## thehindubusinessline.

## Take a bow

Das infused 'Shakti' in RBI to deal with crises

most remarkable period of stewardship of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) ends today as Shaktikanta Das steps down as Governor. Das assumed charge at a most difficult time for the financial markets and for the regulator. And when he hands over charge to his successor, Sanjay Malhotra, it will be with a justifiable sense of pride for what he has been able to achieve in the last six years at the helm of the central bank.



He can count many achievements Taking over in the backdrop of turmoil in the financial markets following the collapse of IL&FS, and friction between his predecessor, Urjit Patel, and the government, Das had to immediately summon all his experience in the bureaucracy to smoothen ruffled feathers, both in the markets and the government, which he did with aplomb. He handled the Dewan Housing Finance bust-up and the near collapse of Yes Bank, both within a few months of his assuming office, with a firm hand, even while signalling to the markets the central bank's commitment maintain stability. But the biggest test of his office, indeed his career, was to come in a year when Covid hit the world. Das' stewardship of the RBI in this period was outstanding. The central bank cut repo rates by a massive 75 basis points within three days of lockdown. This was followed with frequent, proactive policy measures to calm the markets and the financial sector, coordinating strategy with the government to reassure businesses and markets and keeping communication channels open, appearing before the media at frequent intervals. Speaking at the businessline

Changemakers Awards event in New Delhi about a year ago where he received the Changemaker of the Year 2023 award, Das dwelt at length on the steps that the RBI had to take to keep its staff protected even while ensuring that market operations functioned without interruption. In recent times, the RBI has not shied away from wielding the stick to keep its regulated entities in line — whether banks, NBFCs or fintechs — in the matter of curbing sharp practices. A notable facet of the RBI under Das was its ability to "smell a crisis", as he put it in the interview at the Changemakers Awards event, whether it be runaway lending by banks unmindful of risks, or attempts to evergreen loans by some NBFCs. Despite such a stellar list of achievements, one suspects that what Das would cherish most is his role as inflation

Over the last few months, there have been calls from various quarters, including this newspaper, for him to adopt a more benign stance in favour of growth by cutting rates. But he has refused to shed his samurai suit and sword until the "elephant retreated into the woods" without a threat of return. Look at what the RBI Act says in the matter of Flexible Inflation Targeting, he said, in the latest policy statement last week, Das has taken the inflation battle to the decisive stage his successor will have a much easier job, at least on this front. While Das' steadfastness is to be admired, the jury is out on whether his commitment to stable prices will come at a cost to growth, and if es, by how much. Das' list of achievements as Governor are many. Yet, history will probably judge him only on his success as an inflation warrior. That is the lot of central bank governors.



n the conclusion of its fifth bi-monthly meeting this fiscal on December 6, 2024, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) Policy Committee (MPC decided with a 4-2 majority to keep the policy rep or atte unchanged at 6.50 per cent, i.e., eleven times in a row. The stance of the policy was also kept unchanged at 'neutral.' This decision was unanimous. Most of the surveys conducted before the policy meeting indicated continuance of the stans quo with regard to both the policy rate and stance. Expectedly, a few of the responses were similar to the dissent opinions within MPC that favoured a rate cut by 25 basis points.

responses were similar to use opinions within MPC that favoured a rate cut by 25 basis points.
Also, in line with the majority responses in the surveys, the RBI announced a favourable liquidity measure: it decided to reduce the cash reserve ratio (CRR) of all banks by 50 basis points, thereby restoring it to 4 per cent of NDTI, which was prevailing before the commencement of the last policy tightening cycle in April, 2022. Release of primary liquidity to the banks as a consequence of this step would be about \$1.16 liakh errore, boosting their resources for making loans and investments.

#### ADAPTIVE PROJECTIONS?

ADAPTIVE PROJECTIONS?
Two recent data significantly altered the macroeconomic prospects and, by implication, the expected path of the monetary policy for the rest of the current fiscal as also the next one: (DPI print for Ceother 2024 at 6.2 per cent exceeded the upper tolerance level of 6 per cent, and was also way above the latest Q3:2024-25 projection of 4.8 per cent, and (ii) real GDP growth for Q2:2024-25 at 5.4 per cent was much lower than the latest projection of 7 per cent, Q1:2024-25 actual of 6.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent registered in

lower than the latest projection of 7 per cent, QL:2024-25 actual of 6.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent registered in Q2:2023-24.

In the light of the two data, the MPC has reduced the GDP growth projection for 2024-25 from 7.2 per cent to 6.6 per cent and increased CPI projection for 2024-25 to 4.8 per cent from 4.5 per cent and earlier. These are large adjustments happening within a period of about two months, which would raise two questions: One, why, in general, the actual prints with respect to both GDP and CPI happen to be worse than the projections? As a corollary to this is there amy systematic blas in the quarterly projections? Two, to what extent are the projections also adaptive? Getting answers to both these questions is important, as they will provide an insight into the robustness of the models used in the RBI for the purpose of making macroeconomic projections for monetary policy purposes.



# RBI does well to keep status quo

RIGHT MOVE. Monetary policy is not about looking for opportunities to cut the policy rate. It is about macro stability

The number of dissenting members of MPC who favour a commencement of of policy easing with a rate cut by 25 basis points has now increased from one to two. Their line of argument seems to be the following: the recent slowdown in the growth rate as also in private investment in the manufacturing sectopoint to a demand deficit in the economy, which has been compounded by a lacklustre demand for industrial products in india 1 export markets. Real exchange rate appreciation of the Indian rupee since the onset of the tightening cycle in May 2022 and thereafter has contributed to the poor overall export. The number of dissenting members of

cycle in May 2022 and thereaffer has contributed to the poor overall export performance during this period. More real appreciation of the rupee is a possibility if the process of 'normalisation of monetary policy', involving reduction in the policy rate by MPC does not begin here and now. The majority opinion, the essence of which has been articulated by RBI Governor Shaktilanta Das on several occasions in recent months, is that strong foundations for high growth can be secured only with durable price stability. Restoration of the balance between inflation and growth in the

High inflation not only reduces the purchasing power of both rural and urban consumers but also alters relative prices

overall interest of the economy is the foremost task of the MPC. High inflation not only reduces the purchasing power of both rural and urban consumers but also alters relative prices. Both can have adverse implications for private consumption. Any premature cut in the policy rate, i.e., before durable alignment of CPI inflation with the 4 per cent target could lead to several macro-financial setbacks.

The higher-than-expected CPI print for October was occasioned by a sharp rise in food inflation and an uptick in core inflation. Any cut in the policy rate now may engender the risk of inflation getting out of control, requiring policy reversal and several doses of rate increases. Doing so will run against the very grain of the inflation-targeting framework now in place. overall interest of the economy is th

#### TURKEY EXPERIENCE

THE experience of Turkey in recent years highlights the likely mistakes in monetary policy-making in a succinct manner. In the wake of the outbreak of manner. In the wake of the outbreak of war in the Black See region in early 3022, Turkey faced a significant spurt in consumer inflation, like many other countries. The central bank there responded to this development with a very unconventional measure it slashed the policy rates (the main ones being the central bank's overright borrowing/lending rates) thrice later that year. This action was based on the assumption that a lower interest rate stability

would reduce the economy's cost
structure which, in turn, would reduce
inflation and provide a boost to local
industry, particularly the exporters.
None of the anticipated outcomes
materialised, though, The spike in
inflation continued unabated, leading to
a harsh policy reversal in entry 2023. The
central bank's overnight borrowing rate
rose from 7 per cent in Pebruary 2023 to
13.5 per cent in June 2023. Despite the
tightening, consumer inflation in Turkey
is still very high at around 47 per cent.
Monetary policy-making is not about
looking for factical opportunities and
pretexts to cut the policy rate. This
approach is likely to be costly in a
macro-economic sense and could even
be destabilising. The decision to develop
a benchmark overnight interest rate to
be called SORR (Secured Overnight
Rupee Rate) and based on two secured
overnight money market instruments
(basket repo and TREP) is a timely step.
Over the last several years, there has
been a continuous shift in volume from
the unsecured overnight lending and
borrowing market (with MIDOR as its
benchmark) in favour of the secured
market. And in the secured segment,
TREP has been gaining in volume.
TREP has been gaining in volume.
TREP has been gaining in volume.

The writer is a former central banker and a consultant to the IMF. Through The Billion Press

## Unease over Presidential pardons

The Biden administration is toying with the idea of issuing pre-emptive pardons given Trump's long 'foe' list

It is not just the world that's waiting with a degree of apprehension on the incoming President Donald J Trump. America, too, is watching with a sense of unease, of President Donald J sense of unease, of President Joe Biden leaving on January 20, 2025. For all those who were under the impression that Biden's exit was going to be as unceremonious as that of President Jimmy Carter in 1981, there is a reason for re-think. Bizarre as it may sound, Biden is likely to leave behind a legacy not on domestic of foreign policies but on Presidential pardons, something that started with George Washington and the Whiskey Rebellion. Many Democrats are simply outraged that President went back on his word on pardoning his son Hunter Biden of any federal crimes he may have committed between 2014 and 2024. His decision to pardon Hunter Biden opened a Pandora's box with itsid rights remove

between 2014 and 2024, His decision to pardon Hunter Biden opened a Pandora's box with civil rights groups slamming the President for not extending the pardon to hundreds, if not thousands, who are in jail for a number of reasons. After all, President Carter

had pardoned all those who had evaded the draft in the Vietnam War and Barack Obama freed hundreds convicted of non-violent drug offences. Pardoning Hunter Biden was not the only thing that upset Democrats and Biden files. It was also in the rationale that was advanced: "I believe in the justice system, but as I have wrestled with this, I also believe raw politics has infected this process and it led to a miscarriage of justice," the President said. And this is precisely what President-elect Trump has been saying for four years, especially as he was taken through Special Counsels — that he was a victim of politics.

#### MANY TARGETS

MANY TARGETS
The unease in America today is not of
Biden demitting office without a legacy.
It is one of leaving the White House with
an unease that administration officials
may be toying with the idea of issuing
pre-emptive pardons, given what Trump
has said on "enemies". Chants of "Lock
Him Up" on "Lock Her Up" had been a
mantra right through Trump's political
career — from the yesteryear of Hillary
(Clinton and Nancy Pelosi to today's
Clinton and Nancy Pelosi to today's
Kamala Harris, they have been through



the rants of Trump and his Make America Great Again (MAGA) crowd. The "foe" list is long for the President-elect and it could include top Democrats whom he has said should be in juil; sitting and former members of Congress; and administration officials of the Justice Department and ine Justice Départment and investigative agencies like the Pederal Bureau of Investigation. Some say that vaccine czars like Anthony Fauci could also be targeted. On the Republican side the notables would be former Congresswoman Liz Chency, it is difficult to draw up a list for the "likes"

of 'Trump could be counted in one hand, if not two, family included.

There is a bigger problem that Biden must be worried about other than making up that list of who is to be presumptively pardoned. The fact that a dossier is being prepared itself could be damaging enough to those who may not want to be considered potential wrongdoen, on criminal or civil litigations. For instance, former Democratic House lattelligence Committee chief and current Senator-elect Adam Schiff has asked Biden not to consider his name.

The biggest danger to issuing futuristic blanket pardon would come from the precedent it sets on the Presidency. The issue of Presidential pardons was one of those privileged powers of the Executive that came without any checks and balances. Now, if President Biden goes through with the iden, it opens up to calls for Congressional scrutiny, and with this another circus type environment in Washington DC.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

#### OTHER VOICES.

The fall of Assad: a tumultuous, fragile hope in Syria

The fall of Assad: a tumultuous, fragile hope in Syria Bashar al-Assad: downfal came not with a bang but a whimper. The Syrian dictator reportedly field his home in the wake of a bitSaring, advance by a coalition of anti-government rebels. By Sunday morning he was gone - leaving armed groups as the country's dominant political players. A spirit of anti-Assad sentiment surged across Syria, manifesting itself through displays of both celebration and defanace. The quantities of the sunday o

Apropos the editorial 'Warming up' (December 9), the fact that most of

(December 9), the fact that most of the trooftop solar power unit installations under PM Surya Ghar Muff Bill höjnar are confrand to just four States shows that the awareness levels in other States is not up to the mark. Further, the high installation cost factor, even after subsidy, may be impeding the growth of installations. Most of the poor households require installations with capacities of less than or equal to 1 kW for their power consumption. And they cannot

consumption. And they cannot afford the cost of installation ev with the current subsidy of 60 per cent. The subsidy component may be increased to 90 per cent for installations up to 1 kW capacity, so as make the scheme affordable to the poor. And for those who cannot afford to bear the remaining 10 per cent cost of installation, the same may be arranged as a foan from a bank at a nominal interest rate and repayable in easy installments. Further, awareness about the scheme needs to be increased to make people know of the advantagen of having roof top solar and the subsidised cost of installation. Kosaraju Chandramouli

Kosaraju Chandramouli

Consumer spending The article 'What's changing Indian consumers' (December 7) made for a good read. That Indian consumers are spending more on services (education, health,

entertainment, etc) than food entertainment, etc.) than food products these days clearly suggest that there is remarkable improvement in their standard of living. The increased spending on education and beathteare augers well for the country, as these are day components of human capital

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

#### **Sanitation robots**

that do heroic battle in the gutter (December 9). Technological inventions have both flips and flops. Start-ups engaged in designing of sanitation robots for addressing the challenges faced in sanitation infrastructure maintenance need to

be given liberal technical and be given bber# technical and financial assistance in rolling out a perfect prototype model. These sanitation robots, if manufactured on a large scale, would help thousands of water and sewage networks, by fugging leakages and removing sit which are hitherto done manufacture.

End of Assad's regime Syria with an iron-fist for nearly a uarter of a century, fleeing the following the capture of Damascu by rebel forces, Syria now stares at an uncertain future and political instability. The fall of Assad's government in Syria has not only signalled the end of the country's 18-year civil var but wiped out a bastion from which tran and Russia exercised influence across the West Asia. The visual forcage on television showing thousands of Syrians in cars and on foot congregating at a main square in Damascus waving and chanting "freedom" apply reflected their deeper yearning for free rule. Rebels have freed Syria from the clutches of Assad, but they have the daunting task of trying to deliver stability to a deliver so control where country with competing at The fall of Assad's government in diverse country with competing factions that will need billions of

M Jeyaram

CHART 2

16 14

Growth support will start after inflation moderates

ith inflationary pressures continuing and growth losing momentum, the RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) had a challenging task in hand. The MPC chose a cautious approach and with continued focus on inflation, maintained a stratus gue on policy.

chose a cautious approach and with continued focus on inflation, maintained a status quo on policy interest rates and the stance. However, to provide comfort on liquidity front, the CRR was cut by 50 bps. With inflationary risks emanating from domestic food prices and geo political conflicts, the central bank chose a wait-and-watch approach on policy interest rates. While remaining cautious, the RBI did not seem to be overly concerned on the growth front.

CPI inflation rose to 6.2 per cent in October, above the RBI's target band and is expected to remain high our Jost Park Standard Conflicts in CPI inflation is mainly because of food inflation that is at a high of 7.8 per cent (average of fast three months), while core inflation remains being at around 3.5 per

remains benign at around 3.5 per cent.

FOOD CULPRIT Even in food inflation, the main culprit is vegetable price inflation that shot up by a sharp 42 per cent in October and has been at monthly average of 25 per cent in the current fiscal year. In fact, CPI

the current fiscal year. In fact, CPI inflation excluding vegetable prices has been at a benign average of 3.5 per cent in the current fiscal.

Another concerning aspect is the recent spike in edible oil prices. Inflation in this segment shot up to 9.5 per cent in October in response to spike in global prices and increase in domestic import duty. While food inflation is due to supply side factors, the RB has highlighted in the past their concern around inflationary pressure getting broad based. concern around inflationary pressure getting broad based. To add to the domestic inflationary woes, there are global

innationary woes, there are gional inflationary concerns due to geo-political conflicts, threats of a trade war and financial market volatility. RBI has revised upwards its average inflation projection for FY25 to 4.8 per cent, in line with our expectations. With fresh

our expectations. With fresh harvest coming into the market, food inflation is expected to moderate to around 6.5 per cent by the end of the fiscal year. With GDP growth in Q2 sharply lower than expected, the RBI has lowered the full year growth estimate for Pv25 to 6.6 per cent from earlier estimate of 7.2 per cent.

One major reason for slower

December 10, 2004

thehindu businessline. TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

Worst over on inflation: Chidambaram



RBI. Balancing growth and infla

economic growth has been poor economic growth has been poor capex spending by the Centre and State governments. The Centre has achieved only 42 per cent of the budgeted capex in the first seven months of this fiscal, while on a consolidated hasis State governments have only achieved.

governments have only achieved 28 per cent in the first six months. We expect the government's capex spending to improve in the coming quarters and that should be supportive of growth. Private investment is also expected to improve, going by the healthy growth in order book of capital goods and road construction

companies.

Healthyagriculture production and consequent easing of food inflation should be supportive of overall improvement in consumption. Hence, we expect economic growth to improve in the second half of the year.

coomonic growth to improve in the second half of the year. However, our GDP growth projection for FY25 at 6.5 per cent is marginally lower than RBI's projection. The systemic liquidity had become tight with persistent capital outflows and the 50 bpscut in GRR will help improve the situation. This measure willhelp release liquidity of around 81.2 lakh crore in the system. This in turn will ease short-term rates and prepare the ground for a policy rate cut in the coming quarter. Expected moderation of india's economic growth to around 6.5-6.6 per cent in FY25 is not alarming, but it warrants attention as the country moves away from 7.8 per cent growth recorded in the last two years. Hence RII will be looking at providing monetary policy support to growth as food inflation moderates. CPI moderation in Q4 FY25 should provide that window of poportunity to the central bankt ostart a shallow rate cutting cycle. We expect RBI to cut the policy rate by 50 bps in two tranches in 2025.

The writer is Chief Economist, CareEdae Ratines

# What does 'global growth' mean?

The recent period has seen a reassertion of the Western countries as drivers of global growth, and a relative decline of Asia

Growth profile

Growth rates of real GDP of US and China (%)



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

mon to hear analysts talk

t's common to hear analyses talk of "global growth" in a way that suggests that everyone in the world is affected by it equally. Of course, it is well known that this is not true either across or within national economies.

Countries differ hugely in terms of their ability to garner henefits from more rapid global growth or avoid the losses associated with growth slowdown or declines. And within most countries, growing inequality has meant that the cases associated with growth slowdown or declines. And within most countries, growing inequality has meant that the cosmomic expansion and avoid the costs of declines. Nevertheless, the sense of broadly similar movements in economic activity across countries persist, and this divise the approach to think in terms of global aggregates. It is certainly true that business cycles have been now remarkably correlated across broad country categories according to levels of development since the turn of the century, as Figure 1 suggests.

US-CHINA RIVALRY

US-CHINA RIVALRY

to think RIVALRY in all discussion of aggregate global economic activity, the two economies that are generally singled out for special attention are the US and China, not only for their current dominant positions, but also for their increasingly intense rivalry. China's spectagation

for their current dominant positions, but also for their increasingly intense rivalry. China's spectacular economic growth over four decades made it the second largest economy in the world by the turn of the century. Over the past quarter century. China's economic expansion has outpaced that of the US — but recently the difference has been strinking, and it is striking that since 2019 the two countries appear to have experienced synchronous economic cycles, unlike in the previous two decades. This reflects the recent growth is slowdown in China, but also the very sharp recovery in the US following the pandemic year 2020.

The more rapid rates of growth in some middle and lower income countries — particularly populous ones like China and to a lesser extent India—has given rise to talk of global convergence. But a major part of this is the result of a statistical artefact; the use of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) exchange rates to measure and compare GDP across countries.

There are many empirical and conceptual concerns with the use of PPP exchange rates, which have now become exchange rates, which have now become so widespread. In the current context, one major concern is that PPP exchange rates tend to overstate the GDP of lower

In any case, when looking at the relative economic significance of countries in the global economy, or t contribution to aggregate growth, it makes little sense to use an artificial ortheir

past quareer century. As Figure 3 shows, convergence of per cepital incomes of the major country groups in terms of market exchange rates has been both slow and very little. At the start of the century, the average per capita income in advanced economies was round five times the global average, and this has fallen slightly to around 4.25 times in the most recent period.

By contrast, the average per capita incomes of all developing countries taken together (including China) which began at a quarter of the global average, have still not managed to reach even half of the global average.

of the global average

INCOMES DIVERGING

INCOMES DIVERGING
Table 1, describing different regions, shows that the differences across geographies are if anything even greater, indeed, the African regions show no "convergence" at all in terms of per capita income. Meanwhile, South Asia — which contains India that is generally seen as a country experiencing rapid growth — store that the present of the south of the properties of less than one fifth of the global average, and less than 4 per cent of the North American average.

All this of course excludes internal inequalities, which are known to be

North American average.

All this of course excludes internal inequalities, which are known to be especially intense in some regions, and currently account for well more than half of total global income inequality, according to most researchers.

Using the lens of market exchange rates also provides new insights on the contributions to global growth from the different regions. Figure 4 provides data for the first two decades, 2000 to 2020, and then for the four years since the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is evident (as was suggested in Figure 1 as well) that the pandemic year marked a shift in growth patterns, such that in the recent period the US and Europe have emerged as the major drivers of global growth, displacing East Asia, which in the previous period had accounted for nearly one-third of global GDI growth.

In the period 2020-24 North America

Asia, which in the previous person and accounted for nearly one-third of global GDP growth.

In the period 2020-24, North America and Western Europe together accounted for more than half (55 per cent) of total global growth, reversing the trend of decline the previous decades.

This was due in no small measure to the very large countercyclical macroeconomic policies (both fiscal and monetary) which had the double effect of enabling faster and larger economic recovery in their own countries, and causing capital ourflows, devaluation and debt distress in a range of low and middle income countries.

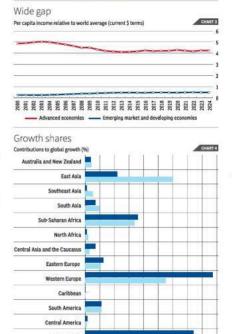
EAST, S-E ASIA SHARE DIP



Meanwhile, East and South-East Asia together accounted for less than 15 per

#### Growing divergence

Per capita income of regions relative to world average (current Sterms)				TABLE
	2000	2010	2020	2024
North America	4.98	3.97	4.97	4.67
Central America	0.37	0.41	0.58	0.59
South America	0.70	0.99	0.69	0.70
Caribbean	0.52	0.48	0.45	0.51
Western Europe	4.07	4.23	4.26	3.69
Eastern Europe	0.40	1.03	1.12	1.18
Central Asia and the Caucasus	0.43	0.63	0.53	0.78
North Africa	0.34	0.40	0.39	0.31
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.12	0.18	0.16	0.11
South Asia	0.08	0.13	0.19	0.18
Southeast Asia	0.22	0.35	0.48	0.42
East Asia	0.87	0.90	1.43	1.13
Australia and New Zealand	3.47	5,42	5.26	4.52



- Advanced economies - Emerging market and developing economies

cent of global growth, compared to nearly \$5 per cent in the previous two decades.

The ability of the North American and Western European regions to once again reassert their dominance does not reflect inherent economic strength and potential so much as the significance of global currency blerarchies and the ability of these countries to maintain

control of the international economic

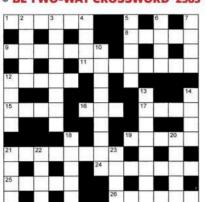
10 15 20 25 30 35 2000-2020

control of the international economic architecture through institutions and legal/regulatory processes established over the previous 75 years.
This is what also enabled them to undertake significantly large fiscal responses during the Covid-19 pandemic, and also provides greater cushion for them in facing future shocks. But nothing lasts forever.

#### **BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2585**

TRAI seeks more power to resolve interconnect rows
The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) said on Thursday that it will
approach either the Supreme Court or the Government to amend the TRAI
Act to get more powers to intervene in dispute relating to interconnect. Mr
Pradip Baljal, Chairman, TRAI, said, "Due to an order by the TDSAT, TRAI has
no policing powers over disputes for which the Telecom Tribunal is currently
the sole authority. We are trying to deal with the situation to get a remedy.
Either we will request that due amendment be made to the law or we will go to
the Supreme Court, that in interconnection, general ruling is not acceptable."

Declaring that the "worst is over" on inflation with global crude oil prices beginning to "moderate", the Finance Minister, Mr P Chidambaram, on Thursday promised in the Lok Sabha to keep a close watch on the prices of essential commodities and resort to further duty cuts if necessary. SEBI amends listing pact terms to benefit investors In order to protect investors' interests in securities and to promote and egulate, the securities market, the SEBI has amended listing agreement terms



01. Carbohydrate (6) 11. Went (8) 17. Accept (4) 19. Plants for flavouring (5)

08. Prepared to go (5) 09. Cut edge in curves; 03. May be depended on (8) 04. Car bonnet (Am) (4) 05. Fracture (5) 06. Quick (4)

21. Taking weight off (8) 24. White ant (7) 26. Short, fast run (6)

02. Unspaken (5)

12. To thieve (5) 15. Deliver an over (4) 16. Method; route (3)

13. Long piece of bunting (8) 14. Confusion, muddle (4) 18. Get a goal (5) 20. Conducting stick (5) 21. Floating device (4) 22. Instrument-face (4)

01. To top the bill when at church needs a lot of form 08. Prepared to study the books at the end of the day (5)

11. Left for dead? (8) 12. Nab a break in the afternoon in special extremes (5)

15. Deliver over for it to hold one's breakfast cereal (4)
16. Make it and leave room for one's manner of living (3)
17. Lay hold of tap key finishes off (4)

oursome things are a wom

21. Taking off revolutionary copper that returns gin cocktail (8)

24. Half the Winter is time to change for a destructive 25. Natural aptitude of a place of fun for taking in pounds (5) 26. Double-curve to write in block capitals for a quick run (6)

02. Bird is holding bill that is understood without words (5)

03. One earl upset a non-u blue who could be counted on (8) 04. Gangster raised by American to get a look at car engine (4) 05. Intermission that will not remain intact (5)

06. 5 will thus go without food except for early meal (4)

07. Looked at what was made yesterday and partly returned (4)
10. For each adult, male, ten arrange it to be there to last (9)
12. Sounds distressed to see former schoolfellow in Nazi force (4)

Discover a pennon right inside a cooking-vessel (8)
 Some disorder occurs where men eat together (4)

18. Incise a line to get goals (5)

20. Even if it's passed in the relay, keep going at the wicket (5)

21. Top of rudder to the stern of seaman's floating structure (4)
22. Being set like the table, is given over to the face (4) 23. For example, give up writing such precious things (4)

#### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2584

23. Precious stones (4)

07. Regarded, looked at (4) 10. Intended to be everlasting (9) 12. Catches breath in sorrow (4)

ACROSS 1. Aristocracy 8. Up-to-date 9. Logo 10. Means 13. Writ 16. Eros 17. Soar 18. Soap 20. Yards 24. Agio 25. Misnomer 26. Refrigerant DOWN 2. Rote 3. Sidle 4. Often 5. Allow 6. Businessman 7. Mortarboard 11. Annoy 12. Saver 14. Room 15. Coda 19. Proof 21. A-wing 22. Diner 23. Amen 

#### WORDLY WISE

I FOUND I COULD SAY THINGS WITH COLOR AND SHAPES THAT I COULDN'T SAY ANY OTHER WAY.

— Georgia O'Keeffe

## The Indian **EXPRESS**

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## AFTER ASSAD

Even as the world celebrates the fall of a tyrant, fingers remain crossed on whether it will lead to a more pluralistic Syria

EW INTHE world, barring the ruling circles in Tehran and Moscow, will shed a tear for the fall of the Assad dynasty that has ruled Syria with an iron list for more than half a century. Under Hafez and Bashar al Assad, Syria, one of the ancient and vibrant societies of the Levant, was turned into a brutal police-state run by a small clique. Bashar's collapse on Sunday — it took an 11-day offensive by rebel groups — is a reminder that rule by dictators is "very strong", until it is not. Back in 2011, amid the Arab Spring, Bashar al Assad crushed the peaceful protests for change. Since then, his rule had been under great stress.

Even as the world celebrares the fall of a tyrant, it is important to remember that it does not take long for mod news from the Middle East to turn bad. Everyone has their findes not take long for mod news from the Middle East to turn bad. Everyone has their findes not take long for mod news their findes.

Even as the world celebrates the fall of a tyrant, it is important to remember that it does not take long for good news from the Middle East to turn back. Everyone has their fingers crossed on whether the new rulers in Damascus can keep their word on developing a more pluralistic framework in Syria that respects minority rights and the heromrous diversity of the nation. That the leader of the rebels who led the charge to Damascus, but Mohammed al-Jawlani, was a former al Qaeda operative raises questions about whether Syria might move from the tyrannical "secularism" of the Assads to an intolerant Islamist authoritarianism. Nori is ticker if the different factions of the rebelgroups that have taken over Damascus will hang together in building a stable system of governance.

Adding to the massive domestic challenges is the role of external powers, It was the Iranian and Russian interventions that helped Assad stay in power at enormous cost to

It among to the massive confession can length of the Moscowa of external powers, it was the lenation and Russian interventions that helped Assad stay in power at enormous cost to the Syrian people. Over the last few days, Tehran and Moscow, distracted by battles else-where, gave up on the dictator, Having been the biggest supporter of the Assad regime. It an is undoubtedly the biggest loser. The loss of Syria punctures a big hole in the "axis of resistance" that Tehran had constructed against Israel. With a new regime in Damascus, reassance: that i errar a near constructed against pract, with a new regime in Dumascus, Tebran loses it sacess to Syria and Lebanon, It is not clear if Russia can retain the air and naval bases it had acquired in Syria under the new regime; but unlike Tebran, Moscowre-tains some diplomatic leverage as a permanent member of the UNSC. Turkey is a major winner, having backed the rebel forces, and has ambitions to expand its influence in Syria and the broader Levant region. Although Israel is pleased to see Assad go, it would be wary of Syria falling into the hands of the extremist groups that could target Tel Aviv with renewed vigour. The moderate Arab states like Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates would not want to see radical Statemier groups destabilising the region. In Delhi, there is a lingering attachment to the Assad dynasty that had backed Delhi in its disputes with Islamabad over the decades. But the bells have tolled for the Assad dynasty. Delhi, whose stakes in the region are growing by the day, has no time to waste on senti-mentalism; it must think of the post-Assad Middle East in broader strategic terms rather than the distorting prism of the competition with Pakistan.

## A HOT WINTER

Record temperature levels in 2024 signal deepening of climate crisis. Policymakers have their task cut out

TS ALL BUT certain that 2024 will be the warmest year on record. Latest data from the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) show that last November was the 16th month in a 17-month period when the average global temperature rise was more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-Industrial Revolution period. The Paris Pact commits its 196 signatories to keep global heating to below 1.5 degrees to limit the impact of climate disasters. The world came close to breaching that threshold last year. With the temperature rise in the first 11 months of 2024 exceeding L6 degrees, C5 warms that there will be a default on the Paris benchmark this year. That does not yet mean a contravention of the landmark climate treaty—its implementation is measured over at least a decade. But reversing temperature trends will require sustained action on several fronts. Meteorologists had anticipated global temperatures to come down a tad this year af-

ter the planet heated to a record level in 2023. Their forecasts were hinged on the cooling effects of the La Nina, which was initially expected to set in around July and then in October. La Nina can only be confirmed if the Oceanic Niflo Index consistently drops to at least -0.5 degrees. This threshold has not been met so far this year, leaving scientists perplexed — the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has admitted to being "spooked" Us National Oceanic and Armespheric Administration in a samittee to being "spooseer". Only twice in the past 75 years has La Nina set in later than October. Experts reckon that the La Nina will be weak even if it arrives mid-winter. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology estimates that it could even be delayed till February 2025. From affecting crop cycles and energy use to having a bearing on local pollution to increasing the wagaries of extreme weather events, the behaviour of this oceanic phenomenon poses a new climate-related when the country of this oceanic phenomenon poses a new climate-related to the country of this oceanic phenomenon poses a new climate-related to the country of this oceanic phenomenon poses a new climate-related to the country of this oceanic phenomenon poses. challenge, Policymakers will have to prepare for the economic ramifications and scientists and Met bodies will have to work together to refine forecasting models.

Close on the heels of C3S's announcement on November temperatures, the Swiss Re

Institute—the academic wing of the eposymous insurance major—released a report on the economic costs of extreme weather events. It estimated that climate vagaries cost the world \$320 billion this year, 25 per cent more than the average over the past decade. Meteorological extremes do not necessarily have to develop into disaster risks. Mitigation of GHG emissions and adaptation to weather vagaries hold the key to a climate-resilient world. If the record of post-Paris CoPs is any indication, national governments and global policymaking agencies have their task cut out.

#### CHOCOLATE, COFFEE, REALITY

Pantone's colour of the year for 2025 - Mocha Mousse speaks simultaneously of indulgence and the everyday

ORGET FAIRYTALES. IF there is one rags-to-riches story worth telling, it is that of the colour brown. For the first time since Pantone began its colour trend forecattle coolur lower, for the lark time since rannore began its count trebs index-cation in 1999, a shade of brown — Mocha Mousse — has been chosen as its colour of the year 2025. The fact that this "warming, brown hue imbued with richness" has been picked as the tone that will define the coming year is one of fashions' one-of-a-kind moments. Brown has risen from its common association with swamps and slush to represent "quiet luxury" and, in the case of Mocha Mousse, "delectable qualities

of chocolate and coffee". Perhaps this is the demure response to Charli XCX's "Brat Green". The internet is agog, Some complain about this "boring" choice while others speculate on the consumer trends that will champion the cause of the hitherto unremarkable brown. At a time when storytelling shapes marketing strategies and entire films are ded-

orowin. As dime when sooryening shapes manketing stategies and efficie times are exer-icated to increasing sales (hello Barbie and The Lego Movie), rest assured, luxury brands will release more tans, more walnus browns, more beige. And yet, when Panneb begain the colour of the year programme, it was meant to be ed-ucational—"to draw attention to the relationship between culture and colour" and pro-mote the "language of colour" to describe the world. While its previous picks have largely been staid, with shades of blue and pink dominating the roster — 2024's "Peach Fuzz" also fought allegations of bias against non-White people — Mocha Mousse delies status quo Brown, with its many textures and tones, denotes diversity, Brown is also the colour of reality; In a world reeling under wars and climate change, what could be more representative, than brown? And then, on a foggy winter morning, there's no greater comfort than a well-worn brown cashmere shawl and a steaming mug of hot chocolate.

# A point of no return



Will Syria and the wider Middle East be better off without Assad? There are no easy answers

P R KUMARASWAMY

IN A SWIFT and unpredictable operation. IN A SWIFT and unpredictable operation, rebel forces have overrun Damascus and top-pled the Assad regime. In a matter of day, fol-lowing the fall of Aleppo, the second largest city, the fate of President Bashar al-Assad was sealed in the early hours of Sunday, Indeed, his ancestral hometown, Qardaha in the Latakia Province in the northwest — where his father Hafez and brother Basil were buried

Latakia Province in the northwest — where his father Halez and brother Basil were buried in the family massoleum — was already under the control of the rebel focces.

Assad became the last of the Arab leaders to be toppled following domestic unrest in the tity of Daraa, closer to the Jordanian border, on March 6, 2011. For over a decade, the survived, primarily due to the commitment and loyalty of the Assad-Army-Alawite triumvirate, and they swam together and survived. When this proved insufficient to counter dozens of rebel forces supported by various regional and extra-regional powers, Assad reached out for military help from Iran Russia and Hezbollah. The decade-long active Russian intervenition, which began in September 2015, shored up the beleaguered Assad regime and also prevented the international community, especially the United Nations, from actively intervening in ending the civil war. For their part, Iranian and Hezbollah fighters fought alongside government forces to recover and nestrain rebel gains. During this period, some Arab countries were critical of Assad for roil ristening? to the voices of Syrians and for prioritising personal survival over the larger interest of Syria. The persistence of the Assad regime resulted in November 2011: however, the survival of Assad regime resulted in November 2011: in when the Arab League in November 2011: in which is the League revoking its decision in May 2023, signalling the Syrian rectum to the Arab fold, in recent morths, several Arab League in resort in the League revoking its decision in the League return to the Arab fold, in recent morths, several Arab League in resort and the Uke, Began courting Syria, and they even hosted President Assad. The restoration of

erai/vae/countres, including saudi Arabia and the UAE, began courting Syria, and they even hosted President Assad. The restoration of Iran-Saudi Arabia relations — mediated by China in March 2023 — partly improved the

Assad became the last of the Arab leaders to be toppled following domestic unrest in the city of Daraa, closer to the Jordanian border, on March 6, 2011. For over a decade, he survived, primarily due to the commitment and loyalty of the Assad-Army-Alawite triumvirate, and they swam together and survived. When this proved insufficient to counter dozens of rebel forces supported by various regional and extra-regional powers, Assad reached out for military help from Iran Russia and Hezbollah,

situation. However, weekend events have rad-ically altered the situation in Syria and beyond. The end of the Bashar regime comes against the backdrop of a volatile and highly charged Middle Eastern order following the October 7, 2023, terror attacks by Hamas against Israel. One, despite the huge civilian against Israel. One, despite the huge civilian casualties, hardships and widespread international criticism, Israel's military strategy brought some tangible, radical and rectonic shifts. There is considerable destruction and downgrading of the terror infrastructure of Hamas and Hezbollah, marked by the elimination of legy figures of the militant groups, including Israel Hantyeh, Hassan Nasrallah and Yatya Simwar. These measures might not have completely eliminated the threats facing Israel, but the military capabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah are significantly downgraded.

Two, the military weakening of Hezbollah

pabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah are significantly downgraded.

Two, the military weakening of Hezbollah was accompanied by its unpopularity over its parallel foreign policy at the behest of fran. This led to considerable resentment against the group within Lebanon and forced the Shia militant group to accept a temporary case-fire with Irsacl. Among others, the casefire deal called for the pullback of Hezbollah militants beyond the Litanti River or about 30 km north of the Israel-Lebanon border. Hezbollah malitants beyond the Litanti River or about 30 km north of the Israel-Lebanon border. Hezbollah the was able to overrule this demand in the past, but not under current circumstances. Moreover, the involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian civil war was unpopular both inside Syria and Lebanon, and the latter ended up hosting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees, who account for nearly 25 per cent of the Lebanese civilians, by railying around and fighting for the unpopular Assad regime, Hezbollah has directly contributed to the infelligence leaks that resulted in the Israel lassassination of Nasrallah last September.

Three, the Islamic Republic of Iran, which leads the anti-Braeli forces in the Middle East under the banner of the Axis of Resistance, is internally weakened. Dispelling regional fears and contrary to its public rhetoric, Tehran chose not to respond to the October 26 Israeli strike believed to have been carried out by 100 fighter jets against 20 Iranian targets. Asking its proxies to pursue resistance while maintaining strategic selence signals the weakeness of the Iranian strategy. Its options are extremely limited in light of the military defeats and setbacks suffered by its proxies. In the wake of Donald Trump's election, even Houthis are signalling friendly overtures. These are manifested in the internal debates taking place in Iran. President Masoud Pezeshkian represents the pragmatic wing that opposes and resists a more activist and militant strategy pursued by the dergy-dominated hardliners in Tehran.

There are initial signs that the forces of Iranian Revolutionary Guards are already pulling out of Syria. Indeed, literally hours before the rebel takeover, the Iranian officials left their mission in Damascus. Moreover, while providing political asylum of Assad, Russia is preoccupied with Ukraine and is unable to shore up additional support for Assad.

With the collapse of the Assad regime,

With the collapse of the Assad regime. With the collapse of the Assad regime, two things are certain, One, Syria, as we have known it geographically since the end of World War II, is no longer possible. Two, Bashar Assad destroyed the lasting legacy of his father: Political stability. As Defence Minister Halez lost the Golan Heights to Israel in 1967, and now, President Bashar lost he whole country to the rebels, some of whom are ideologically closer to the xeno-policis LSS. Will Syria and the wider Middle East be better off without Assad? There are neasy answers, but most probably not. no easy answers, but most probably not

The writer teaches contemporary Middle East at Jawaharlal Nehru University

## DIGNITY AT THE END

As spectre of ageing population looms, India can no longer neglect palliative care

HARMALA GUPTA

DYING WITH DIGNITY is one of the most vex-ing challenges we face today. The recent pas-sage of a bill in the House of Commons in Britain highlights this concern. A cry has been

Britain highlights this concern. A cry has been raised by a section of its citizenty, which is resonating across the globe, asking for assisted dying for themselves and for their loved ones in the face of unbearable suffering.

Data from Oregon — it was the first state to legalise assisted dying for the terminally ill in 1997 — shows that two-thirds of those who asked for help to die last year had cancer. Not surprisingly, the main reasons for patients to seek this recourse are loss of dignity, hear of becoming a burden, inadequate pain control and the financial implications of continuing treatment. What

dignity, fear of becoming a burden, inadequate pain control and the financial implications of continuing treatment. What should also set alarm bells ringing is that research published in the JAMA Network Open suggests that among all cancer survivors, male adolescents and young adults (15-39) not only have the highest rate of death by suicide but that this rate has increased three-fold in recent years.

We have been let down by our policymalers, legislators, administrators, medical mistinuions and practitioners, the judicial and health systems and society at large. The debate in the House of Commons brought these shortcomings sharply into focus with demands for more investment of government resources in palliative care. It was shocking to hear that in the UK, considered the mother of the modern hospice and palliative care movement, hospices have had to shut down because they depend primarily on funds from charity. Accessible, affordable and compassionate palliative care can save many lives.

Based on our 28 years of experience looking after patients with serious healthrelated suffering, there is no doubt in our mind that palliative care must be universally available and made part of the public healthcare system. With non-communicable diseases on the rise and the prospect of an ageing population looming large, we must act now. We can not afford to neglect this aspect of care as what are now isolated cries for assistance in dying are likely to become chorus. For India, this will be disastrous

At CanSupport, we can testify to this. We have had a few people with terminal cancer who had suicidal intentions but once their issues were sorted out, not only did they continue to live well but they also died with dignity. This is what palliative care achieves by focusing on the physical, pspxcho-social, spiritual and financial needs of patients and their caregivers.

Yet, this care is accessible to less than 4 per cent of those who need it is largely provided by NGOs that suffer from a paucity of funds and face a number of hurdles, especially procuring a licence for oral morphine, the drug of choice for unremitting cancer pain. Our laws must also ensure that advance

pain, Our laws must also ensure that advance medical directives or living wills are executed

pain. Our laws must also ensure that advance medical directives or living wills are executed and complied with.

Recently, the Supreme Court of India disallowed parents from removing the feeding tube of a 30-year-old who had been in a vegetative state for 11 long years after suffering a head injury. The parents pleaded that they could no longer afford to look after their son. Such demandars no rot lostled and are a symptom of our calloss indifference to suffering.

When CanSupport heard of this farmily's plight, our palliative care team visited them and discussed with the parents how best to look after their bedridden son, as well as answering queries which had never been addressed.

Based on our 28 years of experience looking after patients with serious health-related suffering, there is no doubt in our mind that palliative care must be universally available and made part of the public healthcare system. With non-communicable diseases on the rise and the prospect of an ageing popu-

lation looming large, we must act now. We can not afford to neglect this aspect of care as what are now isolated cries for assistance in dying are likely to become a chorus. For India, this will be disastrous.

in dying are likely to become a chorus. For India, this will be disastrous. Unlike parts of the Western world, we are a highly stratified society. The potential misuse of a law on assisted dying, despite guardrails, would be immense. Marginal and vulnerable populations who are financially dependent on family members and the state are likely to be disproportionately affected. Developments in Canada after the legalisation of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) testify to this.

Not only has MAID become a slippery slope, with calls now being made to include more sections of the population in its ambit, but Canadian healthcare workers believe that the provision of accessible and quality healthcare services for those most vulnerable is beginning to deteriorate, pushing them in the direction of MAID. In view of this, a coalition of disability rights organisations in Canada have filed a Charter challenge against the so-called track two of the MAID law, which allows individuals to seek MAID ever when death is not reasonably foresceable. In the UK, too, the British Medical Association has expressed its unease with a law that would require doctors to offer assisted survould requ has expressed its unease with a law that would require doctors to offer assisted sui-

would require doctors to offer assisted sui-cide to their patients.

Palliative and hospice care offer the tools to prevent serious health-related suffering. The question is, do we have the commitment and necessary foresight to use them with wisdom and compassion?

The writer is founder-president, CanSupport

## DECEMBER 10, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

#### STILL HAZARDOUS

ATHOUGH SEVEN DAYS have passed since the leakage of the poisonous gas that killed 2,000, the technicians and chemists working round the clock have not been able to decide on a safe method to dispose of the remaining 30 tonnes of Methyl bocyanate. Experts are reportedly concerned that although nitrogen is being provided to purge the deadly MiC, if it is kept for too long, a rise in temperature may lead to another leakage.

TEHRAN AIRPORT CRISIS IRAN DECLARED A state of emergency at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport after hijackers

holding a Kuwam annine threatened to down up. The four Arab hijackers, who are demand-ing the release of 17 prisoners from Kuwaiti prisons, killed four of their hostages, includ-ing two Americans, in the earlier five days of the hijack drama.

#### WORKERS IN DANGER

THOUSANDS OF WORKERS in Faridabad may THOUSANDSUE WORKERS IN FARABASIO MAY be dying a slow death after inhaling toxic gases continuously emitted by chemical factories in the industrial area. The Haryana government is treating the chemical factory owners with idd-glowes because they claim to have "con-nections" at the highest political level. Chlorine and acidic effluents emitted by the factories have caused extensive damage to electric, wa ter and serverage installations in the area.

#### TAMIL MILITANTS STRIKE

WITH THE TAMIL militants in northern Sri WITH THE TAMIL militants in northern Sri Lanka stepping up their activities and the army indulging in retaliatory attacks on the civilian Tamil population, the picture is one of "slow genocide" of the Tamils. The imposition of a 42-hour curfew in three northern districts indicates that either something big other than the hijacking of three oil tankers by Tamil mil-itants, has happened or that the army is preparing for a major onslaught.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS. TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2024

# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE

# The diminution of a party

At least three sets of red lines were crossed by Akal Takht's public interrogation of Sukhbir Singh Badal, and sentencing



BY YOGENDRA YADAV

SOMETHING DEEPLY TROUBLING is hap SOMETHING DEEPLY TROUBLING is hap-pening in Punjab. And it is not just the con-demnable bid on the life of Akali leader Sukhbir Singh Badal. The manner in which the Akal Takht has intervened to resolve the crisis of the Shiromani Akali Bal (SAD) raises deeper political and legal-constitutional is-sues that must not be glossed over. When we face nothing short of a dismantling of the secular republic, we cannot afford to be casual or selective about such issues. The farts of the case are straightfurward.

the secular republic, we cannot afford to be casual or selective about such issues.

The facts of the case are straightforward. The SAD faces an existential crisis following a series of electoral debacles, ever since the younger Badai inherited his father's political legacy and courted serious charges of misgovernance, corruption and political in-eptitude. This led to a full-blown rebellion within the parry that threatened its disintegration. This is when the Akal Takht, the highest religious authority of the Sikhs, stepped in it. summoned Sukhbir Badai, incterrogated him publicly on allegations against his government and his keadership of the party. He was sentenced to a symbolic serva the Goldon Temple and a committee was appointed to restructure the party. The attempt on Sukhbir Badal's life, thankfully averted by an alert policeman, happened when he was serving his sentence.

Now, some of this is perfectly understandable, A robust political articulation of regional concerns is the glue that binds many border states to the ladia union.

sandanic. A rooust pointeal arriculation or regional concerns is the glue that binds many border states to the Indian union. Therefore, an effective marginalisation and possible extinction of a regional political force like the SAD in a sensitive state like Punjab should be a matter of concern. Its absence from the political spectrum would hurt India as well as Punjab. Such a

would hurt India as well as Punjah. Such a vacuum may spawn extremist voices out-side democratic politics. Resides, a signifi-cant section of Sikhs inside and outside Punjab still nurse the wounds of 1984, espe-cially since nothing has happened against the guilty. The presence of the SAD in state and national politics, with all its flaws and failures, is a soothing signal to the commu-nity. Also, there is no doubt that Badal Jr has or inherited the political exercise, the residence of the politics. The political exercise that and the political position that the political exercise that and the political exercise that are the political exercise that and the political exercise that are the p not inherited the political sagacity, tact and popularity of his father. He has been driv-

popularity of his father. He has been driv-ing the party downhill. Someon enceded to intervene to stem this free fall.

This much makes sense. But the real is-sues are: Who could have, or should have, intervened in this matter? Was it appropri-ate for the Akal Takht to intervene and arbi-trate? And, was it appropriate for the SAD to submit itself to the supreme command of the Akal Takht? This is not an internal matter of a party or of a community or beor the AKAI LARIT! This is not an internal matter of a party or of a community or between a party and some religious leaders. There are at least three sets of red lines that seem to have been crossed here. First of all, there is a regress of the SAD from a regional party to a party of one religious community. The SAD originated as a ponthic organisation that has its roots in a



religious reform movement. But following the successful return of the SAD to power in the post-terrorism days, the Akali Dal made a big shift in 1996 in its Moga convention from being a "panthic" party to being a Punjabi party, from a religious-regional to a purely regional entity. While the SAD continued to mainly represent Sikh interests, over the years it offered membership and leadership positions to many Hindus. The message of the latest developments is loud and clear: It is a party of and for the panth, of the majority sikh community in Punjab, accountable to its religious establishment. If we accept this, how do we critique those who wish to run this country as per the wishes of the majority Hindu community? The second issue is about constitutional propriety. How can a registered and recognised political party, that is required to take a pledge of secularism, submit itself to the supreme command of a religious authority? Obviously, the constitution of the SAD, mandated for all parties under the law, does not mention the Akal Takh as the arbiter of its internal disputes. Now, a political party should be free to take its ideological guidance and advice from outside the party. There is nothing anyone can do if a party leadership seles informal advice from cutes that are known to be tide to caste or religious criticis hat are known to be tide to caste or religious criticis hat are known to be tide to caste or religious for form trital that her their guidance.

agous seasors. Indeed, there are parties that are known to be tight caste or religious conganisations and that take their guidance. But here we are speaking of a formal trial conducted in full public view and a binding judgment. How does that sit with the role of a political party that competes for constitutional office? How does anyone, then, question the role of the RSS in running the affairs of the BJP and its government? Finally, there are serious concerns about the propriety of the Akal Takht interfering in political matters. The Akal Takht interfering in political matters. The Akal Takht interfering in political matters. The Akal Takht is not just a spiritual institution of a religious community, independent of law and state, that exercises moral authority. The jathedurs of the Akal Takht are appointed and removed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SEC) cestablished by the land. Needless to say, the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925 nowhere authorises the SCPC or

anyone appointed by it to interfere in politics. The Akal Takht is there to offer guidance to the community in faith-related matters. And if both parties agree, it may adjudicate or arbitrate in social disputes. There have been questions about its authority to 'excommunicate' members of the community former Union Home Minister Buta Singh was excommunicated for his alleged complicity in rebuilding Harmandir Sahib without involving the community following Operation Blue Star. Surjit Singh Barnala, then the CM of Punjah, was punished by the Akal Takht for ordering the police to enter the Gurdwara. These were controversial but borderline cases, way back in the past and pertaining to The SAD originated as a panthic organisation that has its roots in a religious reform cases, way back in the past and pertaining to movement. But following the successful return of the SAD to power in the post-terrorism days, the Akali Dal made a big shift in 1996 in its Moga convention from being a 'panthic' party to being a

Punjabi party, and from a religious-regional to a purely regional entity. While the

who wish to run this country

as per the wishes of the majority Hindu community?

the years it offered

These were controversial but borderline cases, way back in the past and pertaining to religious matters.

The present case is qualitatively different, and crosses the red line. The public trial of Sukhbir Badal was political. Only one of the many questions formally posed by the Akal Takht to him related to a religious issue, namely his mishandling of the 'be-adabi' (desecration) of the holy Granth. Everything else pertained to his role in government and as leader of the party that affected the 'panth'. Of course, the Akali Dal and its leaders have no issues with it: they must have sought this intervention. We that does not answer how this purely religious institution acquired the authority to order the restructuring of a political party. If this is acceptable, what's wrong with Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh of Dera Sacha Sauda instructing his followers to vote for the BJP? Worse, would this action not reduce the Akal Takht to the level of any political entity, subject to the same kind of public scrutiny and must-slinging that any political body exposes itself for Y Would the Akal Takht now fall back upon the 'pir-imir' doctrine that argues for non-separation of religious and political authority for the Sikh community? If this holds for the Sikhs, now can the BJP not invoke it to defend the toxic intrusion of babas, yog's and swamis that it has unleashed into the body politic?

The writer is member, Swaraj India and SAD continued to mainly represent Sikh interests, over membership and leadership positions to many Hindus The message of the latest developments is loud and clear: It is a party of and for the panth, of the majority Sikh community in Punjab, accountable to its religious establishment. If we accept this, how do we critique those

The writer is member, Swaraj India and ional convenor of Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan. Views are personal

#### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The ongoing crisis, playing out against the backdrop of the Malaysian freeze on recruitment of new foreign workers earlier in the year, shows the urgency of addressing procedural bottlenecks and irregularities to better protect the interests of our workers."

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

## In Sri Lanka, a delicate negotiation

NPP's ability to bring about reconciliation between ethnic communities depends on relieving economic pressures



AHILAN KADIRGAMAR AND Devaka Gunawardena

SRI LANKA HAS witnessed a major political shift in recent months, Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) coalition won the presiden-tial election held on September 21. It was the first time a candidate from neither of the two major parties that have ruled Sri Lanka since independence, or their off-

the two major parties that have ruled shi Lanka since independence, or their off-shoots, became president. Then, on November 14, the NPP won a landslide victory in parliament. It won over two thirds of the seats, a number un-precedented under the system of proportional representation. Consequently, the centre-left NPP gov-ernment now has a tremendous mandate. Will it push back against the IMF austerity programme and provide relief to the per-le while rebuilding the economy in the afternath of Sri Lanka's worst economic criss since independence? And can it find the political will for constitutional changes to abolish the authoritarian ex-ecutive presidency and share power with innority communities? The NPP draws its strength from the powerful uprising against President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022 for his fail-ure to address the economic crisis. Across the ethnic divide, people are focused on

ure to address the economic crisis. Across the ethnic divide, people are focused on their livelihoods. This has opened the space to challenge the polarising but mutually dependent Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil nationalisms. Indeed, the most surprising outcome of the parliamentary elections was that for the first time a natival to the control of the parliamentary elections was that for the first time a natival of the control of the parliamentary of the control of the parliamentary elections was that for the first time a natival of the parliamentary of t

prising outcome of the parliamentary elections was that for the first time a national party has won the electrorates in the Tamil nationalist stronghold of the Northern Province.

The results represent a break with the past. The NPF's chief constituent party, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), has a problematic history complicit with Sinhala nationalism. Its insurrection in the late 1980s opposed the Indo-Lanka Accord and devolution of power. It further joined a coalition with the government led by Mahinda Rajapaksa during the last phase of the civil war. These actions have raised concerns about the party's position on minorities.

Since the end of the war in 2009, the JVP has embraced a range of democratic causes. However, it has stayed relatively silent on ethnic issues, gesturing towards national harmony rather than advancing power sharing with minorities. Nevertheless, with its victories in the recent elections, the NPP leadership has made it clear that it is increasingly open to engaging with minority communities. especially in the North, East, and Hill County. That includes promising the release of lands occupied by the military in the war-torn regions. Given its own popularity in the South, it has the latitude to undertake these measures.

In this context, the NPP's ability to

undertake these measures. In this context, the NPP's ability to pursue efforts towards reconciliation are not solely determined by forces within Sri Lanka. The country is now buffeted

by the crosscurrents of an unravelling global order. Many observers have tended to accuse Sri Lanka of creating its own problems. That included the successive failures of the majority leadership to address the concerns of minority communities. But today, the country's exposure to external dangers reflects the growing weight of foreign over domestic politics in constraining or enabling democratic outcomes. The NPD government is bound to face economic disruptions and geopolitical manocaviers. It must prepair the country and take decisive action to manage the shocks. Trade volatility could undermost essential imports while global interest rate hikes may further aggravate Sri Lanka's debt crists, how would regional powers at loggerheads, such as India and

In this context, how would regional powers at loggerheads, such as India and China, deal with a Sri Lankan foreign policy of neutrality? Sri Lanka was at the centre of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Unlike that moment, there appears to be little appetite for a similar coalition of countries in the Clobal South today. The NPP government will have to weigh the value of economic support from major powers and the political cost of aligning too closely with any of them.

litical cost of aligning too closely with any of them.

The determining factor is Sri Lanka's development riquectory, including sources of development financing and its trader— talionships. The new government should seek investments that align with a new development plan that can defend peo-ple's living standards and rejuvenate inveltineds. It alianca must be able to use international funding to make its own de-cisions about how to sustain its pomble

international funding to make its own de-cisions about how to sustain its people. That approach stands in stark contrast to the recent focus of funding mega infra-structure projects, which have been ac-companied by speculation in luxury ur-ban real estate. Moreover, Sri Lanka must build strategic complementarities through trade, rather than being told to liberalise its economy willy—filly. The lat-ter would only put further strain on the balance of navments.

ter would only put further strain on the balance of payments.

Accordingly, a change in external en agement is urgently needed India player agement is urgently needed. India player a major role in providing Sri Lanka a life line during the Covid-19 pandemic an related economic woes. But India's bridge financing came with the assertion that at BMF agreement was the only way out. The IMF programme and its ongoing, auster ty measures are enine to be nechans the

har agreement was too my weyour. MFF programme and its ongoing austerity measures are going to be perhaps the biggest challenge for the new government. There is tremendous pressure from the West and India to stay the Course.

The IMF path is bound to create a tremendous backlash given the Social suffering. The NPP leadership's ability to bring about reconciliation between Sri Lanka's ethnic communities depends on relieving the economic pressures on ordinary people. If the new government fails, it would create room for recompliation forces that would also feed into the already unstable global order. Consequently, the choice is clear. Dissansyake and his government should be given the space to act on the people's mandate for change in Sri Lanka.

Kadirgamar is a political economist and senior lecturer, University of Jaffria Gunawardena is a political economist and research fellow with the Social Scientists Association in Sri Lanka



## Death of empathy

Hard ethnic lines in Manipur have led to a narrowing of the public sphere

G AMARIIT SHARMA

WOMEN AND CHILDREN, languishing as in-ternally displaced people (IDPs), were killed ternally displaced people (IDPs), were killed and thrown in the river. A woman was burnt alive in her house. Another woman was shot and thrown in the river. A woman was short alive in her house. Another woman was shot dead while harvesting in a paddy field. The latest episode of violence in the Jirbam district of Manipur in November accentuated the deeply precarious condition of people in the state since the beginning of violence in May 2023. Several such hrutal lidlings can be cited in the last 17 months of Manipur violence. Why do hornife it lidlings and be cited in the last 17 months of Manipur violence. Why do hornife it lidlings and redefine our politics? Judith Butler, renowned philosopher and gender theorist, maintains that the precariousness of life and vulnerabilities of the body due to pain and grief potentially enable us to see one another as equals, leading to collective chical actions. But what we see in Manipur is different. There is a need to deliberate on the state of brutal politics, the seeming death of collective grief and the absence of ethical action against violence. st violence

against violence.

On November 14, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced the extension of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in six police station limits in five districts of Manipur on the ground of "volatile" situation and "active participation of insurgent groups in heinous acts of crime". In effect, to the contrary, the extension of AFSPA has gone down as an instru-

ment to deepen an already divided society and geographies. The extension signifies not only the continuity of extraordinary laws but also the institution of an extraordinar-ily fragile civil life. It is reminiscent of the ex-

but also the institution of an extraordinarily fragile caville. It is remisiscent of the experience of violence in postcolonial northeast India and the popular movement against it based on the values of right to life and justice. One would expect that the experience of the struggle would have deep-need respect for each other's lives and dignity. What we see is the opposite. The brutality that such people's struggles criticised and challenged in the past has become part of the divisive politics.

Insurgency has not ended. The state's impunity too, has now apparently extended extra-judicially to various nodal power centres in society. Civil society groups that dominated rights politics and challenged military forces' unmitigated powers have fallen silent. Instead, groups that seemingly have a symbiotic relationship with ambiguous state and non-state powers of printing the public discourse. In the past year-and-half of the violence, civilian groups freely roamed fully armed, almost hijacking public life in the name of ethnic demands or territorial identity, In this contoxt, one wonders where the state is. In the official state narrative, there is a rendering of the state as a intrid-party mediator, ascribing current violence entirely as a result of inter-community "historical" hos-

tilities on land and identity. The reality is that while the state fails to act swiftly, armed groups enjoy impunity against punishment for crimes they have committed. The sover-eign is there. But it is not exercising its writs effectively to end the violence.

eign is there. But it is not exercising its writs effectively to end the violence.

Paraphrasing philosopher Walter Benjamin's critique of violence, violent ethnic politics institutes political order, and violence conserves ethnic politics. Such politics determines who is and who is not, who belongs and who does not in an ethnic enclosure. This politics does not allow us to see vulnerability as an equal experience. It tends to privilege one vulnerability over another. Precarity of life and weaknesses are politically ghetoised and not equally seen and experienced. When people mobilise against the extension of AFSPA, other sections of society feel the necessity of the Act in all districts of Manipur. One individual death is the death of a community, while another community is regarded as the perpetrator. While a section of the people feel the protection of security forces. While one feels the state's complicity in the violence, the other feels the same security forces. While one feels the state's complicity in the violence, the other feels the security forces. While one feels the state's complicity in the violence, the other feels the protection of the state. The state is differently felt, accessed, and interpreted. In this precarious circumstance, there is a widespread incapacity to share pain and suffering in Manipur. While fighting in the name of ethnic nationhood and territorial

identity, debates and discussion on public order and civility on matters of life and death have stupped. Across communities, anyone who speals against the self-determined politics of territorial identity or autonomous ethnic identity is silenced or threatened. Ever since violence erupted in May 2023, the unspoken dictum is to speak only to defend your community, or to keep silent. Many feel that long years of self-determination movements have almost become ploys for those who want to preserve political influence or create their own spheres of influence. The unfortunate result is the death of the public conscience and that of a critical public sphere. However, that does not mean one should stop thinking against and beyond the violence. The violent disruption in daily lives, anxiety, uncertainty, and brutal politics can be looked at as critical to rethink our selves and our politics. Taking such moments as those that enable collective moral action, at least for a people who have a shared history of violence in nosteonical methas I lotted.

those that enable collective moral action, at least for a people who have a shared history of violence in postcolonial northeast India, is not political naivete. There is still a silent moral collective that thinks against violence and ruthless politics. The time has come to give space to such a collective.

The writer teaches at the Special Centre for the Study of North East India, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi epaper.indianexpress.com

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### SHORTAGE BURDEN

SHORTAGE BURDEN
THIS REPERS TO the editorial, ATB warming (IE, December 9), India's progress in addressing TB will be jeopardised if there is a shortage of drugs. The government's failure to provide the necessary medication can lead to a catastrophic number of TB cases. There are pre-existing issues that the country needs to resolve, including structural, psychosocial, and clinical barriers. For instance, there are transportation challenges and time and money problems that come in the word distributing medication A shortage of TB drugs will burden the healthcare system, increase susceptibility, and render the 2025 target of eliminating TB impossible to accomplish.

LR Murmu, New Delbi

#### TREAD CAUTIOUSLY

THIS REFIES TO the editorial. Unfreezing ties' (IE, December 9). The impending change in geopolitics, coupled with the apparent skowdown of the Chinese economy, has compelled Beijing to initiate a broader dialogue with Delhi. Indian industries depend heavily on China for technological parts, raw materials, and machinery. While Chinese investments

can inject much-needed capital into the Indian economy, we must proceed with caution, particularly in sectors like telecommunications that have security concerns. Small and medium enterprises are likely to struggle against the lower costs and higher quality of Chinese prod-ucts, potentially disrupting the "Make in India" initiative. A graded opening of the economy to China must be the way. Vijal Pant, Hempur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, Unfreezing ties' (IE, December 9). S Jaishankar's recent statement in Parliament regarding India-China relations is a significant articulation of India's position on the bilateral relationship. While his comments underscore the importance of resolving border disputes and maintaining peace in sensitive areas, the effectiveness of such statements depends on the willingness of both nations to engage. The minister's emphasis on India's sovereignty and territorial integrity reflects a firm stance. However, lasting progress requires more than thetoric; it demands tangible action, Confidence-building measures, strengthened communication channels, and mutual respect for each other's concerns are prerequisites to eace tensions.

Sanjay Chopra, Moholi THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Unfreezing

isites to ease tensions. Sanjay Chopra, Mohal

# Why Punjab has fallen deeper into the abyss



**GURBACHAN JAGAT** 

of the attempt to as sassinate Sukhbir Singh Badal, my mind flashed back to the Arril of flashed back to the April of 1983 and the killing of AS Atw-al (DIC), an outstanding police officer and a gern of a person. Atwal was martyred while on duty with the limited resources he had while facing an armed militancy Sukhbir survived— barely. The individual heroics of a policema, award the due of a policeman saved the day, but how a known terrorist with Dut now a known terrorist with Pakistain truining and support was allowed to not only recee the area but also approach a Z plus protectee is a question that remains to be answered.

They say that history repeats itself but in the case of Punjab. we seem to be approaching the

we seem to be approaching the cycle with alarming speed. The conditions being created are

conditions being created are similar, but as, yet, we do not have a full-blown militancy. The Punjab countryside is awashwith unemployed youth who includge in petty crimes and feed the drug inclustry. A lot of them have organised themnelves into armed gangs, available for kidrappings, killings and inter-gang warfare.

Canada, the USA, Australia and, of course, Pakistan. They even operate from within jails how is this possible?

The youth are unemployed agriculture has been, for the as agriculture has been, for the past many decades, a failing proposition for most marginal farmers. Punjabwas never giv-en priority for industrialisation as it was considered a border state and was landlocked. Even today, with its huge diaspora air connectivity to the rest of air connectivity to the test of the world remains a distant dream, with paltry routes being assigned to its interna-tional airports. Employment in the defence and paramilitary forces is no longer of the sciele it used to be. Also, most youth are unemployable in skilled professions because of a failed education system. In the 1960s and 70s, the region had Sour of and 70s, the region had four of the top medical institutions -Amritsar medical college, CMC, Ludhiana, Rajindra Hospital, Patiala, and the PGIMER. ptal, Patiata, and the PGIMER. Chandigarh. Today, barring the PGI, the rest are poor reflec-tions of their old days as poor funding and administration has eroded them. Punjab Unialumnus in all fields of life. today, it's a shadow of its former self. The odd IIT or private institution that has come up is institution that has come up is a case of too little. There seems to be nowell-conceived plan to create suitable employment. Why are the youth running to fireign shores for basic educa-tion and jobs? Why are they not productively employed here?



that history repeats itself but in the case of Punjab, we seem to be approaching the cycle with alarming speed. Pl

There has been no

coordinated plan to

pull Punjab out of

this morass, no

injection of financial

or administrative support to help revive it.

ly Inaction, initially practised by John Lawrence (Viceroy of India) in the 1860s through his policy on dealing with Afghanistan after the death of its Emir Dost Mohammad its Emir, Dost Mohammad Khan, and the subsequent civil war. This policy helped the British consolidate their Indian empire. Its adaption on the home front is leading to the creation of a failed state. The concept of proactive administration, which identi-fies problems, finds outloos. fies problems, finds solutions ges in planning for its cit izens, has changed to maste

izens, has changed to 'master-ly inactivity', a conjuror's trick of creating an illusion of activ-ity where there is none. Punjab alone is not at fault, Dethi also is missing in action. There is no acknowledgement of our problems. A proxy war was waged on the country

and promoting militancy in the state by Pakistan for two decades. What happened from 1970 to 1995, the days of horror and nights of massacres inflicted on us, is well known. The Government of India

The Government of Incha resources were poured into fighting the militancy, but it was the blood of Punjabis that soaked its fields. Things were brought under control, but the political, administrative and economic fabric was destroyed. The situation required an inirequired political and admin required political and adminis-tutive leadership of the high-estorder, but this was not to be. There has been no coordinated plan to pull Panjab out of this morass, no injection of finan-cial or administrative support to help revive it. People forget the sheer scale of human tragedy during this time — over 3,000 police and paramili-tary personnel were martyred. The Centre should have taken the lead and Punjab followed in its effort to revive. Instead, we fell into the hands of selfwe fell into the hands of self-seeking politicians and corrupt administrators. The decades since then have been the lost decades, with immigration being the perceived salvation. For long, Punjab has borne

the brunt of invasions from the Northwest, countless armies have passed through and, vet we persevered. Once the 'Misls we persevered. Once the Miss's were formed and then, with Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the helm, Punjah Bund its leader-ship and no invader dared to cross the Klyther Pass. The British understood this and divided the region, thereby ensuring that the old strength would not be easily review! In would not be easily revived. In 1947-48, Punjabis were devas tated due to the m tion of Sikhs and Hindus and the bloodshed that accompa the bloodshed that accompa-nied the Partition. Farmers were deprived of their land, businessmenof their business-es. They somehow, got through the first few months until the

sabilitation work was done However, the Punjabis did notask for doles and none were offered. The farmer started with whatever land he was allotted, the affluent b allotted, the affilient business-man started with a small shop. Through the sheer grit of its people, political foresight of its leadership and acumen, integrity and hard work of its administrators, Punjab was soon on its feet and galloping

Green Revolution and boom-ing business. We became the grangry of India and its sword gransry of India and its sweet ann. Ber a time, Punjab led the country in most fields of human development. Howev-ec, this was not to last. Gradual-ly, the extremist thought was born and mutured and the darkness came. The Green Revolution and its initial momentum were demiled by a lack of future planning, educa tion and training of farmers Tertiary industries in food pro cessing which should h essing, which should have accompanied an agmina econ-orny, never came up. The dwin-dling landholdings and the tunsition to commercial farm-ing, along with its debt burden caught up with small farmens. Thday, as Punjab declines further, we once again risk opening our country to the interests of foreign powers, who for long have been inimi-al to us. The border is hot as

who for long have been inimi-cal to us. The border is hot as smuggling of drugs and weapons reaches unprece-dented levels. A strong, pros-perous Punjab would benefit not only its own people but, as not only its own people but, as has been seen in the past, also become the country's bulwark and the vanguard. The wars of 1947, 1965 and 1971 were fought on this soil with the fought on this soil with the brave men of this state con-tributing stupendously. The list of martyrs in the war of Independence is full of names from this region. The state and the Central leaderships must take cogni-sance of the precatious situa-tion and chart a plan.

## The significance of variability in data-based estimates



debate competition as one of the three judges. The ranking made by me prevailed even after the final rankings even after the final rankings of the candidates were pre-pared by aggregating the scores given by all judges. The other two judges were taken aback. However, as a statistician, I was aware of the cause. The other two judges ratings were much less variable; they were typically in the myseof up 600 to cally in the range of, say, 60 to 65. However, the distribution of the scores given by me had a lot more variability because they ranged from 5 to 95

they ranged from 5 to 95.
Ideally, the scores should be added up after each judge's score has been divided by an appropriate measure of variability. Unfortunately, there had been so such clause. This also holds thus in many other real. holds true in many other real-

In fact, statistics recognises sures of central ten many measures of central ten-dency, or "average", such as the mean, which is the total divided by the number of observations, and the median, which is the middle-most value. We often state that country X has a larger per capita income than, say, country Y. However, is the average ncome a reliable measure of the state of the economy if social inequality is ignored

social inequality is ignored? In his 2013 book Capital in the TheentysFirst Century, Thomas Piketty used quan-ties, such as the percentage of total wealth held by the poor-est half of the population, the top 10%, the top 5%, the top 1%, or even the top 0.1% or 0.01%, because he believes that the Giri coefficient — a single number between 0 and single number between 0 and is insufficient to explain economicinequalities and their evolution. Four or five of these quantiles are seen to be adequate to understand the ment, depending on the type of inequality and the

period that is being studied. Therefore, we basically require a sense of how wealth is distributed, which is just is distributed, which is just variability Unfortunately, the majority of data-based esti-mates of different political and socioeconomic indicators are typically published with-out sufficiently addressing the estimates variability. Thise researchers from the

Three researchers from the University of Southern Den mark have illustrated four which the conclusion reached based solely on the mean is qualitatively changed when variability is also taken into account. Their



VITAL FACTOR: Predicting the pande

us published in the Intersa mal Journal of Environ ental Research and Public

mental Research and Public Health in 2020. Variability is a significant issue when it comes to eco-nomic disparities, health and longevity disparities among social groups and population selection potential, which is based on the fitness distribution's tails. This is becoming tions tails. This is becoming increasingly dear to experts working on data. It has also been suggested that predict-ing and comprehending the Covid-19 pandemic required an understanding of the dis-

ease trans nission variability Again, Havelock Ellis, an English physician and author first put up the theory of greater male variability in greater male variability in 1894 to explain the overabund dance of males among the eminent and among the men-tally ill. This theory has been used to attempt to explain

The average is not

individuals from all walks of life understand that, the data-based world will become more transparent and clear to people.

the 'only' message. If

why Harvard has so few

why Harvard has so tew female mathematics profes-sors, for instance.

The statement, 'A statisti-cian confidently waded through a river that was on average 50 cm deep. He ited to Dutch author and tele vision personality Godfried Bornans. To be fair, though, a statistician would never do that because she un the importance of variability the importance of variability and that the river's depth might surpass her height in the midway.

The significance of under-standing variability in med-

cal prognosis is demonstrated by the extraordinary story of renowned evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould. Gould was diagnosed with Gould was diagnosed with abdominal mesothelioma, an incurable cancer, in 1982. From the medical literature, he learnt that the median sur-vival duration was eight

months. I will probably dead in eight months, thought initially. However, means and medi-

is are abstractions of reality. as Gould was aware. Because Gould was an optimist and because he understood Gould was an optimist and because he understood nature, statistics and the meaning of variance in lifes processes, he consequently took a very different approach to the mesotheliona statistics. Well, half of the population will undoubtedly survive longer than eight months if the median is eight morths. an is eight months. Due to his youth disease identification at a relatively early stage, first-rate medical care he received and a strong will to live, he did and years... my favourable profile made me a good candi date for that part of the curve," he thought. Gould's 1991 essay "The Median Isn't the ge" was included in his book Bully for Bronton book Bully for Brontozaurus: Reflections on Naturul Histo-ny, which has been reprinted numerous times for a wide angeofreaders. Thenty years (not 20 months!) after being diagnosed, Gould passed away due to a different cancer. Perhaps, significant in this

context is a quotation from William Winwood Reade that William Winwood Reade that was referenced in Arthur Conan Doyle's novel The Sign of the Four. While the individ-ual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty," Sher-lock Holmes said to Watson. "You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with preci sion what an average number will be up to," said Holmes.

Finally, let's consider a snap Finally, let's consider a snap-shot of election prediction. In the recent US presidential election, the final-minute sur-vey indicated that Donald Trump would receive 47.2% of the national vote and Kamala Harris 48.4%. But in the end, Trump and Harris received 49.9% and 48.4% of the vote, prespectively but the negal pre-server the survey of the present of the p respectively. Was the poll pre-diction, at least for the vote re percentages, overly rd statistically? Obviously weird statistically? Obviously toot. The opinion poll predic-tions are usually subject to a shas-minus 3% margin of error of proper care is taken to design them. This means that if the same process is applied frequently, the true population average will, 95% of the time, fall within the sample estimate, place minus 3%, which is derived using the variability of the estimates, and sample sizes in opinion polls are ideally set accordingly. As per this, the aforementioned opinion poll suggests that Thump's espected vote share could reach 50.4%. At least, it didn't no become that limit! fall within the sample esti go beyond that limit!

All being said, the average is not the 'only' message. It is not the 'only' message. If individuals from all walks of life understand that, the data-based world will become more transparent to the people.

СПУ

Bathinda

Ludhiana

Hisar

Sirsa Dharan Manali

- stabbed (2,10)
  0 Cheerfully cavual (5-2-5)
  10 Cheerfully cavual (5-2-5)
  11 Fashion (5)
  12 A single element (4)
  15 No bejt to overcome difficulty (4,4)
  15 Mack of large particles (6)
  16 Mechaess (8)
  17 excuse from poundament (1,2)

- Confusion (8) Things of that sort (8) Cautious (4) Eventually (2,3,4,3) Ship's cargo space (4)

- Ship's cargo space Caech capital (6) Irritable (6) Unwillingly (5,7)

- at something (5)
  18 Outline of tilm's plot (8)
  19 Automatically (2.6)
  21 Put an end to (6)
  22 Sagocity (6)
  26 Infringement of game's laws (4)
  27 Aggrieved (4)
- Yesterday's solution

Down: 1 Bombard, 2 Go begging, 3 Trail, 4 Saltry, 5 Smother, 6 Acc, 7 Nasty, 12 To no avail, 14 Eamest, 16 Hideous, 17 Upland, 18 Whirr, 20 Aslaw, 22 Top.

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

# YEST ERDAY'S SOLUTION 1 4 7 6 2 5 8 3 9 5 3 6 7 8 9 2 4 1 9 2 8 3 1 4 6 5 7 9 2 8 3 1 4 6 5 7 6 5 2 1 9 8 3 7 4 3 1 4 5 6 7 9 8 2 8 7 9 2 4 3 1 6 5 7 6 5 9 3 2 4 1 8 2 8 3 4 7 1 5 9 6 4 9 1 8 5 6 7 2 3

#### CALENDAR DECEMBER 10, 2024, TUESDAY

■ Gandmoola start 1.30 pm

- Marghshirsh Shaka
  Marghshirsh Parvishle ■ Hijari 14 ■ Shukka Paksha Tithi 10, up to 3.43 am
- Vyatapata Yoga up to 10.03 pm
  Uttrabhadrpad Nakshatra up to 1.30 pm
  Moon in Pisces sign
- Shimla 07 Kargi -11

MAX MIN

23

23

## **FIRST COLUMN BRAIN ROT IN** THE DIGITAL AGE

There is alarming cognitive decline linked to overindulgence in mindless digital content



n a world saturated with endless entertainment, constant noti-fications and superficial distractions, the human brain faces unprecedented challenges. The term brain rot refers to the per-ceived decline in cognitive abilities or intellectual engagement due

to excessive consumption of mindless or unproductive content. While it is colloquial and not a clinical diagnosis, it describes mental fog, reduced attention span and diminished problem-solving abilities often linked to prolonged screen time or low-value content. Studies suggest that heavy screen usage can correlate with reduced grey matter in the brain, which may impair critical thinking and memory, particularly among younger individuals. It also contributes to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, driven by constant comparisons and exposure to idealised

online content. The rise of social media, streaming platforms and short-form content has revolutionised how we consume information and entertainment.
While these platforms offer unprecedented access to global knowl-

while urese plantons oner unject-element access to global known-edge, they also foster habits of passive consumption. Endless scrolling and binge-watching also lead to mental fatigue and reduced attention spans, making it harder for individuals to engage with more complex ideas or tasks. Brain rot can also stem from a fack of intel-lectual stimulation. Activities that challenge the brain such as reading, problem-solving, or engaging in creative pursuits are often side-lined in favour of easier, low-effort distractions. Over time, this neglect cline in critical thinking, memory retention and p



The modern lifestyle, characterised by high levels of stress and con-stant multitasking, can contribute to cognitive decline. It is ofter stant multitasking, can controlle to cognitive decline. It is offer said that chronic stress impairs brain function, particularly in areas responsible for memory and learning which creates a vicious cycle where individuals turn to mindless activities to escape stress, fur-ther exacerbating mental stagnation. Moreover, a sedentary lifestyle, coupled with a diet lacking in nutrients essential for brain function, can also lead to cognitive decline. In maintaining menta clarity and overall brain health, physical exercise and a balanced

diet play crucial roles. The effects of brain rot are far-reaching and can manifest in variour aspects of life. A lack of focus and motivation often results in decreased efficiency and the inability to complete tasks effective-ly. Overindulgence in passive entertainment stifles the ability to think reatively or generate original ideas. The overuse of escapist media can lead to a disconnect from real-world emotions and experiences, Tostering feelings of emptiness or dissatisfaction. Excessive reliance on digital communication can impair interpersonal relationships and the ability to engage in meaningful, face-to-face interactions. Addressing brain rot requires a multifaceted approach that empha-

Addressing thair requires a minimizenesi approach that emphasises mindfulness, discipline and a commitment to personal growth. Setting boundaries for screen time and being intentional about the type of content consumed can help reduce the effects of brain rot. By choosing educational or thought-provoking material over passive entertainment the mind can be stimulated; by prioritising physical properties of the provided of the p ical health such as regular physical exercise, a balanced diet and setting goals for personal and intellectual growth learning can help foster mental resilience and creativity. They will also help reduce stress and combat mental inertia.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

# Addressing Hindu persecution in Bangladesh PRASHANT TEWAR



India must take decisive action to safeguard the persecuted and assert its role as a defender of minority rights, cultural identity and regional stability



he escalating persecution of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh cloaked under the guise of political shifts and regime change, under-

and regime change, undersores an alarming resurgence of communal violence. With reports of systematic targeting and atrocities emerging over months, the role of the current regime, reportedly influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami, demands scrutiny. India, as the world's largest Hindumajority nation and a protector of minority rights, cannot afford to stand as a passive observer. Instead, it must respond with decisive and proactive measures to safeguard not only the Hindu minority in Bangladesh but also its own cultural and historical ethos. Reports of widespread violence against Hindus in Bangladesh reveal a pattern of calculated aggression. From desecration of temples and destruction of property to orchestrated violence, these acts are not isolated incidents but part of a broader, systematic campaign. The roots of this antagonism can be traced back to the Great Bengal Partition of 1905 when radical elements sought to establish an Islamic dominion in the region. Although temporarily disrupted by Bangladeshs liberation in 1971, the vision of Darul-ul-Islam—a dominion governed by Islamic law—has been rekindled. Under the current regime, these historical grievances have been weaponised to erode Hindu culture and population. What makes the situation more alarming is the reported nexus between the Bangladeshi government, Pakistanis ISI, radical jihadi groups, and influential ideologues like Jamaate-Islami. These forces seem united in their goal of reshaping Bangladeshis demographic and cultural landscape to align with extremist ideologies. Mohammad Yunus and the Shadow of Global Influence
Central to this crisis is the controversial figure of Mohammad Yunus, a Nobel laureate who reportedly plays a significant role in the regime sideological alignment. While his global repu-

tation as a microfinance pioneer lends him an aura of credibility, his alleged affiliations with anti-Hindu policies and his ties with the texternal powers, including China and certain factions in the United States, raise concerns.
These alignments have not only the properties of t

INDIA MUST SUPPORT THE

**EXTREMIST** 

IDEOLOGIES.

INDIA'S

THIS APPROACH, WHILE CONTROVERSIAL, ALIGNS WITH

STRATEGIC AND

HUMANITARIAN **INTERESTS** 

EMERGENCE OF A

FAVOURABLE AND INCLUSIVE REGIME THAT CAN COUNTER

a similar humanitarian catastrophe and a strategic threat. India, home to the largest Hindu population in the world, bears a unique responsibility to safeguard its diaspora and kin. The Marendra Modi government has a historic opportunity to emulate the bold decisions of 1971, reaf-firming India's role as a protector of justice and a regional powerhouse.

## A Strategic Path Forward

A Strategic Path Forward India's response to the crisis must be multifaceted, encompassing aggression, diplomacy, and strategic recalibration. India's security apparatus must transcend reactive measures. By identifying and dismantling rogue elements within Bangladesh that orchestrate attacks on minorities, India can send a strong message. Targeted strikes, similar to Israel's preci-

sion operations, could serve as a deterrent and emphasise India's deterrent and emphasise India's commitment to protecting its Hindu diaspora. Bangladeshis economic reliance on India provides a powerful tool. By imposing strategic trade sanctions and mobilising international opinion, India can isolate the current regime, pressuring it to reconsider its policies. Efforts must also focus on high-lighting the human rights abuse.

register its policies.
Efforts must also focus on highlighting the human rights abuses faced by minorities in Bangladesh, garnering global support for the cause. Long-term stability in Bangladesh hinges on a government that respects minority rights and values democratic principles. India must support the emergence of a favourable and inclusive regime that can counter extremist ideologies. This approach, while controversial, aligns with India's strategic and humanitarian interests. A bolder proposition involves addressing the demographic realities of 1971 when Hindus comprised around 21 per cent of Bangladesh's population. Securing territories proportional to this demographic could provide a haven for minorities while addressing historical injustices. Such a solution would echo the decisive territorial realignments of 1947 and 1971, abbeit adapted to contemporary challenges.

The Hindu community world-

e Hindu community world-The Hindu community worldwide must unite against thesa
tarocities. India, with its population of over one billion Hindus,
should lead by example, adopting
a robust stance to counter persecution. Strengthende solidarity,
coupled with decisive government action, can set a precedent
for minority protection globally.
Rebuilding Regional Stability
The crisis also necessitates a
reevaluation of India's relationship with Bangladesh. Despite
India's pivotal role in Bangladesh's on, successive regin

liberation, successive regimes have displayed hostility and indifference. This lack of gratitude underscores the need for a recalibration of india's foreign policy toward its neighbour. Through a combination of economic, social, diplomatic, and military strategies, India must assert its dominance in the region.

The message should be unequivocal: any violence against Hindus or hostile actions will be met with resolute actions. Israel's unwavering commitment to its sovereignty and people offers valuable lessons for India. Despite being a small nation, Israel has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of decisive measures in safequarding its citizens. India, with its vast resources and geophtical influence, must adopt similar strategies to protect its minorities and assert its regional leadership. A Turning Point for IndiaThe Bangladesh crisis represents more than a regional issue; it is a defining moment for IndiaToe than a regional issue; it is a defining moment of IndiaToe than a regional issue; it is a defining moment of IndiaToe and IndiaToe IndiaToe and IndiaToe and IndiaToe IndiaToe and IndiaToe IndiaToe and IndiaToe IndiaToe and IndiaToe Ind

role as a defender of justice and humanity. Protecting Hindus in Bangladesh is not just about addressing a humanitarian crisis—it is about asserting India's sovereignty, preserving its cultural identity, and ensuring regional stability. Instead of hoping for UNHRC intervention, the Indian government must rise to the occasion, transforming the crisis into an opportunity to redefine India's role in South Asia. With decisive action, India can prevent history from repeating itself, ensuring that justice prevails and that the legacy of protecting minorities endures. (The writer is prominent columnist and Public Policy Expert; the views expressed are personal)

## The imperative of continuous learning in India's AI-driven future

The rapid growth of AI, has intensified the demand for skilled professionals. Yet, a stark talent gap threatens this progress

Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives and work, making continuous learning essential to stay relevant. The rapid adoption of automation and advanced digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (A1), is not just transforming industries but also reshaping the skills employers expect from their workforce. By 2027, it is projected that 80 per cent of engineering, roles will require employees to undergo training and development to meet the changing demands brought about by AI advancements, according to Gartner.

In India, the demand for skilled professionals in technology-driven fields, especially AI, is growing significantly. Reports by BCG and NASS

nology-driven fields, especial-ly AI, is growing significantly. Reports by BCG and NASS



COM indicate that the AI market in the country could grow to \$17 billion by 2027, with an annual growth rate of 25-35 per cent. However, this growth is accompanied by a stark shortage of experts in advanced technologies. NASS-COM estimates that over a million skilled engineers specialising in AI and related technologies will be needed in

the coming years. Alarmingly, the talent gap could rise from 25 per cent to nearly 30 per cent by 2028, emphasising the critical need for skill development among both new graduates and experienced professionals.

stonais. One significant challenge is the One significant challenge is the disconnect between formal education and the practical skills required in the job market. Every year, approximately 1.5 million engineering graduates enter the workforce in India, yet only a fraction secure jobs aligned with their field of study. This mismatch is not due to a lack of opportunities but stems from the gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in academic institutions and the hands-on skills sought by employers. skills sought by employers. Beyond technical expertise,

companies now prioritise can-didates with interpersonal skills and emotional intelli-gence, essential for thriving in collaborative and dynamic work environments.

collaborative and dynamic work environments. The India Skills Report 2024 highlights this concern, noting hat while some states, such as Telangana, have made strides in job preparedness among the 18 to 21 age group, critical skill gaps persist. For roles reliant on AI and energing technologies, the gap ranges from 60 per cent to 73 per cent. These statistics underscore the urgent per control of 3 per cent to 73 per cent. These statistics underscore the urgent to the control of the

demands. Updating academic pro-grammes is vital to bridging this gap. Universities and col-leges must incorporate indus-



try trends and practical learn-ing experiences into their courses. Today's workforce needs to think critically across disciplines and understand the broader implications of technology on economic, social, and cultural contexts. Elexible and continuous edu-Flexible and continuous edurecation plays a pivotal role in closing the divide between academic knowledge and the realities of the job market. Digital learning platforms offer

solution in this a promising solution in this context. With over 50 per cent of Indians actively using the internet, online education pro-vides accessible opportunities to acquire new skills. Edtech platforms specialising in skill enhancement allow individu-als to enroll in tailored cours-ce and programmes, presuring

als to enroll in tailored courses and programmes, preparing them for rapidly evolving job landscapes. The benefits of continuous learning extend beyond career advancement. Employees who are adaptable and committed to enhancing their knowledge contribute to organisational innovation and help businesses navigate shifting market dynamics. For instance, as AI becomes more integrated dynamics. For instance, as AI becomes more integrated across industries, the demand for experts in these technolo-gies will continue to rise.

Forward-thinking companies are already investing in employee training programs to stay competitive and ensure their teams are equipped to handle emerging challenges. Despite these efforts, many tra-ditional educational institu-tions structure to meet indus-tions structure to meet indusditional educational initiu-tions struggle to meet indus-ty needs. Relying heavily on locture-based feaching, these institutions often focus on theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical skills. Students have limited access to industry-standard equipment or opportunities for hands-on problem-solving, leaving them ill-prepared for the workforce. Integrating real-world applica-tions into academic learning bridges the gap between the-oretical instruction and prac-tical expertise, ensuring gradtical expertise, ensuring grad-uates are ready to meet

employer expectations.
Upskilling is not just about addressing current deficiencies—it involves cultivating a mindset of continuous improvement. In a world where industries evolve rapidimprovement. In a world where industries evolve rapid-ly and the shelf life of skills is where industries evolve rapid-ly and the shelf life of skills is shrinking, professionals must adapt to new technologies and methodologies quickly. Skills once considered indispens-able can become obsolete with-in a few years, making the abi-ity to learn and relearn critical for success in today's profes-sional environment. For indi-viduals and organisations alike, embracing continuous educa-tion is a strategic move to nav-igate the present and excel in the future.

ire. (The writer is CEO at Scholars Merit, views are personal)

www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

-PAPER WITH PASSION-

## Renewed vigour

PM Modi and the King Wangchuck's meeting strengthens ties with the Himalayan kingdom and lays the groundwork for future collaboration

ndia and Bhutan share a relationship rooted in historical ties, cultural affinity and a deep commitment to mutual progress. This bond was reaffirmed during a recent high-level meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. The meeting underscores the enduring Importance both nations place on their friendship amidst a dynamic geopolitical landscape. The foundation of India-Bhutan relations was laid with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1949, which established perpetual peace and friendship, free trade and mutual cooperation. This treaty was updated in 2007 to reflect evolving dynamics it continued to emphasise close cooperation on defence, trade and cultural exchange. India has been a steadfast partner in Bhutan's development journey, assisting in key sectors such as hydropower, infrastructure, education and health. Bhutan, in turn,

has been a reliable neighbour, sharing India's security concerns and supporting its diplomatic endeavours.

The recent interaction between PM Modi and King Jigme Khesar sought to address emerging challenges and explore avenues for deeper collaboration. Hydropower is a cornerstone of India-Bhutan rela-Hydropower is a cornerstone of India-Brutan rela-tions. Bhutan exports surplus electricity generated from its rivers to India, a mutually beneficial arrangement. Discussions focused on scaling up hydropower projects, ensuring sustainable energy practices, and addressing financial challenges relat-ed to project execution. India remains Bhutan's largest trading partner and the leaders explored ways to

diversify trade and enhance connectivity. Emphasis was also placed on digital infrastructure and technology transfer to support Bhutan's aspirations for modernisation. Geopolitical developments, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Himalayan region, were key discussion points. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to regional stability and countering security threats, including transnational crimes and emerging cyber risks. Recognising the importance of fostering peo-ple-to-people ties, leaders pledged to expand scholarship programmes, skill development initiatives and cultural exchanges. These efforts aim to empower the youth and deepen cultural understanding. The dialogue between India and Bhutan holds broad-er geopolitical significance. As China increases its outreach in South Asia, including in the Himalayan region, India's proactive engagement with Bhutan reaffirms its commitment to its smaller neighbours. Bhutan's strategic location makes its partnership vital for India's security and regional influence. India's support for Bhutan's participation in global forums reflects its willingness to amplify Bhutan's voice on international issues, including climate change. As both nations work toward common goals, their relationship serves as a model for regional cooperation based on trust, benefit and mutual respect.



# Superpower retreats and their fallout

Russians abandoning Assads is a stark reminder of the fact that promises of steadfast allegiance can falter when geopolitical will and resources wane

he Vietnam War was fought between the forces of the North (supported by the Soviet Union and China) and those of the South (supported by the United States of America). While it lasted twenty years (1955 to 1975) the direct involvement of the American troops lasted about a decade from 1965 onwards. The scars of 58,281 US fatalities and 303, 644 wounded had tired the spirits, emotions and morale of the Americans, and they secretly negotiated a pull-out plan under the garb of the Paris Peace Accords that the Americans knew would not hold up. The Americans insincer and knowingly immoral promises to intervene on behalf of its ally, the Southern side, but when the push came to shove, it he Vietnam War was

of its ally, the Southern side, but when the push came to shove, it is pushed the Southern side under the bus with non-intervention or support. Later day US President Ronald Reagen was to coin the term Victnam Syndrome to suggest a reluctance to support an international military intervention, beyond a point. A similar reneging of support after almost a decade of direct military intervention was to face the Sovietten of the Sovi propped puppet government of Afghanistan, under Mohammad

Afghanistan, under Mohammad Najibuilah. Ultimately the political and popular will of the Soviets had waned as the human and financial cost of continuing the war in Afghanistan had waned. A few years later, exactly as it had happened in Victnam, the Afghan government was ousted in a bloody offensive and Najibuillah's corpse was dragged behind a truck through the streets of Kabul. Leventually, the Soviets left him to his fate. It was the sort of end of a regime that was far less than ideal as the land of many 'Great and a street in the street of the street o



its ally i.e., the Ashraf Ghani government, in Kabul on the pretext of a deal signed between the Taliban and the US in Doha. Everyone knew that the deal would not hold up and lo behold the Taliban stormed into Kabul, soon after. The longest war in US history whith a two trillion financial cost, a a two trillion financial cost, a no-win situation, and mounting pictures of 'US body bags' had yet again forced the Americans to push their ally under the bus. By blindsiding its purported ally, the Americans had unilaterally let down its ally after making promises to defend the same. Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh was left mocking the US on its pusilanimous stand, 'when a superpower decided to become a mini power.'

power". Recently, and yet again, it was the decisive reluctance Recently, and yet again, it was the decisive reluctance of a major power and ally i.e., Russia and Iran, that left the beleaguered Syrian Government of Bashar Al Assad, to its inevitable fate and within days of some token sup-port, the Syrian capital of Damascus fell to rebels, who Damascus tell to rebeis, who routed the Russia-Iran sup-ported Bashar Al Assad regime. To be fair, the 'aban-donment' of Bashar Al Assad cannot be compared to the Vietnam or Afghanistan situ-ations, as the principal power

behind the Syrian regime no longer had the wherewithal to continue supporting, even if they wanted they wanted they wanted reeling under the humiliating and costly stalemate on the Ukrainian front, whereas the Iranians and their strategic regional proxies (e.g. Hezbollah and the Houthis) were getting systematically were getting systematically were getting systematically decimated and attacked with

decimated and attacked with literal impunity. After the Syrian rebels had taken over Idlib and were dashing the next profile target of Homs, the Russian fighter planes did bomb some rebel strongholds, but it simply wasn't enough. Soon, the Syrian rebels made the kill for Damascus, and the isolated and unsupported forces of Bashar Al Assad simply could n'hold on. History repeated itself and in the face of supporting foreign allies failing the regime, it was tantamount to pushing the same under the bus!

The lessons are substantial for other regions facing similar belilgerence or circumstances i.e., counting on declared allies cannot be assumed, definitely and certainly not, infinitely. When there were grave tensions on Indo-Sino borders in 2020, then President Donald Trump (author of a book aply titled, "The Art of Deal") made mean-

ingless offers to 'negotiate' between the two sides, as opposed to denouncing Chinese expansionism and aggression, unequivocally. While certain military orders with Delhi were indeed signed and expedited – the same made great transactional and commercial sense to the American defence sector. This is something that the already cornered Ukrainian President Zelensky must be fearing as President-elect Donald Trump teepishly talks about yet another 'deal' to supposedly end the Russia-Ukraine war. History is instructive of the consequences that await whenever similar 'deale' (read, abandonment) are made by a Superpower, be it the Americans or most recently, the Russians in Syria. Reveling on the latest situation in Syria, Donald Trump tweeted, 'Assad is gone. He has fled his country.

His protector, Russia., Led by 'Ladmir Puttin, was not interested in protecting him any longer'—while it is true, it has been no different for the US, throughout history. Trump too has the blood of letting to the supposed the protecting that the protecting him any longer'—while it is true, it has been no different for the US, throughout history. Trump too has the blood of letting to the protecting that the protecting that the protecting him any longer'—while it is true, it has been no different for the US, throughout history. Trump

down Afghanistan on his hands. (The writer, a military veter

an, is a former Lt Governo of Andaman & Nicoba Islands and Puducherry Th



AFTER THE SYRIAN REBELS HAD TAKEN

OVER IDLIB

AND WERE DASHING

THE NEXT **PROFILE** 

TARGET OF HOMS. THE RUSSIAN FIGHTER PLANES DID BOMB SOME REBEL STRONGHOLDS, BUT IT SIMPLY WASN'T **ENOUGH** 

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### WEST ASIA IN TURMOIL

WEST ASIA IN TURMOIL

Madam — This refers to the editorial on the developments in Syria (December 9). In West Asia, mostly countries are dominated by Muslims, the people have hardly anything to feel elated about. The hate against the subsects of the same religion is dominating the scene in most of the countries the subsects of the same religion is dominating the scene in most of the countries there. Each group is in constant war against the other not for economic benefits but for an upper hand over the other group. In the process the struggling groups have taken the path of terrorism forgetting that the one who wins is not the permanent winner and victories are purely ephemeral.

In Syria also the number of such groups divided by sub-divisions of the same religion, culture, etc., is too many, and this makes it clear that whoever has won now is only for a temporary period, as the deprived groups will always be waiting to take revenge and capture power. In this entire game, the real beneficiaries are the developed nations whose main plant of conomy is weapon trade. Selling weapons to every terrorist and warring group is a flourishing trade. Therefore, either of the groups will baway like in the case of Syria, though Assad has fled the country, bowing to the rebels, the civil war among the groups will continue to be there. But all the groups wall continue to be there. But all the groups call it a jihad meaning I am killing you to satisfy the same God whom we both worship piously. Terrorism knows no economy, no logic, no rationality, and no ideology, and it is simply a mental affair capable of destroying anything and nothing constructive.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

AUSTRALIA DEFEATS INDIA

Madam — Indian cricket is not in the pink
of health and the second test at Adelaids
was a highly disappointing one for the fans
by this indigestible defeat. The scores of 180
and 175 in the first and second innings,
respectively, by Indian batters were a little
more than 19 runs behind the chase for the
Aussies in the second innings, winning this

# **World Meditation Day declared** itation has evolved as a science for holistic development, offering hope to those grappling with stress and spiritual unrest. The winter solstice, marking the start of Uttarayan in Indian tradition, is especially sacred for meditation, as the flow of energy in nature fosters spiritual awakening. Amid personal, social, and economic challenges, meditation offers mental stability, reduces stress, and enhances concentration while alleviating disorders like anxiety and depression. Its benefits extend to physical health, stabilising blood pressure, heart rate, and boosting immunity. World Meditation Day, endorsed by the UN, reflects Indias cultural strength and influence. R K Jain | Barwani



Meditation is a timeless element that connects the soul's depth, that connects the souts depth, to mental peace, physical health, and spiritual growth. Recognising December 21 as World Meditation Day honours this ancient practice and symbolies global recognition of India's cultural heritage. In modern life, medsymposies gloosal recognition of indiast cultural heritage. In modern life, med-test by 10 wickets. The coach, Gautam Gambhir, has got no time to spare except to bring in fresh changes to boost the morale of the team, which is certainly too low at the moment. The colour of the ball shouldn't make them blind by coming out with lame excuss for their grand failure. Skipper Rohit Sharma, by batting lower down in this test, has signalled his poor form. Except for N K Reddy, the other batters took a stroll to the wicket by spending more time at the pavilion. Why did they drop Washington Sundar? He has no clue. It's not good for Indian old horses to rest on old laurels to continue their guest appearances in the team. While going by retaining them despite single-digit scores on the board creates a serious doubt about whether they have been retained to promote their commercials in their ongoging contract, The selection policy needs more transparency, and there shouldn't be format-based sefections. The head coach must look for consistent performers by taking into account players like "Head" to be in our team rather than overlooking young talents at this crucial phase of Indian

cricket. With 1 win each, the remaining tests will be the test of time for the future of Indian cricket. A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

MORE SCHOOLS FOR RURAL AREAS
Madam — PM Modi's Saturday-X post,
stating the Cabinet decision to open the 85
new Kendriya Vidyalayas and 28 Nawodaya
Vidyalayas across the country and make
accessible school education maximal, is
top-notch contribution. From the vantage
point of the present, it seems that, osten-sibly, rural students are still under scrutiwe were facilities as compared to urban sibly, rural students are still under scrutiny over facilities as compared to urban.
There are far fewer schools, poorly qualified teachers, and miserable schools,
grinding the little students' study zeal and
future immeasurably. The government
must consolidate the correlation of urban
development with rural. Pull up its socks
to upgrade the situation of being more
adept.

[Akit Hussain] Kommer

Jakir Hussain | Kanpu

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



As social beings, our lives are deeply intertwined with communication, but the same can often become a source of conflict

Communication with others is as integral to us as breathing. We often find conflicting conversations blowing out of proportion, sometimes leading to even a break in relationships. Unpleasantness can be avoided if we are mindful of others. We had lived in bungalows in well-planned colonies for a better part of our lives. It was easy to be more social in such surroundings when

it was easy to be more social in such surroundings when we met only on social occa-sions. We, and more like us, have moved to condomini-um complexes only over the past few years. Private spaces are diminishing as neigh-bours fall over each other, lit-eralls and figuratively.

erally and figuratively. This is a new life that we are This is a new life that we are still adjusting to 1 noticed something different about a neighbour recently as we gathered for a meeting. We indulged in some idle banter before the start of serious business. It was a light-heart-ed conversation, over which we could smile or chuckle. Or as 1 thought, till 1 received his call the next day. I got the message loud and clear that he was upset over



the reference to his receding the reference to his receding hairline. I applogised pro-fusely for the faux pas. He does not seem to have for-given me and has stopped greeting me when we cross each other during walks. He is the same person who does not think twice before breaking into a sarcastic verse on the community. When the property of the community when the property of the property of the community when the property of the property o

verse on the community WhatsApp group, without considering the hurt he might cause to the intended victim. We have regular meetings with the governing body of our welfare associ-

ation.
There are arguments galore on any subject, which would not be such a bad thing, and may sometimes even be considered as a humorous interlude in an otherwise charged environment, were it not

for the seriousness with

for the seriousness with which the adversaries try to push their viewpoint to the exclusion of even listening to the other's perspective. One morning, one of the members told me that it was good that he was now a part of the management body, otherwise he would have vehemently opposed some of the proposals. I could not fathorn the logic. A wrong could not have been right only by his being inside the team. In yet another instance recently, two ladies insisted that they were right in their respective contentions. As the arguments went back and forth, I could see the gradual stubborn look on the faces of both, an indication that they were no longer listening to each other. As an independent observer, I realized that both were talking

tening to each other. As an independent observer, I realized that both were talking the same, albeit in different words.

They were not taking the time to pause and reflect before responding. There is one more incident that I may not forget easily. I felt aggrieved enough to write to the promoter of our condominium complex about the

supposed transgressions of a neighbour in handling the community affairs. The lat-ter was still working as an employee with the builder. I was upset and did not deem if it to consider the latter's point of view or the adverse impact that it might have on his professional prospects. I apologised to him in later years. He has moved on and continues to accord me respect. However, I could have avoided the unpleasant-ness had I taken the time to talk to him about my gree-vances. It would be good for everyone to be more respect-ful and less impulsive in an argument.

If only we could follow the words of Chinese philoso-pher Zhuangai, "We cling to our own point of view, as though everything depend-ed on it. Yet our opinions have no permanence, like autumn and winter, they

ed on it. Yet our opinions have no permanence, like autum and winter, they gradually pass away. (The writer is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator and strategy consultant. He conducts workshops on cre-ative writing for young adults and corporate execu-tives. The views expressed are personal)

#ExpressExplained

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

#### THREE KEY PLAYERS IN SYRIA'S PAST, PRESENT, POSSIBLE FUTURE

#### BASHAR AL-ASSAD

FALL OF AN IRON-FISTED LEADER The fall of Syria's president is also a setback for Russia, where he is currently sheltering, and Iran. Russia's bases in Syria could go, and Iran's pathway to Hezbollah could now be cut off. The shift in Dany cut it rejernic a new chapter of in Damascus is seismic; a new chapter o uncertainty begins now.

#### ABU MOHAMMAD AL-JOLANI

EX-JIHADIST FACES COMPLEX TASK

EX-BRAUSI FRACE SOUTH LAST THE RESERVENCE AND THE RESERVENCE FROM THE RESERVENCE FROM

#### RECEP TAYYIP **ERDOGAN**

LIKELY BIG WINNER OF THE WAR With Russia and Iran losing their long-standing ally in Damascus and Presidentelect Donald Trump announcing this isn't the US's war, Turkey could emerge as the most influential foreign actor in post-Assad Syria — with significant political and economic gains.



EXPLAINED GLOBAL

# Re-ordering of W Asia chessboard

The dramatic collapse of the Assad regime in Damascus could have geopolitical consequences even more decisive than the Oct 7 Hamas attack on Israel. Iran has suffered a setback, and Turkey is now a much stronger and influential regional pole. How did all this come about, and what lies ahead for Syria and the region?





BASHIR ALI ABBAS

AFTER MORE than a half century, an Assad

AFTER MORE than a half century, an Assad — Hafezor Bashar — is not ruling Syria. Rebel fighters spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir al Shaam (HTS) reached Damascus on Sunday, forcing President Bashar al-Assad to flee to Russia with his family. Even in the Middle East's great ongoing tumult, the shift in Syria is seismic. Just over a year and a half ago, Assad was viewed globally as the predominant power in his fractured country. True, the HTS-led opposition lunged at the window of opportunity that opened as Assad's allies Russia and Iran found themselves under pressure — still, Iran found themselves under pressure—still. Iran found themselves under pressure – still, how did the regime that had survived for five decades collapse in less than two weeks?

What went wrong for Assad?
On December 5, as Hama fell after Aleppo, Assad announced a 50% salary hike for serving soldiers to counter the HTS call for them (including Assad's own Alawite ethnoreligious group) to defect. It was symbolic of the desperation that Assad felt, and revealed the structural and financial weaknesses of his Syrian Arab Army (SAA).
The SAA has been infamous both for its brutality—images and videos are emerging from the now-liberated Sednaya Prison in which the regime kept political dissidents.

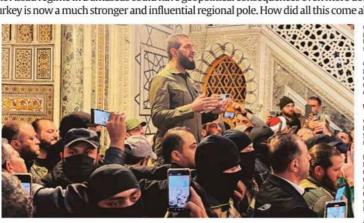
which the regime kept political dissidents, including children — and for extracting informal taxes from Syrians to compensate for

formal taxes from Syrians to compensate for their low official pay. The financial dire straits of the army reflected the state of the Syrian economy itself — before the fall of the Assad regime. I United States dollar was equivalent to about 13,000 Syrian pounds. The stagnation of the conflict over the last five years, with a Russia-Turkey détente towards the end of the earlier phase of the war preventing the SAA from attacking fullib, was perceived and celebrated as a victory by Damascus — which left the army underprepared for any eventual counteroffensive. More simportants the SAA in 2004 control.

red for any eventual counteroffensive. More importantly, the SAA in 2024 continued to rely as much on Russia and Iran as it did in 2015 — even though Assad's relationship with these countries has been under strain, and Moscow has been stretched in Europe and Iran put under pressure in Lebanon.

Where was Iran as the regime collap

There have long existed significant divisions in Iran over Assad, which contributed to stymicing potentially useful Iranian assistance. Presumptions of victory in the Syrian war gave Assad the confidence to resist overbearing Iranian influence over decision-making in Damascus (as it happened in Iraq).



Rebel commander Abu Mohammad al-Jolani speaks at the Umayyad mosque in Damascus on December 8. Reuter.

In 2020, as Iran railed against the US-bro-kered Abraham Accords, Assad said in TVin-terviews that he would not be opposed to conditional normalisation of ties with Israel. Over the last year, he has remained indiffer-ent to Israel's campaign in Gaza and Lebanon, content to prevent the disputed Golan Heights from developing into a fresh theare of war. The indifference continued as Iran's se-called "axis foresistance". Hezbellahi n. -called "axis of resistance" — Hezbollah ir Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas in Gaza - took debilitating hits from Israel.

in Gaza — took debilitating hits from Israel.
Differences on the ground between Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (RCC) and the SAA, and the schiasm is Inan between the pro-Assad IRCC hardliners and the more pragmatic camp of President Masoud Pezeshkan, delayed any significant action long enough for the rebels to cut off the link city of Horns from Damascus — which in any case made the movement of Iranian aid greatly more difficult.
Perhaps the best reflection of Assad's modified position in the Iranian axis was seen in his last hours of desperation, when

modified position in the iranian axis was seen in his last hours of desperation, when he reached out to Washington to secure a deal — President-elect Donald Trump gruffly shot down the idea on X.

What about Russia – and Turkey?

The Russian air action on Aleppo and the highway to Horns cased by December 3, with Moscow focusing on mitigating any immediate threats to its bases in Latada and Tarus.

While Russian constraints in Ukraine are obvious, note that Russia's earlier defente with Turkey now has the context of the dangling Damocles sword over the Bosphorus Strait, which is essential for Russian warships

#### WHO CONTROLS SYRIA? HOW THE MAP HAS CHANGED



■ Syrian government control; unclear if Assad's followers now control any pockets ■ Kurdish forces ■ Turkish army & Syrian opposition ■ Syrian opposition (US backed) ■ Rebel control

to link up with the Black Sea fleet.

Turkey, on the other hand, has little to lose by cooperating with both Russia and other Arab/ Gulf states to promote stability in Syria now that Assad has fallen and the Syrian

now that Assad has fallen and the Syrian National Arm (SNA), the Turkish-backed armed group, canattack the Kurdsin northern and western Syria more freely in the future.

On December 7, Turkey joined its Arab and Iranian partners from the Astana Process, the formal Syrian peace process hosted by Kazakhstan, in calling for a political solution in Syria that ends military operations, an increase in humanitarian aid, and the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2254 (which laid out the process of democratic transition

in Syria in 2015). The statement neither condemned the rebels nor expressed concern over Assad's precarious position. Tehran and Moscow too, signed the statement.

Moscow too, signed the statement. Turkey's rivality with Syria is old and deep, going back to Syrian nationalist opposition to the Ottoman Empire. The large presence of Kurdish groups in Syria are an additional irritant. In 2004, Assad became the first Syrian leader to visit Ankara — but it was merely a brief geopolitical alignment due to shared anxieties ower the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, When the Syrian civil war began, Ankara rushed to bolster the armed opposition to Assad, established its own military presence in Northern Syria, negotiated a freeze in the

pelled the HTS/SNA to the new reality un-folding in Damascus today — all over the span of a decade.

span of a decade. Following Assad's fall, Turkey has been quick to switch to the language of "inclusive governance" in Syria — positioning itself as an enabler of stability, and projecting the rebel takeover of Damascus as a natural and inevitable outcome after a years-long struggle

#### at could the rule of the HTS look like?

What could the rule of the HTS look like?
HTS emir Abu Mohammad al-Jolani has worked for long, with more than just the blessings of Turkey and the Us, to unify the Syrian opposition just enough to coordinate their offensives and unseat Assad.
Jolani's actions since then reflect a broader trend in Islamist Sunni political ji-lahad. By appointing Mohammad al-Bashirt on the head of the 'transitional' government, the HTS has sought to follow the example of Abdul Hakim bil Haji's Libya Islamic Fighting Group, rebranding itself as a regional, pragmatist, almost nationalise force that present itself as an ally of the West.
In behaviour mirricking the Taliban's promises in Doha in 2020, Jolam has personally reached out to neighbouring provernments in Baghdad and Belmit, calling for good relations, even offering Syria's services to the international community in identifying Assad's chemical weapons remnants. (The Talibam were quick to congratulate Syrians farte Assad's fall.) As thousands of Syrians return to their country, rejoicing in the demise of Assad's styranny, the jihadist shadow on HTS character lingers, notwithstanding Jolani's personal overtures to the country's minority groups, including Assad's Alawite base.
And what of the myriad jihadist and separatist militias that united tactically to oppose a common opponent who is now gone? Many of them have enduring intra-group differences—the HTS, in its sender awater of the al-Queel or the HTS, in its sender awater of the al-Queel or the al-Queel or the sender awater of the al-Queel or the al-Queel or the sender awater of the al-Queel or the al-Queel or

a common opponent who is now gone? Many of them have enduring intra-group differences — the HTS, initis earlier avatar of the al-Queda affiliate jabhat al-Nusra, fought some of the groups that are operating currently under the umbrella of the SNA. The principal question for the "transitional" administration is this; will it be able to force the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DOR) of the armed groups in Syria today?

In the wider region, it is now evident that all actors in the Iramian "axis of resistance" including Iran itself, are now prioritising their own security and stability. While the Houthis continue their attacks on Red Sea shipping, Tehran's muscle in the Middle East has been

Tehran's muscle in the Middle East has been Iehran's muscle in the Middle East has been weakened. However, with Turkey now emerging as a stronger pole, triggering both Arab and Persian anxieties, and strael moving swiftly to re-militarise and occupy the Golan Heights after Assad's fall, the geopolitical land-scape in the Middle East has changed even more decisively than it did on October 7, 2023.

#### LIGHTNING STRIKE THAT CHANGED SYRIA REGIME

NOV 27 & NOV 28: Opposition groups launched a large-scale attack on government-controlled areas in northwestern Syria. They were led by Hayat Tahrir al-Shaam (HTS), an al-Qaeda offshoot that later moved away from the parent group. The rebels took de facto control of almost all of the Aleppo ontrot or annoscessor. nd Idlib governorates.

The attack followed weeks of low-level violence. Turkey, a major backer of the rebel groups, said the rebels began a limited offensive but advanced as the government forces of Bashar al-Assad retreated.

NOV 29: Rebels entered Aleppo, Syria's second largest city, for the first time since they were pushed out in 2016. At the time, Syrian government forces had the backing of Russia and Iran. This time, the rebels met with little resistance.

NOV 30: Rebels announced they control Aleppo and occupy the international airport. The Syrian armed forces claimed to have redeployed troops

DEC 1: The Syrian military launched a counterattack in Idlib and Alepp

DEC 2-DEC 5: Russian airstrikes helped the Syrian government recapture some territory, but the rebels swept into the city of Hama, which saw massive anti-government protests in the early days of the uprising in 2011.

DEC 6: Opposition forces seized largest city, and the gateway to Damascus. Its capture also mea the government was cut off from the coast, which is a stronghold of President Bashar al-Assad's minority Alawite sect, Homs fell to the rebels the next day.

DEC 8: State television aired a DEC 8: State television aired a video of a group of men saying that Assad had been overthrown. HTS commander Abu Mohammad al-jolani visited the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, and called Assad's fall "a victory for the Islamic nation". Assad and his family were later reported to have fled to Moscow.

## How Saudi Arabia secured hosting rights for the 2034 football World Cup

MIHIR VASAVDA MUMBAI, DECEMBE

ON WEDNESDAY, FIFA will reveal world ON WEDNESSAY, FITM WILL WEST WORLD football's worst-kept secreet; the winning bid for the 2034 World Cup. In what's ex-pected to be a fairly drama-free affair, the sport's global governing body will name Saudi Arabia, the lone bidder, as the host. Football's return to the cash-rich Gull'af-

ter only 12 years — Qatar hosted the 2022 World Cup — is a study of how a nation wowe a web of influence across

is a study of how a nation wove awebof influence across the world through sponsor-ships. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and investments to secure the biggest single-sport event. It is also a note for India, as to what they are up against in their bid to win the hosting rights for the 2036 Olympies. Saudi Arabia – the destination for the 2034 Asian Games apart from the football World Cup – and 2030 Asian Games hosts Qatar are India's two biggest competitors in the race. And how Saudi won the football World Cup rights unopposed could be an indica-

tion of the way the Kingdom would push for the 2036 Olympics, depending on how badly they want it.

#### Saudi's 910 sponsorship deals

Recently, the Danish research organisa-tion 'Play the Game' traced the football World Cup's path to Saudi. The investiga-tion found that Saudi Arabia had 910 spon-sorship deals across 28 sports, including multisport events like the Islamic Solidarity

**EXPLAINED** SPORTS

annebults of the second of the

For instance, on October 6, 2022, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) signed a MoU with its Saudi Arabian counterpart. According to the AIFF, tincluded "the provision of technological support, the organization and hosting of youth competitions for both men and women on a regular basis". The AIFF hasn't publicly, said since then how much of it has been implemented. However, on December 5, 2022, India – after spending tapaper money on the bidding process — suddenly withdrew from the two-horse race involving Saudi Arabia to host the 2027 Asian Football

Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup. On February 1, 2023, the AFC named Saudi as the host for the showpiece event.

#### Partnerships with AFC

Partnerships with AFC
Simultaneously, the country also enhanced its relationship with the AFC
through partnerships. For instance, Playthe
Game reported that "Neon, Saudh's ambitious megacity project, became AFCs Global
Partner from 2021 to 2024", a deal that was
renewed for another five years.
Such deals were stepping stones to finding its seat on world football's highest table

when the AFC declared Saudi Arabia as the hosts of the 2027 Asian Cup, the country's football federation's president Yasser Al-Mischal was elected as Asia's representa-tive to the all-powerful FIFA Council, which decides on the most important matters about world football.

#### Aramco steps in

Aramco steps in
Aramco, the Saudi state-owned oil and
gas company, then entered into a partnership with FIFA, The deal was widely criticised, and in October, more than 100 female
footballers wrote an open letter to FIFA
againstit. They cited Saudi's alleged human
rights violations and restrictions on
women's rights as the reasons.
All this while, Saudi continued to
splurge on getting the world's top footballers – including Cristiano Ronaldo – to
play in their league while simultaneously
acquiring teams in Europe, the nerve centre
of world football. For example, Riyadh Air
sponsors former Spanish league champions Atletico Madrid and the PIF owns
English Premier League side Newcastle
United.

Additionally, 'Play the Game' reported that Saudi royal family member Addullah bin Musaid Al Saud owns URF's Al Hilal United and England's Shefffield United. In March 2021, he added India's lower division club, Kerala United, to his portfolio. After establishing its footprint globally, Saudi made a move to host the World Cup.

#### Australia pulls out

In October 2023, FIFA set a 25-day dead-line for countries to express interest in host-ing the 2034 World Cup. Less than two ing the 2034 World Cup. Less than two hours after the announcement, Saudi officially declared its bid. A few days later, Australia entered the race but pulled out to focus on securing the 2025 Women's Asian Cup and the 2029 FIPA Club World Cup. That left Saudi Arabia as the sole bidder. Last week, FIFA gave a glowing review of Saudi's bid, scoring it 4.2 out of 5 — more than the 2026 bid of USA, Canada and Mexico, which received 4 out of 5.
Last Thursday, Ronaldo supported the bid, writing on his social media handles: "The @Saudi2034bid is inspiring so many young footballers with the promise of #Growing Together..."





OUR VIEW



## Malhotra has his task cut out as RBI's next leader

As RBI governor-designate Sanjay Malhotra moves from North Block to Mint Street, he will need to tread a fine line on monetary-fiscal policy coordination in favour of India's economy

n Monday, we finally got the n wonday, we in any got the news that every Indian with even a passing interest in the economy had been waiting for. Ending weeks of speculation over whether Shaktikanta Das would be given an extension of an already extended term, the government announced that revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra will take over as the next governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). This brings the curtains down on an eventful term under Governor Das. whose time at the central bank's helm was marked by many challenges, such as guiding the economy through the pandemic, new kinds of inflationary pressures and various global uncertainties. RBI was also at the forefront of innovation, whether in the field of digital finance or with an e-rupee. Malhotra steps into the shoes of someone who came into RBI as a relative newbie (a history student with a long civil-service career), but soon went on to prove himself as more than equal to the task. No doubt, the governor-designate's training in information technology, together with his long years as a bureaucrat, will help him make the transition from North Block to Mint Street.

Unlike Governor Das, who had the advantage of a seasoned deputy governor in charge of monetary policy, Michael Patra, and an experi-enced Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) when he took over, the new governor will have to learn the ropes in a very short period, given his last-minute appointment, and with a relatively new team. Patra is due to retire and is expected to step down shortly, while the MPC was recon stituted less than three months ago. At least Malhotra has his task cut out for him. Governo Das has often spoken of the value of monetaryfiscal policy coordination. At the Southeast Asian central banks forum earlier this year, Das said, "India's coordinated policy response in the face of a series of adverse shocks can be a good template for the future. While monetary policy worked on anchoring inflation expectations and quelling demand-pull pressures, supply side interventions by the government alleviated supply-side pressures and moderated cost-push inflation." This is sound advice for such circum stances; both policy levers must act in unison. At other times, though, RBI has the onerous job At other times, though, RBI has the onerous job of limiting potential damage from fiscal policy, especially if it threatens to be inflationary, if needed, by "withdrawing the punch bowl just as the party gets going," in the words of William McChesney Martin, who led the US Fed for almost two decades. This isn't always easy, The flead dominance of several works. fiscal dominance of monetary policy means much of RBI's work is circumscribed by the Centre's decisions. Given their different time horizons and the vulnerability of governments to fickle electorates, differences with the cen-tral bank are par for the course. Not only in India, but the world over. Successful central bank governors are those who know how to tread the fine line between cooperating with the Centre when the situation requires it and speaking truth to power at other times, Sanjay Malhotra too must frame policy with the long-term interests of the country in mind. Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of

Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, put it well: "Central bank independence matters for price stability—and price stability matters for consistent long-term growth. Risks of political interference in banks' decision making and personnel appointments are rising. Governments and central bankers must resist these pressures."

#### THEIR VIEW

## Trump's victory calls upon us to reshape our globalization game

India should let in Chinese FDI and technology to make the most of its China-plus-one opportunity



S President-elect Donald Trump is now firmly set at the centre of the country's polity, with control on the Senate, House of Representatives and judiciary. During his election campaign, he announced some radical measures on immigration and trade relations. Importantly, with an anti-China hawk Marco Rubio as secretary of state. Trump might actually proceed on his China agenda. There is no doubt that international relations and the global geo-economic order are in for a shake-up. A separate but not unrelated development in recent weeks is the emerging thaw in India-China border relations and a return to the situation that prevailed before the Galwan clash between he militaries of the two countries in 2020. As observers have rightly noted, this thaw is a consequence of China's declining economic fortunes in the last S President-elect Donald Trump

this thaw is a consequence of China's declining economic fortunes in the last one year, strained relations with the US in the last few years and a desire to not fight too many external battles at this point in time. One thing is clear. Now that Trump will be firmly in the saddle, come 20 January, China's economic relations with the US and EU will not improve much for at least the coming year. Technology theft bothers the US the most, as it has been running the largest trade deficits for the last decade or, while depending on technology for a large chunk of its exports. On the other

hand, the EU finds its eastern borders

band, the EU finds its eastern borders unsettled in Ukraine and is forced to support America's santi-China stance. So, how do these geo-economic realities affect India? The first takenway is the increasing role of economics in determining international tensions and even conflicts. Consider the Ukraine issue. When the Ukraine was the European Conflicts and the Ukraine issue. When the Ukraine Wastarde in early 2022, a major worry was the disruption in world supplies of food grain, pat Ukraine and Russia account for almost 30% of world exports. The Russians were quickly persuaded by all sians were quickly persuaded by countries not to block Ukrainian uded by all sians were quickly persuaded by all countries not to block Ukrainian exports, as that was in nobody's interest, Similarly, the US embargo of Russian hydrocarbon exports allowed exceptions for crude oil so long as tis export price did not exceed \$60 per harrel. This was greatly beneficial to Russia's largest trade partner, the EL, while India was able to build a good stockpile of oil for domestic inflation control. Finally, despite laraeil Frimer Minister Beajamin Netarnyahu's resolve to keep the Gaza War going till the Hamas was wiped out, he was asked by its principal ally, the US, to leave Iran's oil depots and nuclear facilities alone in any retalation to Iranian missile attacks. How does this impact India' All indications are that post-covid pent-up demand is winding down. In addition, personal consumption financed by liberal bank loans fone striking example of which is real estate) is now also winding down. There is a limit to how long government expenditure can keep the inling for

down. There is a limit to how long government expenditure can keep the economy going. One silver lining for India, though, is the export growth of mainly electronic items, as a few companies such as Apple have chosen to diversify their supply chains away from China. Regardless of who is president of the US, its best inflation control strategy has been to import cheap manufactured goods from China. Next return the control of the Company of the China. No. 10 Spresident can be controlled to the China. No. US president can be controlled to the China. No. US president can be controlled to the China. No. US president can be controlled to the China. No. US president can be controlled to the China. No. US president can be controlled to the China. change this strategy without risking higher domestic retail prices. Here is where India comes in. In terms of large assembly stations, the

only alternative to China is India. But it is also clear that India is not ready yet in terms of about sidils or technology to replace Chinese exports to the U.S. The next best strategy is to attract foreign direct investment (PDI) to India. As the Economic Survey note of the indight be time to consider Chinese PDI in India with all the necessary security exclusions. I have written extensively in these columns that PDI and trade are two sides of the same coin. EDI. In fact, tonds to promote trade in the longrun. In the case of Apple, its entry to India had to be facilitated by allowing a Chinese investor whose parts were critical to the final assembly of the iPhone.

On the one hand, India worries about its burgeoning trade deficit with China, but its mwilling to allow Chinese companies to produce here. At the same time, whenever it negotiates a free trade agreement of TAI, its primary concern is over Chinese schipments sneading in via that route. We know that FDI (which entails setting up or acquiring producing units in any country) does not exit quickly, Investors can't pick up and telepir factories away. Xiaoni products

ing units in any country) does not exit quickly. Investors card pick up and take their factories away. Xiaomi products are everywhere (phones, air purifiers, fridges) anyway. How would PDI hurt? As far as India is concerned, traditional exports like oil, jewelley, machine tools, etc, are unlikely to drive an export boon, which is more likely to be led by electronic products. Incidentally, China's principal exports are electronics and office machines. A China-phus-one strategy is India's

any, c. mas sprincips expons are rounds and office machines. A China-plus-one strategy is India's best beit in the next few years. But this cannot work on Apple exports alone. A more broad-based strategy would be to let Chinese technology in for some time. This means letting in Chinese FDI. Whatever the US leader says about artiffs and domestic production, Americans would at want their cheap imports to stop, the Chinese need to keep their export engine going and Indians need 8-9's GDP growth. It would make little sense to let politics get in the way of an economic 'triumvirate.'

#### 10 Dears add



## JUST A THOUGHT

The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.

THOMAS MALTHUS

MY VIEW | MUSING MACRO

## Demography is destiny: It's a law that cannot be shaken

AJIT RANADE



arlier this year, Singapore's govern-ment noted with alarm that the coun-try's total fertility rate (TFR) in 2023 had fallen to a record 0.97, TFR is the average number of children born to a woman during her lifetime. For several years, it has been falling, while the share of the elderly, been falling, while the share of the elderly, those above 68 years, has been rising. From 11.7% in 2013, it hit 19,1% in 2023 and is expected to reach 24.1% in 2030. In Singapore, the pendulum of population policy has swung from one extreme to the other. In 1966, a Family Planning and Population Board was set up to encourage birth control. There was "Stop-at-Two" programme, with disincentives for families having more than two children. Sterilization was rewarded. By the early 1980s, the government became pro-natalist, launching a "Have-three-ormore' campaign in 1987. Its population control policies had been too successful and needder eversing. But despite baby-bonus schemes and cash incentives, the fertility rate keeps falling. Hence, immigration pol-

icy is being relaxed. Roughly 40% of Singa-porcans are immigrants and 39% are non-citizens. The current policy seems to aim simply to stabilize the population rather than raise or lower the TFH. Just Ilke Singapore, almost all major countries have tried social engineering and population control. As per the United Nations 2021 World Population Policies report, nearly two-thirds of all countries had policies on fortility: 69 governments to reduce, 25 countries to increase and 19 to maintain it. Half the countries trying to reduce The Teach of the Countries to reduce Teach of the Countries to the reduce TFR are developing, implying that they think that high TFR hurts economic development.

they think that high TFR hurts economic development.

India too has traditionally subscribed to that Malthusian view. In 2022, a private member's bill was introduced in Parlament, perposing incentives for limiting-dilters in a family to two. More than six states have the two-child normas mandatory for panchayat members. Policies to limit family size are being pursued in India even as nearly half of all states have reached a TFR of 21 or below. That is the 'replacement rate' that leads to a stable population. It is a little over two progeny from two parents to account for factors like mortality, infertility and often also a gender ratio in favour of males.

In a sign of a reversal, Andhra Pradesh has scrapped a 30-year-old law barring those with three or more children from contesting local elections. It has a TFR of 1.6 and is worried about an ageing society. Many other southern states will follow suit in relaxing the norm. Echoing this sentiment, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat recently said that India should aim for a TFR of 3. With a lower TFR, "ascretzen gradus."

TFR, "a society can gradu-ally fade away on its own," he said. That may be too alarmist, but clearly the

alarmist, but clearly the sentiment in India shifting to tackling a low TFR, not high fertility.

The actual relationship between population and economic growth has not been settled. Does high population growth cause growth to skew down or the reverse? A per the research of Angus Maddison, continued as the Maddison Project after his death in 2010, there is strong evidence that the long-term link between population and economic growth was stable for about 1,000 years before the industrial revolution. For instance, in England from 1,000

CE to 1820 CE, the average annual popula-tion growth rate was 0.29% and annual per capita income growth was 0.12%, so that overall economic growth (bess um of the two) was 0.41%. But in past two centuries, this relationship has broken. Per capits GDP in England has risen 11-fold since 1820. Between 1820 and 2010, the average population growth was 0.57%, whereas ner capit in grown was 15-

Policies must

aim not to

control fertility

but promote human capital, innovation and prosperity per capita income was ris-ing at 1.28%. During this

ing at 1.28%. During this phase, agricultural output outpaced population, dis-proving the gloomy food scarcity forecast of Malthus. Technological innova-tion seemed to be winning the race against resource scarcity. But Malthus fol-lowers have not given up. Paul Bhidie a contempor Paul Ehrlich, a contemporary Malthusian, and Julian

Simon had a famous bet on commodity pri-ces in 1980, in which the latter said that 'brains would solve the mineral scarcity problem.' Simon won the bet, as by 1990, the world's population had risen by nearly one billion but commodity prices had fallen. Such techno optimism still drives policy-

makers who argue that human capital is the ultimate resource critical for economic growth. Population growth, which parallels growth in productivity, wages and family incomes, is required. India's predicament is that despite being one of the fastest growing economies, its per capita income at around \$3,000 is the lowest in the G20. In the early 1990s, the economies of India and China were of comparable size and shared a similar rank by per capita income. Three decades later, China's economy is six times bigger, and its per capita GDP ranks 70 compared to India's 141. Growth in China has been more inclusive than India's.

Demographic changesare driven by multiple factors. Declining mortality and rising fertility both lead to population growth, but have opposite effects on economic growth, Nising family incomes tend to increase the opportunity cost of raising children, leading to a lower TFR. There is a high correlation between female education and incomes on one hand and family size on the other.

Controlling TFR is doomed to fail. We need policies that rate per capita income, enhance human capital and encourage technological innovation; and state policies that are immigrant friendly and compensate for inter-state TFR differentials.

# Antimatter idea offers scientists clue to cracking cosmic mystery

If the universe started off with equal amounts of matter and antimatter, where has all the antimatter gone? Nobody knows for certain and the best current theory to explain the world fell woefully short of satisfying three crucial conditions, until a new study pointed out a caveat

Nirmal Raj

ne of the most astonishing facts about the natural world is the existence of antiparticles. Theorised by the English observed in cosmic rays by American physicist Carl Anderson in 1932, an physicist Carl Anderson in 1932, an antiparticle is a 'partner' of a particle type that has the same mass but opposite charge. For example, the antielectron is the antiparticle of the electron; it has the same mass and is positively charged. Antiparticles are an inevitable consequence of describing the world in terms of quantum mechanics and special relativity.

terms of quantum measure relativity. An antiparticle is a particle travelling backward in time. This is not an oversimplification. If it sounds eerie, that's because it is.

O antimatter, where art thou? But where is all the antimatter made of antiparticles? It is certainly scarce, or we would have discovered it a long time ago. Still, antiparticles are detectably numerous. Our own bodies make one

sini, amparates we devections, minerous, Our own bodies make one antielectron every 20 seconds from the decay of potassium-40. Cosmic rays raining down on us supply antiprotons, antielectrons, and even antimucle. Every proton and neutron – constituents of the nuclei that make up all the matter we can touch – is teeming with antiquarks.

But it is when we look out at the universe as a whole that antimatter's scarcity becomes clear. All galaxies are made of matter, not antimatter. Even in the infant universe, there had to have been a small dissimilarity between the populations of protons and antiprotons for our predictions about the outcomes of the synthesis of nuclei in the early universe and the features of the cosmic universe and the features of the cosmic

universe and the features of the cosmic microwave background (radiation leftover from the Big Bang) to hold.

That is, for every 1.7 billion proton-antiproton pairs, there should have been an extra unpaired proton. Presumably the universe started out with equal amounts of matter and antimatter before something happened to distort this symmetry. That's a good thing: otherwise matter and antimatter would have mutually annihilated to fill the universe with nothing but a fog of radiation — no raw material to make stars, radiation - no raw material to make stars,

planets or us. But what spoiled the symmetry? Put differently, why is there something around us rather than nothing (but that around us rather than nothing (but that fogs? Nobody knows for certain. What we do know is that any theory attempting to explain it must satisfy three conditions, called the Sakharuv conditions. The best current theory to explain the world, the Standard Model of particle physics, falls woefully short of meeting all of them. At least this was the lore until the authors of an August 2024 preprint paper pointed out an interesting caveat.

They showed that one of the conditions can be satisfied by the Standard Model alone, provided some new particle

alone, provided some new particle species helps with the process of making

#### An unsettling discovery Look at the world in a mirror. Does it look

the same? Apples would still fall and moons would circle planets because gravity would be unchanged. Protons neutrons would cling to form nuclei



Cosmic puzzle: This composite image pieced together by data from multiple telescopes shows a part of the Milky Way galaxy's central region. The bright v

because the strong nuclear force would be preserved. But atomic nuclei won't undergo radioactive fission because that

undergo radioactive fission because that happens via the weak force. And the weak force, like a vampire, vanishes in the mirror-world.

The discovery of this fact in 1957 was profoundly unsettling because it struck at cherished notions of symmetry in nature. A parity transformation (denoted P) – the act of swapping left and right – appeared to eliminate the weak force. But soon physicists found that if they replaced a particle with its antiparticle in the mirror-world, the weak force reappeared. This action is called charge conjugation (C.). It seems the universe didn't conserve (C). It seems the universe didn't conserve P and C separately but did so when they happened together. This is called CP

symmetry.
But in 1964, American physicists James
Cronin and Val Fitch found that even CP
symmetry is violated. And it wasn't

u

up

d

down

e

electron

II

C

charm

S

strange

muon

 $\nu_{\mu}$ 

violated all the time – which made it more nagging. They found that it was violated around once for every thousand times a process involving the weak force happened in nature. Nine years later, Makoto Kobayashi and Toshihide Maskawa in Japan found that if there were at least three variants of every quark species – with all properties the same except for the mass – CP symmetry violation is unavoidable. And all fermion particles do come in three variants, a.k.a. generations. For instance, the up quark has two other variants: the charm and top quarks. (Around the same time, physiciss violated all the time - which made it quarks. (Around the same time, physicists also found that the strong nuclear force involved in fission and fusion — ought to violate CP symmetry strongly but doesn't. This is called the strong CP puzzle.)

Now, as soon as CP symmetry violation was confirmed, the Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov realised it's actually an essential condition to create a

g

gluon

photon

Z

Z boson

W boson

interactions / force carriers (bosons)

H

higgs

GE

Standard Model of Elementary Particles

Ш

t

top

b

bottom

τ

tau

 $v_{\tau}$ 

The (current) crop of fundamental particles making up matter as we know it and the different ways they can interact. The W and Z bosons mediate the weak force, PUBLIC DOMNIN

matter-antimatter asymmetry in the early universe. Unfortunately, the amount of CP symmetry violation the Standard Model allowed for (the -1 in 1,000 rate) proved insufficient to explain the magnitude of the asymmetry. This is where the authors of the August paper have pointed out a loophole. We have known for some time that processes involving mesons – particles made of quark-antiquark pairs – violate CP symmetry, which is just how Cronin and Fitch made their discovery. Now, if a meson could decay to particles not contained in the Standard Model, the matter-antimatter asymmetry could be matter-antimatter asymmetry could be matter-antimatter asymmetry in the early matter-antimatter asymmetry could be controlled by the product of two

controlled by the product of two quantities: the amount of standard CP violation and the fraction of decays into the non-standard particles. This fraction can't be too large: otherwise we would have detected the non-standard particles in particle colliders. The study's conceit, then, is to introduce a mechanism that ensured this fraction was large just in the early universe but evolved to a smaller number today. This can be done if the masses of the new particles vary over time, which is possible to arrange in quantum field theory.

reach of the Standard Model five decades

The other two conditions are: (i) A large violation in a type of charge carried by particles, called the baryon number. For example, protons and neutrons have a baryon number of I and their antiparticles carry a value of -1. (ii) Interactions must occur out of thermal equilibrium, meaning that particle processes in the forward and backward directions do not occur at the same rate. While the Standard Model does not meet these conditions adequately, the work discussed here serves as an important step towards understanding why matter overwhelmingly dominates

why matter overwhelmingly dominates over antimatter in our universe today.

Hard-won progress
This mechanism has thus brought one of
the three Sakharov conditions within the nce these conditions came to light. The other two conditions are: (i) A

(Nirmal Raj is an assistant professor of theoretical physics at the Centre for High Energy Physics in the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. nraj@iisc.ac.in)

Please send in your answers to science@thehindu.co.in

#### THE SCIENCE QUIZ

## The storied lives of hormones

#### Vasudevan Mukunth

On December 10, 1907, the Brown Dog riots in London saw around a thousand medical students clash with police over what the students perceived to be a threat to their ability to conduct \_\_\_\_\_ a procedure in which a live animal is dissected. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 2
The Brown Dog riots were a part of the overarching Brown Dog affair, which began when two people in the audience complained that a dog being dissected (as in Q1) by X didn't seem to be sufficiently anaesthetised. Name X, who is credited with the discovery of hormones using one such

ormones are molecules that are transmitted across a body like messengers, to regulate physiological changes. Name t plant hormone that was also the first known gaseous hormone used to control when flowers open, when fruits

CM CO

QUESTION 4

QUESTION 5

There are four broad ways in which a hormone can transmit its effects: endocrine (released into the blood and acts on cells), paracrine (acts on nearby cells), (acts on the cells that secrete it), and intracrine (acts within a cell without exting). Fill in the blank.

then a hormone reaches a target cell, it binds to a receptor and launches a series of reactions that allow a signal borne by the hormone to reach the cell's protein-making facility. What is the technical term for this series of reactions?



- inswers to December 3 quiz:
  Gas responsible for Bhopal disaster Ans: Methyl isocyanate
  Chemical ingredient used to manufacture Sevin Ans: 1-Naphthol
  Compound France used as a chemical weapon in World War 1 Ans: Pho
  Property of methyl isocyanate that makes eyes water Ans: Lachrymal
  Substance added to methyl socyanate leading to disaster Ans: Water
  Isual: 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko

- First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Jose Joji | Shankar Priyavrat | Basavaraj Meti | Anmol Agrawal
- Answers to Decembr 6 quiz: 1. Year when WHO embraced primary healthcare as the basis of universal care Ans: 1978 2. Year when British National Health Service was launched - Ans: 1948 3. US president who tried twice to establish universal care - Ans: Franklin D.

...

- . US medical insurance schemes Ans: Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE.
- Children's Health Insurance Program

  5. Second component of Ayushman Bharat scheme Ans: PMJAY
  Visual: Launched Affordable Care Act (a.k.a. Obamacare)
  First contact:

contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Basavaraj Meti | Jose Joji



More than three-quarters of the world's la experienced drier conditions from 1970 to than the previous thirty-year period APP

## UN talks in Rivadh keep focus on land degradation

Much of the earth's lands are drying out and damaging the ability of plant and animal life to survive, according to a United Nations report released Monday at talks where countries are working to address the problem.

The report was released at the UN summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on combating desertification – once-fertile lands turning into deserts because of hotter temperatures from human-caused climate change, lack of water and deforestation. It found that more than

deforestation. It found that more than three-quarters of the world's land experienced drier conditions from 1970 to 2020 than the previous thirty-year period. "The drier climates now affecting vast lands across the globe will not return to how they were," said Ibrahim Thiaw, chief of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which is facilitating the Riyadh talks. "This change is redefining life on earth."

At the talks, which started last week and are set to end on Friday, nations are

and are set to end on Friday, nations are discussing how better they can help the world deal with droughts - a more urgent lack of water over shorter periods - and the more permanent problem of

degrading land.
If global warming trends continue,
nearly five billion people – including in
most of Europe, parts of the western U.S.,

Farming is particularly at risk with drier land being less productive and hurting both yields and the availability of food for livestock, the report said

Brazil, eastern Asia and central Africa — will be affected by the drying by the end of the century, up from a quarter of the world's population today, the report warned. UNCO'D's chief scientist Barron Orr warned UncO'D's chief scientist Barron Orr warned drier land could lead to "potentially catastrophic impacts affecting access to water that could push people and nature even closer to disastrous tipping points," where humans are no longer able to reverse damaging effects of climate change.

Sergio Vicente-Serrano, one of the lead authors of the report, said that as the atmosphere heast up because the burning Brazil, eastern Asia and central Africa -

authors of the report, said that as the atmosphere heats up because the burning of coal, oil and gas spews planet-warming emissions, it leads to more evaporation on the ground. That makes water less available for humans, plants and animals,

available for humans, plants and animals, making it harder to survive. Farming is particularly at risk, with drier land being less productive and hurting both yields and the availability of food for livestock, the report said. That can lead to food insecurity for communities worldwide. Aridity also leads to more migration, because errait rainfall, degrading land and frequent water shortages make it harder for regions or nations to develop economically, the report said. It said the trend is especially noticeable in some of the world's driest areas such as southern

teronization, the report sail. It is some of the world's driest areas such as southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and southern Asia. Negotiators in Riyadh are mainly discussing how best the world can respond to more frequent and damaging droughts. Jes Weigelt, of European climate thinktank TMG, said it's still a sticking point because countries can't agree on whether rich nations should be forking out funds for drought responses around the world. Any money pledged would go towards better forecasting and monitoring systems as well as creating reservoirs and other water-management structures.

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



## Indians need the right to disconnect

oon after death of an EY employee in September, allegedly due to work pressure, MP Shashi Tharoor had said that he would raise the issue in Parliament. He said that "inhumanity at the workplace must be legislated out of existence." A recent report by The Hindu reveals that Indian women in professional jobs, such women in professional jobs, such as auditing, Information Technology, and media, work more than 55 hours a week. The working hours vary for those who belong to the marginalised sections of society and work in the unorquanised sector. According to a study by ADP Research Institute, 49% of Indian workers said workplace stress negatively impacts their mental health. As French politician Benoit Hamon said, "Employees physically leave the office, but they do not leave their work. They remain attached by a kind of electronic leash like a dog. The text, the messages, the emails colonies the life of the individual to the point where he or she eventually breaks down". as auditing, Information

#### Right to disconnect laws

Such tragic incidents, research, and statements highlight how the right to disconnect is an important right. It allows employees to disconnect from their employer disconnect from their employer outside of working hours. The Labour Chamber of the French Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that an employee is under no obligation to work from home or take home files and working tools. This decision was subsequently confirmed by the Cour de Cassation (the highest court in the French judiciary), which said, "The fact that [the employee] was not reachable on his cell phone outside working hours cannot be considered as a misconduct". Portugal has a Right to Disconnect law, which makes it illegal for employers to contact employees employers to contact employees outside working hours, except in emergencies. Similarly, according to Article 88 of the Organic Law Personal Data and Guarantee of



India must recognise that the right to

disconnect will increase productivity and

ensure the overall growth

and well-being

and employers

of employees

Lawyer and researcher and forme co- convenor, Constitutional law Society, National Law University, Jodhpur

Digital Rights in Spain, "Public workers and employees shall have the right to switch off devices in order to guarantee that, outside of legal or conventionally established working hours, their time off, leave and holidays are respected, leave and holidays are respected, in addition to their personal and family privacy, with the aim of promoting a good work-life balance". This year, the Australian Parliament passed the Fair Work Legislation Amendment, which gave employees the right to disconnect from work outside of working hours. Ireland has also recognised the right to disconnect recognises. for employees.

Where does India stand? India does not have specific laws recognising the right to disconnect from work. However, the Constitution, the Directive Principles of State Policy, and various judicial pronouncements have spoken of the right to work in a conducive and healthy environment. Article 38 of the Constitution mandates that "the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people". Article 39(e) of the Directive Principles of State Policy directs the state to State Policy directs the state to direct its policy towards securing the strength and health of its workers. The Supreme Court, in Vishakha v State of Rajasthan (1997), ruled that sexual harassment at the workplace violates fundamental rights, narassment at the workplace violates fundamental rights, recognised the right to dignity at the workplace, and issued guidelines to ensure that there is a safe working environment for women and gender equality. In Ravindra Kumar Dhariwal and Ors v. Union of India (2021), the Court read Article 14 to include ideas of inclusive equality to reasonably accommodate persons with disabilities, pustice DX. Chandrachud said that an employer must consider an employee's individual differences and capabilities. In Praveen
Pradhan v. State of Uttarunchal Pradhan v. State of Uttaranchal (2012), the High Court of Uttarakhand held that "under the

pretext of administrative control

and discipline, a superior officer cannot be left to enjoy extreme liberty to make the intense humiliation and scolding inhumanly in front of all the subordinate staff members for a little lapse." Despite the clear recognition of the right to dignity at the workplace and a direction for employers to be sensitive towards mental health concerns, and also laws that fix and asso laws to the case of accountability in the case of breaching working hours, violating dignity is unfortunately common in Indian workplaces.

Prolonged working hours
In 2018, MP Supriya Sule
introduced a Private Member Bill
in the Lok Sabha, which
delineated the right to disconnect
from work after working hours.
The bill included the provision of a
penalty of 1% of the total
renumeration of all employees to
be paid by companies for
noncompliance with its
provisions. provisions.

However, in recent years, there

has been no significant legislative effort to recognise employees' right to disconnect from work outside working hours or to impose a duty on employers to be mindful of employee well-being and avoid overworking them. Research by Harvard Business Review shows that working prolonged hours causes stress, coronary heart diseases, and coronary heart diseases, and impacts overall health. Contrary to the widespread belief that overworked human beings bring in productivity, research by the University of Oxford in collaboration with British multinational telecoms firm BT found a conclusive link between happiness and productivity. Therefore, employers need to take into account psychological factors while dealing with employees. In its march towards becoming the third largest economy by 2030, India must recognise that the right to disconnect will increase to disconnect will increase productivity and ensure the growth and well-being of both employees and employers.

## An onerous task in Odisha

After the initial euphoria, the BJP government confronts legacy problems

STATE OF PLAY Satyasundar Barik

he Mohan Majhi-led iratiya Janata Party (BJP) government as-cended to power with the pro-mise of transforming Odisha's image, which has long been

cended to power with the promise of transforming Odisha's
image, which has long been
associated with poverty and
backwardness. During the
election campaign earlier this
year, the party had accused
former Chief Minister Naveen
Patnaik of failing to upilit a
large section of population living below the poverty line.
Some events in the State in
recent months show that promises are easier made than
implemented. In November,
three women died after consuming gruel made of mango
learnel, a traditional food preserved by tribal communities
for times of food searcity, in
Kandhamal district. In the last
month or so, four women
have sold their newborns, unable to provide for them amid
acute poverty. These are stark
examples of why Odisha is often clied as an underdeveloped State and remind the ten cited as an underdeve-loped State and remind the new government of the chal-lenges that lie ahead.

new government of the chai-lenges that lie ahead.

These incidents have been reported in the past too. In 2001, in Rayagada district, 24e tribal people had died after eating gruel made of mango kernel. In the 1980s, Odisha had grabbed international headlines when a woman in Kalahandi district sold her 14-year-old sister-in-law to buy food, signalling the State's deep-rooted poverty. Since the oath-taking cere-mony on June 12, the new BJP

mony on June 12, the new BJP government has fulfilled four major poll promises: initiating payment of ₹50,000 to every woman between the ages of 21 and 60, increasing the mini-



mum support price for paddy to ₹3,100, opening all the four doors of the Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri, and increasing the monthly pensions to the elderly and to the disabled to ₹3,000. This is largely because the new government enjoys the financial means to fulfill its promises. Over the past 24 years, Odisha's financial health has undergone a remarkable transformation: the State has shifted from a revenue-deficit economy to a revenue-surplus one, driven by prudent fiscal management and substantial revenue from its rich mineral resources.

However, the deaths of the become the state of the temple of the state of the state has of the state of the

However, the deaths of the women and the sale of the ba-bies caused embarrassment to bies caused embarrassment to the party. The BJP blamed the Biju Janata Jau (BJD), which was in power for 24 years, for alleged misgovernance. Ho-wever, Opposition parties hit back at the BJP, arguing that its claims of being new to govern-ing Odisha cannor absolve it of all responsibility. Mr. Patnaik stated that his government's efforts of providing food to the tribal communities had been rendered futile, as the "BJP government had abruptly halted subsidised rice supplies for tri-bal communities".

subsuosed rice suppose for tri-bal communities".

The BIP has also not been able to do much to tackle al-leged corruption. During the election campaign, the saffron party had talked about deep-rooted corruption in the BID government. In his recent statements during the winter

session of the State As-sembly, the Odisha Chief Minister slammed the pre-

vious government saying jobs were provided in lieu of bribes. Six months have passed since the party came to power, but the new governpower, but the new govern-ment has not ordered an in-vestigation into any of the cor-ruption cases that the BJP had highlighted. On the contrary, two Indian Police Service officnignigated. On the contrary, two Indian Police Service officers who were accused of medding in the Assembly elections on behalf of the RID were swiftly reinstated. Political observers point out that this shows lack of decisiveness on part of the new government.

There has also been no significant shake-up in the bureaucracy, which would help the BJP move away from the governance model of the previous BID government.

The BJP government faces an uphill task in improving many key indices. The latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India states that the overall vacancy of

that the overall vacancy of specialist doctors in the State was 49% and 40% for medical officers as of March 2022. In the case of staff nurses and nursing officers, 30% posts were vacant. The human re-sources available in hospitals scross the State did not meet he Indian Public Health Stan-

the Indian Public Health Stan-dards. The doctor to popula-tion ratio was 1:1,622 against the World Health Organiza-tion requirement of 1:1,000. Steering a government on the path of development is far more difficult than shouting slogans from the gallery. The BJP government faces the diffi-cult task of overturning Odish-a's unfortunate legacy of po-verty, unemployment, and verty, unemployment, and terrible public infrastructure. It is important that it stays fo-cused on ensuring steady and effective governance in the

## India used 114 mg of antibiotics for every kg of meat in 2020

Of the 190 countries for which the data was collected, India ranked 30th in terms of antibiotic usage in animals

or humanity, antibiotics are a huge blessing. Antibiotics have saved millions of lives from bacterial infections. However, there is growing concern that these bacteria will become resistant to the drugs we use against them.

When we think about antimior what drugs humans take. We might not even consider the use of antibiotics in livestock, but they al-

so pose a threat. In fact, much more antibiotics are given to livestock than to hu-mans. Researchers previously esti-mated that, in the 2010s, around

mains, researchers previously earnual 70% of antibiotics used globally were given to farm animals. While there hasn't been an update of these figures in the last few years, it's likely that more antibiotics are still used in livestock than humans. Overusting antibiotics in livestock increases the risk of disease in animals and humans in several ways. First, antibiotics are often used as a cheap substitute for basic animal welfare practices, such as giving animals enough space, keeping their living environments clean, and ensuring that burns well-ventilated. A failure to mainwell-ventilated. A failure to main-tain hygienic conditions on farms increases the risk of disease for

both livestock and humans. Second, the overuse of antibiot ics can also increase the risk of bacteria that are resistant to treat ment. That threatens the health of the animals but can also be a risk

for humans for crossover diseases. Finally, humans can be exposed to resistant pathogens by eating contaminated meat and dairy

contaminated meat and dairy products.

One of the key challenges in un-derstanding the extent and risks of antibiotic resistance in livestock is the lack of transparent data shar-ing from countries. Of course,

comparing the total amount of an comparing the total amount of an-tibiotics given to cows, sheep, pigs, and chickens would be unfair. Cows are bigger than chickens, so we would expect them to need more antibiotics for the same im-pact. So, researchers compare an-tibiotic use in units adjusted for the size of animals—usually as the number of milligarams used per ki-logramme of meat product. Chickens tend to receive the least antibiotics. You can see this in Chart I: they receive about se-ven times less than sheep and five

ven times less than sheep and five times less than pigs. Cows also re-

times less than pigs. Cows also re-ceive less than pigs and sheep. Antibiotic use is measured in milligrams per kg of animal pro-duct. Sheep have the highest usage at 243 mg, followed by pigs at 173 mg, cattle at 60 mg, and chickens at 35 mg. One of the reasons why anti-

One of the reasons why anti-biotics are used in lower quantities in chickens is that they are killed at a much younger age. Fast-growing breeds reach their "Staughter weight" at around 42 days, so they are often slaughtered when they are lust 40 to 50 days old. Since their lifespan is shorter, they con-sume fewer antibiotics. Pigs are usually slaughtered when they are around five to six months. The fact that intensive livestock get far more antibiotics than animals raised outdoors is one reason why cows tend to get less antibiotics than pigs.

than pigs. Of course, the exact amount of antibiotics given varies across countries. Researchers Ranya Mul-chandani and colleagues estimat-ed antibiotic use across the world based on the best available data, as well as extrapolations for those

countries that don't release data. Map 2 shows antibiotic usage in livestock per kg of meat in 2020. Asia, Oceania, and most of the Americas use a lot of antibiotics. Europe and Africa, in blue, tend to use less than 50 mg per kg. For instance, India used 114 mg of antibiotics in livestock per kg of meat in 2020, compared to 4 mg in Norway — 30 times less. Of the 190 suntries for which the data wa

countries for which the data was collected, India ranked 30th in terms of antibiotic usage in animals. There are a few reasons why these differences are so large.

The first one is affordability and accountries are a few reasons why make the solid properties. The first one is affordability and example, have less access to other farming inputs, such as fertilizers.

Another reason is the difference in regulatory and industry norms regarding antibiotic use. Antibiotic use has dropped significantly in Europe, partly due to regulatory and incomplete and properties. cantly in Europe, partly due to reg-

Finally, the most popular types of livestock make a difference. As we saw earlier, sheep and pigs we saw earlier, sheep and pigs tend to receive far more antibiotics than cattle or chickens, even after adjusting for their size. That means countries that raise many pigs would tend to use more anti-biotics. More than half of Thai-land's meat supply is in the form of pig meat. In China, it is two-thirds. That's more than the global aver-

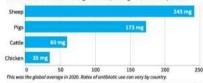
pig meat. In China, it is two-thirds. That's more than the global average of one-third. Some countries have reduced antibiotic use a lot. Antibiotics can play an important role in preventing disease and illness in animals. This is no different from humans. So, removing them completely is not necessarily the best option. The key is to use them more effectively: changing farming pracfectively: changing farming prac-

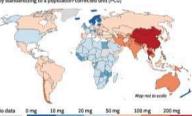
fectively: changing farming prac-tices to reduce antibiotic use where it's in excess or using anti-biotics in smaller quantities when it is needed. Many antibiotics given today are not used to prevent dis ease but to promote growth and produce meat more efficiently.

We know countries can reduce antibiotic use while maintaining antibiotic use while maintaining healthy livestock sectors because some countries have already achieved rapid reductions. Between 2011 and 2022, sales of veterinary antibiotics fell by more than half across several European countries. The use of antibiotics considered critically important in human medicine also fell by half, with some specific drugs falling by 80% to 90%.



Chart 1: The chart compares antibiotic use on livestock, in units adjusted for the size of animals — number of milligrams used per kilogramme of meat product





Flona Spaoner is Senior Data Scientist and Hannah Ritchie is Deputy Editor and Science Outreach Lead in Our World in Data

## FROM THE ARCHIVES The Man Frinde.

FIFTY YEARS AGO FROM THE DECEMBER 9, 1974 EDITION AS THERE WAS NO EDITION ON DECEMBER 10, 1974

#### Thant laid to rest in mausoleum built by students

Rangoon, Dec. 8: The body of U Thant, former U.N. Secretary General, was buried this afternoon at a site chosen by students in defiance of his relatives who wanted him buried elsewhere in the city.

U Thant, who died of cancer in New York on November 26 at the age of 65, was laid to rest in a hastily-constructed mausoleum near the former Students Union Building, demolished during student riots in 1962.

Earlier in the mornings, the body, draped in a U.N. flag, was taken from the convocation hall in a procession of monks and students to the burial site. While people shuffled past the coffin,

U.N. flag, was taken from the convocation hall in a procession of monks and students to the burial site. While people shuffled past the coffin, placed on a specially erected dais topped by golden umbrellas, the students decided by voice vote to go ahead with their burial plans.

In a final mark of respect the students observed a minute's silence and then raised the coffin over their heads for the mourners to see amid shouts of "victory, victory".

While the body was being buried, thousands of Burmese had lined another funeral route to a mausoleum which the Burmese leaders's relatives had built near the Shechagon Pagoda, the country's most sacred Buddhist shrine, in the heart of Rangoon.

The mausoleum, built by the relatives with the help of the Burmese authorities, lies beside the tomb of Burma's grand old man of politics, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing.

The students had seized U Thant's body on Thursday in front of \$0,000 mourners, shortly before it was due to be buried at a public

before it was due to be buried at a public ceremony because they wanted a more fitting funeral and a special mausoleum in his honour.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 10, 1924

#### The Amrit Mahal cattle

It was from a Palegar conqueror that Tippu It was from a Palegar conqueror that Tippu Sultan obtained the Amrit Mahal breed of cattle in Mysore, and that warrior prince maintained the purity of the breed with the greatest care till Seringapatanan surrendered to the British. The cattle in Mysore were so excellent that the British military authorities were not altogether oblivious of the breed for purposes of dragging cannons and stores over difficult country.

## Editorial



## Places and worship

Supreme Court hearing may decide future of secularism in India

A special Bench of the Supreme Court of India, headed by Chief Justice of India Samber 12 a batch of petitions that question the validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, a law that freezes the status of places of worship in the country as on the day of its independence and bars suits that seek to alter such status. It is no exameration to say these ordinates. places of worship in the country as on the day of its independence and bars suits that seek to alter such status. It is no exaggeration to say these petitions pose a virulent challenge to the survival of secularism. The outcome may well decide the trajectory of communal relations and the future of secular thought in the country. The 1991 Act does have some exemptions: it did not apply to what was then the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute, which ended in favour of the Ram temple. Nor does it apply to monuments, sites and remains covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. It will also not apply to any suit that has been finally settled or disposed of, any dispute that has been settled by the parties before the 1991 Act came into force, or to the conversion of any place that took place by acquiescence. The challenge has come in the backdrop of a renewed attempt through motivated litigation by some Hindu organisations and devotees to target mosques such where Community research in Versned the Shabit Id. through motivated inigation by some Hindu or-ganisations and devotees to target mosques such as the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, the Shahi Id-gah mosque in Mathura and the Shahi Jama Mas-jid in Sambhal, among others. Any order that strikes down or dilutes the 1991 law is likely to

have a malign influence on these proceedings.

The petitions highlight the demolition of temples by invaders in the past and contend that ma-ny mosques have been built on their ruins. The Places of Worship Act, they claim, legalises such depredations, and also violates the right of Hindus and other communities to reclaim their plac dus and other communities to reclaim their places of worship through legal proceedings. It also violates the right to practise and propagate religion and manage and administer places of worship. Ironically, they also contend that the Act goes against the principle of secularism, which would surely stand to be undermined if their attempts to reclaim these sites succeed. Fortunately, there are some clearly established principles in favour of the Act. In its Ayodhya judgment, a five-member Bench observed that the law "imposes a non-derogable obligation towards enforcing our commitment to secularism". It also called it a "legislative intervention that preserves non-retrogression as an essential feature of our secular values". For the present, it does not seem likely that the Court will depart from the Constitution's secular vision and Parliament's mandate against misusing judicial fora to remedy historical wrongs. es of worship through legal proceedings. It also

#### Paradigm shift

Syria needs to be free of its societal fissures and religious militias

he regime of Bashar al-Assad has fallen in Syria. The Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former arm of al-Queda that had rebranded liself, is now the most powerful force in the country. Between a secular dictatorship hat collapsed like a house of cards and a surging group of militants with a menacing recent past lies the present and future of 23.5 million Syrians. Eight years ago, Mr. Assad seemed to be winning the civil war. He had recaptured most of the lost territories, with help from Russia, Iran and Hezboldah. A tense calm prevailed as militants holed themselves up in the tiny northwestern region of Idib. In the southeast, the Kurds enjoyed limited autonomy, but bought peace with Damascus. Syria was readmitted into the Arab League. Gulf monarchs, who once funded the anti-Assad militancy, embraced him. But his victory was hollow, as he relied on external allies for security. His army, which fought years of civil war, was in bad shape. Under crippling U.S. sanctions, the government's finances were in a shambles. The country never recovered from the scars of the civil war. To tackle dissent, the regime turned up repression, widening the social schisms.

However, what made Mr. Assad's dramatic fall on December 8 possible were factors beyond his direct control. After the Israel-Hamass war brosch out in 2023, Israel has carried out air strikes in Syria, which weakened its armed forces. Israel's war against Hezbollah substantially limited the Syria. The Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former arm of al-Qaeda that had

ria, which weakened its armed forces. Israel's war against Hezbollah substantially limited the Lebanese outfit's ability to continue to help Mr. Assad. Iran, which lost officers in Syria, also took a step back, while Russia has been preoccupied with the Ukraine war. The weakening and dis-traction of the alliance provided the HTS, backed by Türkiye, a golden opportunity. And it took just 12 days for the HTS, and other militias, to reach by Türkiye, a golden opportunity. And it took just 2 days for the HTS, and other militias, to reach Damascus as the regime army melted away. With Mr. Assad gone, Syria has an opportunity to build a new future. But the key actors of change are far from promising. The HTS wants to turn Syria, a diverse country with Sunnis, Alawites, Christians, Shias and Druze, into an Islamic state. The Syrian National Army, a sideklek of the HTS, is a Turkish proxy. In the south, there are numerous local militias. It is to be seen whether the winners of the civil war are going to unite under a national flag or, as in the case of the post-Communist Afghanistan or post-Qadhafi Libya, going to start a new one. A desirable outcome would be the establishment of a transition government, a disarming of the militias and the laying of the foundations of an inclusive new republic. But given Syria's turmultuous history, societal fissures, and the ideological and programmatic characteristics of the militias, a likelier outcome would be more chaos and instability. That is the tragedy of Syria.

## Under Trump 2.0, the world and the India outlook

onfirming the adage that the victor takes all, the stunning victory achieved by Donald Trump in the 2024 United Stransformed perceptions of him across the globe. There is many a reference to him being the most consequential American President since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and of defining a new political rear for America and the world. Similar hyperbolic statements have been made to the effect that following his latest victory, 'the world lies at Trump's feet'. President-elect Trump is an enigma, and may remain so even after he takes office. Whether he would fit the description of being an iconoclast remains to be seen, but he is known to challenge 'cherished beliefs or venerated institutions on grounds that they are erroneous or pernicious'.

'cherished beliefs or venerated institutions on grounds that they are erroneous or pernicious'. Having also taken control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the incoming President seems unstoppable.

With few restraints remaining, speculation is rife about what he may do, including whether be could strike a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin, over Ukraine, impose still greater burdens on Iran to bring down the temperature in West Asia, and find ways and means to rein in Israel.

What the foreign policy outlook might be It appears almost certain that Mr. Trump's foreign policy priorities would be Europe, West Asia and China. Mr. Trump has been openly critical of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and even more so of Europe's pusillanimous attitude to defence issues, but this does not mean that he will be ready to sacrifice Ukraine to ensure peace in Europe. His approach is also unlikely to be transactional in nature and, hence, giving up on Ukraine for ensuring peace in Europe appears highly unlikely. Mr. Trump would, however, expect Europe to contribute far more towards its defence, but is again unlikely to raise the stakes still higher, to avoid Ukraine turning into a conflict that implicitly takes on the character of a third world war

The incoming President's approach to the West Asia crisis is likely to be still more circumspect, Asia crisis is likely to be still more circumspect, notwithstanding speculation to the contrary. While both Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have sought to ingratiate themselves with him, Mr. Trump is unlikely to be taken in by such manoeuvres. Anyone who is familiar with Mr. Trump's thinking and his family business dealings, would know what his priorities are likely to be and where they lie. On what specific terms Mr. Trump would agree to a modus vivendi



M.K. Narayanan

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

in West Asia is still in the realm of speculation, but prolongation of the conflict on Israel's terms appears highly unlikely. There is much greater certainty in what Mr. Trump's approach and attitude towards China would be. China heads the list of Mr. Trump's 'enemies', followed by North Korea and Iran, with Russia beinging up to mer. It is certain that with Russia bringing up the rear. It is certain that as President, Mr. Trump would raise the stakes as far as China is concerned on economic and trade as President, Mr. Trump would raise the stakes as far as China is concerned on economic and trade issues, including tighter export controls, and raising tariffs on Chinese exports to unprecedented heights. He is, however, likely to avoid any rash actions, conscious of the fact that China's Peoples' Liberation Army has been steadily preparing to confront the U.S. for quite some time and cannot be easily trifled with. The U.S. is also aware that China is known to possess the world's largest hypersonic arsenal, having missiles that can ly and manoeuvre at more than five times the speed of sound. China may be Mr. Trump's enemy number one, but this is no reason to think that he would resort to any rash moves, that may well lead to a wider conflagration.

Taiwan would remain a potential flash point. Nevertheless, like Sumo wrestlers, the U.S. under Mr. Trump and China under President XI, Impigare more likely to test the ground reality, before embarking on a conflict that will not stop with Taiwan, the Pacific region or East Asia, Existing U.S. alliances with nations in Asia and Australasia are certain to be strengthened, and already established links with Australia, Japan and South Korea would be further intensified. Vet, as President, Mr. Trump is unlikely to act as a guarantor of peace across the region, and one to be paid for by the U.S. exchequer.

guarantor of peace across the region, and one to be paid for by the U.S. exchequer. Notwithstanding the impatience that he displays at present, there will be certain limits as far as his actions as President are concerned.

#### Ties with New Delhi

Among the more important countries across the world, there is every reason to believe that Mr. Trump would be inclined to view India more Trump would be inclined to view India more favourably than others. There are several reasons for this. The personality of Mr. Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, are in many ways not dissimilar; both demonstrate a 'no nonsense' approach to issues and problems and also appear to see them through a common prism. Both are powerful leaders who do not allow their political aides and others to change or alter the trajectory of their beliefs under any circumstances. Their dislike for China is visceral, and people in India are not likely to forget that in the wake of the Galwan incident in June 2020 (in which India lost

access to reliable energy. Energy poverty reveals sharp global inequities. Low-income countries account for a small fraction of global energy demand but suffer disproportionately from

demand but suffer disproportionately from supply disruptions. Extreme weather events frequently damage energy infrastructure in regions where power grids are already unreliable. In rural areas, energy deficits hinder agricultural productivity, leading to higher food prices and deepening poverty. In sub-Saharan Africa, per-hectare fertilizer usage remains far below the global average, contributing to food insecurity despite \$1.9 billion spent on fertilizer imports by the top 10 African importing countries in 2021—more than double the amount in 2016.

Agriculture's reliance on fossil fuels further

20 soldiers), Mr. Trump as U.S. President at the time appeared to support India.

Capping the relationship between Mr. Trump, then President, and Mr. Modi was the 'Namaste Trump' event (in February 2020) in Ahmedabad, The event which attracted over a lakh of people was, perhaps, the largest gathering for a foreign leader visiting India. On this occasion, Mr. Modi had hailed Mr. Trump as a 'true friend of India' and a leader who was reshaping geopolitics.

During Mr. Trump's previous tenure, both he and Mr. Modi seemed to arrive at a common understanding on issues and concerns affecting

and Mr. Modi seemed to arrive at a common understanding on issues and concerns affecting the Asia-Pacific region. Little has changed since. If anything, the emphasis on cooperation between the two countries in defence, trade and counter-terrorism has only increased. On his

the two countries in defence, trade and counter-terrorism has only increased. On his previous visit to India as President, Mr. Trump had made a specific mention of the S3 billion military deal that existed between the two countries.

As incoming President, Mr. Trump is certain to be gratified that one of his first acts would be to sign a SL17 billion deal for equipping MH-60R helicopters. He would also be happy that India has firmed up its relationship with the Quad (comprising Australia, Japan, the U.S. and India), which is perceived as an anti-China alliance, even though India does not per se share the view that it is a security alliance.

Mr. Trump, has also endeared himself to many Indians and the Indian establishment by making common cause with India over the plight of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, who are facing a great deal of hostility from sectarian Islamic entities in that country, and who had forced former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee the country. This has further helped build an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship which will stand the two countries in pood steel is noot will stand the sun countries in pood steel. an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship which will stand the two countries in good stead.

The role of technology On the economic plane, India enjoys a slight on the economic plane, mad enjoys a sight advantage in terms of balance of payments, but this is nothing compared with what exists today between China and the U.S. In the case of U.S.-India relations, technology is certain to be a cementing rather than a divisive factor. Silicon cementing rather than a divisive factor. Silicon Valley, which has a sizeable contingent of Indian tech entrepreneurs, could well serve as a vanguard to cement the relationship, quite contrary to the case of China. If innovation and dynamism is expected to be the hallmark of the new Trump Administration – with Elon Musk and others driving it – then the U.S. India technological relationship is well set to approach the take-off point. India-U.S. relations will follow suit.

## In energy-dependent world, the issue of food security +

ddressing food insecurity and energy powerty is central to achieving global stability, but tackling these issues independently is no longer sufficient," warns the World Bank in its latest report on climate and development. The intertwined crises of food and development is additionable to the reservoir the same of the energy security are defining the trajectory of the 21st century, casting a long shadow over global 2lst century, casting a long shadow over global stability. Both systems are under siege – food production is strained by climate change, population growth, and inequality, while energy systems face geopolitical tensions, outdated infrastructure, and the slow transition from fossil fuels. Fet, their interconnectedness presents an even greater challenge: agriculture, a lifeline for humanity, is both a significant energy consumer and a contributor to climate change. As the world teeters on the edge of multiple tipping points, can we truly address one without confronting the other?

Dependency on carbon-intensive energy Agriculture consumes nearly 70% of global freshwater resources and is responsible for over 20% of greenhouse gas emissions. Its dependenc on fossil fuels – for mechanisation, irrigation, fertilizer production, and transportation—has created a vicious cycle of environmental degradation. This reliance also exposes food systems to energy price shocks, threatening global stability. Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns further disrupt agricultural output, putting the livelihoods of 2.5 billion people at risk. Between 2020 and 2023, nearly 1.8% of the global population faced severe food people at risk. Between 2020 and 2020, 16.8% of the global population faced severe food insecurity, a figure projected to rise to 956 million

Renewable energy investments reached \$500 billion in 2022, but fossil fuel consumption remains robust due to short-term economic and geopolitical pressures. Nations such as the United States, Brazil, and Guyana continue to expand oil States, Brazil, and Guyana continue to expain and gas production, prioritising exports and domestic energy security. This ongoing dependency on carbon-intensive energy exacerbates the vulnerability of global food systems, particularly in regions with limited



There is every

reason to believe that U.S. President-elect Donald Trump would be inclined to view India more favourably

ociated with the



Amit Mitra

There is a need

agriculture, with

to reimagine

of food and energy insecurity set to challenge global priorities

more than double the amount in 2016.

Agriculture's reliance on fossil fuels further highlights is vulnerability. Natural gas, critical for fertilizer production, is both a feedstock and an energy source, with 80% of it used for ammonia synthesis and 20% powering the process. Volatility in natural gas prices directly impacts fertilizer costs and global food prices.

Geopolitical actions, such as China's 2021 ban on phosphate fertilizer exports, disrupt agricultural supply chains. India, which imports 60% of its diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertilizers, experienced significant delays during critical cropping seasons, exposing its vulnerability to external shocks.

Renewable energy offers a glimmer of hope, but its deployment remains uneven. High-income external stocks.

Renewable energy offers a glimmer of hope, but its deployment remains uneven. High-income countries installed 83% of new renewable capacity in 2022, leaving low-income nations reliant on outdated, carbon-intensive systems. While solar-powered irrigation and biomass energy solutions could transform agriculture, high costs and inadequate infrastructure limit their reach. The transition risks bypassing those who need it most.

Demands on agriculture
Meanwhile, agriculture is being increasingly
burdened with competing demands. Beyond
feeding a growing population, it is expected to
support the global energy transition by producing
biofuels. This dual role often pits food security
against energy needs, as biofuel production
requires vast land and water resources. In a world

where nearly 12% of the population faces hunger, is prioritising energy over food morally defensible? The financial costs of addressing food and energy insecurity are substantial yet achievable. The World Food Security Outlook estimates that ensuring basic caloric needs for the world's most vulnerable populations will require \$90 billion annually until 2030. Tackling paralutativity among women and children.

\$90 billion annually until 2030. Tackling malnutrition among women and children demands an additional \$11 billion per year, while transforming global food systems could cost \$300 billion annually — just 0.5% of global GDP. However, for low-income nations, these costs are staggering, with food insecurity expenses in some cases surpassing 95% of GDP. The implications of inaction are dire. Food insecurity is projected to cost the global economy trillions in lost productivity and adverse health outcomes. Climate-induced energy disruptions threaten to destabilise entire regions, driving social unrest and mass migration. For example, Africa's mineral wealth, essential for renewable technologies, is often extracted without benefiting local economies, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment.

Despite record investments in renewables, fossil fuel expansions continue unabated. Every delay compounds the human, environmental, and economic costs, narrowing opportunities for a resilient future. Clean energy solutions must address structural barriers to inclusivity, ensuring that the most vulnerable communities are not left behind.

behind. Ultimately, the twin crises of food and energy insecurity challenge global priorities. The solutions are within reach, but they require a fundamental shift in perspective. Agriculture must be reimagined as both a source of sustanance and a cornerstone of sustanable development. Failure to act will create the risk of pushing millions into hunger and undermining global climate goals. As the clock ticks, the question remains: will the world rise to meet the moment?

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Parliament or battlefield?
Even though Parliament is one of the tailest democratic institutions of the country, with a mandate to debate policymaking and national progress and represent the will of the people, it has increasingly become synonymous with disruptions and pandemonium to the monium to the

dismay of conscientious dismay of conscientious citizens of the countries of the countries while the Opposition has increasingly been using disruptions as a tool to stall the government's agenda, the government has been stalling proceedings to scutted discussion on issues ratised by the Opposition. It is time parties across the political spectrum ensure political spectrum ensure

that Parliament does not become a battleground for political rivalry. There is a need to prioritise the nation's interests over short-term political gains.

Any hope of having peaceful parliamentary sessions lies shattered. In the tussle over

'Adani' and 'George Soros', matters of concern are being totally ignored, What is at stake is the very future of our parliamentary democracy. Brandishing pocket editions of the Constitution means nothing, Both sides across the aisle have to change from behaving like street flighters to becoming fighters to becoming

...

respectable and responsible representatives of the people who voted them to power. The ruling party has to be less arbitrary in the use of its majority and recognise the merit of "give and take". When it comes to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, there is a yawning gap in terms of attitude,

experience and political maturity. It would take a deep sense of statesmanship on both sides to recognise their obligation to act in the national interest.

T.C. Narayan,

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address. (60)

CM CO







## Why Bidenomics did not deliver in spite of its working class focus

Joe Biden's policies failed to recognize the changed nature of the US economy and so they were unable to achieve their aims



s US president, Joe Biden charted a new economic path for the Democrats by siding unabashedly with the working class and introducing a wide range of industrial policies to reinvigorate US manufacturing, reshore supply chains and promote the green transition. Most of these new policies made economic sense, and like many other progressives, I thought they made political sense as well. What, then, accounts for Vice-President Kamala Harris's disspointing electoral performance, especially with working-class voters?

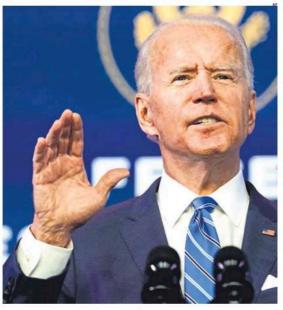
Donald Trump's appeal, like that of right-wing ethno-nationalists elsewhere, owes much to rising levels of economic insecurity, which many regard as the result of deregulation, increased corporate power, globalization, deindustrialization and automation. As the traditional champions of the underdog, centre-left parties could have benefited from these developments. But they had come to speak more for educated professional elites, and they were slow to alter course. Faced with the growing perception that they'd abandoned their working leasn rous, Bideris move toward economic populism seemed like the right strategy.

One interpretation of Trump's re-election is that economic populism was a mistake, implying that the Democratic Party should have moved move forcefully to the centre-ground instead. But Harris's apparently fruitlesse forts to woo middle-of-the-road Republican voters was not much of ascesses either. s US president, Joe Biden charted a

success either.

There are at least three other possibilities. The first is that Biden's strategy did work, but not enough to win the election. Inflation and the increased cost of living produced a generalized backlash against governments everywhere. A widely circulated chari in the Financial Times

widely circulated chart in the Financial Times shows that incumbents have fallen short of their previous share of the vote in every election in 2024. To Bidenomics' credit, Democrats did much better by comparison. The second possibility is that it takes time for new policies to show effect and result in new politi-cal coalitions. Bidenomics is still new, and it faced the daunting challenge of disloyding more than three decades of voter experience with Democratic centrism Perbans it was formed to reserve three decades of voter experience with Democratic centrism, Perhaps it was too much to expect Biden's pro-worker rhetoric and strong manufac-turing construction numbers to overcome the cleavages that have emerged (and deepened) since president Bill Clinton's administration. It takes more than a few years of well-designed policy to engineer a political realignment. The third, and least discussed, possibility is that Bidenomics was economic populism of the wrong kind. By focusing on manufacturing, old-style union power and worker organizations, and geo-



VIEWS

political competition with China, it paid too little attention to the changing structure of the US econ-omy and the nature of its new working class. In an economy where only 8% of workers are factory employed, a policy that promises to restore the middle class by bringing manufacturing back home is not only unrealistic; it also rings hollow, because it does not align with workers' aspirations and everyday expalign with workers' aspirations and everyday expalign.

home is nason.

The typical Use writer today is no longer rolling steel or assembling cars. Rather, s/he is a long-term care provider, food preparer or someone running an independent small business (perhaps via gig work). Addressing the problems of low pay and precardous working conditions in such services requires a different strategy than manufacturing incentives or import ratiffs. Class solidarity also needs to be built differently than through appeals to unions or bargaining power. Biden had the right idea, in this view, but falled to hit the right targets.

Our new economic structure requires a 2list-cern.

idea, in this view, but failed to hit the right targets. Our new conomic structure requires a 21st-century version of 'industrial policy' that focuses on creating good jobs in services. Such a strategy entails organizational and technological innovations to upgrade work in low-pay activities and improve the provision of inputs such as digital tooks, customized training, and credit. One can find local and national examples of such initiatives, but they remain small-scale and largely incidental to federal programmes.

local and national same.
they remain small-scale and largely incidental to
federal programmes.
New technologies that help workers rather than
displace them are critical to this effort. Green
industrial policies show that innovation can
indeed be redirected from carbon-intensive activi-

lar push for labour-friendly technology policies to promote innovation that enables workers with les than a college education to perform more complex tasks in care and other personal services. By devel-

than a college education to perform more complex tasks in care and other personal services. By developing new visions of economic specialization and mobilizing the needed resources, cross-sectoral coalitions, often led by public agencies, can fixed local job creation in regions that have been scarred by long-term unemployment.

It is worth noting that in one poll taken before the election, lispanic voters in Texas said that their biggest problem with Democratis is that it is "the party of welfare benefits for people who don't work." While social transfers to the port—those who either cannot work or face temporary unemployment—are an excessary and integral part of the contemporary welfare state, parties of the left cannot allow themselves to be defined exclusively in such terms. They need to be seen as advocates for those who want to contribute to their community through docent work, and as facilitators for those who face obstacles in doing so.

Reconnecting the Democratic Party with its roots must start with the recognition that today's working class has changed and has different needs. The provision of social insurance and countervailing power against business interests will always remain important elements of the progressive left. But these goals must be augmented with a revamped set of 'good jobs' policies that neither fetshike manufacturing nor view it through the lens of geopolitical competition with China.

MINT CURATOR

## The HPV vaccine saves lives: The US must not mess with it

Anti-vaxxers in charge of public health might endanger women



tech, health care and the pharmaceutical

ew research has again shown the enormous value of the HPV vac-cine, which protects against the virus responsible for more than 90% of cer-vical cancer cases. Studies had already shown that the vaccine dramatically redu-ces rates of HPV infections and cervical cancer. Now comes evidence of what has long been suspected: The vaccine also saves lives. This message needs reinforcing in the US, where vaccination rates consistents.

long ocen suspices. In the vaccuae also saves lives. This message needs reinforcing in the U.S. where vaccination rates continue to lag behind pre-pandemic levels — which were already behind health officials' targets for population-level coverage. Officials will now contend with a new administration that is stacking U.S public health agencies with leadership like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is well known for his secpticism of vaccines, including the HPV shot. In a letter published in JAMA, researchers narrowed in on cervical cancer elasths among women who were younger than 25 between 2016 and 2021—the first group with widespread uptake of the vaccine as adolescents following its approval in 2006. While cervical cancer deaths among younge women had been steadily dropping for years, thanks to screening, researchers found a sharper decline among this group, leading to 26 fewer deaths over that period. The number may sound small. But consider that the vaccine hasn't been around long enough for researchers to comprehensively assess its long-term benefits. Most women are diagnossed with cervical cancer when they are older—typically in their mid-30 sto mid-50s. That means we won't see the larger impact of vaccination until five to 10 years from now, says Ashish Deshmukh, a professor at the Medical University of South Carolina who led the study. Cervical cancer isn't the only disease linked to HPV, and women aren't the only

Cervical cancer isn't the only disea Cervical cancer is it the only onsease linkedto HPV, and women aren't the only ones affected. The virus is also implicated in oral, anal, vaginal, vulvar and penile can-cers. Imagine if vaccination against HPV (eventually allowed the USto cut the 4,000 annual deaths from cervical cancer to zero annual deaths from cervical cancer to zero. —or dramatically reduce or even eliminate the nearly 38,000 HPV-related cancers

diagnosed in the country each year. Both are achievable goals, but it means Both are achievable goals, but it means propping up vaccination rates. Tweens are first eligible for the shots at age 9, yet recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show the number of 13- to 17-year-olds who had completed the series of shots (two doese if minitated by age 14- or three doese if minitated at 15 or older) dipped to 61.49 in 2023 from 62.69, in 2022. Health experts weren't suprised that routine vaccination rates were



Data shows that the HPV vaccine is playing a useful role in women's health втоскного

affected by covid shutdowns, but getting HPV rates back to pre-pandemic levels— let alone to officials' goal of 80% of adoles-cents vaccinated by 2030—has been a soc. Efforts have been focused on addressing Efforts have been focused on addressing disparties in coverage, such a improving access and uptake among people living in rural areas or without insurance, helping paediatriclans make more effective pitches for vaccination, and clearing barriers to starting the short during early adolescence when protection can be achieved with two rather than three doses.

Yet, there's reason to worry all this work could be unresulted to the proposal of the possible to alere.

when protection can be achieved with two rather than three doses. Yet, there's reason to worry all this work could be unravelled by President-elect Donald Trump's picks to lead public health agencies. The HPV vaccine is among those aggressively targeted by Children's Health Defense, a non-profit known for its anti-vaccine rhetoric and misinformation. It was founded by Kennedy, Trump's nomi-nee to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. Kennedy has been involved in multiple lawsuits related to the HPV vaccine, including one filed in 2022. HPV vaccine, including one filed in 2022, claiming Merck's Gardasil has caused inju-

claiming Merck's Gardasil has caused inju-ries to teens. Numerous studies have shown the side effects are nildly spice shown the side effects are nildly spice shown the side effects are nildly spice to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has been embraced by anti-vaccine groups. Most of the former repre-sentative's problematic proposals while in Congress focused on the debunked link between MMR vaccination and autism. But he did criticise the HPV vaccine as lacking long-term safety data. In fact, at the time of its approval. Gardasil had been tested in thousands of women. They were followed for up to four years, long past the time when a safety issue would likely emerge — some-thing Weldon, a physician, should know. The new leadership combo could under-mine vaccine access and uptake (the num-ber of people vaccinated with a certain

ber of people vaccinated with a certain ber of people vaccinated with a certain dose in acertain time period. Beyond the reasonable worry that Kennedy might publicly question the benefits or safety of vaccines, the CDC also plays a significant role by providing recommendations on vas-schedules, which influences insurance coverage. The HPV vaccine prevents unnecessary suffering and deaths from HPV-related cancers. What a colossal shame it would be to go backward—at the cost of women's lives. \*\*RICOMBERG\*\*

MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

## Data brokers pose hidden dangers that must be tackled

SIDDHARTH PAI



n the US, a multibillion-dollar industry thrives on an invisible commodity; per-sonal data. This sector, dominated by data brokers, collects, processes and sells vast amounts of information on individuals, often

brokers, collects, processes and sells vast amounts of information on individuals, often without their knowledge. It is an opaque ecosystem with far-reaching implications for personal privacy, financial socurity and national interests. Despite its outsized influence, the industry remains largely unregulated, raising urgent questions about the need for oversight and consumer protection. Data brokers operate as intermediaries, aggregating information from sources like online browsing histories, credit applications, social modela interactions and public records. This data is packaged into detailed profiles of individuals with sensitive information such as credit scores, financial history, health conditions and behavioural patterns. These profiles are sold to advertisers, corporations, political campaigns and sometimes foreign entities. While these practices enable tailored advertising, marketing and

individually targeted services, they also pose dangers. Commodifying sensitive data— such as financial or health records—opens a Pandora's box of ethical, legal and security

such as financial or health records—opensa Pandora's box of ethical, legal and socurity concerns. There are many risks associated with data brokering. Armed with detailed personal information on us, criminals can craft sophisticated phishing scams, defraud individuals and even steal identities.

Beyond personal harm, there are broader implications. Unregulated data flows can exacerbate systemic inequalities. Errors in aggregated data, such as incorrect credit information, can unfairly deny individuals access to loans, housing or employment. These errors often go uncorrected as we have few accountability mechanisms for data brokers. Selling personal data to foreign entities can undermine national security. For example, foreign adversaries could buy detailed demographic and psychographic data to manipulate public opinion, identify vulnerabilities in government personnel, or sow discord through misinformation.

By analysing behavioural patterns, they could craft campaigns to widen societal divides, manipulate elections or erode trust in institutions—all without any need for lacking or direct espionage. Consider a scenario where a foreign actor legally purchases

data-sets with details on US military person-nel or government employees. This data could be used for blackmail. The US's lack of comprehensive federal

The USs lack of comprehensive federal data privacy laws contrasts sharply with frameworks like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation GDPR), which mandates transparency, consent and accountability, giving individuals significant control over their data. In the US, however, data privacy is addressed in a fragmented manner, with state-level manner, with state-level initiatives such as Califor nia's Consumer Privacy Act offering piecemeal solutions. The US needs a unified regulatory frame-work that addresses transunified regulatory frame-work that addresses trans-parency, consumer control and broker accountability.

and broker accountability.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has emerged
as a key player in addressing the darker side
of data brokerage, particularly in the financial domain. Established in the aftermath of
the 2008 financial crisis, it is tasked with

against credit reporting agencies that are closely tied to the data broker ecosystem. For instance, the CFPB has issued fines for mishandling consumer data and failing to address inaccuracies in credit reports. It has also initiated probes of how credit reporting agencies share data with third parties.

While all this marks progress, the CFPB's neach silmited by esting legismithout the credit proporting active the credit reporting Act (FCRA), which primarily governs the financial aspects of data handling. This leaves a regulatory gap for non-financial data brokers, which operate with even fewer constraints. The CFPB's head Robit

**Profiles being** hawked without tight oversight puts not just individuals but entire countries at grave risk

even fewer constraints. The CFPB's head Rohit Chopra has just announced new steps to expand the FCRA and let his agency FCRA and let his agency police data brokers (shortural/rowZ/). While the CFPB's focus is on financial data, it has the potential to spearhead broader regulatory efforts, its work inholding credit reporting agencies accountable could serve as model for overseeing other data brokers. But it would require legislative

backing to expand the CFPB's mandate beyond its current financial scope. Collabo-ration between the CFPB and other agen-cies, such as the Federal Trade Commission cies, such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), could create a more comprehensive oversight framework. The FTC, which has jurisdiction over unfair business practices, could complement the CFPB's efforts by keeping the data broker industry in check. However, where such regulation might go after Donald Trumptakes office is unknown. It appears the proposed Department of Government Efficiency may have the CFPB in its cross-hairs (shortur Lat 7U/Gol). Whatever course the regulation of data.

cross-hairs (shorturLat/Tl/Gol).

Whatever course the regulation of data brokers may take in the US, public awareness is critical. Consumers must be informed about the data broker risks and empowered to demand greater control over their personal information. Advocacy groups, journalists and tech companies can play a pivotal role in pushing for transparency and accountability. Without regulation, the risks well only multiply appropriate properties. accountability. Without regulation, the risks will only multiply, spanning personal harm, financial exploitation and threats to national security. As we grapple with challenges of the digital age, reining in the data broker industry should be a priority. After all, in the hands of the unscrupulous, your data isn't just a commodity—it can be a weapon.



#### FROM THE ARCHIVES



## A dialogue with our fragile past: the importance of historical memory

The world needs to look differently at its historical memory and the cultural heritage which embodies it. The large fire that broke out in Paris and which consumed a part of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in 2019, is a grim reminder that centuries of heritage can be destroyed in minutes

On December 7, the Notre Dame de Paris or the Cathedral of Notre Dame was re-opened after a massive fire destroyed its roof and spire five years ago in 2019. In this article, dated April 20, 2019, Ramin Jahanbegloo explains the importance of historical memory and why it is imperative to preserve it, however fragile.

It is only after our heritage is destroyed in natural disasters and

destroyed, in natural disasters and conflicts, that we realise how fragile historical memory is – even for a globalised period of history like ours. The large fire that broke out in Paris on Monday and which consumed a part of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, is a grim reminder that centuries of heritage can be me camediator of the riange can be destroyed in minutes. Of course the French people can rebuild the physical structure and in this enterprise they will be certainly supported by the vast wealth of Europe, America and others, made possible by centuries of industrialisation and capital accumulation. But rebuilding the Notre-Daim de Paris does not mean that we can necessarily renew its original spirit – of blocks of sandstones which marrate their own geological and social history. Undoubtedly, for over 800 years, the cathedral has been the driving force behind the eternal return of Paris as the 'Heart of the World'.

Christian faith, it counts many treasures, such as the crown of thoms, which are believed to have been placed on Jesus Christ's head, Joan of Are was beatified in the cathedral in 1909, after her execution for heresy in H3SI.

And, for more than three centuries, Notre-Dame has stood as a symbol of political change in France. During the French Revolution, its treasures were plundered.

However, as seen in the famous

plundered.

However, as seen in the famous painting of Jacques-Louis David,
Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor of France at Notre-Dame in 1804. Other famous political ceremonies of the 20th and 21st centuries in France, such as the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation in 1944, the farewell to Charles de Gaulle in 1970, and a requiem mass in tribute to François Mitterrand in 1996, took place in the Notre-Dame Cathedral.

Last but not least, for nearly nine Last but not least, for nearly nine centuries, Notre-Dame has been at the centre of French and world literature. We all remember Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1831) with the cathedral as its centre plot. Hugo's multiple references to the architecture of the Cathedral are breathtaking and struckions.

stupelying.

Strangely, it is as if Hugo was present at
the fire, when he described flames in the
cathedral (when Quasimodo uses fire and
stones to attack Truands in order to save
Esmerelda): "All eyes were raised to the

top of the church. They beheld there an extraordinary sight. On the crest of the highest gallery, higher than the central rose window, there was a great flame rising between the two towers with whirlwinds of sparks, a vast, disordered, and furious flame, a tongue of which was borne into the smoke by the wind, from time to time.

time to time."

Even for those of us who are not religious and yet believe in the cathedral as a spiritual home and a monument in glory of the human creativity, the horific fire destroying this Gothic edifice has been a moment of tragedy and despair. Time might have been the devourer of Notre-Dame as Hugo wrote in his novel, but humanity has long been the enemy of

#### Spirit of freedom

Spirit of freedom
As a matter of fact, what was important
for Hugo, as for many other writers and
intellectuals of his time, was the spirit of
freedom represented by Notre-Dame.
As he put it clearly, 'There exists in
this era, for thoughts written in stone, a
privilege absolutely comparable to our
current freedom of the press. It is the
freedom of architecture.' Hugo is right.
To feel the spirit of Notre-Dame, as that of
Paris, one needs the freedom of a flaneur.
One needs to allow one's gaze to be
further absorbed by the play of light upon
a meaningful stone that remained alive
after a catastrophe.
Without the stones of Notre-Dame,

these aesthetic compasses, we would never be able to take our responsibilities in the world. If we want to be at home in this century, even at a price of living in a topsy-turry world, we must try to take part in a dialogue with our fragile past. We need to educate our senses and to look differently at our historical memory and the cultural heritage which embodies it.

For centuries, humanity has witnes the destruction of its historical memory,

For centuries, numarity has witnessed the destruction of its historical memory, and each time a new door to our common fate is closed forever. We all believe that this should not happen anymore. But it does happen, and we cannot reconcile ourselves with it. None of us can.

However, within this horizon of despair, which manifests itself in the fragility of human history, there is a moral horizon that expresses a love of humanity in spite of its brokenness. Heritage, therefore, expresses a joy of witnessing the past despite the sadness of historical destruction. It is this joy of witnessing the past due becomes an awareness of our landscape of memory. This awareness is the strongest evidence of the victory of peaceful coexistence between the past and the present. Those who fail to see it, forget to make a prayer that one day the organ pipes of Notre-Dame of Paris will once again reverberate through the sanctuary.

Ramin lahamberloo is Director.





#### THE DAILY QUIZ

## A quiz on computer programmes on the birth anniversary of Ada Lovelace, the first computer programmer

#### Vighnesh. P. Venkitesh

QUESTION 1 What is Lovelac called?

What is Lo calculate?

Which unfinished device was Lovelace's algorithm written for?

program, who is the first person to programme an electric computer?

CM CO

QUESTION 5 What is the first computer virus?



Visual question: How is this comedy troupe related to computer programmes? GETTY IMAGES

Rojava

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This military leader of Iran's elite Quds Force played a major role in training fighters in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. **Ans:** 

Qassem Solaimani
2. The name the Syrian Kurds call the de facto autonomous region in northeastern Syria. Ans:

Name the rebel force that was trained by the U.S. and is composed of Syrian Arab Army defectors. Ans: Syrian Free Army or Revolutionary Commando

eam of Islam it is an offshoot of Ans: The Alawites: Shias

5. This intellectual is considered a major influence in the development of the Ba'athist movement. **Ans:** 

Michel Aflaq Visual: Name this individual. Ans: Abu Muh al-Jolani

Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Basavaraj Meti| Tito Shiladitya| Bharath Viswanathan| Jose Joji



#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your **English**

## K. Subrahmanian S. Upendran

Why do the Australians call the English

Because the English drank a lot of

lime juice."
"Lime Juice! Oh stop joking. I want a

serious answer."
"I am giving you a serious answer. You see, during the late 18th century, the British navy made its sailors drink a lot of lime juice."

"But why?"

"As protection against scurvy. at's that?"

"What's that?"
"It's a disease which is due to lack of vitamin C. You see during the early days of sea travel, sailors dish't get a balanced diet. Since it wasn't possible to store things like fruit and vegetables on ships, many sailors had vitamin C deficiency."
"So in order to increase the vitamin C

"So in order to increase the vitamin C intake, the British navy asked its sailors to drink lime juice. Is that it?" "That's right. And since all English sailors drank the stuff, the Australians contemptuously referred to them as "lime-juicers". Later, it was reduced to "limev."

"lime-juicers". Later, it was reduced to 'limey'. "So the word 'limey' originally referred to an English sailor?" "Yes, but later on it began to be applied to all Englishmen." "I see. So the people of a country are called something because of something that they drank?" "Happens all the time. Just look around you. People are often called something because of what they eat or drink. The Germans, for example, are contemptuously called 'Krauts'. The 'au' in the word is pronounced like the 'ou' in

contemprotosisy caueo 'Krauts'. The 'au' in the word is pronounced like the 'ou' in words like 'out' and 'bout'."
"Kraut! I think I've got that. But what does it mean?"
"It's a German word meaning

'cabbage'.'
"A German is referred to as a 'cabbage'!

Because they eat a lot of 'sauer kraut', that is 'sour cabbage'. The Germans love their sour cabbage. And as for the French..."

French..."

"...ah, yes! The French. They are supposed to love good food. I'm sure they're called something that ... that tastes delicious."

"Do you think 'frogs' taste delicious?"

"The French are called frogs! That must make them hopping mad. But why, froes?"

frogs?"
"Because the french have a great reputation for eating frogs. Similarly, the Latin American has a reputation for eating beans, so he's often called a 'beane acter' or 'beaner'. The Italian is called a 'macaroni', the Dutch 'butter box'.."
"... Ston! Ston!"

'. . . Stop! Stop!" 'You don't like any of these culinary

insults?"
"I don't. Can we change the topic?" "Certainly. But don't you want to know hat Indian women are sometimes called in America?

"Is it another culinary insult?"
"No, it isn't."

'Then tell me."

"The Indian woman is sometimes referred to as a 'dot head'."

"Dothead! Why? Because some of our women wear a bindhi?"

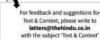
Published in The Hindu on May 10, 1994.

#### Word of the day Fulgent:

Synonyms: blazing, blinding,

Usage: The fulgent starlight cast hard shadows on the landscape.

International Phonetic Alphabet: /fxidgent/, /fuidgent/



## HT **OPINION**



## On the road to Damascus

Assad's fall and the rise of Islamists in Syria is a momentous event for West Asia

he Arab Spring found its moment in Syria a decade and half after it had bloomed (and died) on Sunday when the Baathist regime fell and President Bashar at Assad fled Damascus with his family to Moscow, where they were granted asylum. And whether it is really a spring is to be tested —the rebels who control Damascus now are aligned to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an Islamist outfit of radicals. They have been fighting the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war that ravaged the West Asian country from 2011 onwards.

country from 2011 onwards.

The geopolitical implications of this regime change are significant. One, it marks the end of a five-decade authoritarian rule by the Assad family. Two, it signifies a shift in power balance in the region. The Assad regime was aligned to Russia and Iran: Its fall suggests that Moscow and Tehran have lost the game this time to the US and its allies; Turkey, which backed the rebels, seems to be in the driving seat. Three, the Assad administration was the last of the secular regimes in the region. HTS has its roots in al Oaeda although it the region. HTS has its roots in al Qaeda although it parted ways with the latter some time ago. Unlike al Qaeda, HTS has claimed it is not interested in any Qaeda, HTS has claimed it is not interested in any global jithad and said that it is committed to the protection of religious and ethnic minorities and gender rights. These claims will be tested when HTS settles down in office. Pour, HTS, a predominantly Sunni outfit, is committed to Palestine though opposed to Tehran. Its rise may have a ripple effect in the neighbourhood, including Saudi Arabia and the various emirates, which have been slowly and cautiously liberalising their societies.

The transition from one regime to another is a

The transition from one regime to another is a complex and risky process as evident from the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan. The Assad regime, very much like Saddam Hussain in Iraq, held together a country that was born in the ruins of the Ottoman Empire after the first World War. The new regime will need to negotiate the different fault lines and arrive at a federal arrangement to avoid the outbreak of sectarian violence. An unstable Syria will

outoreas of sectarian violence. An instance syria will compound the tensions in a region already consumed by the Gaza war and other conflicts. For India, the Assad regime was a friend: Damascus was consistent in its support of the Indian stance on Kashmir in international fora. Delhi has rightly been cautious in responding to the changes in Damascus. Sanctions had crippled bilateral trade. Hopefully, the new regime will stabilise Syria and facilitate the rebuilding of the nation. Delhi needs to ride out this tricky phase carefully.

## Speech that doesn't befit a judge's office

7hen they're sworn in, high court judges take an oath to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India. Their work, and words are supposed to be directed not just by the letter of India's founding document but also its spirit—of constitutional monility, fairness and justice for all, Which is why the speech delivered by a sitting Allahabad high court judge, delivered at a Vishwa Hindu Parishad event, is so vexing, Delivering a lecture on the constitutional necessity of Uniform Civil Code at an event organised by the legal cell of the VHP, justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav said, "I have no hesitation in saying that this is Hindustan; this country would function as per the wishes of the bahusankhwa [majority] living in Hindustan. This is the law." He made a litany of controversial statements, used a slur often are supposed to be directed not just by the letter of a litarry of controversial statements, used a slur often employed by social media trolls to describe orthodox Muslims, and said while children of one community are taught kindness, tolerance and non-violence, in another community, children cannot be expected to be tolerant given that they witness animal slaughter. The

insinuation was obvious, and unfortunate. This cannot stand. The judiciary has helped this Republic defy the odds and thrive. Its majesty is repulse dery the couls and tarter, to majesty is undermined by sectarianism and hate speech. In addition to questions of propriety that arise when a sitting judge of a constitutional court attends an event organised by a Right-wing group, justice Yadav should introspect on whether he is being true to his oath of office when he appears to single out a single community for censure. The words uttered are unbecoming of someone who is supposed to deliver justice impartially and be a protector of all communities from excesses. The Supreme Court should take note

# Arab Spring in Syria marks a power shift

The collapse of the Assad regime has far-reaching consequences. There is genuine fear that Syria could become a safe haven for extremist groups

for extremist groups

n a stunning turn of events, the Syrian government under President Bashna al-Assa d collapsed without any resistance as a stunning turn of the standard standard

the regime, which claimed to have controlled 70% of the territory of Spria, succuritied to such a sudden collapse, many factors seem to have contributed to it. Years of conflict the Syrian arrange forces fragmented and significantly weakened, with the Syrian arrange of Syrian - Russia and transport of Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange and Hezboliah units failed to elicit any favourable response when talks among foreign ministers of Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regime to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regiment to solicit military support from Iran, Irangand the Irange Syrian regiment to solicit military support from Iran Irangand the Irange Syrian regiment to solicit military support from Iran Irangand the Irange Syrian regiment to solicit military support from Iran Irangand the Irange Syrian regiment to solicit military support from Irangand Iranga

talks among foreign minis-ters of Syin, Fran and Iraq in Bagh-dad on December 6, amidst the rap-dity evolving situation in Syria, con-cluded that it might be too late to address many of the development on the ground or to swing the bal-ance in favour of the Syrian reported forces. This might have prompted the Byrian Prime Minister Monther med Ghaaf Jalali to announce his government's readiness to cooperate

The Bidera administration is closely monitoring the situation without plans for direct intervention while President-efect Donald Trump advocated for a hands-off approach state, Syra is a mess. Let it play out.

The property of the propert

stria. Israel is particularly con-cerned about the situation along the Syrian-Israeli bor der. It is also worried abou the possible landing o lethal chemical and strate

the bostness and the control of the



Hayat Tahrir al-Sham taking control of Syria is ca

have issued joint statements warning of the risks of further instability and sought groster international humanitation and for the Syrian people. Turney officially derived any involvement but is believed to have given taxis approval for the robel offensive. The collapse of Assad's regime represents a seismic shift in West Asia's goopolitics with far-reaching consequences. It has significantly affected Russia and Iran's influence in the region, severely weakening.

consequences. It has significantly defected Russia and Iran's influence in the region, severely weakening and disrupting Iran's 'Axis of Resistance'. On the other band, Turkey's influence in Syria and the region is likely to increase substantially as it has been amain backer of opposition groups, particularly Notional Army. The potential control of Syria by Mational Army.

The potential control of Syria by HTS raises concerns about increused radicalisation and its implications as it may seek to establish governance based on strict Sharria laws. The characteristic of the string with the new Syrian eggins and other countries could complicate dealing with the new Syrian regions. As the situation continues to evolve, the international community faces the challenge of addressing the

(Syria is cause for concern see power vacuum left by Assa's departure while mitigating the risks of further instability and radicalisation. India has maintained cautious nearling in the Syrian conflict, opposing foreign intervention and opposing foreign intervention and opposing foreign intervention and opposing foreign intervention and expectively contributed to Syria's development, focusing on infrastructure, education, and capacity building, India has also provided humanitarian aid to Syria, including prosthetics, anticancer drugs, and earthquake relief. There are many opportunities for Indian investments in Syria, particularly in the pharmaceuteis, agriculture, and technology sectors. Syria's phosphate rock reserves, estimated at over 2 billion tonnes, contain high-grade are with a phosphorus contain.

## Why children in schools take to physical violence

succumbed to his injuries on the way to such soprail. A child was bludgeconed by his schoodmate following a minor fight. Two students killed several classemates and a teacher to mancher part of the world.

Children involved in these incidents may be goographically far apart, yet the desire for a contract of the contr



sion. As parents and educators, we must remember that challenging behaviour does not happen overnight. Children camot identify or communicate disruption in the manner that adults do. Their anger often rises from fear, defiance from manipulation, and violence from anxiety, a result of a damaged connection between the adult world and that of the child and herhis peers.

Education has become extremely aspirational. This has resulted in ghetroisation in schools as classrooms become challenging that the state of the child and herhis peers.

Education has become extremely aspirational. This has resulted in ghetroisation in schools as classrooms become challenging that and the state of the children swith the baggage of single/divorced parents, domestic wholence, or some other familial factor. A plethora of behavioural issues result from such social conservations and the same stream of the same stream

I MD TOUHID HOSSAIN | BANGLADESH FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISER



overcome this impasse ... mutual communication and meeting each other is very important to overcome any such stalemate

On the chill in India-Bangla

## Can ICJ deliver climate justice to Global South?

sional Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague has now become the buttleground for the developing and the developed worlds to face off on the climate issue. The ICJ is hearing on this over December 2-83, and the focus would be on determining the obligation of developed-world States with respect to the climate erisis and the legal consequences of these obligations.

The origin of this case before the ICI ses with a youth group from Vanuant, called the Padic Islands Students Fighing Climate Change. This organisation had taken up the matter with the government of Vanuatu, which, in turn, discussed it with a core group of countries and made a reference to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2021; 132 countries in the UNCA co-sponsored the resolution, and the matter was referred to the ICJ in April 2023. The resolution relied

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultum Rights, the Interna-tional Covenant on Chil and Political Rights, the UK Convention on the Law of the Sea, the UK Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Gourse, the Paris Agreement. This climate crisis case is the biggest such before the ICL where there are 91 written statements and 82 written comments on the statements and "Seasonatt Howesternal Comments on the statements of "Seasonatt Howesternal comments on the statements and "Seasonatt Howesternal comments on the statements and "Seasonatt Howesternal comments and statements and "Seasonatt Howesternal comments and "Seasonatt Howesternal and 62 written comments on the statements 97 States and II international organisations includ-ing the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Constricts. World Health Organisation and the European Union) are participating in the pro-ceedings. It has not been eagle for States like Vin-uator to pursue this matter given the limited resources and logistics at their disposal. The resources and logistics at their disposal. The right of the other small biand States involved in the process is much the same as Varmatis's and quite a few of them are participating with pro-form assistance.

quiès a few of them are participating with pro-bono assistance.

The need for the transfer of resources from the developed rations to the developing ones has been the bone of contention in several COP-meetings in the part, COPP-but so founction as the "finance COP", but the deliberations only allowed for a transfer of \$500 billion a year by 2036. This is the total quantum of funds that can be expected from the developed nations, the multilateral development banks, the private sec-tor, and also transfers between developing nations themselves, all put together. Further, this is expected to take care of the miligation and

adaptation needs of the developing world. What the small island States are crying for is the immediate transfer of resources to compensate for loss and damage already experienced. They certainly can't wait it ill 2005, given the risks of inundation they lice. To take care of flist, the Loss and Damage Fund was set up during COP27 in 2022 and operationsilised during COP28 in 2023. The finer details of this final daw yet to be worked out. The biggest challenge, however, is that there is hardly any corpus to this fund, and, as of date, less than \$700 million has been committed. The biggest historical polytoce, i.e., the United States has committed only \$125 million — a more 22% of the total.

Whether file Cli 28 takes has provide contains to be seen, his verdict won't be binding, and, hence, immediate relief is unlikely. The ICI has drawn up a schedule for depositions by each of the 97 countries and Ill International organisations. It would be interesting to see that the developed world will have used be willing to accept given past emissions. Google by the broad principles of the provide of the provid

the elimate hand. The real mention is to clear a wedge among the developing nations. The ICI has a difficult job in hand, where it must balance climate equity and justice with geopolitis. One can't also be oblivious to the fast that one IV in instrution (ICI) will be ruining on the founding principles of another UV institution (UNFOCC. The parties natitude in flowur of the developed nations during COF29 inspires very little hone.

angupta is senior visiting fillow, lerier, an mer member (committee and commissival the Central Electricity Authority The views expressed are persons

## A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE IN SYRIA

In a world which has lost appetitie for dethroning dictators and despots, in a matter of a few days, a fifty-year-old powerful regime has been brought down in Damascus. It is surprising that a historically marginal-ised community – Alawites – could repress a country for so long. ginal-ised community for so long could repress a country for so long. Thus, it is clear that in power games played by vested global interests, govern-ments, especially dictators, got to reign as long as they enjoy the patron-age of some or other external sweer.

The fall of Bashar al-Assad, who The fall of Bashar al-Assad, who ruled for 24 years, is definitely an epoch-al moment in Syrian history and a watershed event in global poli-tics, more so in West Asia. However, the irroy of it all is that while a des-potic regime met with its ultimate end, power seems scarily poised to pass on to a Abu Mohammed al-lolani-led Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), previously the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, al-Nusra Front, Transfer of power signals a potential rout of Damascenes thought to be close to the Assaf regime the Assad regime.

Initially hailed as a beacon of hope

Initially hailed as a beacon of hope for Syrians longing for liberty and re-forms, following his accension after the death of his dictator-fathers' (Hafar al-Assad, a London-returned doctor, was soon sowyed by the fure of limitless power. His presidency turned to authorizatianism, cropsiven, and brutal suppression of dissent, which only exacethated sectariant temions. With help of external powers, he withstood the waves of unrest that swept dictator regimes in 2011 during the Arab Spring.

Assad, who secured asylum in Russia, literally waged a war on his own people. As the hapfess sections, driven to the wall, recolted, global powers started dabbiling in Syrian affairs. Bashar was propped up by Russia, Iran and militias from Iraq, while the West and Turkey backed the rebels. It is distressing to note that

while the West and Turkey backed the rebels. It is distressing to note that over 6,00,000 people perished in the battles and millions were displaced. Syria under Bashar touched the nadir, and wallowed in powerty and dis-cases amidst widespread destruc-tion. Livelihoods were destroyed and thousands fled to other coun-tries. Gradually, unable to bear any popen his introvities, vast vestales of longer his atrocities, vast swathes of repressed populations either joined the ranks of various rebel groups or rendered aid to them.

What would be implications for

geopolitics in the region? A western-backed regime could be unsettling for Russia which staunchly stood by Assad and actively rendered air pow-re. Irard which shares a short border with Syris hitherto maintained neu-trality. Assad did not bother it much. But fundamentalists in power could be worrisome for Tel Aviv. Turkey, which helped the rebels, may try to intervene and crush the Kurds with the help of new regime. Iran loses its leverage in West Asia; Houthis and Herbolthia are already weakening. Unless a coalition government lakes hold and brings in reforms with in-clusivity and mass prosperity as all in-clusivity and mass prosperity for evaluation of the longer disease and death plague the war-weary people. The world com-munity should come forward to ex-

tend liberal aid for the reconstruction of Syria, a nation rawaged for over five decades. It is good that the US vowed to stay back and wert the rise of Islamic State or al-Queda.

Authoritarianism is surging, and democratic foundations continue to be shaken, especially in small and poor nations. A few names come to mind: Mall, Myanmar, Chale, Galton, North Korea etc. However, the regimes there would not survive without at least one external power's support. Only a coup or a revolution can bring in the alternative in those and the property of the surgice of the surgice. without at least one external power's support. Only a coup or a revolution can bring in the alternative in those countries. Autocratic regimes know it is either prison or execution if they lose power. Hence, repression is an existential requirement for them. It is sad the world is yet to collectively debate how to deal with the dictators.

seconds. One in every five American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape. From

or completed rape, Fron 2009-13, US Child Protec

tive Services agencies found strong evi-dence indicating that 63,000 children per year were victims of sexual abuse. These developments re-elect a troubling pattern. There is evidence from Donald Trump's first term that there could be further crostion of women's rights in his second presidency. Dur-ing his previous term there were significant attempts to weaken healthcare access, with his foreign policy rein-

weaken healthcare access, with his foreign policy rein-stating the "global gag rule" restricting access to women's

reproductive healthcare worldwide via funding con-

## **LETTERS**

#### Human rights under grave threat

SINCE 1948, December 10 has been observed as World Fluman Rights Day by the United Nations. The primary objective of this day is to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights in all countries. This year's theme is "Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now." Currently, the world is witnessing significant geopolitical upbeavals. Despite having experienced the devastation and horrors of two world wars, hu-manity continues to choose war over peace, prosperity, and security. Unfortunately, the brunt of such decisions is borne by ordinary citizens who are compelled to forfeit their fundamental rights.

\*\*Deficient Mori, Kutch, Gujarat\*\*

#### Team India at a loss to recover its wits

I refers to "India crash to 10-wkt defeat in Adelaide."

If ne the last four completed linnings in the last two test matches Team India could only score more than 180 once and other scores read 150, 180 and 175, and we could play more than 50 overs only once in the last 4 innings, which sums up our performance, Poor form of Rohl Sharma and Kohli is pulling the whole team down and the way our batsmen per-formed in Adelaide, it made victory at Perth leok like a thing of the past. With Shamis induction into the team still not decided, our bowling arsenal looks very thin.

GRAND victory in first cricket test match by Indian Austrian team is completely shadowed with the great win by Austrian team in the second test match which concluded in just three days. Indian batters have proved several times that they can exhibit excellent show with tons of runs and also display dismal performance with single digit scores. Calling a batsman or bowler in superfluous form is quite absurd as they can fly to sky and flatten on floor. Test matches are being played like one day and T20 matches. Let us see how the remaining three matches will offer to its seedlesses.

#### CM Revanth's creditable performance

A PROPOS of Trevanth carves out a niche as CM of Telangana (Dec. 7). Greenhorn Revanth Reddy, though inexperienced, has completed a year in office as the CM of Telangana creditably. Though poll promises made to the people of Telangana seem a mountain to climb, some of them have been honored with de-termination, displaying maturity and focus, which his bosses in Delhi need to emulate. While Rahul Gan-dhi as Leader of the Opposition and others of the Congress and INDI Alliance have been paralysing Par-liament irresponsibly, against the Centre's adamancy vis-à-vis Adani, Revanth has stood out as an example of poise and focus, prioritising Telangana's welfare.

Dr. George Jacob, Kochi

#### Allies should jolt Rahul back to reality

Re: "INDIA bloc, not constitution is facing 'Khatra' (Doc. 9). Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's frequent outery that the Constitution is under siege by waving a small handbook everytime is nothing but a velical attempt to manipulate political narratives for political gains. Congress which ruled India for six decades used its absolute majority to amend the Constitution to suit its own agenda. Besides, Congress party introduced Articles 370 and 35A as temporary provisions despite Ambedkaris objections to special privi-leges based on religion or allowing states to draft their own constitution or have separate flags. In view of this, the oppositions' outery now appears selective. It is high time, INDIA bloc would do well to advise Rahul Gandhi to introspect and stop crying wolf by saying the Constitution is in danger.

\*\*KR Srinivasan\*\*, Secunderabad\*\*

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

THE knives are out in Opposition INDIA bloc, especially after the drubbing suffered by the Congress-led Maha Vikos Aghadi at the hands of the BP-helmed Mahayuti in Maharashtra. The grand old party's poor show has dented its predominant position in INDIA, prompting TMC and West Rengal CM Manuta Banerjee to throw her hat into the ring. It's apparent that Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, is losing ground as the face of INDIA. The Congress has no option but to pay heed to its part-ners. In case of no course correction, allance might implode sooner or later, leaving the field open for the IPP and PM Modi.

N Sadhaniya Reddy, Bengaluru.

thehansreader@gmail.com

# Women rights being eroded

ROM Iraq to Afghani-stan to the US, basic freedoms for women are being eroded as govern-ments start rolling back ex-isting bases.

Just a few months ago a ban on Afghan women speaking in public was the latest measure introduced by the Taliban, who took back control of the country in 2021. From August the ban included singing, read-ing aloud, reciting poetry and even laughing outside their homes. eir homes. The Taliban's ministry for

The Tallban's ministry for the propagation of virtue and the prevention of vice, which implements one of the most radical interpreta-tions of Islamic law, enforces these rules. They are part of a broader set of "vice and virtue" laws that severely restrict women's rights and

virtue' laws that severely-restrict women's rights and freedoms. Women are even banned from reading the Quran out loud to other women in public. In the past three years in Afghanistan, the Taliban has taken away many basic rights from women who live there, so that they's very lit-tle that they are allowed to do.

From 2021, the Taliban started introducing restric-tions on girls receiving edu-cation, starting with a ban on coeducation and then a ban on girls attending secondary schools. This was fo ondary schools. This was too lowed by closing blind girls' schools in 2023, and mak-ing it mandatory for girls in grades four to six (ages nine to 12) to cover their faces on the way to school. Women can no longer attend universities or receive a degree certificate nationally, or follow midwifery or nursing training in the Kandahar region. Women are no longer allowed to be flight attendants, or to take a job outside the home. Women-run bakeries in the capital Kabul have now been banned. Women are mostly now unable to earn any money, or leave their homes. In April 2024, the Taliban in Helmand province told media outlet site oven refrain from airing women's voices. Afghanistan is ranked last on the Women, Peace and Security Index and officials at the UN and elsewhere have called it "gender partheid". Afghan women are putting their lives on the line — facing surveillance, harassment, assault, arbitary detention, torture and exile — to protest against the Taliban.

exile — to protest against the Taliban.

Taliban.

Many diplomats discuss how important it is to "engage" with the Taliban, yet this has not stopped the assault on women's rights. When diplomats "engage", they tend to focus on counter-terrorism, counternarcorics, business deals, the counter-terrorism, counternarcorics, business deals, ternarcotics, business deals, or hostage returns. Despite everything that has hap-pened to Afghan wom-en over a short period, critics suggest this rarely makes it onto diplomats' priority list.

#### Iraq's age of consent

Meanwhile, in Iraq, on August 4 2024, an amend-ment to Iraq's 1959 personal status law which would pos-



The UN agency, UN Women, says it could take another 286 years to close the global gender gaps in legal protections. No country has yet achieved gender equality, based on the gender pay gap, legal equality and social inequality levels

years old from 18 (or 15 with permission from a judge and parents) was proposed by member of parliament Rada al-Maliki and supported by conserva-tive Shia factions in the government.

The law would have the potential of having matters of family law—such as marriage — adjudicated by religious authorities. This change could not only legalise child marriage but also change could not only legal-ise child marriage but also strip women of rights relat-ed to divorce, child custody

ed to divorce, child custody and inheritance. Iraq already has a high rate of underage marriage, with 7% of girls married by 15 years old, and 28% mar-ried before the legal age of 18.

Unregistered marriages, not legally recorded in court but conducted through religious or tribal authori-les, prevent girls from accessing civil rights, and leave women and girls vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and neglect, with limited options for seeking justice. Many women's groups have already mobilised against the law But the amendment has passed its second reading in parliament. If introduced, it could pave the way for further modifications that deepen sectarian divides and move the country further away the country further away from a unified legal system. It would also be an espe-cially troubling step backward in protecting children's rights and gender equality.

Abortion rights in the US
Meanwhile, in the US,
Meanwhile, in the US,
women's access to abortion has been eroded significantly in the past few
years. In late 2021, the US
was officially labelled a
backsliding democracy by
an international thinktank.
Six months later, the landmark US Supreme Court
ruling of Roe w Wade, which
had safeguarded the constitutional right to abortion
for nearly 50 years, was
overturned. This led to a
cascade of restrictive laws,
with more than a quarter of
US states enacting outright
bans or severe restrictions Abortion rights in the US US states enacting outright bans or severe restrictions

Republican US congress woman Marjorie Taylor Greene suggested, in May 2022, that women should stay celibate if they did not want to get pregnant. If only all women had that choice. In fact, in the US a sexual assault occurs every 68

di-tions.

Fragility of women's rights. If the world can tolerate the Taliban's abuses, Iraq's testrictive laws and the US restrictions on abortion access, it reveals the fragility of women's and girls' rights globally, and how easy it is to take them away.

The UN agency, UN Women, says it could take another 286 years to close the global gender gaps in legal protections. No country has yet achieved gender equality, based on the gender quality levels. Women and girls continue to face discrimination in all correres of the world, and it.

di-tions.

corners of the world, and it seems to be getting worse. But despite everything

## A TALE OF OBLIGATIONS DILUTED

#### Developed world performed 'great escape' from finance obligations at COP29

NEW DELHE "At COP 29, we lost an opportunity -without a meaningful agreement on climate finance;
both in terms of quantity
and quality, large parts of
the world that would have
had the chance to rein-went
growth to make it low-carbon intensive, will not be
able to do so. What's worse,
this comes at a time when
these countries are even
more vulnerable due to climate change impacts," said
Sunita Narain, director general, Centre for Science and
Environment (CSE), speaking at an online debriefing
on the Baku conference's
results. CSE organised the
debriefing = titled "Did the
finance COP deliver?" - today, the Conference of NEW DELHI: "At COP 29,

The 29th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Framework Convention on Climate Change ended No-vember 24 in Baku, Azer-baijan. The headline issue of the conference was the New Collective Quanti-fied Goal (NCQG) on climate finance. The NCQG is the successor to the US 5100 billion per year com-mitment made by developed countries in 2009 to support climate action in developing countries by

2020. Says Avantika Gos-wami, programme manager, Climate Change, CSE. "An ambitious NCQG out-come at COP 29 would have been critical for supporting the increasing climate needs of the Global South. So did the finance COP deliver? The answer has to be a most em-phatic "no?"

2020. Says Avantika Gos-

answer has to be a most emphatic 'no."
What the COP29 presidency did was to gavel a climate finance deal of US 5300 billion per year for devel-oping countries - the money is expected come from developed Parties and other sources by 2035. The deal abo "Calls on all actors" to contribute towards an overall climate finance goal of US \$1.3 trillion per year to developing countries. year to developing countries by 2035, which would also by 2035, which would also include voluntary contri-butions from develop-ing countries. The Global North has abandoned the Global South with this meagre offer. It has no right to demand mitigation ambition from our part of the world with so little finance on the table. To begin with, the deal dilutes the legal obligation of developed countries to provide the entirety of the finance under the new goal, as per Articke



To begin with, the deal dilutes the legal obligation of developed countries to provide the entirety of the finance under the new goal, as per Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement. The ambiguities of the goal make it clear that there will be little accountability and traceability of funds

9.1 of the Paris Agreement. The ambiguities of the goal make it clear that there will be little accountability and trace-ability of funds. "This was the last remaining window for the Global North to step up, pay its fair share, and restore some semblance of trust in the mul-tilateral process. They have failed," says Goswami.

NCQG whitewash The adopted NCQG deci-sion text extends the erst-while US \$100 billion com-

mitment to a mere US 5300 billion per year by 2035 with developed countries "taking the lead". Says Gos-wami: "The stated US \$300 billion figure is far below billion figure is far below developing country needs. The demand from the G77 and China bloc — the larg-est negotiating bloc of 134 developing countries — was for US \$600 billion annu-ally in public finance from developed countries, out of a larger annual sum of US developed countries, out of a larger annual sum of US \$1,3 trillion by 2030 - all of

veloped countries only.

In addition to the amount, the timeframe of achieving the goal by 2035 is also problematic. CSE researchers point out that 10 years is too long for such a low amount of finance, potentially leaving devel-oping countries stuck with highly inadequate finance until it is much too late for significant climate action within this critical decade. Meanwhile, the 1.50C target of the Paris Agreement alips further out of reach.

Moreover, the US 5300 billion quantum is not specifically

billion quantum is not speci-fied as grants-based or con-cessional, which leaves scope for debt-worsening modes of financing in the Global South — going against the demands of vari-ous devel-

demands of vari-ous developing country groups. The decision text also fails to clarify any separation between 'provision' and 'mobilisation'. In this con-text, framing the US \$1.3 trillion per year target for developing countries as a goal from 'all actors' shifts the burden of climate action on the private sector, which has historically contributed only a small frac-tion of climate action of climate acti

mate finance. This casts seri-ous doubts on achieving the needed scale of US \$1.3 tril-lion annu-ally.

#### Carbon markets adopted

After close to a decade of de liberations, Article 6 of th liberations, Article 6 of the Paris Agreement vasa finally adopted at COP 29. Under Article 6, countries can vol-untarily cooperate via mar-ket-based trades denomi-nated in tenne of carbon, to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). While Article 6.2 involves bilat-eral agreements. for trading carbon redits, Arti-cle 64 sets up a global car-bon market. But Trishant Dev, programme officer, Climate Change, CSE has

bon market. But Trishant Dev, programme officer, Climate Change, CSE has his doubts – on Article 6.2, he says: "The framework as adopted is weak on account-ability. There are no strong in case of inconsist-encies flagged by experts, such as misreporting or not fol-lowing the framework to the spirit. Overall, de-spire some transparency meas-ures, nothing in the frame-work prevents Parties from trading low-quality carbon credits."

## BENGALURU ONLINE

#### Bring disputed Belagavi border areas of Karnataka under Central rule'

of Karnataka under Central rule

MUMBAI: As the Maharashtra-Karnataka boundary flared up afresh, the Shiw Sena (UBT) has demanded that the Centre should declare the disputed border areas in and around Bel-agavi (Belgaum) between the two neighbours as Union Territory, here on Monday.

Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Group Leader Aditya Thackeray protested against the injustice met-ed out to the Marathi-speaking people in and around Belgaum as the border dispute wants a long-term solution.

"Now there's a Bharatiya Janata Party government both in the state and the Centre. Why carft they solve the matter? Prime Minister Narendra Modi must intervene immediately and ensure that injustice is not done to our Marathi brethren there," urged Aditya Thack-eray.

He added how the Karnataka government not only refused permission for a conference of the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) in Belagavi and did not allow leaders from here to travel there, but the local authorities imposed a curfew there. "The borders are being sbut. Belgaum is and will remain an integral part of the Marathi identity. We strongly condemn this injustice to the Marathi geopte there. "I peed to the Karnataka government to ensure this immediately," said Aditya Thackeray, speaking to the media outside the Assembly.

Read more at

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

(IIII)





#### INDIA'S STEPS FORWARD

Prime Minister Narendra Mod

Today, every expert and investor around the Today, every expert and investor sharet.

Following the mantra of Reform-Perform-Transform, Bharat has achieved remarkable growth that is visible across all sectors

## A new beginning

As he begins his term as RBI governor, Malhotra has to fill the big shoes of Das who has done a tremendous job

T MAY NOT quite be baptism by fire for the new Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra as it was for Shaktikanta Das, who had to contend with the pandemic during his tenure at Mint Road. However, Malhotra also has his task cut out. He has to negoti-Road. However, Malhotra also has his task cut out. He has to negotiate a loss of momentum in the economy as seen in the sharp slowdown in the gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the September quarter at 5.4% while ensuring that inflation is reined in. That a seasoned bureau-rat is replacing Das does not really come as a surprise, because the government is understandably more comfortable with an Indian Administrative officer who has worked in the finance ministry. The coordination with a North Block officer can be a lot easier than with an outsider. Indeed, there is no real case for an economist holding the Governor's post. History shows that with some exceptions, the bureaucrats have done fairly well. However, as we have seen with Governor Das and his predecessors, the mindsets of bureaucrats can change once they are in the rarified environs of the central bank. As insiders have pointed out, views on whether the RBI should be the debt manager for the government or

thee environs of the central bank, as insiders have pointed out, views on whether the RBI should be the debt manager for the government or whether the foreign exchange reserves should be used to fund infrastructure projects have undergone a complete change after the move to Mint Street. That is understandable and to be expected. After all, the mandates of a central bank are different and therefore, its policies cannot

always be aligned with the policy expectations of the North Block. However, the bond markets would be pleased that the new chief of the central bank is a finance ministry bureaucrat because friction between the North Block and RBI is not desirable. Malhotra, an engineer and a 1990-batch IAS officer from the Rajasthan cadre, should be able to keep the relationship from getting strained. Having worked as secretary both in the department of financial services and the revenue department, the has a fair bit of experience in the areas of banking and taxation. Monetarypolicy is not easy to implement but Malhotra will have an expert team to advise him not just in this area but also on other important matters. It to advise nim not; just in this area but also on other important matters. It would be interesting to see which Deputy Governor would be handling monetary policy as Michael Patra is retiring next month. The new appointment would be a crucial one as they would be of immense use to the new Governor amildst a very difficult economic environment.

Malhotra has to fill the big shoes of Governor Das, who has done a

Malhotra has to fill the big shoes of Governor Das, who has done a tremendous job over the past six years, especially during the pandemic when the central bank liquidity in the system was ample and the cost of money affordable. The currency has been relatively stable and during his tenure, the country's reserves have been built up to new levels. The quintessential bureaucrat, Das has, with some exceptions, managed expectations across the board. He has enforced and tightened regulation, taken errant entities to task, even if it meant calling out the biggest. Under his watch, several digital initiatives have been rolled out. The central bank under Das has also been seen as more interventionist in financial markets, stamping out volatility in the exchange rate to decadal lows. A favourite with the media, if not always with the bond markets, his will be favourite with the media, if not always with the bond markets, his will be a tough act to follow. Meanwhile, here's wishing Malhotra the very best for a tough act to follow.Mean

## Crypto doesn't deserve a tax exemption



**DYNAMIC TIMES** 

VOLATILE GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES DO NOT AUGUR THE END OF GLOBALISATION

## Globalisation and India

LOBALISATION, A COM-PLEX phenomenon, is about the growth of interdependence across continents rather than just regions or within states. Further, the internet facilitated instant global communication.

in the internet facilitated instant global communication. Globalisation has survived financial crises, the worldwide Covid-19 health emergency, and political instability, improved international collaboration has increased global capital flow. Global trade in goods and services has made a strong comeback after the pandemic, although recovery has been unequal across areas. Globalisation will also survive Donald Trump 2.0 and his mercantilist threats, but it also faces challenges from the economic and political upsets triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For centures, issues as varied as war,

the economic and political upsets trig-gered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
For centuries, issues as varied as war, migration, and technological change have added layers of global connections. They did not take place in just one country or one continent. Chinese and Indian tea, spices, and handicrafts made their way into Europe centuries ago, long before the word globalisation was coined.
At another, political, level, india's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stressed that post-coinoial countries had a global role to play and had no intention of being ignored, passed by, or led by the nose by more powerful coun-tries. Indian independence and non-alignment meant that hundreds of thousands of Indians would no longer serve in the British-Indian armed forces, and that struck at the core of Britain's global military power in the mid-20th century. And in the 21st century, emerg-ing market economies, some of them former western colonies, want political choices and multiple trading partners to



navigate an interdependent world.
Millitary and economic rivalry does
not augur the end of globalisation. The
rivalries between the US and China or
India and China will not end their economic liniages. Annanlogy can be drawn
with Germany and Japan, which were
among the US 'Jargest trading partners
in the early 20th entury. They fought the
US in the Second World Way but became
its allies after 1945, creating a new international order.

Its alies after 1945, creating a new inter-national order.

Since inwading Ukraine in 2022, Russia has continually threat-ened a third world war and even nuclear strikes. But fundars were strikes, But recognises the link between even nuclear strategy. And the companies of the continual to the continual to the under the continual to the continual to under t recognises the link between economics, strategy, and great power in the 21st century, and may prefer the international peace essentiat for globalisation so that it can increase its economic clouw corldwide, even as it claims the territories of most neighbouring countries.

Authoritarian China's economic rise Authoritarian China's economic rise makes it a strategic threat, so western democracles wish to reduce their depen-dence on China, But trade between them and China, and between India and China continues to grow, the latter despite a longstanding border conflict. Globalisation is continuous and

reading. While China's share of the

apreading. While China's share of the US'Imports dropped from 21% to 17% between 2018 and 2022, US imports from Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Thailand rose by more than 80%. The section of India's economy that benefited most from globalisation after the 1990s was computer software, india's trail-blazing software city, Banglore, became a synonym for foreign jobs lost to outsourcing. Globalisation has also encouraged for-Globalisation has also encouraged for-

newinterJobalisation has also encouraged forGlobalisation has also encouraged forlocation and also encouraged foreign investment in India, though it has
rever reached the heights
of FDI in China, Unfortunumployment, and
the environment

1,48% of GDP in 208,
2,49% of GDP in 208,
2,49% of GDP in 208,
2,49% of GDP and further way to 1.4% of GDP in 2020,
4% of GDP in 2021, and further
g a more
syer in a
d world
in a make its business environment more investorment more investorincludy if it is to remain
securely and fruitfully on
the rails of globalisation.
With the recent deterioration of
political relations between China and
the West, some multinational croprorations hoped to shift to India, but India
has failed to take sufficient advantage of
China's relative economic sluggishness.
India intends to achieve autramirbharra (self-reliance) to reduce imports.
Aatmanirbhar Bharat is intended to pro-

duce goods for Indian as well as foreign markets. But it does create the idea that imports will be restricted, and thus go against globalisation. Overthelast decade, the fibartitya lanta Party government he raised import duties on a wide range of goods, and the average import duty rose from 15% in 2021. India's old problems of education, unemployment, and the environment block its way to becoming a more active bayer in a globalised world. Despite boasts about economic growth, India is simply not creating enough jobs. The labour participation rate is barely 40%, and the urban female participation rate is estimated at being below 6%. These stars, among the world's lowest, also highlight the waste of India's much-vaunted demographic dividend.

Last but not least, progress can celebrate ethnic and religious diversity as well as a capacity to become a global player. In the 18th century, when flush was varuled by a mis of Hindi, Muslim and Sikh dynasties, its share of the world economy was around 23% in 2023, that was 7.93%. That was much better than the 29% that existed when it achieved independence from British rule in 1947, but less than half of China's, which was nearly 19% in 2023. The lesson is that India's diversity is not a barrier to the progress that can emerge through globalisation. But, a narrow maintailism, which sparks socio-political violendissism, which grant of the first his development. obstacle to India's ability to contribute to socio-economic flows that will be nationally and globally compatible. India should refresh its development strategy. For globalisation will endure, though it will change, as states craft new economic and social policies to advance national and international interests.

## A solution in search of a problem

CBDCs, India can

enabling cost-effective and efficient

block its way to becoming a more active player in a globalised world



K YATISH RAJAWAT

THE DREAM OF a BRICS currency—a unified tender for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—bas lingered as a geopolitical counterweight to the dollar's dominance. Advocates see it as a path to financial sovereignty, freeing emerging markets from the constraints of dollar begemony. But in today's fast-evolving inancial cosystem, where Central Brank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) are becoming mainstream, pursuing a BRICS currency seems anachronistic, and even redundant. CBDCs, issued by central banks and powered by blockchain or other disturbuted ledger technologies, allow course in the disturbuted ledger technologies, allow course its ost earlier blateral trade directly, as opposed to the traditional 'interim' currencies like the dollar. This makes a BRICS currency unnecessary for the very purpose it seeks to serve. With CBDCs, India can settle its energy trade with Russia in digital rupees and rubles. Similarly, Brazil and South Africa can transcut directly without needing top get their payments to a standard tender. CBDCs' efficiency lies in their digital-first nature. Traditional cross-border payments rely on a multi-layered system involving correspondent banks, Society of Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) messaging networks, and currency conversion, each adding time delays, compliance costs, and transaction fees.

nsaction fees. Meanwhile, CBDCs enable near Meanwhile, CBDCs enable near-instantaneous settlements powered by distributed ledgertechnologies that allow direct, secure transactions between cen-tral banks. This eliminates the need for intermediaries, reducing the time and costs of routing payments through mul-tiple layers. Furthermore, by allowing

maintain monetary sovereignty while

direct exchanges between digital currencies, CBDCs cut down on the high conversion costs associated with traditional trade. The transparency inherent in CBDCs also simplifies compliance with trade. The transparency inherent in CBDCs also simplifies compliance with regulations like anti-money laundering (AML) and know-your-customer (KYC) commis, reducing the risk of Taud, disputes, or delays.

Traditional cross-border payments incur transaction fees ranging between 5-7% of the transaction value. These costs arise from intermediary fees (like correspondent banks), currency conversion charges, and compliance expenses (AML/KYC). CBDCs can reduce these costs to as low as 1-3% by eliminating intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, enabling direct currency exchange between nations using intermediary banks, and own int

tem, making it seamless and useful for all parties involved.

tem, making it seamies and userui forail parties involved. For a \$100 million cross-border trade settlement, raditional costs are around5-7%, or \$5-7 million. However, for CBDC-enabled transactions, the same costs are 1-2%, or \$1-2 million. This results in savings of \$4-6 million per transaction. For nations conducting billions of dollars in trade annually, this translates to billions in collective savings, which can ensure viability of products and services which were not even traded earlier.

ABRICS currency at best, in a symbolic

ABRICS currency, at best, is a symbolic initiative, signalling unity against West-ern financial systems. But beyond its negotiating clout, its practical utility is

ren financial systems. But beyond its negotiating clout, its practical utility is limited. Designing a viable common currency requires a degree of economic and monetary alignment that continuing a degree of economic and monetary alignment that continuing the common currency requires to degree of economic and monetary alignment that continuing the common currency requires the common currency requires the green of the common currency requires the current production of the current produ

cal and economic minefield. India, already a leader in digital pay-ments, has much to gain from prioritising CBDCs over a BRICS currency. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is piloting the digital trupe, which has significant potential for cross-border trade. By leveraging CBDCs. India can maintain monetary sovereignty while enabling cost-effective and efficient

While the idea of a BRICS currency is a powerful

there are more long-term solutions

negotiating tool in challenging dollar dominance,

bilateral trade. The country can avoid the pitfalls of joint governance, which a BRICS currency-would necessitate, and retainful control over its trade mechanisms.

The strategic autonomy provided by CBDCs also ensures that India's financial systems remain insulated from undue external influence. Unlike a BRICS currency, which would dilute control among memberstates, adjustal upsea BRICS currency, which would dilute control among memberstates, adjustal upsea BRICS currency, which would dilute control among nemberstates, adjustal upsea BRICS currency, which would dilute control among nemberstates, adjustal upsea BRICS currency, which would be a speaked by the standard of the properties, and stream the remaining that the remaining that the remaining that the remaining that the weaponised. The ability to bypass currency volatility, reduce settlement costs, and streamline compliance processes furner, which is the standard processes for the remaining both trade efficiency and financial stability.

The financial world is moving toward ceen trails action and digital scores to the trailer of the properties of the remaining tool in challenging dollar dominance, there are more long-term solutions. The future lies in CBDCs, blockhain-enabled trade mechanisms, and digital cosystems that transcend the need for any interim currency.

India and its BRICS currencr should priorities accelerating CBDC adoption, building robust financial infrastructure, and fostering bilateral agreements tailored to their unique needs. A BRICS currency, while ideologically appealing, is a eliciof the 20th-century monetary order. Ultimately, technology— not deniancial sovereignty.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Syria's victory

The groundswell of anti-Assad sentiment across Syria, coupled with the innate human longing for freedom, brought down his regime. Bashar al-Assad brought it (his downfall) on himself. The Ascumulated weight of fis brutalities. The key takeaway from the fall of the regime is that the people of a country cannot be held in oppression for long or

indefinitely. There is bound to be a popular uprising against a tyrannical regime. The departure of Assad mark a turning point in the history of Syria. From now onwards Syria should From now onwards Syria should shape up as a country in which all people feel a sense of belonging to the nation and find space to unlock their potential. The new leadership should choose the path of democracy and keep the country inclusive; it should choose wand shun extermism and sectarianism. The post-Assad Syria should get international aid for its reconstruction and international goodwill for a reboot of its relations with the world. —G David Milton, Maruthancode

#### Decorum and grace

Apropos of "Two-minute fame" (FE, December 9) Ola's founder 8havish Aggarwal's spat with Kunal Kamra was not called for and he could have easily ignored it. He should remember that he and his company are in the journey

of providing cleaner and sustainable EV solutions to the consumer and their focus is to fine tune the technical glitches in their product and better after sales services. Taking potshots with companies and other individuals are avoidable distractions. He indeed has a long road to travel and learn more than a thing from stalwarts like Anand Mahinda.

—Ball Govind, Noida

•Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

dillo

Regd, No: DL-12048/03-05. R.N.I.No.26750/74. Printed and Published by R.C. Malhotra on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd and printed at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Fress, A-8, Sector-7, Noida - 201301 and published at The Indian Express (P) Ltd, Mezzanine Floor, Express Building, 9 & 10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Dehl-110002. Phone: 0120-6631500. (Cover price: Patrix Non-Fit 22, Sat 8 San 4122 (Rajori Helpin Shodhana Shoramarish (Responsible for selection of News under the PBB Act) @Copyright: The Indian Express (PIL Add Indian Storamarish (Patrix Searend. Responsible for selection of News under the PBB Act) @Copyright: The Indian Express (PIL Add Indian Storamarish (Patrix Searend. Responsible for Search Responsible for Responsible for Search Responsible for Search Responsible for Respons -

financialexp.epapr.in

New Delhi



# **Text&Contex**

#### THE MOOR HINDU -

#### **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

Number of new faces in AAP's second list of candidates

The Aam Aadmi Party released its second list of 20 candidates for the upcoming Delhi assembly polis, dropping 18 sitting MLAs and moving two others, including senior leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Stodia, to new seats. Mr. Sisodia will now contest from Jangpura. Ph. 1

#### Retail inflation for farm workers in the month of October

In per cent. Retail inflation for farm workers and rural labourers eased to 5.96% and 68%, in October from 6.36% and 6.39% in September. The All-India Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers registered an increase of 11 points in October.

#### Bihar's abysmal sex-ratio at birth in 2022-23

The Bihar governmen is alarmed over the State's abysmal "sex ratio at birth" (SRB), and has decided to strictly implement measures for checking female foeticide. The SRB — the number female births per 1,000 male births — ha been declining in the State. m

#### Number of people killed in Haiti's capital due to gang violence

The UN rights chief said that 184 people had been killed over the weekend in the Haitlan capital, rocked by a spike in gang violence. The violence was orchestrated by the leader of a powerful gang in the Haitlan capital of Port-au-Prince, in the Cite Soleil area.

#### The increase in India's copper demand in the fiscal year of 2024

In per cent. India's copper demand grew by 13% annually to hit 1,700 kilo tonnes in PZ4, driven by the rapid pace of infrastructure development and building constructions, the international Copper Association India said on Monday. In:

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us O facebook.com/thehindu O twitter.com/the\_hindu O instagram.com/the\_hindu

# On reforms in merchant shipping

Have the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, and the Coasting Vessels Act, 1838 failed in addressing the contemporary needs of the merchant marine sector? What are some of the international maritime conventions that India has ratified? Will the new Bills address maritime training and education as well?

EXPLAINER

Amitabh Kumar

The story so far:

he Government is preparing to he Government is preparing introduce several significant bills aimed at driving much-needed reforms in the shipping industry. Key among them are the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 and the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024, both of which promise to bring transformative changes

to boost the sector.

Why a new bill?

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, and the Coasting Vessels Act, 1838, which the new bills aim to repeal, have become outdated and fail to address the contemporary needs of the merchant marine sector. Significant regulatory gaps exist, particularly for vessels operating in the offshore sector which comprise nearly 50% of Indian-Bagged vessels. Furthermore, maritime training was liberalised allowing private sector participation, by there is no legal framework in the existing Act to regulate their activities effectively.

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, also restricts seafarers' welfare provisions to Indian-Bagged ships, despite 85% of the 2,80,000 active Indian seafarers working on foreign-flagged vessels. Additionally, the Act lacks enabling provisions for implementing certain international conventions that India has signed or plans to ratify. Crucially, the contained.

implementing certain internations: conventions that India has signed or plans to ratify. Crucially, the outdated, license-era provisions of the Act have become a roadblock to modernising maritime administration, which needs to transition from being a mere regulator to a regulator-cum-facilitator, thereby promoting the 'ease of doing business.'

promoting the 'ease of doing business.'
What are the features of the Merchant
Shipping Bill?
The Merchant Shipping Bill introduces
significant changes to modernise India's
maritime framework, drawing upon the
best practices of leading maritime
jurisdictions like the U.K., Norway, and
Singapore. Some of the key reform
measures include:
i) Ease of registration: the existing law
restricts vessel registration to entities with
100% Indian ownership. The new Bill
proposes significant reforms to attract
foreign investment. It also reduces the
ownership threshold for Indian
citizens/entities from 100% to 51%,
enabling more flexibility, It allows Limited
Liability Partnerships (LLPs),
Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), and
Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) to own
and register Indian vessels. This is in line
with the law of the U.S. where Green card
holders are permitted to own American
flasships or Singarore law when holders are permitted to own American flagships or Singapore law where permanent residents can own ships of their flags. It also permits foreign entities to hold shares in Indian vessels while ensuring majority ownership remains with Indian entities, NRIs, or OCIs.

Additionally, the Bill allows the registration of vessels chartered by Indian entities under the bareboat charter-cum-demise, enabling charter-cum-demise, enabling entrepreneurs to acquire ownership of vessels at the end of the charter period. This provision, particularly beneficial for capital-deficient entrepreneurs, facilitates entry into the shipping industry without upfront investment. India is the second largest ship recycling centre after Bangladesh, and the ship recycling industry practises the concept of cash purchase of the vessel before it is brought for demolition. Often



ck change: Catamaran boats pass by a merchant navy ship anchored off Visakhapatnam. FILE PHOTO

it becomes difficult for cash buyers to

it becomes difficult for cash buyers to register the vessels for their final voyage, as they no more remain 'seaworthy'. To address challenges faced by the ship recycling industry, the Bill introducing provisions for temporary registration of vessels destined for demolition. This measure is expected to bolster activities at India's ship recycling hubs like Alang. ii) Enlarging the scope of vessels: the existing Act regulates only mechanised ships (engine-fitted vessels) above a certain size, leaving smaller mechanised vessels and all non-mechanised vessels designed from yessels to operate without adequate oversight. India's offshore drilling sector gained prominence in 1974 when Sagar Samrat, a merchani vessel designed for exploratory offshore drilling, drilled the first well in Bombay High. Since then, the offshore sector has employed a diverse range of mechanised and non-mechanised vessels, such as accommodation barges, work barges, submersibles, and drones. However, accommodation barges, work barges, submersibles, and drones. However, these vessels remain either unregulated or inadequately regulated under the current framework, exposing the sector

to operational and safety risks.

The new Bill seeks to address this issue by expanding the definition of 'vessels' to uniformly include a wide range of crafts, including submersibles, semi-submersibles, hydrofoils, nor-displacement crafts, amphibious crafts, wing-in-ground crafts, pleasure crafts, barges, lighters, Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (MODUs), and Mobile Offshore Units (MOUs), whether mechanised or not. This definition is expected to enhance transparency and ensure comprehensive regulatory oversight in the offshore sector. Furthermore, the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, which exploited gaps in maritime security, underscored the urgent need for stricter regulation of all categories of vessels. By empowering authorities to issue instructions to all types of vessels, the new Bill aims to strengthen coastal semi-submersibles, hydrofoils

security, making India's coastline safer

and more secure.

What about marine pollution?

The Government has recently undertaken several initiatives to minimise pollution from shipping activities. Some of the measures include reducing the sulphur content in marine fuel from 3.5% to less than 0.5%, banning the use of single-use plastics on Indian ships, and launching the online portal 'Swachh Sagar' to facilitate the proper disposal of ship-generated waste at Indian ports.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has adopted several conventions aimed at preventing and combating marine pollution, such as the Civil Liability Convention (CLC), the Convention on Limitation of Liability on Maritime Claims (ILMO), the Bunker Convention the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), and the Wreck Removal Convention. The existing law, however, has either omitted or partially implemented these conventions. The new Bill fully incorporates these international conventions, aliening India's maritime Bill fully incorporates these international conventions, aligning India's maritime regulatory framework with global standards. This comprehensive approach reinforces India's commitment to combating marine pollution and safeguarding the maritime environment for sustainable shipping practices.

# What are provisions for seafarers'? what are provisions for seararers? The remarkable growth in the number of Indian seafarers employed on foreign-flagged ships over the last 7-8 years stands out as one of the biggest success stories in Indian merchant

success stories in Indian merchant shipping. The workforce has grown from 1,16,000 in 2015-16 to 2,85,000 today, with nearly 85% of these seafarers serving on foreign-flagged vessels. However, the existing Act lacks provisions for the welfare and safety of this vast workforce working on foreign-flagged vessels. The proposed Bill addresses this gap by extending the scope

of welfare measures initiated by the Union government to include Indian seafarers working on foreign-flagged ships as well. Furthermore, it seeks to extend the protections and benefits outlined in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) to all Indian seafarers, ensuring better working conditions, safety standards, and support systems for those contributing to the global maritime industry.

What about maritime trainin

# What about maritime training? Under Entry 25 of List I (Union List) of the Constitution, the Union Government is responsible for the education and training of the mercantile marine and the regulation of such education and training provided by States and other agencies. In the past, maritime training was primarily conducted by government-run institutions directly under the administrative control of the maritime regulator, the Director General of Shipping. Consequently, there was no need for a specific legal framework to regulate these institutions. However, following economic liberalisation, maritime training was opened to the private sector. Today, over 160 maritime training institutes operate across the country, yet their activities are governed solely by rules, government orders, and notifications rather than an enabling legal framework. This regulators and has allewed unauthorised institutes to

enabling legal framework. This regulatory gap has allowed unauthorised institutes to operate without obtaining proper approvals, making it challenging for the maritime administration to take action

maritime administration to take action against offenders.

The proposed Bill seeks to address this significant anomaby by introducing clear legal provisions for regulating maritime training in line with the constitutional mandate. This step is expected to eliminate illegal maritime training institutes and associated fraudulent practices, which often exploit unsuspecting tural youth, while ensuring the delivery of high-quality, standardised maritime education nationwide.

Is there a focus on coastal shipping?
The Government has taken a significant step by distinguishing between the technical regulation of ships and the commercial utilisation of Indian coastal waters, removing provisions related to the latter from the Merchant Shipping Act. These aspects, including licensing, permissions for operations along the Indian coast and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), creation of a coastal plan involving the Union and States, and the integration of inland and coastal shipping, have been incorporated into the proposed have been incorporated into the proposed Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024. This focused approach aims to foster growth and development of the Indian coastal sector,

development of the indian coastal sector. The move aligns with the Government's flagship 'Sagarmala' program, which emphasises the promotion of coastal shipping through initiatives like dedicated berths for coastal vessels and enhanced hinterland connectivity for coastal cargo movement. Infrastructure development and a robust regulatory framework must progress simultaneously, making the introduction of the Coastal Shipping Bill both timely and essential.

and essential.

Maritime development, like any developmental initiative, should remain bipartisan and above party politics. By fostering investment, enhancing safety, combating marine pollution, and supporting seafarers' welfare, the proposed reforms promise to unlock the true potential of India's maritime sector. Amitabh Kumar is Former Director General Shipping, Government of India. Views expressed are personal.

...

#### THE GIST

The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 introduces significant changes to modernise india's maritime framework, drawing upon the best practices of leading maritime jurisdictions like the U.K., Norway, and Singapore.

Under Entry 25 of List 1 (Union List) of the Constitution, the Union Government is responsible for the education and training of the mercantile marine and the regulation of such education and training provided by States and other agencies.

The Government has recently undertaken several initiatives to minimise pollution from shipping activities. Some of the measures include reducing the sulphur content in marine fuel from 3.5% to less than 0.5%, banning the use of single-use plastics on Indian ships etc.

CM COM

NEW DELHI | TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2020

## Turning the page

The new RBI governor's first test will be on the external front

fter much anticipation, the Union government on Monday appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra next governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The term of incumbent Governor Shaktikanta Das ends today. Mr Malhotra, an engineering graduate from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, with a master's degree in public policy from Princeton University, is a 1990 batch officer of the elite Indian Administrative Service. Interestingly, the government for the second time in a

Administrative Service. Interestingly, the government for the second time in a row has chosen a career bureaucrat and not a professional economist to lead the RBI. The decision may have been motivated by the experience of Mr Das' term, which rarely witnessed friction between the RBI and the government. However, with the Budget-making process underway, the Ministry of Finance will have to quickly find a replacement for Mr Malhotra.

Mr Das' term over the past six years was fairly challenging for both the Indian economy and the RBI, largely because of the pandemic. The RBI had to take emergency measures and ensure the financial system remained resillent. While the RBI took several steps during and after the pandemic, there are two areas from policy and financial stability points of view that are worth discussing here. First, the RBI is an inflation-targeting central bank. Although the responsibility of setting the policy interest rate is now with the six-member Monetary here. First, the RBI is an inflation-targeting central bank. Although the responsibility of setting the policy interest rate is now with the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the term of any governor will, in part, be judged by the record on inflation management. In this regard, it is fair to argue that the RBI underestimated the inflationary impulse over the past few years. However, once it started policy tightening, it did well to not reverse it prematurely. The MPC is willing to wait to complete the disinflation process.

The second is external-sector management. After initial volatility during the pandemic, as large global central banks started pumping liquidity into the system besides taking the policy rates to near zero. Indica witnessed a significant

system besides taking the policy rates to near zero, India witnessed a significant surge in capital inflows. The RBI did well to absorb excess flows. Higher reserves helped a great deal in 2022, when large central banks, led by the United States

surge in capital inflows. The RBI (lid well to absorb excess flows. Higher reserves helped a great deal in 2022, when large central banks, led by the United States (US) Federal Reserve, increased policy interest rates in a coordinated way to deal with inflation. Global currency markets witnessed significant volatility. Although the rupee did depreciate during this period, the impact was limited because of the active intervention of the RBI. Maintaining stability on the external front has been one of the highlights of the RBIs efforts over the past few years. In fact, some economists have argued that the rupee is too stable. It has indeed been overvalued, which can affect the competitiveness of tradable sectors.

In this context, MF Malhotra's challenge will be to ensure that currency-market interventions do not become a burden on the tradable sector while containing excessive volatility. This aspect will be closely watched from the very beginning of his tenure. Policy changes promised by US President-elect Donald Trump can have significant implications for currency markets. On the inflation front, while the projections suggest that the inflation rate will align with the target of 4 per cent in the second quarter of next financial year, the RBI and MPC will need to be careful and ensure that the decline is durable. While the RBI expects growth to recover in the coming quarters, surprises on the lower side could put pressure on the central bank to support growth. One of the important tools in the toolkit of modern central banks is communication. This improved significantly during Mr Das' term and is something Mr Malhotra will be expected to build on. Besides, it will be interesting to see if the RBI changes its stance on cryptocurrencies.

## Reckoning in Syria Bashar al-Assad's ouster adds to West Asian tumult

Bashar al-Assad's ouster adds to West Asian tumult

ith Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's precipitate flight to Moscow
less than 15 days after rebels led by a breakaway al Qaeda affiliate
Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Turkish-backed Syrian
National Army overran the country, geo-politics in West Asia has
grown more complex and tumultuous than ever. Despite the celebrations in
Damascus over the end of al-Assad's 24-year rule following 13 years of civil
war, it is by no means clear whether stability will return to this country of 25
million people, 90 per cent of whom live below the poverty line. Its two mainstays of agriculture and oil, which accounted for about half its gross domestic
product before the civil war, have been hit by drought and economic sanctions.
A-Assad's overthrow was the result of the distractions of his chief backers, the
Iran-sponsored Hezhollah and Russian President Vladimir Putin. A peaceful
transition of power appears possible with the sitting Prime Minister agreeing
to cooperate with the rebels. As yet, however, there are more troubling questions
than reassuring answers over Syria and West Asia's future.

Though the HTS has positioned itself as a moderate force, its chief Abu

than reassuring answers over Syria and West Asia's future.

Though the HTS has positioned itself as a moderate force, its chief Abu Mohammed al-Julani has resolved to establish Sunni Islam. This will represent a major power shift and the history of coups in West Asia suggests that this process is unlikely to be peaceful. In Syria 74 per cent of the people are Sunni and 13 per cent Shia. Al Assad came from the Alawite community, a Shia sect that had grabbed power and resources in the 25 years of his family's rule. HTS also has a griin reputation for human rights abuses in areas it controls. Power plays by other regional actors also hang in the balance, Israel, for instance, has seized control of a demili-rafsed buffer zone vacared by the Syrian army between Syria and the Golan tarised buffer zone vacated by the Syrian army between Syria and the Golan Heights on grounds that Tel Aviv wanted to ensure that no hostile force establishes itself on its borders. The defence minister has said the occupation was temporary. itself on its borders. The defence minister has said the occupation was temporary. Since farsale is not known to retreat from territory it occupies, its presence in the buffer zone could be a potential source of conflict with the incoming regime. It is unclear now how Israel's principal regional enemy, Iran, will respond to the defeat of its Syrian client. Russis, the other principal al-Assad backer, withdrew its naval and military assets from Syria ahead of the rebels' advance. Meanwhile, Turkiye's role adds a level of complexity over resettling the 3 million Syrian refugees in the country and seeking to crush Kurdish separatist groups, which may make common cause with Syrian groups flighting for autonomy. Added to this mix is the United States (US) in the threes of a presidential

Added to this mix is the United States (US), in the throes of a presidential transition. On Sunday President Joe Biden authorised US ainstrikes against Islamic transition. On Sunday President Joe Baden authorised US ainstrikes against Islamic State camps in central Syria to ensure that this anti-American grouping does not become a factor in Syria. The nature of US relations with the incoming regime has not been articulated, though the abrupt regime change suggests some superpower involvement. President-elect Donald Trump, who had ordered a strike on a Syrian airbase in 2017 (when he was President) in retailation to a chemical attack on US-backed rebels, has said he is waiting for events to play out before committing him-self. India will also need to wait and see how this affects the turbulent region.

# American exceptionalism

Earnings growth in the US will be faster than anywhere else in the world

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



here has been a series of articles and com-ments by numerous market observers on the United States (US) equity market, and the ear-universal belief that it is the only market worth investing in. Most of these market observers are of the view that the US is in a bubble and we are seeing the view that the US is in a bubble and we are seeing peak US buillishness. The consensus remains over-whelmingly positive on the US and many global investors have given up locking at other geographies like emerging markets (EMs). The EM asset class currently has serious challenges in trying to remain readure. Much of the global outlook for 2025 and beyond continues to believe that the US is the only market really worth spending time and investment dollars on.

Looking at the data, it is easy to see why everyone is positive on the US, and why the contrarians are deeply

and why the contrarians are deeply uncomfortable with the current level

and why the contrarians are deeply uncomfortable with the current level of positive sentiment towards US assets. American equities have massively outperformed those in all other geographies, generally over the years but especially so after the global financial crisis (2008). Since the beginning of 2010, in the 15 years till the end of 2024, the US markets have outperformed MSCI Oveloped and EMs (set-US) by 3.5 times. Over the past 10 years, the SEP 500 has outperformed European equities by 72 per cent annually and EM equities by 92 per cent annually and EM equities by 92 per cent annually and EM equities by 42 per cent annually and EM equities by 45 per cent annually and EM equities by 45 per cent annually and EM equities by 47 per cent annually and EM equities by 48 per cent annually and EM employer empl

AKASH PRAKASH

on the US. It is the only market which seems to matt. All other markets and global trends key off the US.

All other markets and global trends key off the US. Today US stocks trade at near-record absolute and relative multiples to global stocks. These high multiples are not only due to the Magnificent 7 (Apple, Microsoft, Google parent Alphabet, Amazon, Nvidia, Meta, and Tesia). If we look at the SePhago (see Magnificent 7), and compare them to European Union equities, there is a valuation premium US companies enjoy across every major sector. This valuation premium is linked to structurally higher returns on equity.

However, it was not always so. The relative gap in valuation and performance in

However, it was not always so. The relative gap in valuation and performance in favour of US equities opened up after the global financial crisis. While the crisis was largely centred on the US, through a combination of aggressive and rapid policy responses and the willingness of corporate America to restructure and focus on profitability, the US broke out after 2009.

If we go back in time, leading up to the crisis, till the end of 2007, greater Europe had a higher market capitalisation and weighting in global indices than the US. From the beginning of 2002 to 2009, in that eight-year period leading up to the crisis, MSCI World outperformed the S&P SOO in seven of the eight years. Difficult to imagine today but back in 1989, Apan had a higher weighting in global indices than the US, did, and was the most valuable and most expensive market in the world. While the US has the best long-term returns of all major equity markets, about 7 per cent real, it has not always been a one-way bett. There have been periodic of five years, or even longer, when it lagged global markets. The US was not always a default overweight as we seem to see today.

Combined with its stellar performance over the

past 15 years, today we are seeing US valuations nearly at all-time highs, only surpassed on the Schiller CAPE (cyclically adjusted PE) by internet bubble readings of the year 2000. Even on sentiment indicators, on any survey of perfessional fund managers, bullishness on the US has never been higher. Retail sentiment indicators are also near all-time highs and retail flows into equities have rarely been higher. While the jury is still out on whether US equities more broadly are in a bubble, there are parts of the marker and sparts 10 feet.

**OPINION 9** 

more broadly are in a bubble, there are parts of the market and assets like crypto currencies which seem to be in a speculative frenzy.

On can see the contrarian case. US equities have had an amazing run in the past 15 years, after 2008. On both sentiment and valuation, readings have rarely been higher. It is a consensus that one should never bet against the US, and the US weighting in global indices is near all-time highs. For anyone with any belief in regression to the mean, this is a classic setup. I am sympathetic to this view and for an individual investor, or anyone managing proprietary capital, it makes sense to gradually underweight the US and fade the momentum. The US markets may or may not be in a bubble, but we are definitely at peak positivity on US equity assets. A period of underperformance is due to the US.

itivity on US equity assets. A period of underperformance is due to the US.

As a tactical call, it is very easily possible that the US can underperform global equities for a five-year period. Given the relative starting points of valuation today, can the US lag other markets for a period of time? Definitely. Both EMs and Europe are due a bounce and are consensus underweights. This, however, tomy mind is a tactical, trading call. Over longer periods, the US has delivered the best returns and must remain the core of any global equity allocation, Its lead in innovation and technology is just too great and the intense focus on profitability is such that ultimately earnings growth will be faster there than anywhere else in the world.

and the intense focus on profitability is such that ultimately earnings growth will be faster there than anywhere else in the world.

For institutional investors the decision is more difficult. Given the hazardous nature of active money management today, most funds cannot afford underperformance that being too early in underweighting the Us will guarantee. Many of these funds had been advocating this relative switch away from US equities for the past five years and, having got it totally wrong, are uncomfortable sticking their neck out again. It is impossible to get the timing right as to when relative US underperformance well begin. Trees do not grow to the sky, the US cannot outperform forever, it cannot become 80-85 per cent of global indices. So this reversal of fortune will happen. It is just impossible to predict when.

In such a situation it is easier to manage your own money and be accountable to yourself and take the risk of being early. Most institutional investors do not have the tolerance to face any extended period funderperformance. They will by definition be late in moving away from their US weightings. They will follow, not lead.

The author it with Amanum Caubial.

## Promise of level playing field in the AI age

Tristhattime of the year when looking backcomes naturally. Besides the many electoral victories and sethacks as well as geopolitical disruptions with far-reaching implications, the following list captures a slice of India in the year that would soon be gone — against a setting of intense competition and the promise of a level playing field.

Among business trends, quick commerce has to be achard have for 2004. Started by smaller startings

be a charibuster for 2024. Started by smaller startups such as Zepto with 20-something founders and by off-shoots of food-delivery players like Swiggy and Zomato.

annos of bod cavery players are over quom is being experimented by theb; like Amazon and Flipkart (owned by Walmart). In a unique role reversal, the smaller firms are forcing the big ones to change their business model, quick and fast.

quick and fast.

Next, spectrum for satellite communication (satcom) has been a contentious issue through the year, with
lobbies being formed for and against

lobbies being formed for and against auction of airwaves. Those seeking the auction route (a challenging proposition as international case studies and experiments have shown in sate can) have argued that blodding in sate can) have argued that blodding in sate can would ensure a level playing. Bled with mobile telephony, Indian telecom administrators should make sate on take off at the earliest without getting distracted by any lobby, Arecent reply in Parliament by the telecom minister suggests that the level playing field will be ensured while administratively allocating spectrum to sate or players. At the heart of the issue is the Supreme Court judgement of February 2012, upholding auction as the preferred heart of the sease is the Supreme Court plaggered in of Pebmary 2012, upholding auction as the preferred mode of allocating source public resources liketelecom spectrum. While the court has not reviewed the judge-ment, the government believes that laws governing statem in the Felecom Bill allow administrative allo-cation of airwayes. Amid the debate on the level playing

field, satcom is expected to usher in another level of connectivity in the remotest hinterland. In business, nothing is complete without AI (arti-ficial intelligence) or GenAI, The India visit of Jensen Huang, chief executive officer of Santa Clam-based Nyklia, and his conversation with Reliance Industries Nvidia, and his conversation with Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Arnhanlon the future of A possibly triggered many partnership discussions in the area. Been so, the report cardso far in India, on Al, is ambiguous. It seems so rious boardroom discussions on Al are still few. As a consultant working in this area put it, the courage to invest serious money in Al is missing in India Inc. That said, big groups and taking tiny steps, at least, in being Aleducated. Some companies, including among the biggest, have made it mandatory for every executive to go for Altraining.

for Altraining.
Apple and its increasing share in

consumer electronics exports from India havebeen a talking point of the

PROFIT

India have been a talking point of the year too. Apple phones, manufactured by its wendor companies such as Foxon and others, accounts dor 35 billion worthof exports from India in 2022-23. Exports deubled to \$10 billion in 2023-24. How will the AppleIndia trajectory jab yout vis-a-vis the overall manufacturing universe from here on?

Also, a record number of initial public offering. (QPos) has been a headline time and again this year. As 2024 draws to a close, the number could fall short of 100, which is not much. But the biggest IPO so fir, from South Koman automobile major Hyundai, fellowed by the reb herring propercus of LG Electronics. lowed by the red herring prospectus of LG Electronics, also from South Korea, stood out at a time of political turmoil in the East Asian country. Will Samsung join the IPO blitz next? As the new year rolls in, someother rquee IPOs could be in preparatory mode, including m the house of Reliance Jio and probably Flipkart.

And, in a rare coincidence, three of the largest business houses — Tata, Reliance Industries, and Adami Group — were in the headlines, for very dif-ferent reasons. While the salt-to-software conglom erate made defining inroads into new businesse such as semiconductor and military aircraft manu facturing, it was the passing away of Ratan Tata and selection of his half brother Noel Tata as his succesfacturing, it was the passing away of Ratan Tata and selection of his half brother Noel Tata as his successor at Tata Truss, which controls 66 per cent in Tata Sons, that struck a chord in an overwhelming way. For Reliance Industries, the starry wedding of Anart Ambani in Jamnagar, Gujarat, stood out as a high-point even as the group made stides in some key sectors. In the case of Adani, it was the latest attack from unexpected quarters — the US Securities and Exchange Commission and US Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of New York — in connection with its solar business that kept things buzzing in the business and political circles. In all three instances, it was more about people and less about business that found traction.

There are at least four more developments to make it a list of top 30 that have a bearing on us. For example, Vistara was merged into Air India but has a tayed quite like Vistara, so far. Also, work from home (WFH) refused to leave us all of 2024 despite efforts from organisations to fight a trend meant for Codd times, And, luxury home prices competed with top-end salaries, well almost. The highest entry-level salary for an IIT gadaate was pegged at 4c rore per annum, Finally, the two biggest consumer-facing announcements in the last Union Budget — the Internship Scheme and Ayushmaan Bharat for all 70 Plus — made a debut, but not a smashing one.

smashing one.

As the government finetunes the nuts and bolts of the two schemes to make them sparkle, many other key events in the top 10 list could play out decisively in the weels and months to come a competition takes on the level playing field head on.

## Equality by any other name



**BOOK REVIEW** 

NAYANTARA ROY

"Most of usreact angrily if we feel we are being treated unequally. While the rhetoric of equality is often used as a mere slogan by politicians, most people intuitively feel that it captures something truly important about the human essence Forget academic debates concerning the distribution of government benefits and historic patterns of inequality, even very young children will reject the idea of being treated unequally. Thus equality seems to capture something unique, almost primeval, about us as persons".

With these words, Saurabh Kirpal, a senior Supreme Court lawyer, sums up the results of a research study carried out on employees of corporations in

California in regard to equality in Who is Equal: The equality code of the constitution, a wonderfully unusual book on an aspect of law that concerns us at a basic humanof law that concerns us at a basic human-trarian level but is often buried in techni-calities and polemics. Writing defily and in an easy style, he takes the reader through a philosophical and jurispruden-tial understanding of equality as a concept and thence, through its historical progress and judicial handling in Indian law and sections.

and judicial handling in Indian law and society.

At the base of the book is the author's contention that "there are multiple and often competing visions of what it means to be equal and how best to achieve that goal". As he writes, "When we look around and ask, who is equal, the short answer is not very many." Expounding on the complexities of the concept he points out that a "Dalit or a woman, may suffer discrimentation at the work points. tions a ball of a worman, may suffier discrimination at the workpleace, but their experiences would not be identical. The experience of a ball woman would also be districtive because it's an amalgamation of the two axes of discrimination". Introducing us to the ideas and

philosophical thinking behind the concept, he moves on to the practicalities of how our society attemps to achieve varying concepts of equality via law. He takes us from the originally narrow interpretations of Article 14 (which sets out our fundamental right to equality), using the classification test that allows the state to classify individuals into different groups for specific purposes, as long as the classification is rational, based on intelligible differentia, and has a rational nexus with the object sought to be achieved by the law.

This expanded over time through judicial interpretations to add "manifest arbitratiness" as a test for Article 14. After familiarising the reader with the

familiarising the reader with the development of these tests and how the impacted or were used in various cases, he presents a situation where in October 2023 presents a stuation where in October Act the Supreme Court randomly chose the classification test in deciding that the Special Marriage Act is not discriminate by not including queer couples. As the author, who is also an LGBTQ rights activist, muses, they could just as well ha

chosen the test of manifest arbitrariness, and wonders, "perhaps this is what happens when faced with a bewidering array of possibly conflicting precedent." On forms of discrimination in education, employment, disabilities, caste, ediglion, marriage and as on, the author takes in a nimby through the blarget and content of the content historical backgrounds, the decision naking of the

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

Constituent Assembly and its members, as well as the progress in case law (along with inconsistencies in judicial decisions). W are shown how we moved from the decision of the decision of a judge in an early post-Independence case Independence case where his sensibilit

were such that, "the fact that system was so rigged that no member of the so rugges that no member of the scheduled castes would have qualified, but for the reservation, did not occur to the learned judge" to a more empathetic understanding of "substantive equality that are seen in later judgments such as the NM Thomas case (1976), which

addressed the constitutionality of reservations in government jobs. In interesting comparison was the judgment of the Supreme Court in TMA Pat Foundation (2002), which contains elements of "substantive equality" with the US supreme Court's majority decision banning quotase or racial communities on the basis of race in public or private educations. Who is Equal: institutions. The missifity judgments

The equality code of the Author: Saurabh Kirpal Publisher: Penguin Vintage Pages: 273

minority judgments of Justice Ketanji Brown-Jackson and Justice Sonia superficial rule of colourblindness as a

constitutional principle in an endemically segregated society". As the author points out, "rather than focusing on the rights of the educational institutions, the USSupreme Court focused on the rights of the excluded candidate".

Mr Kirpal suggests moving on

beyond only reservation as a sole solution to issues of discrimination and proposes more and better anti-discrimination legislation. As he writes, "A comprehensive anti-discrimination law ought to examine 'disadvantage' as a systemic organising principles".

The book takes us through issues of equality in other spheres of life as well, such as the courts dealing with the rights of businesses and issues of maintaining equality in the democratic process. Towards this, he examines aspects such as the pros and consofthe first-past-the-post system or proportional representation and how constituency mapping can create inequalities.

Popular histories are currently in demand. Here is a book that does with law what some of our better writer-historians have done to make history

historians have done to make history more accessible. The author has put together a cross-section of material containing complex ideas, historical information and critical analyses of case law with a delightfully light hand, erudition, empathy and even an occasional splash of humour.

....

## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Assad's fall

Fragile hope in Syria's new dawn

HE downfall of Bashar al-Assad marks the end of over half a century of authoritarian rule in Syria, ushering in a fragile era of hope and uncertainty. Assad's hasty depar-ture, following a swift rebel offensive led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), symbolises both the col-lapse of despotism and the challenges of rebuilding a fractured nation. For over 13 years, Syria endured a brutal civil war that claimed over 5,0,000 lives and dis-placed millions. Assad's regime, once propped up by Russia and Iran, crumbled under the weight of its own corruption and violence. Yet, the victory of the HTS, an Islamist faction, offers no guarantee of stability. While its leader, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, has shifted the oup's narrative toward national liberation, critics estion the HTS' capacity to govern inclusively. The immediate challenges are monumental. Syria's

institutions lie in ruins and its economy shattered by war and sanctions. Internally displaced citizens and refugees yearn for a return to normaley, buffears of ethnicand sec-tarian divides linger. The promise of democracy is clouded by the ghosts of Libya and Iraq, where transitions led

ed by the ghosts of Libya and Iraq, where transitions led to chaos rather than cohesion.

The US faces a critical moment in its West Asia strategy. Having supported Kurdish forces against the ISIS and maintained a military presence, Washington must now navigate the aftermath of Assad's fall. Its role could define whether Syria's future is one of peace or continued strife, balancing counterterorism with humanitarian engagement. While President-elect Themphas sight have been supported to the continued straight and supported to the continued straight and supported to the continued straight and supported the continued straight and supported to the continued straight and supported to the continued straight and supported to the continued straight and supported the continued straight and supported to the supported straight and supported to the supported straight and supported Trump has said the Americans must keep off, the ques-tion is how the HTS was able to find the gunpowder to mount the final assault on Damascus, forcing even the Russians to withdraw. Who has this kind of military might? External forces further complicate Syria's path. Turkiye, the Gulf states and western powers have vested interests, while Israel and Iran remain wary of instability spilling across borders.

## Gifted lot

MP's principled stand must trigger change

MEMBER of the parliamentary stand-ing committee on railways earned accolades recently for returning a gold coin and a silver block that he had been gifted. The other MPs, who were part of the visiting team, apparently, did not consid-er it necessary to part with the gifts presented by the and convincingly so — that accepting such gifts was not only in Bihar, Sudama Prasad, argued — and convincingly so — that accepting such gifts was not only unchical, but also bordered on corruption to silence the MPs from raising public issues. For to silence the MPs from raising public issues. For many conversant with the sarkari ways and means, the inquiry ordered by the Railway Minister to pin-point who came up with the idea of such gifts would come as a surprise. Ingenuity in the selection of gifts is actually considered a special trait in government circles. It is the public exchequer who is paying after all, so why worry about the cost involved, or the need of such offerings? of such offerings?

of such offerings?

So forceful has been the imposition of the bouquetand-shawl culture that even political parties now
swear by it. An endless array of flowers and shawls is
handed over with reverence at any public event, and
tossed to the background within no time. One worries
for the health of the flowers as much for the health of the
State that is made to fund such meaningless
stagecraft. Some Union ministers have thankfully
lowered their welcome party to a rose. But, why even
that? The MPs principled stand must trigger a serious debate on doing away with unnecessary frills that
are wasteful and distasteful in equal measure.

Probly in public life has to be the norm and not an

Probity in public life has to be the norm and not an exception. It's a lofty thought, but that's one gift India is so desperately in need of.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1924

Late Dr Subramaniya Iyer

IF the passing away of any man, who had died full of years and of honours, can be rightly moumed by his countrymen, that of Dr Subramaniya was in is on mourred by the whole of India todge. Dr Subramaniya was in his own Province the sole survivo; and in India as whole one of a few survivors, of genemation of mighty actors who made public life in India all that it was until a few years ago it was further transformed by two still mightler actors. He was one of the Counclers of the Indian National Congress and of the Mahajain Sabha, the premier political organisation in the Madras Presidency. He had taken a conspicuous part in the Congress movement before be touncers or the intuin national Congress and or the Mantagin Sailha, the premise political organisation in the Madras Presidency. He
had taken a conspicuous part in the Congress movement before he
became a Judge of the Madras High Court and han actually been
elected President of the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1891,
though he could not preside over it owing to his elevation to the
bench; and after his retirement from the bench he resumed his
dufies as an active Congressman. He took an equally conspicuous
part in the Horne Bale movement of 1914-16 and actually renounced
his Knighthood as a protest against the intermnent of Dr. Besant, the
leader of that movement. To his letter to the President of the United
States we have referred already. However opinion might differ
regarding its propriety from a strictly technical point of view, nor
could fall to be struck either by its note of independence or by the
burning love of country and of freedom of which it was the expres-sion, an independence and a love of country and freedom which the
distinguished patriot evinced still more clearly at the famous interview he had with the Vicercy and the Secretary of State when they
were on their visit to Madras in connection with the Reforms.

# Stakes are the highest for Israel

Assad was pillar of Iran-led 'axis of resistance' that posed a challenge for Jerusalem & US



SHYAM BHATIA BASED SENIOR JOURNALIST

HE US and its Turk ish and Ismeli ailies are the prime movers in whathas been characterised as the Syrian revolution that brought astu revolution that brought a stunning end to the 54-year rule of the Assad dynasty. They are the apparent beneficiaries of a process that start-ed with a civil war, which began in 2011 and reached its climax on Theoretics & when the serious of iber 8 when the regime col lapsed and the country's dictator, Bashar al-Assad, fled to Moscow with his wife and three children.

with his wife and three children. Assad was the main pillar of the Iran-led "axis of resistance" that posed a major challenge for both Jerusalem and Washington. He was also Russia's most trusted regional ally and his departure means. Moscow is obliged to evacuate its last naval and military strongholds in West Asia. Turkew for its next sufficient.

tary strongholds in West Asia. Turkey, for its part, will finally have a sympathetic regime in change in Damascus that can help Anlara confirent the problems it faces with its Kurdish minorities living along the Syrian border. Even better for Turkey is the prospect of lakhs of Syrian refugees returning home and reducing the companie burden. reducing the economic burden of hosting them that Ankara has been forced to bear for the past er a decade

over a decade.

The stakes are the highest for Israel where Assad's downfall has attracted mixed responses, ranging from jubilation to fears about what could emerge in the new Synwhat could emerge in the new Syn-in This is a historic day in the his-tory of the Middle East," Ismeli Prime Minister Benjimin Netamyahu declared during a visit to the Syria border. The Assad regime is a centual link in Iran's Axis of Evil—this negime has fall-en." In a bit to take credit for what



has happened in Syria, Netanyahu added, This is a direct result of the blows we have inflicted on Iran and Hezbollah, the main support ers of the Assad regime. This has created a chain reaction through out the Middle East of all those

out the Middle East of all those who want to be free from this oppressive and tymunical regime.' In this time of uncertainty, includ-ing a power vacuum in Damascus, Israel has taken the initiative by launching a series of pre-emptive military measures. These include deploying army bulldozers, paintdeplosing army bulldozers, paint-edin distinctive orange colours, to dig three-metre deep ditches along the Syria border to block militants from attacking the Jew-ish state that has the most to lose from what unfolds in Damuscus. The nightmarish scenario for laraeti generals, echoed in Wash-ington, is a west of last work.

ington, is a repeat of last year's invasion from Gaza when Hamus gunmen used 4-by-4 Toyota pick ups to crash through border fences and launch the deadliest attack and launch the deadliest attack against Jews since the World War II Holocaust. At least 1,200 Israelis were killed and thousand sinjured, while 240 were kidnapped and tak-en as hostages. Currently, 100 hostages still remain in custody.

nostage state remain in custory.

Ismelis, monitoring the progress
of Syrian rebels, as they too drove
to Damascus in similar four-byfour convoys and backed up by
rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs),
are fearful that what happened

The nightmarish scenario for Israel is a repeat of last year's invasion from Gaza when Hamas gunmen launched a deadly attack against Jews.

across the Gaza border last year could be repeated on the northern border with Syria. Digging the border with Syria. Digging the trenches — code-named Project New East — is one of the several measures approved by cabinet ministers who have been holding emergency meetings to assess the unfolding crisis in Syria.

In another unprecedented move, thousands of Israeli soldiers move, thousands of Israeli soldiers have created a 14-km deep buffer zone on the Syrian side of the bor-der, known as Mount Hermon and famous on the Israeli side as a win-ter ski resort. Israeli media has published pictures of soldiers dis playing their national flag with a caption declaring: "Syria's Mount Hermon has been occupied."

Hermon has teen occuped:
Such is the freo of an escalating
conflict along this border that the
Israeli cabinet is contemplating
ordicing the army to expand its
presence by capturing yet more
Syrian territory. In the past few
days, Israeli warplanes have
days, Israeli warplanes have
days, Israeli warplanes have
and strategie military installations
that are alleged to host dusters of
chemicalweapons, first used more
than a decade ago to intimidate
opponents of ousted President
Bashar al-Ascad, an ally of Russia
and Inn., when they demanded
the end of his authoritation rule.
At the time, Assaid defied US
President Banac Okamaby crossing a so-called red line and deploy-Such is the fear of an escalating

ing a so-called red line and deploy ing these chemical weapons with disregard for international law Obama could have retaliated, but chose not to risk involving the US

chose not to risk involving the US in the Syrian civil war. Delight in Assad's downfall is shared by many Syrian political prisoners rescued from his noto-rious jails. Horror stories of what they endured have sent shock waves across the region. These waves across the region. These include the account of a weeping man who described how he and 54 others were due to be execut-ed last Sunday, but were saved at the last minute when the regime

in Damascus collapsed. Another released victim is a middle-aged woman who was jailed as an unmarried teenager and has now emerged as the mother of two children. She has no idea about the identity of the children's fither or fothers. Some adjusts. father, or fathers. Some elderly prisoners, long presumed dead by their families, have resur-faced to tell their horror tales.

None of these accounts come as a surprise to Syrian human rights campaigners, who explain how Assad and his late father, Hafez al-Assad and his late father Hafezal-Assad, were among the Arab world's most ruthless dictators. Although the Assad family's human rights record has nevel been of interest to Israel, Tel Aviv has always been fearful of how Syria has played host to multiple terror groups headed by the likes or Nari funtities Adis Bruners of Nari funtities Adis Bruners of Nazi fugitive Alois Brunner, an associate of the late Adolph Eich-mann, who died in 2001, Ger-many's Baader-Meinhof, Carlos the Jackal, and membees of the Japanese Red Army, They also include Benazir Batuto's late brother and founder of Al-Zul-fikar, Murtaza Bhutto, famous for swaggering around Damascus hotels in his red-and-gold suits and peat-handled revolver. More recently, Ismelis were worassociate of the late Adolph Eich-

More recently, Ismelis were wor-ried about how Assad allowed himned about how Assad allowed him-self to be used as a proxy for Iran's endless war against Ismel. Iranian military experts were allowed to enter Syria with Assad's personal blessings, bringing with them the expertise to manufacture chemi-cal explosives, drones and long mnge missilesaimed at destroying the Jewish state. Assad also allowed his country to be used as allowed his country to be used as safe passage for Iranian weapons to frontline Hecholiah fighters in the Lebanon. These weapons were repeatedly used during 14 months of the sepanate Ismel-Hecholiah war that ended last month with a US-brokered ceasefire. Sceptics wary about the post-Assad regime involve comparisons with what happened in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan when the dietatorial regimes torought down with the help of the West degenerated into feuding Islamie theoretics.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

History has proved that dictators can't last forever. - Lee Hyeon-seo

## Naming places, the **CRPF** way

KULBIR SINGH

URING the late 1970s, my unit, 18 CRPE was deployed

DuRING the late 1970s, my unit, 18 CRPF, was deployed in Nagaland for counter-insurgency duties. In January 1979, the unit moved at short notice to the Merapani area in Stvasagar district (Assam), where ammed miscreants from Nagaland had killed 54 persons along the interstate border. This area is now called DAB (Disputed Area Belt). I was commanding B company, which was tasked to establish platone posts ahead of Merapani on a stretch of 15 km and carry out extensive patrolling to instil a sense of tranquility amongst the locals. Paddy and mustard crops were all around, with just a narrow foot track to proceed from Merapani. At places, embankments in the fields were also used to traverse the area. Three camps sites were selected where tents were pitched for accommodation, using dry straw from locals. The major problem was of potable water. Locals advised us to excavate around four-feet deep pils in camps, wherein water would come up on its own within a fewhours. I visited the hutments of some locals to see how water was collected from the ground. I found that a small pond-like water body was there in close proximity to every house. It is called polshri in the versacular language. Such pokhris are found in most north-eastern states. The groundwater level in that region is shallow due to excessive rains and a large number of rivers and streams. We, too, prepared a pokiri in our camps. But the water was inadequate for the strength of troops. On moving around, a shallow stream was found. A soil bundh was raised and water collected by diverting its flow. We used choint etablets and also filtered the water with cloth. That is how we managed for a few days until hand pumps were installed. Koresone lamps and petromax were the source of light, the area being devoid of electricity supply.

We started receiving messages from the Unit Hz (to intimate the rame of camploations. The area around was mostly units.)

We started receiving messages from the Unit HQ to intimate the name of camp locations. The area around was mostly unin-habited. We enquired from local settlers, but no one could name halted. We enquired from local settlers, but no one could name the place. With the CRPF dominating the area by extensive floot patrolling, ramay people who had fled started returning. A few settlers were Gurkha and tribals from Orissa and Bihar. They could converse in Hindi. I held a meeting with locals in the camps for better relations and collecting information. I raised the issue of naming the CRPF camp locations, which were to be in Assamese and appropriate with the local topography and culture. After discussions on suggested names, it was quite convincing to name one post as Dightol Pani as a nearby narrow stream flowed from hills and its route was curved like a long serpent. The second post was on a mised piece of land, like a long lateau, so it was good to call it Odali Pothar. We sent these names to the Unit HQ. No one questioned us about the validity of these names. It was satisfying to learn that the Assim Government, too, accepted the names given by the CRPF and validated them in their revenue records.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Address dissent constructively

Refer to 'Rumblings in INDIA'; the alliance focuses on issues like social justice, economic inclusivity and federalism. However, there have been internal challenges, or 'rumblings', among member parties due to ideological differences. seat-sharing disputes and regional priorities Such tensions highlight the difficulties in main taining unity within a diverse coalition, especial taining unity within a diverse coalition, especial-ly in a highly polarised political landscape. Estab-ish a clear framework for decision-making that respects the views of all member parties, ensur-ing no single party domirates the narrative. It is the need of hour to create a patierm to address disagreements constructively without public disagreements constructively without public spats, maintaining the alliance's credibility

SIKANDAR BANSAL, SHIMLA

#### INDIA bloc must show unity

INDIA BIOC MUST SHOW unity Apropos of 'Aumbings in INDIA'; the infight-ings in the INDIA bloo does not augur well for the coalition. At a time when the BJP's jugger-nauth as allowed it to sweep in the Haryana and Maharashtra polls, the disunity of the Opposi-tion is proving costly. The comments made by NCP chief Sharad Pavar showcasing his patron-NCP chief Sharad Pawar showcasing his patron-age for Mannta Banerjee as a cupable leader has caused more trouble. It's high time that the opposition parties get their act together and find a way to take on the mighty BIP which is prov-ing to be invincible after its humdinger perform-ance in the recent Assembly dections.

AANYA SINGHAL, NOIDA

#### Do all to boost GDP levels

Refer to 'A balancing act'; hats off to the RBI for upholding its steadfast stance on inflation control by keeping the repo rate unchanged for the 11th consecutive time despite pressure for the 11th consecutive time despite pressure from the government and stakeholders. This truly reflects the Monetary Policy Commit-tee's continued reliance on price stability over growth amid persistently high inflation and liquidity concerns. Notably, its latest move will add around Rs 1.16 lakh crore more to the and around its 1.10 aith crote more to the banking sector's kitty, which may be gainful-by utilised for further credit creation, being so essential for boosting the nation's GDP levels. However, the ball now lies in the govern-ment's court and it must do everything possi-ble to reverse the declining frend. KUMAR GUPT, PANCHKULA

#### Restructure tax rates

Restructure tax rates
Refer to 'The cost of GST' & fiscal crises in
states;' its true that the intention with which
GST and VAT were introduced as a part of the
fiscal policy has not been achieved. The policy
has failed to bring price stability in the Indian
economy. The taxes levied under it have
resulted in soaring prices of daily use commodifies. As a consequence, the free flow of
noney circulation in the market has been subdued. The proper allocation of the revenue
generated can grant much respite to the ailing
economy. The proper utilisation of resources
in hand and restructuring of tax rates may
bring stability in the declining GDP of India. bring stability in the declining GDP of India RUPINDER KAUR, AMBALA CANTT

#### **Ensure strong India-China ties**

Ensure strong India-China ties
Apropos of 'Opacity continues to afflict IndiaChina relationship', in dealing with Sino-India
relations, one has to understand that there are
numerous interests involved domestically as
well as on the international level. The conflicts
well as on the international level. The conflicts
between the two nations mostly emerged from
the colonial period owing to multiple factors,
including boundary and smuggling, which finally led to the 1962 Sino-India war. Except that,
both have shared a millennia-long civilized history of no-conflict. Our cultural peradigmi is the
same, which means that India and China can
have strong strategic ties benefiting both countries. However, truth and transparency are needed for maintaining good ties. They are pammount for future foreign relations. mount for future foreign relations.

VAIBHAY GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

#### Penalise mobs causing damage

With reference to 'Farmers' march stalled at Shambhu again'; India needs to formulate strict Shambhu again'; India needs to formulate strict guidelines for groups planning to cany out guidelines for groups planning to cany out guidelines for groups planning to can by out guidelines for growth and stake governments. An agistion causing damage to public assets should be regarded as a criminal offence. Mobst throw rocks at policemen, selfreie buseaund block throw rocks at policemen, selfreie buseaund block throwing all in the name of social justice and freedom of expression. In view of protests in US universities. President Biden made it clear that freedom of expression does not constitute freedom to disrupt public order. India should follow his lead and ensure safety and security here in the same way. CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR