan's coronavirus outbreak wreaked the Union Carbide factory site in Bhopal. Nevertheless, the waste removal process marks a crucial step in addressing the long-standing environmental and health issues stemming from the 1984 gas leak tragedy. Though the disposal of the toxic waste symbolises progress, the lingering fears among those near the Pithampur facility underline the need for transparent communication and proactive community engagement. But scepticism still persists high among residents in Bhopal who have lived with the consequences of the gas leak for decades, as the tragedy continues to haunt the local population, with many still suffering from its long-term effects. While the removal of toxic waste is a good step forward, it also highlights the ongoing struggle for justice and environmental safety in the region. The community's concerns must be addressed to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated, and that the health and safety of residents are prioritised in future actions.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Ranganathan Siyakumar | Chennai

havoc worldwide, and now, the HMPV virus appears to have originated from the same location. Is this merely a coincidence, or is Wuhan a hub for developing biological colds and fevers in children. Now, the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is spreading in China, sparking fears that a similar outbreak could occur again. Wuhan, the epicentre of the initial coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly the origin of this new virus as well. China has stated that the situation is under control, and no travel restrictions have been imposed internationally. The Chinese Dragon seems to be spewing various deadly viruses. It is essential for the World Health Organization to take timely notice of these recurring dangerous viruses emerging from China.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

MELANISTIC LEOPARD SPOTTED AGAIN

MELANISTIC LEOPARD SPOTTED AGAIN
Madam — After a "melanistic leopard"
was spotted in the forests near Odisha's
Nayagarh, wildlife lovers are understandably euphoric. Over the last five
years, various forests of the country have
reported the sighting of "melanistic leopaards." Black feline of the big cat family,
with small head, a robust jaw and strong
hind legs-that's the compact description
of "panther" or "melanistic leopard." In
India, dense forests of the southern part
harbour the black beauty.
The black cats love to live in dense evergreen forests so that they can, as far as
possible, avoid light. A genetic mutation,
dominant or recessive, causes an overexpression of melanin pigments resulting
in the so-called "melanistic leopard.
However, the joy of sighting the big cat
should be tempered with sobriety. Some
15 variants of the black cats are endangered.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Ganapathi Bhat | Akolo

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com