



Defending disability reservations

The recent controversy involving Puja Khedkar, who allegedly faked her disability and caste to obtain benefits, has ignited a debate on the reservations granted to persons with disabilities (PwDs). The issue gained further traction when a former chief executive officer of NITI Aayog tweeted that reservations for PwDs need to be reviewed. Although he later clarified that he was referring only to mental disabilities (thereby drawing an unnecessary and baseless wedge between physical and mental disabilities), his statement, along with similar comments from other civil servants, raises troubling questions about societal attitudes towards disabilities and reservation policies.

Deep-rooted ableism
First, how many disabled individuals have these officers interacted with, or had the opportunity to know? Have they ever been introduced to the challenges faced by PwDs, during a session or a workshop? The deep-rooted ableism that their statements reflect are the lived realities of many PwDs.

PwDs face multiple barriers to their effective participation in society and the workforce. These include infrastructural challenges, the education system, and exam curricula and formats that are designed to be used by, and suit, able-bodied individuals. Reservation policies aim to level the playing field by providing equitable opportunities to PwDs. That a few individuals are exploiting these benefits should not overshadow the broader purpose and impact of such policies. Sweeping generalisations based on isolated incidents are unfair and counterproductive. Certain officers have asked whether PwDs who hold positions within the civil services have the “physical fitness” to fulfil their duties. Such statements reflect the unconscious bias that many people hold against PwDs.



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Puja Khedkar's alleged fraudulent activities should be met with stringent punishment. This is the solution, not the review of the reservation system that provides crucial support to a marginalised group

PwDs continue to face challenges in both the education and employment sectors, yet those are hardly highlighted. The 76th round of the National Sample Survey in 2018 found that only 23.8% of PwDs were employed, whereas the Labour Force Participation Rate at the national level was 50.2% the same year. This can be attributed to lack of access to accessible education; stigma and biases at the hiring stage; and lack of reasonable accommodation at the workplace for PwDs.

These structural issues, however, are hardly ever pointed out by the same individuals who question the validity of affirmative action provided to PwDs. For instance, take the case of Kartik Kansal, who is affected by muscular dystrophy. He has not been allotted a service despite clearing the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)'s civil service exam four times. Similarly, due to her disability, Ira Singhal had to approach the Central Administrative Tribunal to secure her rightful posting despite having secured the first rank in the civil service exams. These are the moments when the conscience of our intellectuals should be stirred.

Potential misuse
In a related context, the Supreme Court addressed the potential misuse of scribes in *Vikash Kumar v. UPSC* (2021). The argument was that PwDs, if allowed to choose their scribes and if their disability percentage is less than 40%, might misuse this provision. The Court countered this saying: “If some incidents come to light of able-bodied candidates hiding chits in their dress code and misusing them to cheat in an exam, the normal consequence is suitable punitive action against such students. It is not to switch to a different dress code that is so uncomfortable that many competent students find it hard to sit in it for the entire duration of the exam and perform to the best of their ability.” This principle

should similarly apply to reservations for PwDs.

Certification system
India's certification system for disabilities also has significant flaws. The practice of quantifying disabilities by percentage is outdated and not supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Functional limitations, rather than medical percentages, should be the basis for assessment. Also, the UPSC insists on a separate and independent disability assessment, thereby cocking a snook at the disability certification process recognised by the government that results in the issuance of a disability certificate and Unique Disability ID (UDID). This gives rise to the possibility of the two sets of assessments yielding contradictory results

An additional challenge is the lack of specialists to evaluate various disabilities, which makes the certification process inaccessible and time consuming. The complicated assessment guidelines prescribed by the state are often unrealistic at the level of district hospitals, which are constrained in terms of both infrastructure and resources. This leaves the assessment of the disability and its extent open to interpretation. Psychosocial disabilities, whose assessment is relatively more subjective, are assessed based on the outdated IDEAS (Indian Disability Evaluation and Assessment Scale) scale. In many cases, such tests are not even conducted. Persons with invisible, hidden, or less apparent disabilities, such as blood disorders, often face rejection because they “do not look disabled”.

The focus should be on addressing these systemic issues. Ms. Khedkar's alleged fraudulent activities should be met with stringent punishment. This is the solution, not the unwarranted review of the reservation system that provides crucial support to a marginalised group.

Udhayanidhi Stalin's great challenge

If he does not rise to the occasion, it could affect the Dravidian movement

STATE OF PLAY

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M.K. Stalin, who had waited for decades to become president of the DMK and Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, seems to have fast-tracked the rise of his son, Udhayanidhi Stalin. The younger Stalin, a debutant Minister for Youth Welfare and Sports Development, and secretary of the DMK's youth wing, has climbed the political ladder quickly. There is now intense speculation that he could be elevated as Deputy Chief Minister.

While Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin has sought to play down the rumours saying he “values the post of the secretary of the youth wing above all positions”, senior leaders and ministers believe there is “no smoke without fire.” They have reasons to say this. When there were whispers earlier that Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin and his brother-in-law Sabareesan would join politics, Mr. Stalin had said no one from his family would enter politics, but it did not take long for him to contradict his statements.

Back then, it was a different time in Tamil Nadu. Mr. Stalin, who had inherited the party from his father, DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi, was wary of public opinion against the elevation of his son. Mr. Stalin had taken over as DMK working president when Karunanidhi was inactive in politics due to old age, but still had a significant presence in the party. The AIADMK, the main opposition party, which was in power after the death of its leader Jayalalithaa, could claim the moral high ground saying it was free from the pressures of family politics.

The 2021 Assembly polls were crucial for the DMK, which had been out of power for 10 years, and Mr. Stalin was worried that his son's rise could work against the party. But the death of Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi would have emboldened him to appoint his son – first as secretary of the youth wing and later as the DMK candidate for the Thiruvallikeni-Chepauk Assembly constituency.

It is not as if Mr. Udhayanidhi was given everything on a platter. He proved himself as a campaigner during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In the 2021 Assembly polls, by holding a single piece of brick, he conveyed the message that the BJP-led Central government had not done anything beyond announcing that it would set up an All Indian Institute of Medical Science in Madurai. He had already gained attention in Tamil Nadu as an actor even though none of his films, barring *Maamannan*, a political drama that was released after the 2021 Assembly polls, carried a strong social message.

The DMK won the Assembly elections comfortably in 2021. However, despite the fact that Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin had gained acceptance among the party leaders and cadres alike, Mr. Stalin did not include his son in his Cabinet. Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin had to

wait for more than a year to find a place in the cabinet and rank ninth in seniority in the ministry.

Clad in jeans and tee shirts with a logo of the party's youth wing, Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin has refused to be bogged down by embarrassing questions, such as those relating to dynasty politics. He has shown that he is capable of handling major political issues, such as the uproar that followed his comments on Sanatana Dharma. At the same time, he has not made any significant change that is expected of a successor. Whenever he was expected to be proactive in dealing with certain issues, he has left them to be tackled by his father. For instance, the recent hooch tragedy in Kallakurichi, which claimed the lives of 67 people, provided a great opportunity for him to rise to the occasion. But the DMK government handled it the way the previous governments in the State did. The killing of Bahujaan Samaj Party leader Armstrong and the gunning down of one of his assassins after their arrest speak poorly of the planning and performance of the government.

The Dravidian movement captured the imagination of the people by highlighting genuine issues that failed to be addressed by the Congress, which led the freedom movement in the country. The DMK and its offshoot, the AIADMK, dominated the political scene by meeting regional aspirations. But half a decade of Dravidian rule has not brought any qualitative change in Tamil Nadu politics. If Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin fails to usher in the changes expected of young politicians of modern times, it will prove to be difficult for the Dravidian movement as a whole.

The Dalit factor in the 2024 Lok Sabha election

The Congress improved its vote share in Scheduled Caste-reserved seats to 20.8% in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections from 16.7% in 2019

DATA POINT

Sanjay Kumar
Jyoti Mishra
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The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost the election in the Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency, which is home to the Ram Mandir. There was a lot of speculation that the party would make gains in this seat because this was the first election after the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. However, the verdict came as a surprise. Not only did the BJP lose, but the Dalit candidate from the Samajwadi Party (SP), Awadhesh Prasad, defeated the Thakur candidate from the BJP, Lallu Singh, in this non-reserved seat. In Indian electoral history, this was one of the few instances of a Dalit candidate winning from an unreserved Lok Sabha seat. This draws attention to how Dalits voted in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Gains for Congress
A look at the performance of political parties in parliamentary constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) – 84 in total – shows that the Congress won 20 such seats and the Congress and its allies won 33. The Congress won only six SC-reserved seats in 2019, so its performance in 2024 in SC-reserved seats was a considerable improvement for the party. The Congress performed better not only in terms of seats but also in terms of vote share: it secured 20.8% of the vote share in the 2024 elections compared to 16.7% in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

On the other hand, the BJP suffered a setback in SC-reserved seats. It won only 29 seats in 2024 compared to 46 in 2019. Overall, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) managed to win 39 SC-reserved seats in 2024, which is 15 seats fewer than in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections (**Table 1**).



Samajwadi Party MP Awadhesh Prasad speaks in the Lok Sabha in New Delhi. ANI

The electoral fate of parties
In many States, the choices of Dalit voters may have changed the electoral fate of political parties. More specifically, they may have been instrumental to an extent in shaping the electoral outcome of the NDA and INDIA blocs in many States. While Dalits did not vote in a similar manner in all States, data suggest that wherever Dalit voters supported the NDA or the INDIA bloc, that alliance got more seats. For instance, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have a similar nature of political contest. The INDIA bloc performed well in Uttar Pradesh, but not to the same extent in Bihar. The findings of the National Election Study (NES) 2024 show that Dalit voters backed the INDIA bloc candidates in Uttar Pradesh, but not to the same extent in Bihar.

The findings of the NES reveal the same story in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Dalits preferred voting for candidates of the INDIA bloc in higher numbers compared to those of the NDA in Maharashtra, but not in Madhya Pradesh.

In Rajasthan, 46% of the Dalits voted for the Congress, while only 37% voted for the BJP candidates (**Table 2**). In this State, the BJP had won all 25 seats in both the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections; it lost 10 Lok Sabha seats in 2024.

In Gujarat, 57% of Dalit voters voted for the BJP and only 43% vot-

ed for the Congress. The BJP won 25 of the total 26 Lok Sabha seats.

Dalit voters favoured the Congress in Haryana; Congress won five of the 10 seats. During the 2019 elections, the BJP had won all the 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana.

The BJP won 20 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats and 78 of the 147 Assembly seats in Odisha. Among the Dalit voters, 46% voted for the BJP, 40% voted for the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), and 15% voted for the Congress/INDIA bloc in this State.

In neighbouring West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress maintained its dominance winning 29 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats; here, however, 45% of Dalits voted for the BJP, while a smaller share (41%) voted for the Trinamool, which managed to mobilise voters from various other social communities.

In the south
In Andhra Pradesh, the Dalit vote was more or less equally divided between the Telugu Desam Party and its allies, and the YSR Congress Party.

In Telangana, 46% of Dalits voted for the Congress/INDIA bloc, 23% for the BJP/NDA, and 31% for the Bhartiya Rashtra Samiti (BRS).

The good performance of the Congress in Karnataka is largely credited to the shift of the Dalit voters to the Congress (66% voted for the party).

The BJP's good performance in Assam is credited to the continued support of Dalits for the party. The NES 2024 data indicate that 70% of the Dalits voted for the BJP/NDA in Assam while only 12% voted for the Congress/INDIA bloc.

The data show the significance of the Dalit votes for the victory/good performance of political parties in various States, though they do not indicate that this may be the only reason for the party's victory in these States.

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How Dalits voted

The tables were sourced from Centre for the Study of Developing Societies' Data Unit and the National Election Study (NES) 2024 conducted by Lokniti-CSDS



Table 1 | The table shows the party and alliance-wise performance in Dalit reserved seats in the past three Lok Sabha elections

Poll year	Congress		UPA/INDIA		BJP		NDA		Others	
	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)
2014	7	17.6	7	18.9	40	27.6	49	35.4	28	45.7
2019	6	16.7	12	22.1	46	35.3	54	44.3	18	33.6
2024	20	20.8	33	31.9	29	34.5	39	42.4	12	25.7

Table 2 | The chart shows how Dalits voted in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Figures are in percentage

States	INDIA bloc	NDA	Other state parties
Bihar	40	60	—
U.P.	38	26	32 BSP
M.P.	36	53	—
Maharashtra	46	35	—
Gujarat	43	57	—
Rajasthan	46	37	—
Punjab	31	15	54 AAP
Haryana	67	25	—
Odisha	15	46	40 BJD
West Bengal	3	45	41 TMC
Andhra Pradesh	2	48	50 YSRCP
Telangana	46	23	31 BRS
Karnataka	66	33	—
Assam	12	70	—

Dalits backed the INDIA bloc in Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Telangana. The NDA candidates were supported in States such as Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam and Andhra Pradesh

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 29, 1974

Floods recede in Kerala: 38 dead

At least 38 persons have lost their lives in floods and landslips caused by heavy rains that ravaged the central and northern districts of Kerala during the weekend.

Twenty-eight of these deaths occurred in the worst-affected Idikki district in the High Ranges. Official confirmation was available only for 19, all in Devicolam taluk. Officials, however, feared that the toll might be even higher. The remaining ten deaths were in the Malabar region.

As reports of damage to property and standing crops were trickling in, the floods have started receding everywhere. Road communication between Cochin and the northern region, snapped yesterday following the inundation of patches of the national highway, was restored this afternoon as the rains ceased and the waters got drained out.

While information from Idikki was tardy in coming because of communication bottlenecks reports from other centres spoke of mass evacuation of people from low-lying areas. As many as 25,000 people were removed to places of safety in the three northern districts and another 1,000 in Ernakulam district.

A number of buses and passengers were reported trapped in several localities as boulders had blocked roads at many points in Idukki. In certain areas portions of roads had been completely washed away. Till to-night there was no information about these buses.

Five persons including three women were killed in a landslide in Vellathuval. Seven were killed in Koompanpara. Among these were three members of a family who left their house fearing that it was not safe and took shelter in another building which was razed to the ground when boulders came hurtling down. Ironically their houses remained intact. Three perished in a landslide at Adimali.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 29, 1924

Rebellion in Brazil

New York, July 28: The Cable Company has received a message from an authentic source stating that the revolutionary outbreak in Sao Paulo is concluded by a Government victory. The message adds the conditions in Sao Paulo are rapidly becoming normal.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of Indian sportswomen who won Olympic medals

8 Manu Bhaker becomes the first Indian marksman to secure an Olympic medal, ending a 12-year drought in medals for shooting, with the most recent win being from shooter Vijay Kumar in the 2012 London Olympics. PTI

Funds raised by the Harris campaign for the U.S. electoral race

200 in \$ million. This amount was raised in less than a week. Vice President Kamala Harris' candidacy earned enough delegates to become the presumptive nominee. PTI

The points deducted from Canada women's soccer team

6 FIFA dished out several punishments to the Canadian women's soccer team. Two assistant coaches were caught using drones to spy on opponent New Zealand's practices before their opening game. PTI

The projects advanced by Coal India Ltd to boost output

119 Coal India Ltd is advancing projects with a capacity of 896 million tonne per year and a sanctioned capital of ₹1,33,576 crore. The company has set a target of 1 billion tonne of production by 2025-26. PTI

The smuggled foreign cigarettes seized in Mumbai

63 in lakh. The Special Intelligence and Investigation Branch seized the cigarettes with an estimated value of ₹6.5 crore from Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in Mumbai. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On reservations and the OBC creamy layer

What were the recommendations of the Mandal Commission? What is the criteria for exclusion of the 'creamy layer' of the Other Backward Class? Is the concentration of reservation benefits a concern? What can done for a more equitable distribution?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

The allotment of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) to Pujya Khedkar as an Other Backward Class (OBC) Non-Creamy Layer (NCL) candidate coupled with multiple disabilities has raised issues surrounding the creamy layer in OBC reservation.

What is the history of reservation?

Articles 15 and 16 guarantee equality to all citizens in any policy of the government and public employment respectively. In order to achieve social justice, they also enable special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes or OBC, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Reservations for SC and ST are fixed at 15% and 7.5% respectively, in jobs, educational institutions and public sector undertakings (PSU) at the central level. It was in 1990, when V. P. Singh was Prime Minister, that 27% reservation for OBC was implemented in central government employment based on Mandal Commission (1980) recommendations. Subsequently in 2005, reservation was enabled for OBC, SC and ST in educational institutions including private institutions. In 2019, 10% reservation was enabled for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among the unreserved category.

What is the creamy layer?

The 27% reservation for OBC was upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Indra Sawhney* case (1992). It opined that caste is a determinant of class in the Indian context. However, in order to uphold the basic structure of equality, it fixed a cap of 50% for reservation unless there are exceptional circumstances. The court also provided for exclusion of creamy layer from OBC.



High stakes: Aspirants look for their roll numbers before the UPSC civil services exam, on June 16. PTI

The criteria for identifying a person as part of the creamy layer is based on the recommendations of the Justice Ram Nandan Prasad Committee (1993). It is determined by the position/income of an applicant's parents alone. The criteria for belonging to creamy layer is parental income, excluding income from salary and agricultural income, being more than ₹8 lakh in each year in the last three consecutive financial years. Further, the following categories of applicants are also considered as belonging to creamy layer : (a) parents, either of whom entered government service (centre or State) as Group A/Class I officer or parents, both of whom entered as Group B/Class II officers or father, who was recruited in Group B/Class II post and promoted to Group A/Class I before 40 years of age; (b) either of the parents employed in a managerial position in PSUs; (c) either of the parents

holding constitutional posts.

What are the issues?

The recent controversy has raised issues surrounding the inadequacies in the process. There are allegations that some applicants manage to obtain NCL or EWS certificate through dubious means. The same may also be true with respect to disability certificates in order to take benefit of the 4% of seats reserved for persons with disabilities in central government jobs. There are also allegations of applicants and their parents adopting strategies to get around the creamy layer exclusion like gifting of assets, taking premature retirement etc., since the applicant's or his/her spouse's income is not considered for such exclusion. Another contentious issue relates to concentration of reservation benefits. The Rohini Commission, that

was set up for providing recommendation on sub-categorisation among OBC castes, has estimated that 97% of reserved jobs and seats in educational institutions have been garnered by just around 25% of the OBC castes/sub-castes at the central level. Close to 1,000 of around 2,600 communities under the OBC category had zero representation in jobs and educational institutes. Similar issue of concentration of reservation benefits persists in the SC and ST category as well. There is neither any exclusion based on 'creamy layer' for these communities.

The reservation at present stands at 60%, including the reservation for EWS. Considering societal realities, this higher percentage of reservation is required. It is pertinent to note that as per government replies in Parliament, 40-50% of seats reserved for OBC, SC and ST in the central government remain unfilled.

What can be the way forward?

The foremost requirement is to plug the loopholes in the issue of NCL, EWS and disability certificates. There must be thorough scrutiny to ensure that only eligible applicants obtain these benefits.

The vacancies for reserved communities should be filled without backlogs. Sub-categorisation of reservation may be essential to address the under representation or non-representation of various communities. Similarly, creamy layer exclusion in SC and ST category, at least for children of Group I/Class A government officials may be considered. These are sensitive matters in which for every argument in favour of such a proposal, there are valid counter arguments that can be advanced. Nevertheless, a discussion should begin on these aspects with all stakeholders to implement them. This would ensure that benefits of reservation reach the more marginalised among underprivileged in successive generations.

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THE GIST

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What is South Africa's new law on climate change?

What are the features of the law? Does India have an omnibus legislation on climate change?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, signed into law a piece of legislation that will impose mandatory curbs on the emissions from large, fossil-fuel heavy industries and, require climate-adaptation plans from towns and villages. The President said this would enable South Africa to meet its emissions reduction commitments under the Paris agreement.

What is the significance of this law?

The Climate Change Bill was approved by South Africa's National Assembly last November. South Africa relies on coal as its primary fuel source for electricity generation and is one of the world's top 15 greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters. According to an official estimate, net emissions in 2017 were estimated at 512 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂e), an increase of 14% from 2000. In 2022, this fell to 405 Mt

CO₂e, a 3% fall from 2021, according to Statista. It is unclear if these numbers are strictly comparable and if the fall was linked to the worldwide, temporary dip in emissions following COVID-19. The energy sector represents roughly 80% of gross emissions, with energy industries (~60%) and transport (~12%). Being an economy which is dependent on agriculture and tourism, South Africa has faced increasing Western pressure to accelerate its transition away from fossil fuel.

What steps has South Africa taken?

Every country submits Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), which are time-bound commitments to lower emissions. South Africa submitted its first NDC in 2016 and its updated NDC in 2021. The updated NDC commits to 31% reduction and a fixed target for GHG emissions levels of 398-510 MtCO₂e by 2025, and 350-420 MtCO₂e by 2030.

The NDC outlines an approach for a 'just transition,' – or the sustainable movement to jobs away from fossil-fuel

dependent industries – to achieve targets, focusing on agriculture, forestry and other land use, energy, industrial processes and product use, and waste sectors. South Africa has estimated that it requires \$8 billion per year by 2030. It has set an internal goal of reaching 'net zero emissions' by 2050 in its Low-Emission Development Strategy submitted in 2020. In addition, the Presidential Climate Commission released its Just Transition Framework in 2022, which aims to inform policy making at the nexus of climate and development to enable deep, just transformational shifts. These were the actions that preceded the signing of the Climate Change Bill.

What about India?

India does not have a comprehensive legislation on climate change. Priyanka Chaturvedi, the Rajya Sabha parliamentarian, had moved a Private Member's Bill, called the Council on Climate Change Bill, most recently in 2022. This proposed setting up a Council,

chaired by the Prime Minister, for advising the Union government on all matters related to climate change but there has been no significant movement on this so far. However, climate change features in multiple Acts and subordinate legislation. These include the Environmental Protection Act, Forest Conservation Act, Energy Conservation Act, Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act among others.

Are these enough?

In April this year, the Supreme Court ruled that citizens have a "right against the adverse effects of climate change," and referred to the fact that India did not have an omnibus legislation on climate change. "Despite Constitutional guarantees that give the citizens equality before the law and right to life and personal liberty, it was now necessary, in the Court's view, to explicitly link the impact of climate change as something which impedes these rights of liberty, life and equality." Prior to the UN Conference of Parties in Dubai last year, India communicated that the intensity of its energy emissions had reduced by 33% from 2005-2019, 11 years ahead of target. It also committed to revising its emissions intensity to 45% by 2030 in the updated set of NDC. Emission intensity refers to the total amount of GHG emitted for every unit increase of GDP. It is different from absolute emissions. India has also committed to source 50% of its electricity in 2030 from non-fossil fuel resources.

THE GIST

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CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

What are the various efforts being taken to mitigate caller ID spoofing?

Caller ID spoofing is a technique with which the phone number that a call appears to originate from can be falsified. Spoofing techniques have been honed by enthusiasts, telemarketers, and fraudsters alike, over the years

Karan Saini

Several friends and family members of mine received a call from a North American (+1) phone number which played a pre-recorded message informing them of a supposed court summons. I happened to receive a call from a +1 number too. I had also missed a domestic call shortly before the international one. While these automated calls are part of a well-known scam, looking at the phone numbers, I noticed that the Indian and North American phone numbers were identical to each other, save for their country codes. The Indian number was +91 98199 69857, and the American number was +1 (981) 996-9857.

What is caller ID spoofing?

Caller ID spoofing is a technique with which the phone number that a call appears to originate from can be falsified. On a technical level, caller ID spoofing is not difficult to perform. Spoofing techniques have been honed by enthusiasts, telemarketers, and fraudsters alike, over the years. Malicious individuals use caller ID spoofing primarily to shield their identity when engaging in illicit activity. At times, caller ID spoofing is used by these individuals to carry out social engineering attacks, where the spoofed caller ID is abused for the implicit trust that the receiving party associates with it. Caller ID spoofing can also be used to circumvent standard call blocking

systems, and even for exploiting vulnerabilities in insecure Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems. Caller ID spoofing in itself is perfectly legal in many jurisdictions, and as a result of this several companies offering caller ID spoofing services to customers around the world have popped up over the years, with the first commercial caller ID spoofing service launching in 2004.

Tackling scam calls

Caller ID spoofing is a costly affair for everyone involved. Telecommunication service providers lose revenue, users that are defrauded due to a scam call abusing a spoofed caller ID lose money, and law enforcement has a harder time investigating crimes where spoofed caller IDs are used. Caller ID spoofing is not a new phenomenon, and there have been several earnest technical efforts made for fixing the problem.

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is a special UN agency focused on improving and standardising global information and communication technologies. The ITU was originally established as the International Telegraph Union in 1865, much before the UN existed, and of which India has been a member since 1869 onward. In 2021, the ITU published a technical report on countering caller ID spoofing. While this report does not have any mandatory provisions, it does provide a reference using Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) based authentication which could be

implemented by Indian telecom operators to fix caller ID spoofing for good.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had earlier recommended to telecom operators to integrate a system known as Calling Name Presentation (CNAP), with the idea of allowing consumers to know who is calling them in a way similar to how applications such as TrueCaller do it, except CNAP would be mandatory, and caller names would appear as per KYC documents. A 2022 consultation paper on the project makes only a few mentions of caller ID spoofing, and does not provide a plan or technical measures for tackling the issue. It merely acknowledges in one sentence that caller ID spoofing is a problem that exists. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is reportedly in the process of launching a pilot of the CNAP project. Though it is not known whether CNAP will (or should) be implemented, it can be said that introducing such a system without first implementing a technical fix for caller ID spoofing will be a mistake.

According to news reports from May 2024, the DoT has devised a system to “identify and block” international calls with a manipulated Calling Line Identity (CLI) and has issued directions to telecom operators to prevent such calls from reaching subscribers.

However, considering that the problem has still not been fixed, it is unclear whether the system (technical details of which have not been furnished) is effective, or if it has even been

implemented.

Government inaction

The Telecommunications Act, 2023 which was partially notified on June 26 of this year allows the Union Government to take over control and operation of any telecommunication service or network during times of “emergency.” Section 20 of the Act empowers the Government to take “temporary possession of any telecommunication service or telecommunication network from an authorised entity” for “any public emergency, including disaster management, or in the interest of public safety.” The Act has received criticism for being invasive and potentially increasing surveillance powers. That aside, it can be said that fixing caller ID spoofing would be “in the interest of public safety”; why then has the Government not taken action?

Fixing the technical and implementation problem of caller ID spoofing will have an outweighed impact for all stakeholders. For consumers, fixing caller ID spoofing will reduce spam and fraud calls, and will completely eliminate fraud that relies on false representation of one’s identity via phone number. For telecommunications providers, it will save revenue that would otherwise be lost, and for the Government and therefore the public, it would result in revenue that would contribute to the Indian economy.

Karan Saini is a security engineer and researcher based in New Delhi, India

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

A quiz on some of the important events that happened on July 26

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

Two former Prime Ministers of these two countries, which are part of Oceania, were born on July 26. While one of them was the PM of this country between 1996 and 2007, the other was this country’s third female PM between 2017 and 2023. Name the Prime Ministers and the counties.

QUESTION 2

This American actor born on July 26 has received numerous accolades including Academy Awards. Known for this political show called *House of Cards*, he was recently accused of sexual misconduct in 2017. Name the actor.

QUESTION 3

This Irish singer-songwriter died on this day last year. After converting to Islam in 2018, she adopted the name Shuhada’ Sadaqat, while continuing to perform and record under her birth name. Identify her.

QUESTION 4

This is celebrated every year to observe India’s victory over Pakistan, in a war that ended on July 26, 1999. What is it called?

QUESTION 5

This English writer was born on this day in 1894. His novels include *The Genius* and *the Goddess*, *Point Counter Point* and *Eyeless in Gaza*, among others. Name the writer.



Visual question:

Identify this American sportsperson born on July 26. What is the sport she was known for?

Questions and Answers to the July 26 edition of the daily quiz: 1. *The Tiger of Dross* is a biography of this Mahavir Chakra awardee. **Ans: Capt. Anuj Nayyar, MVC(P)**

2. The sub-sector west of the Siachen glacier was renamed after this Vir Chakra awardee’s sacrifice. **Ans: Capt. Haneef Uddin, Vr C (P)**

3. The codename of the Indian Air Force operations during the Kargil War in 1999. **Ans: Operation Safed Safar**

4. The science block of the National Defence Academy is named after which Param Vir Chakra awardee of Kargil. **Ans: Capt. Manoj Pandey, PVC (P)**

5. Bikram Saluja portrayed which Vir Chakra awardee’s role in the movie *LOC*. **Ans: Capt. Sanjeev Singh Jamwal, VrC**

6. This PVC awardee’s code name was Shershah. **Ans: Capt. Vikram Batra, PVC**

7. The name of the Indian Navy operation launched in conjunction with Op Vijay in 1999. **Ans: Operation Talwar**

8. The Chief of Army Staff of India during the Kargil War. **Ans: Gen V. P. Malik**

Visual: The monument of this ‘Batalik Hero’ was established in 2007. **Ans: Capt. M. Saravanan, VrC**
Early Birds: Animesh Mohan| Tamal Biswas| Kaustubh Rana



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subramanian

“Difference between ‘among’ and ‘amongst’ (Chandra Mouli, Madras).”
“There is no difference. Fowler says that ‘amongst is more usual before vowels.’ ‘Among’ and ‘amongst’ must be followed by a plural noun or pronoun. They can also be followed by a group noun, singular in form, but plural in sense such as ‘family,’ ‘crowd.’

*I found him among his friends.
He loves to work amongst the weaker sections of society.*

*The girl was found among the crowd.
They are always quarrelling among themselves.*

She is the most talented among her sisters.

You use ‘among’ when more than two persons or things are involved. ‘Between’ is ‘used of people or things, either two in number or more than two considered individually.’

*This is strictly between you and me.
There will be an interval of ten minutes between the acts* (not between each act).

‘Between’ and not ‘among’ is used where three or more parties are considered to be in a close relationship.

Negotiations are going on between members of the European Common Market.

When you describe a triangular piece of land, you say the land is between three points and not among three points.”

“Crapulent (S. K. Chaturvedi, Nagpur).”
“ ‘Crapulent’ is a literary word which means ‘feeling unwell as a result of eating or drinking too much.’

He drank like a fish last night and is in a crapulent state now.

The ‘a’ is pronounced like the ‘a’ in ‘man’ and ‘u’ like the ‘u’ in ‘tube.’”
“Onomastics (G. Bapiah Gupta, Ponnur).”

“ ‘Onomastics’ is ‘the study of the origin and formation of (especially personal) proper names.’ This is a plural noun treated as a singular. Onomastics is an interesting science. The adjective is ‘onomastic.’ The first ‘o’ is pronounced like the ‘o’ in ‘got,’ the second one like the ‘a’ in ‘India,’ the ‘a’ like the ‘a’ in ‘man.’ The stress is on the third syllable. It is from Greek ‘onoma’ which means a name.”

“Meaning of ‘to turn a blind eye’ (G. Ravichandran, Bombay).”

“ ‘To turn a blind eye’ means ‘to take no notice (of an action), stop oneself deliberately from becoming concerned.’ When you turn a blind eye to something, you pretend not to have seen something, although you actually have. You do not let what you have seen affect you in any way because as far as you are concerned you have not seen anything!

Shanthi’s behaviour at the party was outrageous. But her husband Ram turned a blind eye to everything.

Our new Vice-Chancellor is very strict. He has asked us not to turn a blind eye to copying by students.”

Published in The Hindu on October 20, 1992.

Word of the day

Parsimony:

extreme care in spending money; reluctance to spend money unnecessarily; extreme stinginess

Synonyms: thrift, penny-pinching, tightfistedness

Usage: *She was surprised by the parsimony of larger corporations.*

Pronunciation: bit.ly/parsimonypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /paːsəˈmɒni/

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

Amber signal

Rail Budget's capex boost welcome, but concerns remain

The recent years have seen a major transformation in Railways' finances. The Centre has stepped up its gross budgetary support to the Railways, bringing down the latter's reliance on external borrowings. A 77 per cent increase in capex over the last five years, culminating in ₹2.6 lakh crore in FY24, is geared towards modernisation of passenger and freight services. This effort to raise Railways' modal share in freight transport (barely 30 per cent now, against 52 per cent in 2007-08) will take time to bear fruit.

The Budget rightly steps up support at ₹2.55 lakh crore for FY25, against ₹2.43 lakh crore in FY24 (with external borrowings pegged at ₹10,000 crore this fiscal against ₹17,000 crore last year) but the issue is whether there should be some benchmarks on returns to investment and project execution. For now, there are no signs of a turnaround in freight earnings. A 6 per cent growth projection in goods earnings, from ₹1.64 lakh crore last fiscal to ₹1.74 lakh crore in FY25, seems underwhelming — particularly when viewed against the fact that the revised estimate for FY24 was way below the Budget projection of ₹1.75 lakh crore, the same as the target for this year.

A projected 9.5 per cent increase in passenger earnings at ₹80,000 crore suggests that freight services are under a little less pressure to subsidise passenger travel. But the Railways must attract higher freight volumes even as it positions itself as a high-end passenger travel option. According to an analysis by PRS, the share of the Railways in the movement of cars has increased from 1.5 per cent in FY14 to over 16 per cent today. However, the share of coal in freight volumes remains unchanged at 43 per cent over a decade, with iron ore and cement making up 15 per cent and 9 per cent respectively, while containerised volumes remain flat at 7-8 per cent. While the development of Gati Shakti terminals and dedicated freight corridors is expected to lift high-value traffic movement, it is worth asking whether multi-modal connectivity can be improved in other ways. CAG audits on execution of projects must be taken seriously. Apart from a freight turnaround, safety is a concern. There has been an increase in investment in new lines and rolling stock (passenger coaches) but less so in signalling and communication works and track renewals. The Railways, simply speaking, cannot fund its capital needs. Its revenues just about cover its operating expenses of ₹2.75 lakh crore with about ₹2,800 crore to spare. The Budget will have to provide for capital outlay, unless the Railways pitches in with better revenues. There are no easy solutions to reducing the salaries and pensions burden, accounting for two-thirds of the operating expenses. Indeed, the Railways needs critical safety personnel. Finally, investing in Railways brings an economic rate of return but efficiencies in managing physical and human resources are important.

OTHER VOICES.

The New York Times

Decoding JD Vance's brand of nationalism

President Biden, in his speech on Wednesday explaining why he withdrew his candidacy, described America as "the most powerful idea in the history of the world." In language echoing legacy Republicans like Ronald Reagan, Mr. Biden said that it was "an idea stronger than any army, bigger than any ocean, more powerful than any dictator or tyrant." But Donald Trump's Republican Party is turning away from that kind of language. At the Republican convention, JD Vance, his running mate, made a point of saying that America is "not just an idea" but a "homeland," evoking a mountain cemetery in Eastern Kentucky where he said his ancestors are buried and where he hopes that he and his children will be buried as well. Some of his critics denounced those references to his family's land and lineage as coded "blood and soil" nationalism. NEW YORK, JULY 28



America holds the cards in the US-Israel relationship

When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed a joint meeting of the US Congress, he began by telling the assembled lawmakers they were meeting "at a crossroads of history." Mr Netanyahu is right about that, albeit for entirely the wrong reasons. What he failed to acknowledge is that the cause of Palestine has rarely attracted so much righteous support from the international community as it does today. Mr Netanyahu's speech seemed primarily for domestic consumption. But even many Israelis were left disappointed. There was little mention of the need for a ceasefire, a Palestinian state or US President Joe Biden's three-phase peace plan, a credible proposal that received backing from the UN Security Council. ABU DHABI, JULY 26

LINE & LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

It's almost two months since the 2024 election result was announced, long enough to take a dispassionate view of it. The starting point must be the fact of the BJP losing its majority being interpreted by the Congress as having anointed Rahul Gandhi as the real prime minister.

That Indian politics needs an opposition is not in doubt. What is in doubt, however, is if the Congress should be that opposition, especially if led by Rahul Gandhi.

I reminded a friend of the Indian cricket team's World Cup win in 1983, which was a fluke. It took very long after that for the team to perform consistently and win a big trophy. The 1985 thing in Australia was the sole exception.

The Congress did better than expected but hardly very well in the general election mainly because of the 30 seats that the BJP lost in UP.

And that was because the Congress successfully spread the lie that the BJP would do away with caste-based reservation. It said the Constitution would be amended.

That it would be amended was probably true. But not with respect to reservation. As Modi said with respect to the MGNREGA rumour once, he knew his politics and wasn't about to undo a political boondoggle. Ditto with reservation.

The Congress is also trying to project Rahul Gandhi as Jack the Giant Killer. Winning 99 seats out of 543 is hardly convincing proof of that.

After all, the BJP won 240 and, but for some tactical mistakes, it would have won around 290.

If I may revert to 1983, the Congress is like the Indian team and the BJP is like the West Indies then. Look up the stats and you will see how enormous the gap between the two was. They, and all other teams, walloped India repeatedly for a decade after that.

CONGRESS'S BAZBALL APPROACH It's obvious now that the Congress has decided to adopt bazball tactics. There's a new aggression aimed at the BJP that is good to see.

But the difference between actual bazball and this Congress thing is that in cricket, bazball is a cold and calculated approach. The Congress and Opposition



Can Congress play bazball and win consistently?

The party cannot displace the BJP from the public mind merely by aggressive posturing

way, however, is inspired in part by sheer anger at losing power and in part by a terrible fear because they all have something to hide. There's nothing cold and calculated about it.

Bazball in cricket worked for a while till the opposition came up with a counter. Also, remember, if it worked half the time in T20 games that was considered fantastic. But that percentage in other formats is just plain disastrous. Politics and cricket are patience games. Equally, bazball depends primarily on a good wicket.

It fails on surfaces where the ball

Can a party that makes minority rights its central platform win over the majority without creating its own minorities of caste and still talk of Bharat Jodo?

doesn't come to the bat. The BJP will surely fix the wickets soon.

THE ROLE OF RAHUL GANDHI

Finally, there's Rahul Gandhi. He reminds me of many modern IPL batsmen who forget that the bowlers also have skills and that it's consistency that matters, not a few flashes in the pan.

The problem with Rahul Gandhi is that he has started believing that he is a great mass leader. He is being bolstered by the usual gang of family hangers-on. What he forgets is that of the 232 seats the Opposition alliance won, he can take credit only for 99. Modi, on the other hand, can take credit for 240 of the BJP's alliance. That's the gap and if Rahul Gandhi doesn't mind it, he will fall in. Does he have the political nous not to fall in? I doubt it very much. He is far too dependent on others. Worse, he has been copying the playbook Modi employed since 2007. But the main difference is that while Modi had only one way to go — up — Gandhi also has only one way to go —

down. As a friend who knows French history put it, "Rahul Gandhi has changed his style from being Bonny Prince Charlie and the King over the Water to being the Scarlet Pimpernel and saving Congress Aristocrats from the Jacobin Terror. Either way, he's Ancien Régime stuff."

But leave all this aside. Forget Rahul Gandhi. Politically, he is actually still not very convincing. Instead, ask if a party like the Congress, with no organisation worth the name, and dependent on European ideas of social democracy, can displace the BJP from the public mind?

Can a party that makes minority rights its central platform win over the majority without creating its own minorities of caste and still talk of Bharat Jodo? Fear mongering worked once in one State, UP. But in the even more caste-based politics of Bihar, it failed. The Congress needs to ask why. It also needs to ask if India has reached the stage of political evolution where individual rights matter more than group rights. Truth be told no country has. It's just that the groups are different.

Preparing agriculture for a richer harvest

The Budget's thrust on R&D, natural farming and Digital Public Infrastructure will help boost food and nutrition security

Shaji KV

The specific measures announced for agriculture in the Budget reflect the vision of transformative changes that must be induced through right policy interventions proactively to ensure that the farm sector performs in sync with the pace and quality of progress in other sectors of the economy. With rising per capita income, the consumption basket of households is changing and, along with food security, nutritional security is also becoming important.

The demand for food is rising, requiring tech-led cultivation practices to raise farm productivity as input-intensive production is increasingly appearing to be less commercially viable and also environmentally unsustainable.

The emphasis of the Budget in transforming agriculture research is path-breaking. The current institutional architecture for applied research in agriculture — Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), agricultural universities, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), private sector R&D initiatives and agri start-ups — has consistently provided innovative solutions over the last several decades but for which India would not have emerged as a net food surplus country and ensured food security for its 1.4 billion population.

But the challenges in the farm sector

are rising, and technological solutions and their mass adoption may be the only way to breakout from a potential low-equilibrium trap. Realignment and refocusing of the research set-up, therefore, seem necessary.

The prominence given to vegetable production and related supply chains in the Budget must be assessed in the context of: (a) the diverging core (ex-food and fuel) inflation and food inflation, with high vegetable prices considerably slowing the disinflation process, highlighting the importance of supply-side measures, and (b) the change in the consumption basket, where, as per the Consumption Expenditure Survey (2022-23), the share of vegetables in consumption now exceeds that of cereals in both urban and rural areas, unlike in 2011-12.

EFFICIENT SUPPLY CHAIN

The challenge in the vegetables segment is not only higher production but also an efficient supply chain that could ensure supply to consumers at more competitive mark-ups. Reduction of post-harvest losses and preservation of perishables — given seasonal supply cycles and high sensitivity to climatic shocks — are also important dimensions of the vegetable supply chain. As envisaged in the Budget, a formal structure for engaging farmer producer organisations (FPOs), cooperatives and agri start-ups, leveraging on their experience and reach in rural areas, would be essential.



EMPHASIS. On chemical-free farming

Post-Covid supply chain disruptions brought to the fore the importance of indigenous production of key food items for preserving domestic food security. Minimising transmission of volatility from global food and commodity (input) prices can also help achieve the goal of domestic price stability. The measures announced in the Budget — missions for pulses and oilseeds and shrimp production and export — would help enhance the country's resilience and also create growth opportunities.

With climate change-related risks rising, mitigation as well as adaptation across sectors has become unavoidable, notwithstanding the apparent trade-offs between short-term costs and long-term benefits.

The thrust given to natural farming — covering one crore farmers across the country supported by certification and branding over the next two years — will

help enhance the spread of sustainable farming practices. Chemical-free farming, with resource recycling, scope for improving soil fertility and reducing greenhouse gas emissions while also enhancing farmers' income is already being practised in some States, and the Budget will provide a significant boost for their wider adoption.

Farming is progressively transforming to agri business. In that context, the Budget's proposal to implement Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in agriculture, with a plan to cover farmers and their land records in three years, is another path-breaking initiative. This will empower farmers with easier access to finance and the government's targeted benefits while also enhancing their reach to partners for agri-business ventures.

With the satisfactory progress of monsoon in July after the June deficit, the outlook for agriculture has improved. The measures in the Budget will brighten the medium-term prospects of agriculture.

The policy challenge of simultaneously raising farmers' income, enhancing farm productivity and promoting sustainable framing practices while keeping food prices reasonable for consumers is daunting, but the Budget deftly balances all these objectives while remaining focused on securing a higher growth trajectory to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

The writer is Chairman, NABARD. Views are personal

BELOW THE LINE



Return of black money?

The Modi government's bold move to scrap indexation benefits on real estate sales has set off alarm bells among industry experts. Critics argue that this shift, which lowers the LTCG rate to 12.5 per cent without exemptions, could push the sector towards undervaluing deals, reigniting the black money menace. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman defends the decision as a

simplification measure, promising market benefits for long-term property holders. The real estate sector, already grappling with transparency issues, could see a resurgence of shadowy deals, undermining the government's clean money crusade. As the debate heats up, one thing is clear: the real estate tax landscape is in for a turbulent ride. Whether this change will streamline the market or open a Pandora's box of black money remains to be seen.

Murmu's Mandaps

Guess what's buzzing in the corridors of power? President Droupadi Murmu just gave a *desi* twist to two iconic halls at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Goodbye, colonial 'Durbar Hall' and 'Ashok Hall'. Hello, 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap'! The

rechristened venues now echo India's rich republican ethos and cultural heritage. 'Ganatantra Mandap' celebrates our ancient democratic roots, while 'Ashok Mandap' pays homage to Emperor Ashok and his legacy of unity and peace. With these changes, Rashtrapati Bhavan isn't just a seat of power — it's a symbol of our glorious past and vibrant present. Talk about making history while embracing it! **Golden strategy** Whispers are heard in financial circles about the real motive behind the recent gold duty cut. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's 9 percentage points reduction in customs duty on gold to 6 per cent has not only sent gold prices tumbling and shoppers rushing to jewellery stores but also sparked

speculation about a hidden agenda. As sovereign gold bonds mature this year, the government faces hefty payouts to investors. By slashing import duties, gold prices have dipped, potentially easing the payout burden for government. Economy watchers and market analysts are excited, suggesting that this strategy effectively reduces government liability while encouraging consumer gold purchases. Was this a fiscal master-stroke to balance the books or just a happy coincidence for the treasury? Either way, it's clear that in the game of gold, the government might just be playing a winning hand! **Congress's back flip** While presenting the full Budget for 2024-25, Telangana Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister said

the Congress Government will join the PM Fasal Bima Yojana. The BRS Government had decided to stay away from the Central-sponsored crop insurance for the reasons best known to it. The FM also said the government would pay the premium and not burden farmers. So far so good. But the BRS hit back, saying that Congress had opposed the insurance scheme tooth and nail. Citing a recent comment by senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, the BRS wondered how the State unit of Congress can take a stand that is diametrically opposite to its stand at the national level. Ramesh alleged that the Central insurance scheme was a failure and was aimed at benefiting insurance companies. A hit-wicket by the Congress. **Our Bureaus**

A delightful innings

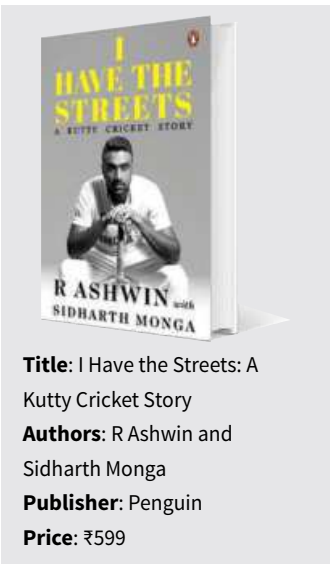
Ashwin’s early days in cricket, and more

BOOK REVIEW.

PK Ajith Kumar

Earlier this year, R Ashwin played his 100th Test. He has 516 Test wickets; only one Indian, Anil Kumble, has more. But in his autobiography, there isn’t a mention of any of those wickets. And yet, *I Have the Streets*, which he has co-authored with cricket writer Sidharth Monga, works. Ashwin is one of India’s finest cricketers. He is fiercely competitive and keeps reinventing himself as a bowler. Throughout his career, he has often reminded us of the fact that he had started out as a batter, an opening one at that, with some gritty knocks. Like he did with his 39 not out against Australia in the third Test at Sydney in 2021. Despite a painful injury, he batted for more than three hours, giving staunch support to Hanuma Vihari, to help India save the Test, which would pave the way for India’s greatest Test win in the following match at Brisbane. You would not get any insight into that gritty knock at Sydney in *I Have the Streets*. The book is about how Ashwin travelled from West Mambalam, Chennai, all the way to the Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, where he became part of the Indian team that won the 2011 World Cup.

PASSION FOR THE GAME The autobiography is also a delightful account of childhood and of coming of age (he talks about romancing the girl who was his schoolmate, too). Plenty of space in *I Have the Streets* is devoted to Ashwin’s earliest days in cricket. We are told of his passion for the game. He not merely enjoyed playing cricket, but he also loved watching matches — some of them in distant Mumbai — at the ground and on television. He was lucky that his father was just as mad as himself about the game. We discover about his health conditions because of which his mother asked him to try off-spin if he felt leg-spin was tough (he had been a pacer), and how his father went that extra mile to support his cricket. We also learn how Ashwin develops a stomach ache — requiring absence from school — just in time to watch the highlights of Brian Lara’s epic 153 not out that took the West Indies to a stunning one-wicket victory against Australia in the Bridgetown Test in 1999. The mysterious ailment would return for India’s Test victory against the



West Indies at Port of Spain. ‘Appa knows. There is no need to wink.’ There are several sentences that would put a smile on your face. Humour, in fact, helps the book greatly. Talking of Anirudha Srikkanth, his friend, Tamil Nadu teammate and rival, he says: ‘We have both been opening batters, we have both scored heavily... but he has more games against Goa than I have.’ (A cricket follower would understand runs scored against Karnataka would count more than those against Goa). Ashwin’s fears about his future also find expression. He wonders whether his name plate outside his home — in the Chennai tradition of adding educational qualifications — would read Ravichandran Ashwin, Twelfth Standard. (That fear would prove unfounded: he would get a degree in Engineering). There are also some interesting short profiles of his friends in street cricket. Ashwin also paints a vivid picture of Chennai’s vibrant cricket culture. We get glimpses into the city’s highly competitive domestic structure. He acknowledges the roles the coaches like WV Raman have played in his career. The book also tells us why his ‘Mankading’ Jos Buttler in an IPL game — one recalls filing a report from Jaipur on the incident for the late edition of *The Hindu* — really should not have come as a surprise. He had done it as a kid to Anirudha. The book, of course, talks about finer points of cricket, such as developing a carrom ball. We get a close look at how MS Dhoni became such a fine leader of men, despite his pep talk at team meetings usually lasting a sentence (‘All good, let’s go’).

The writer is Senior Assistant Editor-Sports, ‘The Hindu’

JRD: A team builder exemplar

At the heart of JRD Tata’s ability to build and nurture a strong team was his eye for spotting exceptional talent

BOOK EXTRACT.

Extract published from *Jamsetji Tata: Powerful Learnings for Corporate Success*, by R Gopalakrishnan and Harish Bhat. This extract is from the chapter ‘JRD Tata: a leader of leaders.’

JRD Tata was an outstanding leader of men. During his tenure as chairman of the Tata group, he built for the group the finest ensemble of corporate leadership India has seen. So many members of his leadership team were legends in their own right, yet JRD inspired them and earned their abiding respect and love.

Consider the galaxy of stars who worked with JRD across two generations. In the 1940s, his leadership team at Tata Sons consisted of towering stalwarts such as Sir Homi Mody, AD Shroff, Dr John Mathai, Ardershir Dalal and Naval Tata. Post the 1950s, a second generation of equally accomplished leaders were part of JRD’s core team. They included the likes of Sumant Moolgaokar, Darbari Seth, Nani Palkhivala, Russi Mody, JJ Bhabha and Ratan Tata.

JRD led these accomplished people on the strength of his principles, by empowering them and by building consensus where it was required. Most importantly, he inspired these leaders to stretch beyond themselves and often achieve the impossible.

Speaking of how he did this, JRD himself once revealed his secret sauce of leadership: ‘If I have any merit, it is getting along with individuals, according to their ways and characteristics. At times, it involves suppressing yourself. It is painful, but necessary. To be a leader you have got to lead human beings with affection.’

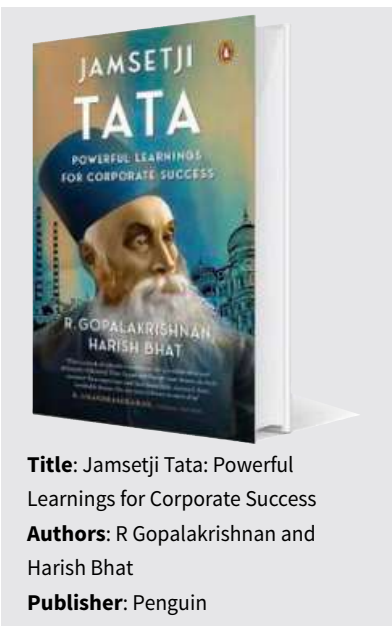
At the heart of JRD Tata’s ability to build and nurture a strong team was his

eye for spotting exceptional talent. He would then convince them to join the Group.

Consider the story of Sumant Moolgaokar, the man who went on to build Tata Motors. During the 1940s, JRD Tata had been on a learning mission to the UK and the USA. Accompanying him was a young Moolgaokar, at that time a director of the Associated Cement Companies (ACC). During this visit, JRD saw how passionate this young man was about engineering and factories. He had already known about Moolgaokar’s brilliance in his existing role. JRD felt increasingly certain that this was the man to lead a new project that the Tatas were about to launch, the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO).

MOOLGAOKAR DRIVES TELCO When they were back in India, JRD asked him, ‘How long are you going to make the glue that sticks the bricks together?’ He then approached the chairman of ACC, Sir Homi Mody, with a request that he release Moolgaokar to TELCO. JRD’s request was initially refused, because Sir Homi felt that ACC required the man. But JRD persisted. He approached Sir Homi Mody once again. Eventually, Sir Homi agreed. How long could he keep saying no to the chairman of the Tata group!

JRD then brought Sumant Moolgaokar on board as director-in-charge of TELCO. This was in 1949, when Moolgaokar was only 43 years old. For the next four decades, in most matters relating to TELCO, JRD deferred to Sumant Moolgaokar’s expertise and judgement, while providing guidance where required. He did this because he quickly understood Moolgaokar’s style of leadership. Many years later, JRD revealed this to his biographer RM Lala: ‘I realized early that Sumant was a lone wolf. If I let him run it



his way he would deliver the goods. And he did.’ JRD was, however, a constant source of motivation and support, which kept Moolgaokar’s spirits high even during challenging times.

A second story illustrates how JRD Tata spotted extraordinary talent from within the group, providing highly capable employees a platform to make a big impact. In 1939, Tata Chemicals had been created. The Tatas had taken over an existing soda ash company which had collapsed, because they felt that there was a real opportunity to pioneer an inorganic chemicals industry.

However, soda ash manufacture was a closely guarded secret, and consultants began advising JRD to exit the industry. They said the location was not right and the business was destined for failure. The Tata Group was about to engage the services of a foreign firm to help, when JRD Tata, at a review meeting, met a young chemical engineer called Darbari

Seth. Seth debunked the proposal of the foreign firm and presented with enthusiasm his dream idea for manufacture of soda ash at Tata Chemicals and the details of how he would go about making this happen. His enthusiasm was infectious. JRD could feel the spark in this young man, though he could not understand all the technical details. Back in his office, JRD studied Seth’s background and found that the youngster was very well qualified. He had worked in Dow Chemicals in the USA and had also earlier designed a soda ash plant in Holland. However, at Tata Chemicals, Seth was still in a relatively junior role and his managers were unwilling to listen to his ideas.

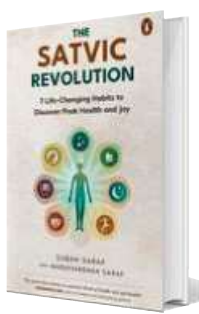
JRD came to the considered conclusion that Darbari Seth, with his deep expertise, unbridled enthusiasm and lateral thinking, could make Tata Chemicals a success. Immediately, he instructed the management to put Seth in charge of the soda ash plant, notwithstanding his youth. Then, he provided Seth all the support required to navigate uncharted waters.

Darbari Seth went on to develop and implement the technology required, and he made Tata Chemicals a huge success. He led the company until his retirement in the 1990s and was recognized as a technocrat par excellence. Once again, JRD’s eye for talent had delivered results.

JRD was also keen to institutionalize the onboarding of exceptional leadership talent into the Tata group. To ensure this, he created the Tata Administrative Service (TAS) in 1956. Over the years, many TAS officers have gone on to assume leadership positions in the Tata group. Some of them have also been pioneers.

Extracted with permission from Penguin. Today is JRD Tata’s 120th birth anniversary

NEW READS.

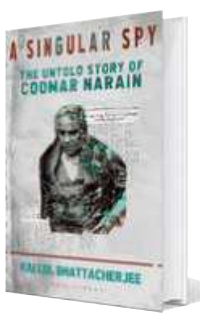


Title: The Satvic Revolution: 7 Life-changing Habits to Discover Peak Health and Joy

Authors: Subah Saraf and Harshvardhan Saraf

Publisher: Ebury Pr

If you are looking for a practical guide to help you achieve peak health, increased energy in your day, and a calm mindset even amidst chaos, then this is the book for you.



Title: A Singular Spy: The Untold Story of Coomar Narain

Author: Kallol Bhattacharjee

Publisher: Bloomsbury India

Through extraordinary, meticulous research and dogged interviews, the author uncovers the audacious story of an outsider exploiting the weakest links in the Indian bureaucracy.



Title: Fallen City: A Double Murder, Political Insanity, and Delhi’s Descent from Grace

Author: Sudeep Chakravarti

Publisher: Aleph Book Company

The author’s exploration of the murder of the Chopra siblings and the hunt for their killers will take the reader on a compelling journey through that dark period in Delhi.

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

July 29, 2004

Govt clearing decks for foreign hedge funds

The Ministry of Finance and SEBI are busy taking the sheen off participatory notes (PNs) while they prepare to put up the welcome sign for foreign hedge funds to enter the Indian capital market in a big way. The easing of the registration norms for FILs would be aimed primarily to attract hedge funds to register directly with SEBI instead of routing their investment through PNs.

ICAI to write to GTB auditors

Even as the Reserve Bank of India’s letter alleging “misconduct” by statutory auditors of Global Trust Bank (GTB) does not constitute a formal complaint, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) intends to write to the auditors concerned seeking their views on the matter.

Bond prices crash by over a rupee

Fears of a hardening in domestic interest rates coupled with a panic bout of profit booking by bond market participants led bond prices to crash by over ₹1 across maturities in the government securities market. The yield on the 10-year benchmark ascended to a 16-month high of 6.11 per cent, a level last seen on March 31, 2003, according to debt market dealers.

Short take

Vijay Menon

India is urbanising at a rapid pace, with the country’s urban population expected to rise by around 328 million by 2047. To support this growth and the needs of the citizens, while also minimising the associated risks, such as air pollution and traffic congestion, it is imperative to build world-class urban infrastructure. This includes developing mass transit systems which are sustainable while also being accessible, clean and comfortable. Accordingly, the government, auto OEMs, and the larger ecosystem have undertaken high capital investment along with a creation of a trained workforce and rapid development of EV technology.

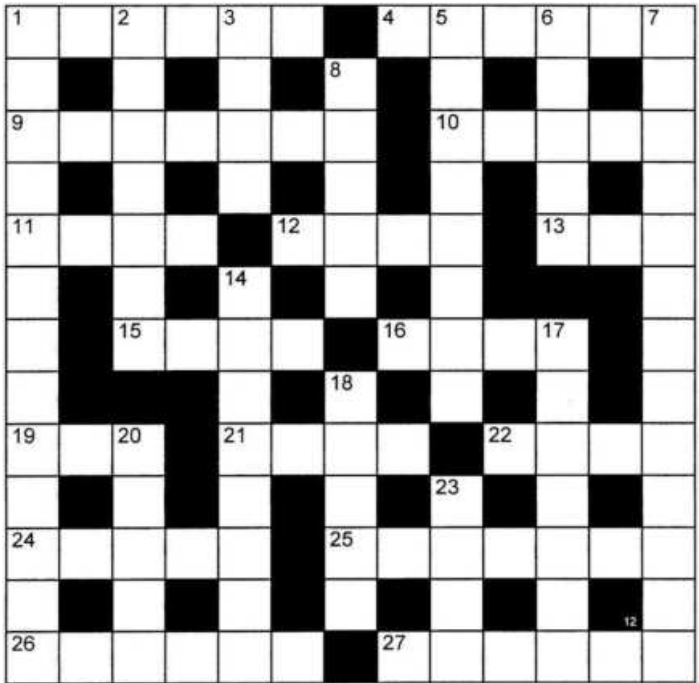
The government covered e-buses under FAME scheme in 2015. The subsequent launch of the PM E-bus Sewa Programme seeks to further expand the induction of e-buses to 169 cities across India. OEMs are now offering mobility as a service and creating an ecosystem that includes charging equipment manufacturers, charge point operators, software providers, infrastructure project specialists and bus operators. This ensures uninterrupted operations of e-bus fleets. The building blocks of such an EV ecosystem should include incorporation of advanced technologies, extensive charging infrastructure and trained manpower. . E-buses also require a bank of high-capacity DC fast chargers along

with the supporting electrical and civil infrastructure. In addition to depot-based charging, opportunity charging locations might also be required to provide mid-day charging for uninterrupted operations. All these chargers are digitally monitored using a charger management system that help optimise charging operations. To successfully scale the adoption of e-buses, it is important to put drivers and technicians at the centre. Drivers could be trained on defensive driving technique, EV technology and soft skills to enhance customer experience. Whereas technicians could be re-skilled on EV technology and standard operating procedures. As e-buses are gaining traction, a developed ecosystem is being built that

comprises vehicle technology, charging infrastructure, operations, and maintenance. The traditional vehicle selling model is transitioning to new business models to meet the growing demand for electric mobility. While the Gross Cost Contract model has been prevalent in e-bus procurement by State transport undertakings, other models like fleet management services, leasing, and AMC are also available. E-buses represent a crucial step towards sustainable transportation. By embracing these zero-emission vehicles, India can drive positive change, reduce its carbon footprint, and pave the way for a greener, safer, smarter future.

The writer is Chief Operating Officer of TML Smart City Mobility Solutions Ltd — A Tata Motors subsidiary

● BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2491



EASY

ACROSS

- Wind instrument; standard-bearer (6)
- Psychiatrist (slang) (6)
- Worthy of remark (7)
- Military cap (5)
- Put, give out (4)
- River valley (4)
- N European deer (3)
- An air (4)
- Let fall (4)
- Likely, suitable (3)
- Want what another has (4)
- Loyal (4)
- An utter fool (5)
- Small species of shark (7)
- Lengthen (6)
- Inn stable servant (6)

DOWN

- In a brown study (13)
- Keeps (7)
- Declines, sinks (4)
- Inn (8)
- Angry (5)
- Roughly build (5,8)
- Concerning punishment (5)
- Not conquered (8)
- Inclined to favour one side (7)
- Escape capture (5)
- Twine together (5)
- Matures (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2490

ACROSS 1. Nepotism 7. Error 8. Several 9. Maidens 10. Lamb 12. Needles 14. Satanic 17. Sago 18. British 21. Erosion 22. Thong 23. Betrayer
DOWN 1. Nestle 2. Pavement 3. Tore 4. Salmon 5. Free 6. Crisis 7. Evident 11. Hunting 13. Locality 14. Sabots 15. Cohere 16. Corner 19. Iron 20. Door

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- An ice-cream to blow, rather than suck? (6)
- A psychiatrist will evidently get less (6)
- Is without skill, but worthy of one’s attention (7)
- Ahead of a military man it will almost tremble at nothing (5)
- Put out what watch shows to have been returned (4)
- Depression is despairingly begun with drink (4)
- Animal king is after the Spanish (3)
- Words and music for it at a very low price (4)
- Don’t continue if it’s such a small amount of liquid (4)
- Father returning to first last, as is fitting (3)
- Green quality will not quite finish if Ivy loses her head (4)
- Tale-teller initially to regret being factual (4)
- One gets little Dorothy to hold one, silly fellow! (5)
- Follow on heels of a swimmer – it’s a shark (7)
- Make it longer ten, in Roman and English, held by editor (6)
- Inn-servant may have been lost on a half of beer (6)

DOWN

- Study temple at four being imprisoned when thoughtful (13)
- Keeps guidelines for rider at getting up inside (7)
- Recedes in a tidy way? (4)
- Entertainer gets right inside Ely tavern (8)
- Angered a strike-breaker that is on the outside (5)
- Roughly construct what knees do in trepidation (5,8)
- Ring the bells around end of conviction about punishment (5)
- Eggs in their shells are like record still standing (8)
- Favouring one party, it’s not all there (7)
- Avoid greed, a vestige of which turns up in part (5)
- Dance – give it a turn (5)
- What one does as time goes on for so long (4)

Bringing on track

Railways must address structural inefficiencies

It has been exactly a hundred years since the first Railways Budget was presented in 1924 — an era when the size of the Railways Budget exceeded the size of the general Budget. Much has changed since then and India no longer has a separate Railways Budget. In this year's Budget, unsurprisingly, the Railways found very little space. Mere absence in the Budget speech, however, should not be seen as neglect. On the contrary, for 2024-25, the capital expenditure of the Railways has been pegged at ₹2.62 trillion, of which gross budgetary support stands at ₹2.52 trillion while ₹10,000 crore will be met from extra-budgetary resources. Although budgetary capex outlay this year represents a mere 5 per cent increase over that of the previous year, it must be seen with 2023-24, when the capital outlay was significantly higher than in the previous year, representing an increase of almost 51 per cent.

This year's Budget envisages integrating railway connectivity with industrial development. For this, an announcement was made regarding enhancing connectivity across major industrial corridors such as the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor, Hyderabad-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor, and Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor. However, the result of increased capex remains mixed. Revised Estimates for 2023-24 show that cumulative expenditure on laying new lines, gauge conversion, doubling, and track renewal stood at ₹90,560.57 crore. The outlay for these four dimensions decreased to ₹86,286.42 crore this financial year. The outlay for rolling stock and electrification projects has also registered a marginal decrease. However, despite increasing capex, efficiency is not improving. For instance, in 2019-20, the operating ratio was at 95 per cent, indicating that the Railways spent ₹95 for every ₹100 it earned. It worsened to 98.65 per cent in 2023-24.

Over the past 10 years, the Railways commissioned 31,180 kilometres (km) of tracks. During the same period, the pace of track laying also increased more than three times. Electrification is also complete in around 95 per cent of the broad gauge network. In 2023-24 alone, the Indian Railways electrified 7,188 km. Yet, the data released by the Ministry of Railways suggests that the average speed of freight trains was 23.6 km/hour (kmph) in 2023-24. Speed restrictions have also reduced the average speed of semi-high-speed Vande Bharat trains from 84.48 kmph in 2020-21 to 76.25 kmph in 2023-24. It is not clear at what point increased capex will start showing results in terms of improved efficiency. Low speeds and high logistics costs mean the Railways is losing its freight share to other competitive modes of transport like roadways.

Further, despite the recent spate of railway accidents — though the frequency has come down over time — it is surprising that the allocation to the Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh remains stagnant at ₹10,000 crore. The Kavach Automatic Train Protection System is operational on only 1,500 km of railway tracks, which accounts for only 2.14 per cent of the railway network. The Railways also needs to address overcrowding, particularly in non-air-conditioned coaches on busy routes. The way forward could be fare rationalisation and capacity addition. Clearly, the Railways needs significant adjustment to be able to cater for the needs of a rapidly growing economy.

Building social capital

India needs to spend more on education and health

The Economic Survey 2023-24, released last week, noted: "The realms of health and education are witnessing turning points in quality and access." Universal access to health and education, the two most critical social sectors, is directly linked to human resource development and economic growth. Although general government spending on the overall social sector is rising in recent years, reflecting the sector's growing importance, a closer analysis of government expenditure on specific sub-sectors reveals a more complex and nuanced picture.

In the Union Budget, presented last week, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare received a significant increase in allocation of approximately 13 per cent over last year's Revised Estimates, underscoring the government's prioritisation of health care. However, the Ministry of Education's Department of School Education and Literacy saw a modest increase of only 0.73 per cent. More strikingly, the allocation for higher education faced a substantial reduction of 16 per cent, leading to an overall net decrease of 7 per cent for the Ministry of Education. Further, under the Department of Higher Education, while the allocation to autonomous bodies saw a marginal improvement, the University Grants Commission (UGC), a statutory and regulatory body, faced a Budget cut of more than 50 per cent from the Revised Estimate of last year, potentially hampering the transfers to universities. This is particularly concerning, given the growing importance of higher education in an economy that is increasingly driven by knowledge and a skilled workforce.

As the Economic Survey showed, the social-sector expenditure of the general government — the Centre and the states combined — as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) has increased in recent years. This increase is driven largely by improved spending on health and health care facilities. The share of health expenses within social-services expenditure has risen by 3.5 percentage points in 2023-24 compared to 2017-18 levels. In contrast, the share of education within the social sector came down by 7.1 percentage points during the same period. Despite these changes, the shares of education and health expenditure, at 2.7 per cent and 1.9 per cent of GDP, respectively, are significantly lower than global benchmarks.

It is important to note that health and education are complementary sectors. They collectively contribute to improved living standards, increased productivity, and the enhanced efficiency of human capital. Improvements in these areas are the key to achieving steady economic growth, as underscored by endogenous growth models. Adequate allocation to health care is essential to tackle frequent health shocks, which affect productivity, and to position India as a leading destination for medical tourism. Equally important, however, is the requirement for substantial investment in education. The paradox within the Indian education system is stark. India rightly aspires to develop world-class educational institutions and universities. However, more than half the youth aged 14-18 years struggle with basic division, as highlighted by the recent Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) findings. This discrepancy points to significant gaps in the educational framework that need urgent attention. India must address foundational issues and invest strategically in both sectors to realise its ambitions for higher sustainable growth over the long run.

ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



A change in course?

Three shifts in the Union Budget that may pay off

It is often hard for governments to reverse course. This involves admitting that something you earlier did might have been ill-advised. It also could mean that you have to listen to advice from those whom you either think are poorly informed or do not have your best interests at heart. But it is far more dangerous to stubbornly stick to a course of action after it has become clear that it is failing.

It may not be immediately clear, but the Union Budget, presented last week, did, in at least three important fields, signal — if obscurely — that the finance ministry is listening to advice and changing the direction of policy. This is of particular importance since ill-natured punditry over recent years has often accused the current finance minister and finance ministry bureaucracy of being unwilling to listen to criticism.

The first shift might be in trade and tariff policy. Since at least 2016, Union Budgets have had an overtly protectionist tone. Tariffs have been raised across the board, and we seemed to have returned to an era in which Budget speeches would tinker with tariffs at the request or insistence of various interest groups and domestic industries. This not only incentivises rent-seeking and raises costs for domestic consumers, but it also means that Indian companies struggle to enter global value chains. It diminishes our export potential. These points have been repeatedly made to the finance ministry, apparently to no avail. The concerns of traders and consumers seemed irrelevant compared to the protectionist demands of local capital.

There may be signs in this Budget that this knee-jerk protectionism is coming to an end. There was a subtle shift in rhetoric: The finance minister's speech specified that "export competitiveness" was an aim,

while also adding that "the interest of the general public and consumers" was the overall aim. This was reflected in concrete proposals, as well. Most importantly, the Budget proposed a reduction in Customs duties on mobile phones and printed circuit boards, "in the interest of consumers".

The finance minister also promised a "comprehensive review of the rate structure" before the next Budget to "rationalise and simplify it for ease of trade". This seems to be an invitation for further constructive suggestions about how a low and stable tariff rate is important for both consumers and exports.

The second shift is in direct tax policy. The Budget speech insisted on "simplification" as the goal for its tax policy. Here, again, a "comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act" was promised, in order to increased certainty and reduce litigation. A target of six months — again, presumably to inform the next Budget — has been proposed for this as well as the tariff review.

The much-criticised changes to capital gains taxation — which removes indexation while changing the tax rate to 12.5 per cent on long-term gains — has been specifically defended by the finance minister in subsequent public appearances as a shift towards rationalising direct taxes. In one such appearance she argued that people had long demanded that all forms of income face similar tax rates, and this was a preliminary shift in that direction. This will likely be the mandate, therefore, of the review of the Income Tax Act. On this occasion, therefore, the finance minister clearly signalled that this shift was in response to long-standing concerns about tax policy.

The final shift — more nebulous, but also more



POLICY RULES

MIHIR S SHARMA

Bull market logic

On June 4, the Lok Sabha election results shocked the markets and jolted the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. But the markets were perturbed for barely two hours. By noon, stocks started recovering and within a week surpassed the all-time high it had hit just before the election results. A month later, as the steady upward drift continued, the indices were much higher still, belying worries about a hobbled minority government. On the day the Union Budget was announced, the markets fell

due to the imposition of higher taxes on capital gains. Investors took two days to digest the uninspiring Budget provisions. On the third day after the Budget, the indices charged up again, recording handsome gains. Internationally, wars are raging in Ukraine and West Asia, pushing up shipping costs and time. Domestically, worries include electoral setbacks for the ruling party, poor consumption, jobless growth, and high actual inflation, combined with extreme valuations in certain pockets of the economy. And yet, the markets are scaling news highs. What gives? With the benefit of hindsight, here are the set of factors fuelling the bull market.

Government spending: For the first five years, the Modi government tried many tricks but struggled to generate much economic growth. In September 2019, the government slashed corporate taxes in the belief businessmen will use the money saved to invest and expand. Grateful businessmen mostly held on to the savings, partly spending them on dividends and buybacks. They did not invest more and tax cuts failed to create jobs. During Covid-19, the government was forced to adopt reflationary tactics to keep the economy going, which boosted economic growth and led to higher stock prices. Higher growth, combined with high rates of goods

and services tax (GST) and strict enforcement of GST rules, led to booming revenues for the government, giving it elbow room for a second gamble — massive capital expenditure on highways, expressways, railways, water works, energy, and defence. This kicked off huge growth for a large number of listed companies, many in the smallcap and midcap space, which is why these indices have done much better than the largecap stocks.

The government has not given up nudging companies to invest. First it brought back tax on dividends. Then, Budget 2024-25 announced investors would be taxed when a company buys back its shares, with the payout treated as dividend income and taxed in accordance with their income slabs. Until now, companies have had to pay a 20 per cent tax rate on share buybacks. The idea is to discourage firms giving back surplus money to investors; it wants them to spend on expansion and job creation.

Savings pattern: For decades capital-market evangelists have dreamt of shifting the middle-class from investing in safe but low-return bank deposits to higher-return stocks. For a variety of reasons this did not happen, mainly because India has not had a long secular bull run. The 2003-07 bull market was marred by two major crashes in 2004 and 2006. In 2008 an epic global crash, which lasted almost a year, killed any interest in stocks. The current bull run, which started in May 2020, has been punctuated by minor declines in mid-2022 and early 2023. It has drawn in more and more investors. After years of poor returns from all other asset classes, investors have finally embraced equities. In 2020, the number of demat accounts was 40 million. It has now jumped to 162 million,



IRRATIONAL CHOICE

DEBASHIS BASU

A lesser-known history of maths



BOOK REVIEW

ALEC WILKINSON

Mathematics has been described as the longest continuous human thought. This thought is typically said to have been held most effectively by Western mathematicians and mainly by men. The narrative supporting this notion regards mathematics as having its origins in ancient Greece, and the mathematics done in other early cultures as peripheral — barbarian science or "ethnomathematics," even though non-Western thinkers often practiced math that was more advanced than what Europeans knew.

In *The Secret Lives of Numbers*, Kate Kitagawa, a mathematics historian,

and Timothy Revell, a science writer, intend by reasoned and scholarly means to overthrow the "assumption that the European way of doing things is superior."

Their book begins with prehistoric counting methods (one of the earliest was based on the number 60, unlike our own base-10 system) and goes on to the fourth-century Alexandrian women Pandrosion, a geometer who solved the difficult problem of doubling the volume of a cube (ancient mathematicians lacked the algebra that makes this straightforward), and Hypatia, who wrote mathematical commentaries, including on Apollonius' "Conics," an investigation of circles, ellipses and other shapes. Kitagawa and Revell speculate that Johannes Kepler, who described the orbits of the planets in the 17th century, may have been influenced by her contributions.

Overlooked or forgotten accomplishments by women mathematicians are a recurring theme. There is a chapter on Sophie Kowalevski, a 19th-century

Russian who became the first woman math professor, in Sweden. Employing methods that no one before her had thought of using, Kowalevski solved a recalcitrant problem involving the mathematics of a spinning top. The French Academy of Sciences heard of her work and, hoping to have her submit it, framed its annual prize in 1888 around the spinning top problem. Kowalevski missed the deadline, and so the academy extended it by three months. When the judges gave her the prize, they increased the award money by nearly half, a rare example of a woman mathematician being favoured by and above male colleagues.

Kitagawa and Revell devote a chapter to the House of Wisdom, a kind of exalted library and school in eighth-century Baghdad where Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, often referred to as the father of algebra, did some of his work, and they highlight the women, called "human computers," at Harvard in the late 19th century who refined the application of light wavelengths to

classify stars. Towards the end of the book, the authors discuss the glorious, god-soaked and essentially self-taught early-20th-century Indian mathematician Srinavasa Ramanujan, whose suppositions were so profound and wide-ranging that their implications are still being considered.

As well as knowing history, Kitagawa and Revell are expert

explainers of mathematics. Anyone who has never been sure what an algorithm is can understand the concept here, and their account of calculus is so lucid and compact that I found it thrilling. It is with calculus, though, that they slip, perhaps, into something like advocacy.

The invention of calculus is traditionally attributed to Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz, working independently in the 17th century. However, Kitagawa and Revell write that "it is wrong to claim that the

origins of calculus lie with either Leibniz or Newton, as one thing is certain: Neither of them got there first." Instead, they say, calculus was brought into being in India in the 14th century by a mathematician named Madhava. Madhava taught at a school in Kerala and made use of procedures that are subordinate elements of calculus.

Kitagawa and Revell cite the Indian mathematician George Gheverghese Joseph, who wrote about the matter in a 2009 book, *A Passage to Infinity*. Joseph, they say, "argues that there was a pathway for knowledge from India to the West," which suggests that "Leibniz and Newton could have been influenced by the school in Kerala."

The claim is based in part on the possibility that Jesuits brought Madhava's work to Europe, but in his book Joseph writes that a "painstaking trawl of the mass of manuscripts" has

provided "no direct evidence of the conjectured transmission." Perhaps, he suggests, European sailors used Madhava's work in navigation. It might then have been absorbed into European practices without anyone knowing, centuries later, where it had come from. This would be a case of someone who told someone who told someone and so on, more than 600 years ago, a circumstance virtually impossible to substantiate. On the other hand, novel discoveries rarely stay where they were made.

Madhava's work serves to make the point that complex mathematics belongs to all people and all cultures in all periods, and that to dismiss historical work as ethnomathematics is to express a prejudice. When one acknowledges the intellectual reach of these ancient achievements and the love of pure thought they suggest, it leads one to wonder where else we might look for illumination and what we might find.

The reviewer is the author of A Divine Language: Learning Algebra, Geometry, and Calculus at the Edge of Old Age ©2024 The New York Times News Service



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Work together
for governance

The Supreme Court looking into grievances against governors by Bengal and Kerala underscores a long and unseemly tussle

The Supreme Court’s decisions to scrutinise the actions of the governors of Kerala and West Bengal to delay assent on Bills for several months or years has once again put the spotlight on the unseemly tussle between Raj Bhavans and elected state governments. Kerala told the Supreme Court that seven Bills were stuck with Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, with two pending for 23 months, another two for about 15 months, and three for 10 months. West Bengal said eight Bills were pending with Governor CV Anand Bose, six of them since June 2022, and the other two for the past eight months. Unfortunately, this has now become the norm in some states, particularly those ruled by the Opposition parties whose governments find themselves at loggerheads with governors picked by the Centre. Such face-offs are not unprecedented — the debate around the powers of the governors and the role of the Union government in controlling them is at least 50 years old and the earliest instance of overreach came in 1959, when the Congress-run Union government dismissed the Left administration in Kerala.

The recent intensity and frequency of animosity outlines the stress this puts on India’s federal structure. The breakdown of the relationship between state governments and governors spans a string of states, ranging from Punjab and Bengal to Kerala and Tamil Nadu, whose governments are opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party. At stake is not only smooth functioning of the state but also everyday governance matters.

This is an untenable situation. The Constitution clearly defines the role of the governor, the extent of her relationship with the state government, and her discretionary powers. The governor is imagined as a guardian of the state, a moral figure of authority who will work in consonance with the elected government for better administration. Raj Bhavans need to be aware that they have to work within the bounds set by the Constitution and not as political offices. Such action lowers the authority of the position and creates avoidable complications in governance. At the same time, state governments must accord due respect to the office of the governor and not turn every disagreement into a political spectacle. Both sides need to step back from their aggressive stances. At a time when a clutch of new governors have been appointed, such efforts at improving mutual understanding will augur well for India’s democracy.

The history lesson in
the nod for Moidams

The inclusion of the Charaideo Moidams of Assam in the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco)’s World Heritage List is a significant moment not just for Indian soft power but also the country’s history. The announcement of the inscription of the 700-year-old burial mounds and shrines of the Tai Ahom dynasty that ruled large tracts of modern-day Assam from the 12th to the 19th century couldn’t have come at a better time given India is hosting the ongoing session of the World Heritage Committee that decides on these inclusions. Inscriptions are not just an acknowledgment of the overwhelming value of a property to humanity but also signal member-States’ collective intent to conserve it, and represent a big win for the jurisdictions housing them.

That said, the larger import of the decision is more inwardly directed. It compels a harder look at those facets of the country’s history that are in need of greater acknowledgment in its historiography. The tales of the Ahoms’ long reign, till recently, largely remained confined to the state. The Moidams held special importance for the Ahoms, who shifted capitals along the Brahmaputra Valley at different points of time, but came back to the necropolis to bury members of their royalty and aristocracy. The Unesco nod blends the Moidams into the broader discourse on Indian heritage and, thus, could end up stoking not just tourism interest in the site but also interest in the Ahoms and other regional histories from across the country that are waiting to be mainstreamed.

Greed isn’t good for
the planet’s survival

India is treading a path that strikes a fine balance between economic development and climate action, in collaboration with the rest of the world

The Western model of development told us “greed is good”. This thought argued greed is an important fuel to drive industries, keep the economic engines of the modern economy well-oiled, and consumer sentiment buoyant. This acceptance of greed as a necessary fulcrum of economic growth and prosperity has brought us to a point where despite understanding that the main cause of the climate crisis is overconsumption, there is a mad rush to overconsume at a time when the only way to save the planet is to find ways to reduce and reuse. The Economic Survey 2023-24 extends an imperative understanding of this key issue.

It points out that even as developed nations are gearing up to impose a carbon tax on imports coming into their countries laden with carbon, they are ramping up energy demand driven by their obsession with letting artificial intelligence (AI) take over natural intelligence. Meanwhile, we are being told

through multilateral bodies and experts that climate mitigation is the way forward. This implies avoiding and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere in order to prevent the planet from warming to more extreme temperatures. This approach fails to accord the same importance to biodiversity loss and land degradation. All of these factors impact the quality of life not just for humans but also for our co-habitants on the planet.

As a climate-vulnerable countries, India has a greater need for adaptive strategies in agriculture and conservation efforts to save lives and livelihoods.

India has, therefore, taken a nuanced stance that we must look at climate change through our own lens and not be dictated by those who are historically responsible for the problem and refuse to put a check on their consumption patterns. We are treading a path that strikes a fine balance between economic development and impactful climate action in collaboration with the rest of the world.

If India accepts greed as good and overconsumption as a pivot for prosperity, focusing our energy on ways to consume more, the world is doomed. The climate fight has to move beyond finding ways to limit the Earth’s temperature rise to 1.5 °C or 2 °C and adjust the climate budget. It has to address the complex rela-

tionships between climate, human welfare, and ecological diversity.

In that regard, India has also shown the way. We have been a nation where technology and science have flourished even as nature is worshipped. Mission LIFE, or Lifestyle for Environment, addresses the question of greed versus need. The concept envisioned by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi is a road map to making pro-planet choices in a way that people live quality lives without hurting nature. A technocentric approach, which creates a value system that is centered on technology and its ability to control the environment, lacks the basic understanding that no artificial mechanism can control the natural flow of life. Efforts to address climate change must thus focus on devising ways that ensure the natural flow of life is not disrupted. For that to happen, we have to live environmentally friendly lives.

The Economic Survey 2023-24 draws our attention to data that shows how addressing consumption patterns is imperative to sustenance. One key data which has caught many by surprise says making one toilet roll uses 1.5 pounds of wood, 37 gallons of water and 1.3 kWh of power. The Global South has sustainable practices that avoid this consumption. Yet, increasingly and worryingly, we find the former making its way into our lives.



Bhopender
Yadav

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



Should states have a
stake in foreign policy?

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) recently pulled up the Kerala government for appointing a secretary in charge of “external cooperation”. Kerala surely has no business appointing a “foreign secretary” (as some media reports suggested), nor does it have the constitutional mandate to engage in foreign relations. Bur, the controversy is an opportunity to revisit the debate on the slow but growing influence of the states on India’s foreign relations since the 1990s, thanks to economic liberalisation and coalition governments.

The makers of the Constitution were clear that states have no role in the realm of foreign policy, and foreign affairs, international law, foreign trade, and citizenship matters were placed on the Union list. Therefore, these are exclusively within the jurisdiction of Parliament, as per Article 246(1). Under Article 253, Parliament enjoys exclusive and complete authority to legislate on such matters. And, unlike the Canadian, Swiss, and German Constitutions, where provinces are allowed to engage in foreign affairs within certain restrictions, our Constitution does not allow such subnational engagement. As for foreign economic relations, Article 293(1) places territorial limits on the borrowing power of the states, implying their non-access to foreign loans on their own accord.

Yet, an increasing number of states have been pushing the boundaries since the 1990s. For instance, states with proactive leadership and greater industrial bases have been at the forefront of subnational, foreign-trade-related diplomacy. Narendra Modi, as Gujarat’s chief minister (CM), started Vibrant Gujarat to showcase the state’s economic potential. Its success inspired other states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan to undertake similar initiatives.

Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu has long been a key player in his state’s foreign economic engagement. In April 2015, he led a high-level delegation to China on the Centre’s behalf. Earlier this year, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy attended the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos and signed new investment deals of ₹40,232 crore.

States such as Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra have also approached the World Bank directly for development loans. In 1997, Andhra Pradesh became the first state to receive a structural adjustment loan directly from the World Bank.

In 2017, the Centre approved guidelines to allow “financially sound” states to borrow directly from the bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) partners for vital

infrastructure projects. The same year, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority approached the Japan International Cooperation Agency for loans for the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link project, which it subsequently received.

Today, several Indian states have WTO cells as well as NRI cells. While Punjab has a department of NRI affairs, Kerala, since 1996, has had a department of non-resident Keralites affairs (NORKA), for grievance redressal both in India and abroad. Even though states are proactively negotiating with foreign entities, they are not allowed to establish their own offices in foreign countries or place officials in the Indian embassies abroad.

The Centre has also made attempts to consult states on foreign policy. In 2000, the then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government established the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, which recommended “that for reducing tension or friction between States and the Union and for expeditious decision-making on important issues involving States, the desirability of prior consultation by the Union Government with the Inter-State Council (ISC) may be considered before signing any treaty vitally affecting the interests of the States regarding matters in the State List.” It has not been implemented.

The arrival of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in 2014 had created hopes that the states would have a larger influence on foreign policy matters. In October 2013, Modi had said “India is not just Delhi. The foreign policy should be decided by the people and not by some politicians sitting in Delhi.” In November 2015, he said, “In a break with over 65 years of tradition, we have involved states even in foreign policy. The ministry of external affairs has been asked to work with the states.” He was referring to the States Division that was established within the MEA in 2014 to facilitate meetings of Indian officials with foreign delegations in India and abroad. In 2017, the then external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj tweeted, “We’ll set up ‘Videsh Bhavan’ in all state capitals. These will be one-stop centres to provide all facilities given by various MEA departments”. This proposal has not yet been implemented. The closest institutional mechanism to that is the existing MEA branch secretariats in cities like Hyderabad and Kolkata, which have limited mandate.

While, unsurprisingly, the States Division does not include state representatives, the ISC, which could have helped states air concerns, has become dysfunctional. In the post-liberalisation political and economic context outlined here, the controversy over the Kerala government appointing a secretary in charge of matters concerning external cooperation is a needless one. It should restart conversations about how to creatively involve Indian states in matters of foreign policy.

Happymon Jacob teaches India’s foreign policy at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, and is the founder of the Council for Strategic and Defence Research, a New Delhi-based think tank. The views expressed are personal



Despite the realisation that the main cause of the climate crisis is overconsumption, there is a mad rush to consume even more

HT PHOTO

Amid this crisis, India stands as a beacon of hope. Despite being one of the fastest growing economies in the world, India’s annual per capita carbon emission is only about one-third of the global average.

We have successfully reduced our emission intensity vis-à-vis our GDP by 33% between 2005 and 2019, thus achieving the initial NDC target for 2030, 11 years ahead of scheduled time. We also achieved the target of having 40% of electric installed capacity from non-fossil fuel sources nine years ahead of the deadline (2030). Between 2017 and 2023, India has added around 100 GW of installed electric capacity, of which around 80% is attributed to non-fossil fuel based. On the global stage, our contribution to climate action is significant with the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, creation of LeadIT, Infrastructure for Resilient Island States, and Big Cat Alliance.

India believes all these efforts are cures, and while they are important to address (reflected in India’s cli-

mate action measures), it is the cause that needs to be looked at closely. The cause is overconsumption without a care for consequences, believing technology will take care of the fallout. The Indian way of life is seeded with the principles of moderation. Mission LIFE is PM Modi’s clarion call for the world to follow. Under this philosophy, the Modi government has initiated a noble drive — Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam — to plant a sapling in the name of our mothers. So far, 16,60,52,178 trees have been planted. The campaign has been initiated to inculcate environmental sense in people by encouraging them to plant saplings and nurture them as they grow into trees, just like a mother nurtures a child.

Only by respecting nature can we learn to live with nature and not overpower it. We cannot continue to find technologies to sustain our lifestyle. We must change our lifestyle.

Bhopender Yadav is Union minister for environment, forests, and climate change. The views expressed are personal

{ GEORGIA MELONI } PRIME MINISTER OF ITALY



We want to relaunch our bilateral co-operation (with China). We will both work to experiment with new types of collaboration, too

On her first official visit to China since dropping out of the Belt and Road Initiative



{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Globetrotter who used
his capital for local good

Educationist and activist Virendra Singh, more popular as Virendra Sam or Uncle Sam, passed away last Tuesday at his daughter’s house in the United States (US). His mortal remains were brought back to his village in Bulandshahr, and last rites performed there in keeping with his wishes. Sam adored his birthplace and had left everything in the US to return to his village, Bichola. His tale is interesting and inspirational. I had the pleasure of spending a delightful evening and a rejuvenating morning with him almost ten years ago.

That evening, Sam shared his love of hockey, which he had played since childhood, and which had transformed his life. His team was once playing against the Aligarh Muslim University team, when the vice-chancellor of Punjab University noticed Sam, then known by his given name Virendra Singh. The vice-chancellor told Sam he could get him an admission into the engineering college at Bhiwani if he played for Punjab University. Sam accepted the offer. He soon got an opportunity to play a hockey match in Manchester. The professional approach of the West he noticed during that match, left an indelible impression on Sam. After finishing his engineering degree, he worked for a period at DCM, after which he got admission to the University of Minnesota in the US, where he earned a master’s degree in textile engineering. This set off the transformation of Virendra Singh, the rustic youth from Bulandshahr, into “Sam”.

The transformational era of the 1960s needed spirited youths like Sam to take it forward. Sam eventually started working at Du Pont. Married by then, his wife and he welcomed two daughters into their lives. By this time, the family had blended in with the American society. Sam was always full of energy and vigour, instilled in him by hockey. In no time, he rose through the ranks to head operations for all of Asia and eventually to the company’s chairmanship. Few Indians in the corporate sector attained such prominence in the Cold War era. It was amid such success in the US, in 2000, that Sam decided to return to his village. The decision took his family, coworkers, and even people in his village by surprise. The question all had was: Why?

Sam had succeeded in life, but a worry nagged him. Often during company board

meetings, the CEO would draw attention to tragedies in India, such as a boat capsize somewhere or a train derailment, or a stampede, and everyone at the meetings would observe silence as a mark of respect to the victims. The frequency of such instances disturbed Sam and he increasingly yearned to see change. One day he decided, if someone had to take the initiative, it was I. Sam quit his job, moved to his village, and started the Pardada-Pardadi Educational Society.

There is an old saying, “Havan karte haath jale”, which roughly translates as facing ill consequences for trying to do good. His initiative had teething troubles in getting students to his institution. A common response he got from parents when he tried to get girl children in particular to be educated was, “Babuji, I need to marry off my daughter. I will not teach her so much that she becomes a collector.” But his hockey experience had taught Sam patience, which he used to great advantage. In the first year, his school got only 45 girls to enrol. Today, about 4,000 girls study there. Each girl gets free uniform, three meals a day, books and transportation. Additionally, ₹10 is transferred into their accounts every day. These girls are promised employment and get training according to their interests.

This organisation has helped thousands of girls in Anupshahr and nearby areas to become self-reliant over the past 24 years. The organisation includes more than 7,000 women who are learning how to produce incense sticks, pickles, and sanitary pads. Earnings from the sale of these products go into their accounts. That evening, Sam led us to Anupshahr, where his society runs a drinking water ATM on the banks of the Ganga. Dozens were getting water for twenty-five paise per litre. When I asked why he charged for drinking water, Sam explained, “Freebies are not respected anywhere in the world. I offer water worth ten rupees for twenty-five paise, not to make a profit, but to guarantee that people value and conserve it.” This practical approach to conservation seemed novel to me. Sam may be gone, but he will be remembered by the thousands of families whose lives his efforts changed. Do people like Sam ever really die?

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

OUR VIEW



Beijing's dragon breath mustn't scorch factories

As Chinese exports threaten production elsewhere and face Western barriers, India should invite FDI from China as part of its plus-one strategy—but only with due safeguards in place

The Chinese word ‘*ma*’ can mean mother, horse, hemp or scold, depending on how it is said. Tone and nuance are equally vital when it comes to welcoming foreign direct investment (FDI) from China. This is what the *Economic Survey* has to say: “India faces two choices to benefit from a China plus one strategy: it can integrate into China’s supply chain or promote FDI from China.” Of these, “focusing on FDI from China seems more promising...” This needs to be qualified on multiple counts. China is not just another economy. It is a neighbour with which India has fought a war and whose hostile intent occasionally finds articulation as skirmishes with Indian soldiers along the Line of Actual Control and diplomatic pressure on other neighbours to disadvantage India. Another relevant aspect is that China has been identified by the US as its strategic rival, whose rise is seen to threaten the stability of the world over which the US presides. A third point is that China is the world’s great big factory and its second-largest economy, thanks essentially to an industrial policy that funnels subsidies to the tune of 1.8% of GDP into sectors of industry that the Chinese Communist Party has earmarked for global dominance.

Hostility must be fended off with our own strength and deft diplomacy to leverage the fact that India is the only country in the Indo-Pacific with the heft to counterbalance China. It also means that allowing Chinese entry into sensitive sectors, such as telecom networks, could compromise national security. China’s strategic rivalry with the US exposes Chinese output in some categories—whether exported directly from China or via third countries—to potential American or Western sanctions. This could

even apply to shipments with large Chinese inputs. Thus, it would be best for India to avoid letting investment from China into advanced sectors. Beijing’s industrial policy results in cost-crushing scale economies, subsidized competitive efficiency and giant overcapacity in relation to local demand, and this poses the threat of replacing local production with cheap imports from China in much of the world. Since Beijing’s opaque subsidies make Chinese production costs hard to estimate, it isn’t always easy to identify its export game as ‘dumping,’ which is a violation of trade rules, but it clearly squeezes investment in factories elsewhere.

China’s policy has lessons for developing countries, though. Access to its large and fast-growing domestic market, for example, was used by Beijing to ‘persuade’ foreign companies to transfer technology in strategic sectors. This led academics to coin the term ‘forced technology transfer.’ While we should unconditionally welcome investment proposals from China in sectors like consumer goods and light machinery, we could insist on joint ventures (JVs) with local partners in fields where Indian players lack know-how. This would replicate the tech diffusion seen in the auto sector, thanks to JVs with Japanese and Korean carmakers. Within sub-sectors that overlap with sectors that involve strategic capabilities, FDI could be strictly regulated in terms of ownership caps, management control and monitoring of local value addition. Broadly, India should welcome FDI from China, as the *Economic Survey* says, but only armed with sufficient policy safeguards and regulatory oversight. In short, we must use a whip alongside the training manual. This may or may not be a ‘game of thrones,’ but there is no such thing as a friendly dragon.

MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION

Our focus on the Constitution is edifying but we must not deify it

It’s a social contract for Indians and should neither be identified with any policy nor held as ‘holy’



NITIN PAI is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy.

It was edifying to see the Indian Constitution occupy centre-stage during some phases of this year’s general election. Indian republicans—those who believe in upholding constitutional values and behaviours—have long been a beleaguered lot. We have watched in impotent horror as both the left and the right have used the brute force of populism to ignore or circumvent constitutional norms. We have seen rulings of the Supreme Court that appear to side a little too readily with what is popular over what is constitutional. We have been derided in some of the public discourse as being impractical, “like street dogs barking at passing cars.” It was, therefore, a delight to see opposition politicians waving the pocketbook edition of the Constitution and the government responding by announcing the celebration of its 75th anniversary on a grand scale.

I am happy that Indian politics has rediscovered the Constitution. Yet, I have been concerned about some of the motivations behind the newfound enthusiasm. In some places at least, the Constitution was conflated with India’s policy of reservations and people voted to preserve it. Now there is nothing wrong in voting for reservations. It is the equation of the Constitution with a specific policy—in this case education and job quotas—that ought to worry us. Social justice is one of the first objec-

tives of the Indian republic, but a reservation policy is just one of several possible ways to achieve it. It is not hard-coded in the document. Indeed, if there are better ways to achieve social justice, then both constitutional and conventional morality require us to adopt them. The danger of equating reservations with the Constitution is that we will let that single policy hijack the entire enterprise. Then those who are opposed to reservations will needlessly become opponents of the Constitution.

When asked in 1949 why ‘socialism’ was not written into the Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar replied that it would be unwise to commit future generations to a particular policy, however desirable it might seem at the time. The same goes for reservations.

It is not just possible, we are actually enjoined to think of improving how we achieve the goals set out in the Constitution. The road to social justice does not end at quotas. As much as we celebrate the rekindling of political interest in the republic’s founding statute, we must be very careful not to devalue it by identifying with narrow causes and policies.

Citizens of a democratic republic should also be concerned when the Constitution is claimed to be a ‘holy book.’ It is not holy. It is clearly not the immutable word of supernatural providence. It is, in fact, a social contract framed by humans. As I have written elsewhere, “Instead of centralising power in an almighty God, it divides power among fallible humans. The Constitution is, ultimately, a product of reason and a framework for us to conduct our affairs using reason.”

It is amendable by popular consent. In interpreting it, we must be sensitive to what the framers intended, to present realities and precedents for the future. We must respect it, but it is unnecessary to attach holiness to a book in order to do so.

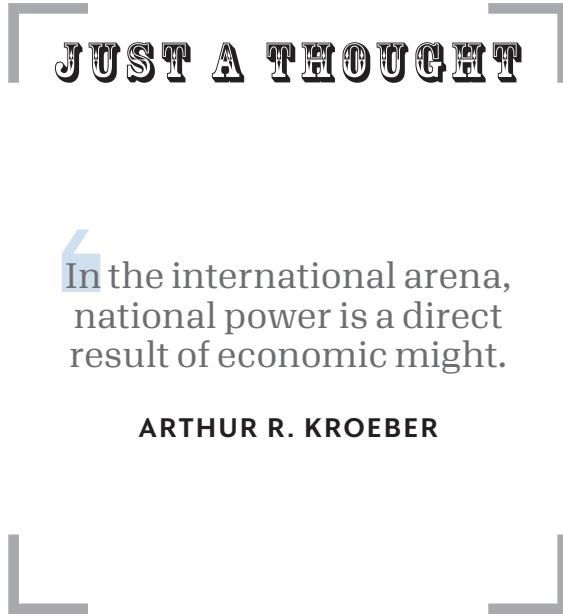
The risk of deifying or sanctifying a book is that it becomes possible to wor-

ship it while ignoring its content. Indian society has successfully raised the Buddha, Rabindranath Tagore, M.K. Gandhi and Ambedkar onto pedestals while forgetting the principles they advocated. The Buddha, it is often forgotten and records show, had a non-theistic religious persuasion. Tagore is included in the nationalist pantheon despite his rejection of the idea. Gandhi is frequently a statue, road or a pretext for prohibition. Ambedkar, who warned against hero worship, seems to be worshipped as a statue even as his ideas on constitutionalism and building a casteless society are ignored. We must not allow the Constitution to go the same way. In any case, a holy book for a secular state is a contradiction in terms.

Similarly, as the Chief Justice of India warned earlier this month, “There is a very grave danger when people say that the court is a temple of justice. It is a grave danger that we perceive ourselves as the deities in those temples.” The judge is a public servant bound by constitutional morality. We can stick with the convention of addressing judges as ‘My Lord’ or ‘My Lady,’ and accord them due respect, but without deifying the humans occupying a very human seat.

We should therefore neither diminish the Constitution nor worship it. More than book-thumping or worship, constitutionalism is about day-to-day conduct. The profound declaration “*Dharma rakshati rakshitaah*” (dharma protects those who protect it) enjoins everyone to act according to constitutional values and norms. Remember Ambedkar’s words: “The first thing... we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives.” We have to do a lot better in this respect.

Tailpiece: The pocket edition of the Constitution of India is beautifully produced and I recommend that you buy one for yourself. It also makes a great gift. Its resemblance to a holy book is entirely coincidental.



MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Kamala Harris inspires us but don't ask us to explain

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, ‘Decoupled’

Among the leading causes of human absurdity is people identifying with the famous just because they have one thing in common. As we will see in the coming days when Kamala Harris intensifies her campaign to become the next American president. Three kinds of people will extol her because they would misunderstand her as a beacon of hope and pride. The most obvious would be Indians who would celebrate once again the notion that she is of ‘Indian origin’ because her mother was from Tamil Nadu. The celebration of foreigners of ‘Indian origin’ is among the silliest things Indians do. It is as though the Indian links of successful foreigners somehow demonstrates that Indians have respectable genes.

But there is a more erroneous idea that Harris inspires and it is more sophisticated than the absurd pride of Indians in foreigners who look a bit like them. There is a broad consensus in America that the Indian community succeeds in America because of something that Indians do in an Indian way,

something abstractly but innately Indian. Americans of ‘Indian origin’ like this view. They use their general success to subtly and bluntly admonish African-Americans and other communities and tell them that the secret of success in America is very simply valiant human virtues. This is nonsense. Indians appear to do well compared to other communities because the first wave of Indian migrants were the social and economic upper class back home. They were the Caucasians of their native lands. In fact, they could migrate to the US precisely because they were a part of the elite. It was an extension of their privileges. In fact, by virtue of being born in the right homes, they had a head-start not only against most Indians, but also most Americans. This is what they never tell African-Americans.

Some Indians in America may point out that they emerged from what they claim are “humble backgrounds.” For instance, the CEO of Alphabet, which owns Google, Sundar Pichai has said, “My father spent the equivalent of a year’s salary on my plane ticket to the US so I could attend Stanford. It was my first time ever on a plane. Without all that, I wouldn’t be here today.” This, in fact, shows that he probably belonged to the top 1% of Indians at the time. Around the time

Pichai took his first flight, Indians were so poor that if a man’s yearly salary was as much as a plane ticket to the US, he was in a position to favour his children in ways a majority of Indians could not. And that head-start is not a trivial thing.

The mother of Kamala Harris, Shyamala, too, though not royalty, was a beneficiary of belonging to the upper class in a poor country—a fortune that helped her migrate, legally.

When Donald Trump was president, he opened a broadside against migrants in America. His concern was entirely the poor among migrants. His actions created a moral counterforce, and influential people of ‘Indian origin,’ including Kamala Harris, spoke against his policies. They gave the impression that migrants were a single collective block of an identical class. But in reality, they had more in common with privileged Americans than the poor migrants who smuggle themselves into America.

The third group of people who may see a

bit too much in Harris are women. But then, the success of Kamala Harris is not an indicator that the time has come for women to have a fair chance at success. She is a sign of something more pedestrian, which is that upper-class women have greater opportunities today to trounce upper-class men. The fact that women identify with her because she is a woman will make no difference in a world where the odds are stacked against most women.

A few hours before I began writing this column, during the filming of the Olympic torch relay, Salma Hayek did a good cartwheel. She did it exactly like the little girls in my park. She is 57. And that may have brought a flutter to the hearts of many

57-year-olds, even though they can barely run up a flight of steps and they know they are never going to do a cartwheel in their lives. Hayek demonstrates that there are things you can do at 57 if you live the right way. But that is not going to happen to most people. They felt a flutter because they iden-

tified with her age, that is all. There is something human about identifying with someone in a similar circumstance. It is human, but also absurd. The fact that Salma Hayek can do something at 57 portends absolutely nothing for millions of 57-year-olds in the world. Similarly, what some fortunate women like Kamala Harris can do portends nothing for most women in the world. Unlucky women have more in common with unlucky men.

A more meaningful inspiration for women across the world are female athletes from nations like India, where they face enormous odds in their formative years. They are jeered at by their families, communities and even coaches. India gives them almost nothing; India is in fact their adversity. Yet, they are so innately talented that they triumph.

I wish I could say that the lesson here is that if you are a very talented girl in an objective field, even India cannot stop you. But the real lesson, instead, is that for the poor to triumph, first the field should be beyond the interest or capabilities of the upper class, like sports. And second, men should not be in the fray. That would make the conditions ripe for true social justice to occur. Otherwise, it is just the 98th percentile beating the 99th, and calling it storming the bastion.

How educated mothers of young kids can be asset for NIPUN



EXPERTS EXPLAIN

SANJAY KUMAR & RUKMINI BANERJI

THE NEW National Education Policy (NEP 2020) was launched on July 29, four years ago. One of NEP 2020's key recommendations was to ensure that by the time children reach Grade 3, they have acquired foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

To this end, the Centre launched the NIPUN (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) Bharat Mission on July 5, 2021. The mission has seen energetic implementation in many states, with a new framework for the foundational stage of education developed and released well before frameworks for other stages.

This framework includes teacher training

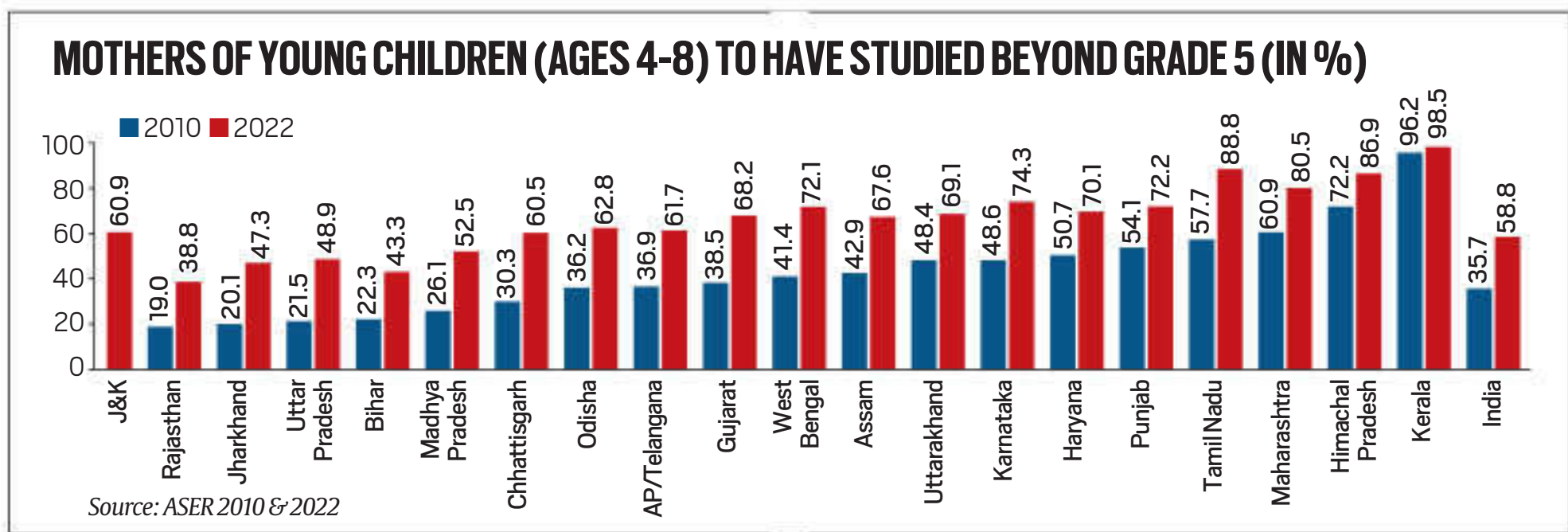
oriented towards the new goals, specially designed teaching-learning materials for use by children and teachers in early grade classrooms, etc. But in addition to these in-school efforts, there are a set of interlinked social and demographic trends which, if leveraged, could provide a boost to the NIPUN efforts.

Here we focus on parents, specifically the mothers of young children (between ages 4 and 8), to see how their contribution can help in strengthening children's learning journey.

Two demographic trends

School enrollment levels (between ages 6-14) have shown a remarkable rise in the last few decades. With the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001, school enrollment levels reached well above 90% in rural India by the early 2000s. The push for universal elementary education has meant that not only are more children getting enrolled into schools, but increasingly, a higher proportion of each cohort is completing elementary education.

The data on education levels of mothers with children between ages 4 and 8 — the target age of the NIPUN mission — show a steep rise over the last decade. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) sur-



veys, between 2010 and 2022, the number of such mothers to have studied beyond Grade 5 jumped from 35% to nearly 60%. In fact, in 2010, less than 10% of young rural mothers had completed more than 10 years of schooling. By 2022, this number was well over 20%.

In states like Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Haryana, 30-40% of mothers of young children have had schooling beyond Grade 10. In Tamil Nadu, this figure is close to 43%, while in Himachal, it is higher than 54%.

Kerala tops this list with almost 72% of these mothers receiving high school education.

However, young women in India are not joining the labour force at a rate comparable to the rest of the educated world. According to latest data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23, the over-all female labour force participation rate — LFPR shows the percentage of the population which is looking for a job — in India is only 37% (41.5% in rural, 25.4% in urban India). For women in

the 15-29 age-group, the LFPR is even lower at 24.5% (25.8% in rural, 20.8% in urban India).

Leveraging educated mothers

The economic implications of India's low LFPR are debated in India's public policy circles. There is undoubtedly scope for much improvement in this area.

But educated mothers provide a uniquely positioned resource for supporting young children's learning. Although father's education

matters as well, 65.5% of young men (ages 15-29) in rural India are a part of the workforce, and thus, not as available to be with children.

The data outlined above suggests that due to the push towards universal elementary education, India today is in a unique position to leverage young mothers' schooling levels as a resource in their children's journey to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy.

The pandemic, which was a difficult and disruptive, has already laid the ground for this higher engagement. With schools closed for more than a year, parents — regardless of their own education levels — had to get involved in their children's education. Before the pandemic, parents largely left the business of learning to schools.

The active participation of families, especially mothers, should be further encouraged to meet the goals of the NIPUN Bharat Mission. For young children to grow and thrive, nothing can be more powerful than teachers and mothers joining hands.

Sanjay Kumar is Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Rukmini Banerji is CEO, Pratham Education Foundation

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

GAZA'S TELL UMM AMER NOW A WORLD HERITAGE SITE: WHY THIS MATTERS

THE WORLD Heritage Committee (WHC) on Friday decided to include the Palestinian site of Tell Umm Amer in both the UNESCO World Heritage Site List and the List of World Heritage in Danger during its 46th session in New Delhi.

Also known as the 'Monastery of Saint Hilarion', the site lies in the Gaza Strip which continues to reel under Israel's relentless assault.



Fourth century monastery

Situated on the coastal dunes of the Nuseirat Municipality, just 10 km south of Gaza city, the ancient Christian monastery was founded in the fourth century by Hilarion the Great (291-371 CE), considered by some to be the father of Palestinian monasticism.

Born in Tabatha, close to where his monastery would eventually come up, Hilarion became a monk at the age of 15. As his fame grew, his small hermitage turned into a thriving monastery, which attracted followers from all over, many of whom would choose Hilarion's mendicant lifestyle.

The present-day archaeological remains of the site span more than four centuries, from the time of Hilarion to the Umayyad period. The ruins comprise "five successive churches, bath and sanctuary complexes, geometric mosaics, and an expansive crypt" making the monastery "one of the largest in the Middle East", according to The World Monuments Fund, an independent organisation which facilitates the preservation of "the world's most treasured places".

The monastery was likely abandoned after a seventh century earthquake, only to be uncovered by local archaeologists in 1999.

Much-needed protection

With Israel's ongoing onslaught re-

Ruins of the Monastery of Saint Hilarion. UNICEF

ducing much of the Gaza strip to rubble, monuments and sites of cultural significance have not been spared either.

According to Mahmoud Hawari of the Institute of Palestinian Studies, as of February this year, "207 archaeological sites and buildings of cultural and historical significance... have been reduced to rubble or severely damaged". The site of Tell Umm Amer was also "damaged", Hawari wrote in "Israel Destroys Palestinian Cultural Heritage Sites in Gaza" (February 28, 2024).

This is why Tell Umm Amer's inclusion in the aforementioned UNESCO lists matters. The World Heritage Convention of 1972, of which Israel is a party to, sets out duties for identifying, protecting, and preserving World Heritage sites. States cannot take any deliberate measures which are likely to cause direct or indirect damage to this site.

The inclusion on the list of World Heritage in Danger automatically opens the door to enhanced international technical and financial assistance mechanisms to guarantee the protection of the property and, if necessary, to help facilitate its rehabilitation, the UNESCO statement on Friday said.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

LAST WEEK, the Supreme Court agreed to hear a case whose outcome will likely shape the contours of the "right to be forgotten", known in European information privacy regulation as the "right to erasure", in India. The top court now has to decide whether the right to be forgotten is a fundamental right and, if so, how it relates to other fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud will hear a challenge against a Madras High Court ruling that on February 27 directed legal search portal Indian Kanoon to take down a judgment in a 2014 rape and cheating case. The acquitted man had moved the Madras HC in 2021, saying that he had been denied the citizenship of Australia because his name appears in the judgment that is publicly available on the legal portal.

What is the right to be forgotten?

The right to be forgotten can be loosely described as the right to remove one's digital footprint (from Internet searches, etc.) where it violates the right to privacy. In May 2014, the Luxembourg-based Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), the highest court in matters concerning the application and interpretation of EU law, affirmed that there exists a right to be forgotten.

In what is commonly referred to as the "Google Spain case", the court ruled on the plea of Spanish lawyer Mario Costeja González to have Google remove information from 1998 regarding the forced sale of his property due to social security debt.

Citing Articles 7 (respect for private and family life) and 8 (protection of personal data) of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, the CJEU ruled that search engines must cater to individual requests to remove data that "appear to be inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant or excessive in the light of the time that had elapsed".

Informational self-determination — an individual's right to control and limit her personal information — is now widely recognised in EU law. Article 17 of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) describes the right to erasure. From victims of so-called



"revenge porn" to individuals whose personal cases are on the Internet, the right to be forgotten is a crucial remedy.

How is the right interpreted in India?

In India, there is no statutory framework that prescribes the right to be forgotten. However, not all constitutional rights need to be written in black and white. Until the 2017 judgment in *Justice K S Puttaswamy v Union of India* — in which the apex court explicitly recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right, placing it as a facet of the right to life, right to equality, and the right to freedom of speech and expression — there were also questions on the right to privacy.

A concurring opinion in the *Puttaswamy* ruling by Justice S K Kaul mentions the right to be forgotten. Justice Kaul said that this right "does not mean that all aspects of earlier existence are to be obliterated... It would only mean that an individual who is no longer desirous of his personal data to be processed or stored, should be able to remove it from the system where the personal data/information is no longer necessary, relevant, or is incor-

A restaurant in Pescara, Italy, where a man stabbed his brother in 2008. In 2019, the 'right to be forgotten' privacy law was used to force a former editor of an Italian news website to delete a story about the incident. *The New York Times*; (left) In 2014, the EU's top court ruled in favour of Spaniard Mario Costeja González who asked for Google to remove information about him dating back to 1998. *Reuters*

rect and serves no legitimate interest".

Justice Kaul also gave a list of valid justifications for the right to be forgotten to be violated. These included "exercising the right of freedom of expression and information, for compliance with legal obligations, for the performance of a task carried out in public interest, on the grounds [of]... public health, for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes, or for the establishment, exercise or defence of legal claims".

How have courts ruled on the issue?

In several isolated pleas, mostly asking the court's permission to take down information in court rulings, courts have passed orders with regard to this right.

In the landmark 1994 ruling in *R Rajagopal vs. State of Tamil Nadu*, the SC had talked about a "right to be let alone".

"A citizen has a right to safeguard the privacy of his own, his family, marriage, procreation, motherhood, child-bearing and education among other matters. None can publish anything concerning the above mat-

ters without his consent whether truthful or otherwise..." the SC had said. But the ruling drew a distinction between the right to be let alone and the publication of public records, such as court decisions. "This is for the reason that once a matter becomes a matter of public record, the right to privacy no longer subsists and it becomes a legitimate subject for comment by press and media among others," the two-judge Bench had held.

More recently, several High Courts have passed rulings that often conflict with one another.

In *Dharamraj Bhanushankar Dave vs State Of Gujarat* (2017), the petitioner had asked the Gujarat HC to remove details of his acquittal in a murder and kidnapping case, saying that it had come up during background checks while he was applying for an Australian visa. The court refused to grant him relief, holding that court orders are allowed to be in public domain.

However, in *[Name Redacted] vs The Registrar General, the Karnataka HC in 2017* ensured that the name of the petitioner would be protected in an annulment case. Although the court did not substantially engage with jurisprudence on the right to be forgotten, it said that the ruling is in keeping "with the trend in the Western countries where they follow this as a matter of rule... in sensitive cases involving women in general...".

In 2021, the Delhi HC extended the right to be forgotten to even a criminal case by allowing a ruling involving Jorawar Singh Mundy, an American law student, to be taken down from search results. Mundy was acquitted in a customs case involving narcotics. The HC cited "the irreparable prejudice which may be caused to the Petitioner, his social life and his career prospects" as reason for taking down the details of the case.

The Orissa HC in 2020, while hearing a criminal case which involved "revenge porn" said that the legal possibilities of being forgotten "online or offline cries for a wide-spread debate".

"It is also an undeniable fact that the implementation of the right to be forgotten is a thorny issue in terms of practicality and technological nuances... It cries for a clear cut demarcation of institutional boundaries and redressal of many delicate issues which hitherto remain unaddressed in Indian jurisdiction," the HC said.

Progress of the monsoon: Taking stock at halfway stage of rainy season

ANJALI MARAR
BENGALURU, JULY 28

WE ARE almost halfway through the June-September four-month monsoon season. Although the overall rainfall over the country has been good, there have been large variations in the distribution of rainfall, in spatial as well as temporal terms. While at least 10 states/UTs continue to receive below normal rainfall, central and peninsular regions have either received normal or excess rainfall, so far in the season.

Rainfall performance

The monsoon got a good start in June. It covered the southern peninsula ahead of time, bringing widespread rainfall until it covered central India. However, the June rainfall over the country ended at being 11% below normal.

The rainfall picked up intensity after the monsoon covered the entire country on July

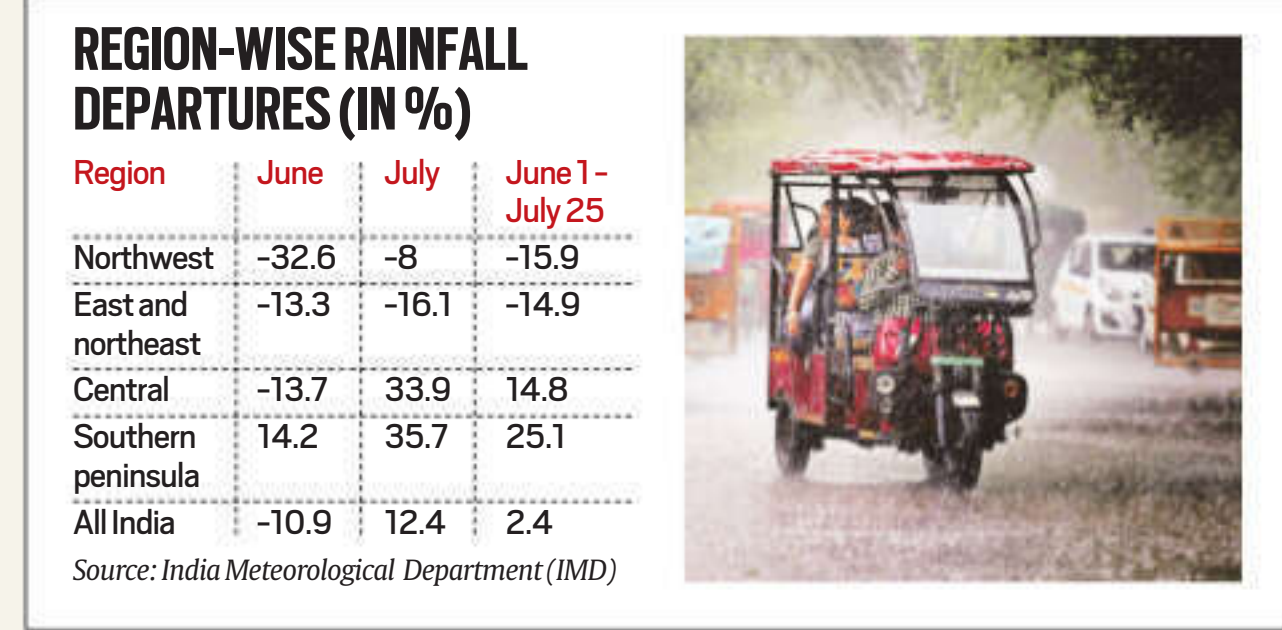
2. A majority of regions continued to experience good rainfall throughout July.

The overall seasonal performance improved due to the rainfall recorded between July 18 and July 24. During this period, a low pressure system developed in the Bay of Bengal and subsequently intensified to keep the monsoon either active or vigorous. The system weakened around July 23.

Between July 19 and July 25, India received 41% surplus rainfall, which was 80.5 mm against a normal of 57.2 mm. The rainfall was largely concentrated over southern peninsular (except Tamil Nadu) and central India regions.

Region wise performance

IMD data show that between June 1 and July 19, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh received close to normal rainfall. In the same period, Odisha and Chhattisgarh reported rainfall deficits of 25% and 34%, respectively. Until the third week of July, 12 states were in the "deficit" category.



The situation turned around as the west coast and central regions began to receive unabated heavy rainfall between July 18 and July 24. During this period, Central India recorded 107% excess rainfall — 137.8 mm against the normal of 66.6 mm — and southern peninsular India received 82.6 mm against the normal of 42 mm — 97%



surplus for this time of the season.

Gujarat, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu received excess rainfall. Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Kerala, and Lakshadweep saw normal rainfall.

However, regions along the northwest,

extreme north, east, and northeast India remained largely dry in recent weeks — rainfall deficits here are between 8% and 16%. Despite early monsoon onset in these parts, significant rainfall is yet to be realised.

High rainfall receiving areas such as Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Jharkhand, Bihar, Haryana, Chandigarh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir have remained in the rainfall "deficient" category.

Behind skewed distribution

The central and southern peninsular regions have received a surplus rainfall primarily due to the position of the monsoon trough — a semi-permanent, low-pressure area extending between Pakistan and the Bay of Bengal during the monsoon season — which usually oscillates between north and south within the season. Whenever it moves towards the south, as it has done in the present case, more rainfall can take place in central, eastern, and peninsular India. When it shifts towards the north, the Himalayan

foothills are likely to receive more rainfall but the rest of India sees a drop in rainfall.

Other rain-bearing weather systems such as an off-shore trough (a shallow trough of low pressure, which develops along India's coast during the monsoon) have also contributed to the surplus rainfall in the central and southern peninsular regions.

As the monsoon trough is yet to move northwards, rainfall has remained deficient over northwest, extreme north, east, and northeast regions, so far this season. Moreover, there have been fewer rain-bearing weather systems, and those that formed did not reach and bring rainfall over these regions.

IMD's forecast does not indicate much rainfall for northwest or north India during early August.

The skewed rainfall distribution can severely impact Kharif crops — sown between June 15 and July 15 — and their yield. For instance, excessive rainfall in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district forced many paddy farmers to resow their crops this season.

*The Indian***EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

KILLING STUDENTS

Will Honourable Delhi CM fix accountability from Tihar Jail? Do traumatised parents have to line up at Raj Bhawan?

THE DEATHS OF Shreya Yadav, Nevin Dalwin and Tanya Soni on July 27, after they were trapped in the flooded basement of a UPSC coaching centre in Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar, tell a grim story of criminal failures. There is, first, the failure of the coaching centre to prioritise the safety of the students over profits. It flouted the city's building by-laws to house a library and reading room in the basement, with just one exit/entry point. When water gushed in following the bursting of a nearby drain, there was no way for the students to escape as the door remained shut. Then, the failure of callous local authorities that allowed the unregulated growth of the coaching industry, with overcrowded centres operating in residential buildings, disregarding safety norms. But the tragedy also points to a larger failure — of a government being run, allegedly run, by a chief minister in jail. The AAP government seems much too convulsed by its internal disorders to attend to the tasks of governance in India's capital city, including building and maintaining the infrastructure that can support the aspirations of students who flock to it.

Even as the lapses that led to this incident are investigated, a larger reckoning is called for, accountability must be fixed at multiple levels. The business of coaching is a multi-crore, nationwide behemoth built on the anxieties of young people hoping to crack the civil service exams as a ticket to success in a jobs-starved economy. The pursuit of profit is legitimate but too often, it comes with administrative negligence and a regulatory system that exists only on paper. Witness the industry's exponential growth riding on centres that lack basic safety equipment, or toilets or proper electrical wiring, evident in past incidents — such as the 2019 fire in a Surat coaching centre that killed 20, after the sole exit from the rooftop class, a wooden staircase, was engulfed in flames. Following this incident, an inspection by the Delhi fire department found that several coaching centres around the city had flouted fire safety norms and called for their closure. But little has changed on the ground. When a fire broke out in a Mukherjee Nagar coaching centre last year, students had to use ropes and wires to rappel down the building. That young people around the country are forced to study in unsafe conditions in such institutes, points to the need for a law which can enable regulation of the industry — not mere guidelines, like those issued by the Union government earlier this year.

The tragedy of the Rajinder Nagar deaths is compounded by the political bickering in its aftermath. The blame-game between the AAP on one side and the BJP and the Delhi Lieutenant-Governor on the other, is predictable and unseemly. It also distracts attention from the real governance problems in a state where, in the absence of a firm and clear line of accountability, basic municipal responsibilities, such as desilting and clearing of drains, have become so contested that the High Court is forced to demand a timeline. The deaths of the three students must be investigated urgently. But justice for them can only come when those who are responsible for their safety and well-being act decisively to set their own house in order. The highest court has to clean up the mess after an exam paper leak, maybe grieving parents now need to knock on its door for justice.

AN INCOMPLETE VICTORY

Twenty-five years after Kargil, reforms of India's national security system are still too incremental and tentative

A QUARTER OF a century after the Kargil War ended, a serious reflection would suggest India's victory or "vijay" is incomplete. Pakistan's Kargil aggression in the spring of 1999, just weeks after Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's peace mission to Lahore, highlighted three broad challenges in the domains of defence, deterrence, and diplomacy. On the defence front, the Kargil surprise exposed the multiple vulnerabilities of India's security. India did reverse the Pakistani ingress across the LoC, thanks to the extraordinary courage of officers and men. But sacrifice of its best men is no way of defending a nation's territory; what India needed was a root and branch overhaul of its higher defence organisation, modernisation of its armed forces, upgrading its rusty defence industrial infrastructure, revitalising its intelligence mechanisms, and restructuring the decision-making on national security. The Kargil Review Committee headed by K Subrahmanyam produced a series of defence reforms. Over the last 25 years, Delhi did seek to restructure the national security system. But these reforms have been incremental and sub-optimal. The intensification of the conflict on the China frontier has highlighted India's two-front challenge and the case for faster transformation.

The second was the challenge of countering Pakistan's pursuit of cross border terrorism under the shadow of its nuclear gun. After a period of hesitation, Delhi began to experiment with bolder efforts to raise the costs of Pakistan's terror policy. The 2016 "surgical strikes" across the LoC, and the 2019 air attacks on a terror camp in PoK following the Pulwama attacks demonstrated Delhi's new political will to enhance deterrence. Pakistan's successful riposte in 2019 that saw the downing of an Indian Air Force Mig-21 pointed to a stalemate. India needs a massive military superiority that can inflict decisive punishment on the Pakistan Army for effective deterrence — it is nowhere near achieving that kind of military edge.

Finally, military means alone will not bring the desired results. They need to be matched by diplomacy. The overall balance of power has indeed tilted in favour of India, thanks to Islamabad's economic failures since Kargil and Delhi's rapid growth. Many traditional friends of Pakistan, except for China and Turkey, now see India as a more valuable partner. Yet, Delhi should not delude itself that it can unilaterally define the terms of engagement on Kashmir and other disputes. The change in the constitutional status of Kashmir in 2019 and India's hard line on talks with Pakistan have not eliminated Rawalpindi's capacity to create trouble. The upsurge in cross-border terror attacks in Jammu offers evidence of Rawalpindi's capacity for mischief. Delhi must find ways to engage the political classes and civil society in Pakistan that can create the conditions for transcending the bitter legacies of Partition that were at the root of the Kargil war and continue to hobble the bilateral relationship.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



Kargil, the unfinished tasks



C UDAY BHASKAR

Steps taken by the Vajpayee government to reform national security need to be taken forward

ON JULY 26, the 25th anniversary of the Kargil war, Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the nation in paying tribute to the bravehearts, who displayed extraordinary valour in the face of enormous tactical difficulties posed by the craggy Himalayan topography to safeguard the country's sovereignty. The choice of Dras in the Himalayan heights was appropriate for this solemn occasion.

Whether the Kargil war of mid-1999 was a victory or a case of the armed forces evicting Pakistani troops from Indian territory at a high human cost is a matter of debate. However, PM Modi highlighted a very important aspect of that war. "In Kargil, we not only won the war, we also presented an incredible example of truth, restraint and strength," he said. The endeavour was helmed by then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who headed the first BJP-led NDA government, and the then National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra.

The Kargil war has several distinctive facets, each of which merits detailed discussion, but some aspects are particularly important. In the post-Cold War period, this was the first such exigency in which two states with nuclear weapons capability, also proximate neighbours, were engaged in a limited but intense conventional war over territory.

Despite some feckless sabre-rattling by Pakistani diplomats at the UN in the early stages of the war, in hindsight, it is evident that both sides exercised nuclear restraint and the apocalyptic escalation that was feared did not occur. PM Vajpayee arrived at a very prudent politico-military decision: India will evict the intruders even if at high human cost but would not cross the Line of Control and take the war into Pakistan. This reassured the global community that the Kargil war had a limited military objective.

Kargil was also the first televised war in India, and this added to citizen awareness and emotive nationalism — Captain Vikram Batra's battle cry "Yeh Dil Mange More" is now part of collective memory. But Kargil@25 is also an opportune moment to reflect on major omissions and inadequacies. Here, the military and

National security matters must not be exploited for short-term electoral gain and politicised. But that seems to be the current state of play in domestic politics. Bemoaning this trend, at Dras, PM Modi claimed that "it is not the party (BJP) but the country that is paramount for me". In his third tenure, which will also define his legacy, Modi must lead by example. Not doing so will amount to dishonouring the sacrifices of the country's soldiers in Kargil.



ANNAPURNA BHATTACHARYA

ON NOVEMBER 5, I will be a first-time American voter. By the looks of it, I'll be voting for a candidate who shares my grandmother's first name.

Vice President Kamala Harris is now the Democratic Party's presumptive presidential nominee. To many Indians at home and in the diaspora, the vice president's arrival at the forefront of the presidential election has brought on many feelings. For those in the country, living through a deeply nationalistic moment, this is another step into the world. For Indian Americans, it feels more like coming home.

The Indian-American community of today largely traces its beginnings to the 1960s. In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished national origin, race and ancestry as bases for immigration into the US. Instead, it permitted immigrants on what then President Lyndon B Johnson called their "merit as [men.]" As a result, foreign professionals, whose skills would benefit the US, were ushered in. A significant section of this group came from India, where, after two centuries of colonial rule, huge investments were made in developing a graduate and professional class.

My maternal grandparents were a part of this first flush of Indian immigrants to the US. Both doctors, they graduated at the top of their class in the Calcutta National Medical College and moved to the US. They raised three children in the US and eventually became American citizens. Even though they

KAMALA HARRIS AND I

Because of her, for the first time, I also saw myself in American politics

Perhaps, the best thing to do right now is mark the significance of this moment. Whatever happens in November, Kamala Harris's place at the top of the presidential ticket is a celebration of American and Indian plurality, both of which, at this moment, are fighting against forces that attempt to condense and abbreviate them.

remain deeply Indian, both in behaviour and belief, they are grateful for the home that the US has provided them for 50 years.

Like my grandparents, I grew up in India. I was born in Delaware and moved to the IIT Kharagpur campus when I was two. We returned to Delaware each summer to a 1950s-style bungalow that's been ours since before I was born. Growing up, I felt rooted in both India and America.

For each of the four US presidential cycles following my move, I watched from afar. At four, I didn't understand the paradigm shift that Barack Obama's 2008 win was — its significance dawned on me after witnessing the entirely opposite direction that 2016 took. The next four years challenged my perception of both the US and my place in it.

Joe Biden's 2020 victory renewed my sense of belonging, not least because, Biden, Delaware's golden boy, had alongside him Kamala Harris: A woman who shares a past and a name with my family.

With her, the US had many firsts: The first vice president to be a woman; the first Black, Asian and South-Asian vice president. Because of her, for the first time, I also saw myself in American politics.

And because I did, because I do, I am torn between awe and apprehension.

Harris has been a part of an effective presidential term. In the three-and-a-half years since Biden and she came into office, they have overseen the mass distribution

ment and (higher) management of defence.

Domain experts from outside the government were invited to head these TFs. They included G C Saxena, N N Vohra, Madhav Godbole and Arun Singh. It is pertinent to note that the Vajpayee team had no hesitation in inviting Arun Singh, who had been a minister in the Rajiv Gandhi cabinet, to be part of the exercise in reforming the outdated national security architecture.

All the TFs submitted their findings and recommendations by the end of September 2000 and these documents were placed before Parliament. Redacted versions were placed in the public domain. However, the Vajpayee government's attention was diverted by other events, including 9/11 and the terrorist attack on Parliament in December 2000. The implementation of the GOM TF recommendations, therefore, remained incomplete.

It is a matter of regret that in the last two decades, India was again "surprised" by the adversary — in Mumbai in November 2008 and in Galwan in June 2022. Reviewing and reforming the Indian national security edifice — both external and internal — and making it nimbler and more effective will require time. PM Vajpayee took the first major step by investing in transparency and encouraging deliberations in Parliament — though the Congress used every opportunity to attack the government (remember George Fernandes and "Coffin Gate"?). Will PM Modi be able to complete the task begun by his illustrious predecessor in the BJP and use the same toolkit?

National security matters must not be exploited for short-term electoral gain and politicised. But that seems to be the current state of play in domestic politics. Bemoaning this trend, at Dras, PM Modi claimed that "it is not the party (BJP) but the country that is paramount for me". In his third tenure, which will also define his legacy, Modi must lead by example. Not doing so will amount to dishonouring the sacrifices of the country's soldiers in Kargil.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi

of Covid-19 vaccines, passed legislation that has dropped the unemployment rate in the US to the lowest it's been since 1969, and created the most significant gun regulation of the past 30 years. Under them, the US rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement and passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill that has funnelled huge investments into public infrastructure.

Yet, as effective as their partnership has been, I worry that by herself, Harris may not have everything that made her and Biden such a good team. Joe Biden is a veteran politician; an establishment man who managed to get things done by calling on relationships he's built over five decades. He also happens to be a White man.

Kamala Harris is a biracial Black and Indian-American woman. I don't know how the country will react to her — even if she does win. It's uncomfortable to put this into words because it reflects a feeling I have about myself and who I am to America.

Perhaps, the best thing to do right now is mark the significance of this moment. Whatever happens in November, Kamala Harris's place at the top of the presidential ticket is a celebration of American and Indian plurality, both of which, at present, are fighting against forces that attempt to condense and abbreviate them.

The writer is a second-year student of mathematics and journalism at Duke University, USA

JULY 29, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

KAR SEVA DIVIDE

THE VETERAN SIKH religious leader, Baba Kharak Singh, announced his willingness to undertake *kar seva* in the Golden Temple complex and drew a retort from the Nihang chief, Baba Santa Singh, who said this could precipitate a confrontation. While Baba specified no condition, the SGPC, Sikh high priests and the Akali Dal demanded that security forces be withdrawn from the Temple to enable Baba to carry out his *kar seva*.

DONS LET OFF

SUCCUMBING TO PRESSURES from various

quarters, the Maharashtra government has reportedly let off two underworld dons — Haji Mastan Mira and Karim Lala — and 39 others who were arrested under the National Security Act for their alleged involvement in the recent communal riots in Bombay and other places. Their release has surprised many.

J&K WHITE PAPER

THE JAMMU AND Kashmir government has in a "white paper" said that the state Governor, Jagmohan, was not bound by the advice of the council of ministers in relation to the appointment of G M Shah as Chief Minister on July 3 after Farooq Abdullah lost majority in the

Assembly. The 32-page document says that there is no clause in the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution which says that the governor is debarred from taking note of a "fact which is unmistakably proved before him."

DHAKA-DELHI HEAT UP

BANGLADESH ON SATURDAY expressed "surprise and disappointment" at a statement by the Home Minister, PV Narashimha Rao, that India will go ahead with plans to build an anti-immigrant fence along the border between the two countries. Rao told Parliament that India's decision concerned no one else and that it would not be discussed with Dhaka.

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



C R Sasikumar

A recent circular allows central government employees to participate in RSS's activities. Does this undermine the neutrality of the steel frame? Or is the Opposition repeating old allegations reflexively?

Attacking RSS is diversionary

Its opponents must engage in debate, which the Sangh welcomes



RAKESH SINHA

THE CENTRE'S CIRCULAR lifting the ban on government employees from participating in RSS activities has revived the controversy over whether the latter is a political or cultural organisation. This is not the first time the issue is being discussed. What is lacking is intellectual honesty in understanding the problem. The RSS's reach is visible: More than three dozen affiliates work on almost every aspect of life, including programmes for tribals, Dalits and marginalised sections. However, the RSS is not an NGO. Its actions are more than philanthropic and not confined to social and economic empowerment. The ideology of Hindutva is behind all its actions. The RSS believes that India's civilisational deficit cannot be resolved by a compartmental approach to definitions of secularism, liberalism, nationalism, multiculturalism and Hindu civilisation. It does not avoid economic or political questions. Therefore, its definition of culture encompasses issues affecting national life.

In the past, the ban has been discussed in Parliament, going back to the colonial era. The debate begins, and is deliberately abandoned. The Indian intelligentsia's selective use of facts blinkers our vision.

The vexed question cannot be addressed polemically. This is obvious from the Rajya Sabha debate on the nature of the RSS on July 3, 1968. More than half a dozen members, including the then Home Minister YB Chavan, minister of state Vidya Charan Shukla, Communist leader Bhupesh Gupta and RSS thinker Dattopant Thengadi spoke on the issue. The immediate reason was the resolution at the RSS's annual general body meeting in March 1968 against the Kutch Award (mediation by the British government through a Tribunal on the rights of India and Pakistan over Kutch in Gujarat). S K Vaishampayan blamed the Sangh for violating its commitment to the government in 1949 to not meddle in politics. When Chavan asked Thengadi whether the said resolution "does really come under culture", Thengadi replied with a question that remains unanswered: "Is it the contention of the hon'ble Home Minister that the problems of national security and national integrity are mere political problems and not problems of national importance which should be taken cognisance of by nationalist organisations, and if the RSS has taken cognisance of national security and national integrity, merely on that ground, can it be dubbed as a political organisation?" The home minister said it was a philosophical question, which he would discuss later. During the colonial era, when the British government prohibited government employees from participating in RSS activities, the issue was discussed on two days (March 7 and 8, 1934) in the Legislative Council of Central Provinces. All 14 members who participated in the debate opposed the government which

The RSS has been used as a convenient tool by pseudo-seculars to hide their political sins and opportunism. They have blamed the RSS for criminal acts, in defiance of facts. One of them is the assassination of M K Gandhi.

was compelled to withdraw the order.

In our democracy, ignorance is often celebrated. Political actors interpret ideologies lazily and the intellectual class is divided in a caste system of its own: Ideological prejudices transferred from one generation to another. The RSS has been used as a convenient tool by pseudo-seculars to hide their political faults and opportunism. They have blamed the RSS for criminal acts, in defiance of facts. One of them is the assassination of M K Gandhi. Nathuram Godse, in his letter to V D Savarkar, shows his highest contempt for the RSS. He wrote that it was wasting the energy of Hindu youths. He echoed Savarkar who once said, "the epitaph of a RSS volunteer is [that] he is born, lives as and dies as a Swayamsevak without accomplishing anything." Godse argued that the RSS's social philosophy replicated socialism.

Hindu Mahasabha leaders, including Savarkar, were angry at the RSS because it refused to be a part of their political ambitions. There are fundamental differences between the two organisations on both ideology and strategy. Since its inception, the RSS has rejected majoritarianism and taken the social-cultural path to create nationalist consciousness among Hindus. Most non-RSS votaries of Hindutva cannot comprehend K B Hedgewar's dictum of "organisation for the organisation". In the Sangh worldview, conservatism and communalism are deeply rooted in Indian society. Tackling them requires consistent and committed cultural actions. The RSS believes cultural consciousness can have a moral influence on politics.

Nevertheless, it is not absurd to question the RSS's political role. Its opponents must engage in debate — which the Sangh welcomes — instead of merely repeating old allegations.

The RSS has a historical relationship with the BJP, and earlier, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS). It helped in the formation of both parties. The RSS was besieged after Gandhi's assassination and its isolation led it to use its organisational strength to form the BJS. It is true that RSS-trained cadres dominated both the BJS and the BJP — but the RSS itself remains at a distance. Its views on secularism, nationalism and culture remain under attack. The BJP represents its ideology in politics. In the last seven decades of parliamentary

democracy, parties of various shades have joined hands with the BJP and shared platforms with the RSS. While many were honest in raising their views, others were opportunists. In 1967 and 1977, socialists and communists worked in close proximity with it. When the ban on government employees joining the RSS was removed in 1977, most of Congress's current allies, then part of the Janata Party, did not oppose it.

Government employees participating in RSS activities will understand socio-cultural realities better, helping them undo the elitism they carry as a colonial badge. It would also transform them from passive to passionate officers. Non-BJP parties' grassroots workers differ from the leadership's narrative on RSS. Being prisoners of vote-bank politics, they however, remain unresponsive to the Sangh's desire for dialogue. This is nothing but democratic deficit.

The writer is a former Rajya Sabha MP

Normalising a shadow executive

Government order could make bureaucracy beholden to RSS agenda



MANOJ KUMAR JHA

VERY FEW WOULD disagree that government employees ought to adhere to a code of conduct which ensures efficiency, impartiality, predictability, and professionalism. By restricting political activities and ensuring accountability, conduct rules for government officials help maintain the integrity and neutrality of public administration. By prohibiting political affiliations and activities, the conduct rules aim to ensure that government employees act impartially and are not influenced by a political belief that may override the requirement of rational-legal objectivity. This reduces the likelihood of arbitrary actions under the influence of a political ideology. A key feature of bureaucracy or officialdom is a well-defined organisational structure where each level has distinct responsibilities and authority. Most importantly, the chain of command is well-enunciated and anchored in constitutional principles.

Membership of an organisation like the RSS, which has expressed a lack of faith in the Constitution of India, criticised the tricolour and harboured delusional ideas about regional and global geopolitics, can be particularly disastrous. Despite the official restriction on government servants, it is a well-known fact that high officials and foot soldiers affiliated with the so-called cultural organisation exist everywhere in the Indian

The recent order is merely a diversionary tactic by the government to shift focus from the attack of an Opposition strengthened by the mandate of the people of India. We must counter the push to align bureaucratic operations with the RSS's ideology.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which now dominates Indian politics. The RSS's involvement in political strategy, candidate selection, and policy formulation is well-documented. Its sway over the BJP ensures that its ideological goals — centred on Hindu nationalism — are pursued at the highest levels of government. The RSS has consistently harboured ambitions to direct the political future of India.

The recent order, allowing government employees to participate in RSS activities, is merely a diversionary tactic by the government to shift focus from the attack of an Opposition strengthened by the mandate of the people of India. However, we must reiterate the facts, as many times as needed, to counter the push to align bureaucratic operations with the RSS's ideology, effectively seeking to create a parallel system of governance that adheres to the organisation's principles rather than the Constitution.

This move undermines the autonomy of the state apparatus, which is supposed to function impartially and uphold the Constitution. Instead, government officials could well be pressured to follow the RSS line, compromising their professional integrity and the foundational principle of neutrality in public service. This subversion of bureaucratic independence for ideological gain is a direct attack on the constitutional framework that upholds Indian democracy.

Let me remind you that the RSS also seeks to exercise control over the academic and intellectual sphere. Efforts to rewrite history textbooks, influence curriculum design, and suppress dissenting voices in universities reflect a broader strategy to mould the intellectual landscape in accordance with its vision. Curiously, to encroach on academic freedom, the broader Sangh Parivar sought to silence public intellectuals and academics by trying to bring them under the rules for bureaucracy and officialdom that otherwise did not apply to them. This assault on intellectual autonomy is equally if not more dangerous as it seeks to indoctrinate future generations and reshape the cultural and historical narrative of the nation.

The RSS's strategy of on the one hand, loosening the rules of political engagement for the bureaucracy, while shackling intellectuals on the other, serves its broader agenda of subverting the Constitution. By compromising the independence of officialdom, it aims to create an administrative machinery that is subservient to its ideological goals. Simultaneously, by exerting control over academia, it seeks to ensure that intellectual and cultural discourse aligns with its vision of Hindu nationalism.

This pursuit of power and influence at the expense of constitutional principles and intellectual freedom is a grave threat to Indian democracy. It is imperative for citizens to recognise and challenge this duplicity, ensuring that the autonomy of the state and the intellectual community is preserved. Only by doing so can India remain true to its democratic ideals and continue to uphold the values of diversity, pluralism, and intellectual freedom.

The writer is Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Rashtriya Janata Dal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Democracy worldwide remains under challenge from rising illiberalism and authoritarianism. But the story halfway through this year is one of resiliency. Democracy is not a perfect system, but millions of people around the world, doggedly — and wisely — prefer it to the alternatives." — **THE WASHINGTON POST**

After Budget, the challenges

In an era of high inflation and large debts, Budget 2024 prioritises debt reduction over increased spending



PINAKI CHAKRABORTY

THE UNION BUDGET 2024-25 seems to be an admission of the various challenges confronting the economy. The Finance Minister started her budget speech by citing two important macro risks — rising global economic uncertainty and inflation. The upfront mention of these two risks underlines how an emerging economy like India is vulnerable to them. The Finance Minister said that despite these risks, India will continue to have resilient growth. The fundamental requirement for such resilience is a stable macroeconomic regime, sustainable debt, buoyant domestic investment, stable inflation and rising consumption demand.

Fiscal stability in an uncertain economic environment is always challenging. However, the complexity of achieving fiscal balance needs to factor in two competing priorities. First, creating the fiscal space for social and development spending. Second, reducing the level of debt. Some key budget numbers in this context may be useful to understand the issue. The total size of the Union Budget 2024-25 is Rs 48.21 lakh crore, up by Rs 3.96 lakh crore from the previous year. What explains this rise?

Out of this increase, interest payments are around Rs 1 lakh crore higher as compared to the previous year, accounting for roughly 25 per cent of the rise. The rest is in central sector schemes (Rs 70,000 crore), centrally sponsored schemes and other central grants and transfers to states. A part of this additionality in transfers to states is also due to the new expenditure scheme allocations provided to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar in lieu of their demand for special category status. However, as a percentage of GDP, the central expenditure shows a decline from 15.06 per cent of GDP to 14.77 per cent between 2023-24 and 2024-25 (BE). The gross tax revenue of the Union government as a percentage of GDP is expected to remain stagnant at 11.7 during this period and the debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to remain at around 56 per cent.

A faster reduction of debt is critical as the interest burden of the Government of India is now Rs 11.62 lakh crore. When around 25 per cent of the additional increase in expenditure is only due to the interest liability of the government, it is natural for it to prioritise fiscal consolidation over creating fiscal space for non-interest expenditure. However, fiscal consolidation beyond a point can have its own adverse distributional, development and growth consequences. There is a need to rethink the existing framework of fiscal consolidation.

Globally, a reassessment of the conven-

tional wisdom on fiscal rules and the accumulation of public debt is underway. Since the budget is a cash flow accounting in most countries, fixed numerical limits on deficits can make adherence to such rules challenging during macroeconomic uncertainties. Also, as the level of inflation is very high, a large part of the debt may be knocked off by high inflation without a significant reduction in interest outgo from the Budget. This is the case in India also.

Though the debt-to-GDP ratio of the Government of India is set to decline from its Covid-19 peak of 61 per cent in 2020-21 to 56 per cent in 2024-25, the interest payment to GDP ratio remained above 3.5 per cent during this period. This stickiness of interest liability, despite the debt reduction, is acting as a major constraint to increasing development expenditure. A time-bound debt reduction path is critical to reduce the strain of interest burden on the Union Budget. That would also conform with the amendments to the FRBM Act in 2018. As per these amendments, the government was required to reduce Union debt to 40 per cent of the GDP and general government debt to 60 per cent by March 31, 2025. Though this is not possible given the COVID-19 shock and the consequent rise in the debt ratio, a debt reduction path as a framework of fiscal consolidation is necessary, particularly, in the era of high inflation and large debts. This will ensure greater fiscal prudence.

This Budget has also made several announcements that are in the domain of states, such as the next-generation reforms related to land, labour, capital and use of technology. However, these are complex areas of reform. For example, encouraging states which charge a lower stamp duty for property registration may not be easy. A similar kind of reform was tried as a part of the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission. However, the dispersion in rates across states is still very large. This difference in rates is intimately linked to the nature of the property market in individual states, the valuation of land and also their revenue needs. Though the rationalisation of the stamp duty rate is important, it also requires critical reforms in the land market.

The Union government can only act as a facilitator. Experience suggests that these reforms cannot be top-down, driven by the Centre. Carrying out any major reforms in taxes that are in the domain of states would be more challenging now as they have lost substantial fiscal autonomy post the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax. A bottom-up consultative process with the states would be critical for the success of the implementation of such reforms. Their success would also depend on Union-state coordination and the willingness of the latter to undertake such reforms without compromising their fiscal autonomy.

The writer is visiting Distinguished Professor at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy and the vice-chairman of the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INTROSPECTION IS KEY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Cutting down rivals' (IE, July 28). The BJP ought to introspect more earnestly than it appears to be at the moment. It is looking for faults everywhere, except within itself. The high command-driven culture that it was deriding in Congress has crept into the BJP with a stronger hold. Candidates recommended by the regional leadership were ignored. Such a dismissive attitude worked in Gujarat. But if the BJP wants to get some any seats back, introspection is necessary.

R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

CHEER THEM ON

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Simone and Vinesh' (IE, July 27). For many in India, sports is one of few options available to climb the social ladder. With odds stacked against them, against the tide, when players like Vinesh Phogat and Simone Ashley emerge, the world should have one job: Cheer them on. The way the wrestlers' protest against ex-WFI chief Brij Bhushan Singh played out and the lack of accountability was disheartening to witness. Speedy justice is the only acceptable path here.

Shreya Thomas, Thane

A LARGER FAILURE

THIS REFERS TO the report, '3 students dead as UPSC coaching centre gets flooded' (IE, July 28). How do incidents like this keep occurring? In a country like India, where thousands of engineers are being minted at any given moment, simple engineering keeps failing us. Roads,

bridges, coaching centres — there are failures at all levels. The approach to urban planning needs to move beyond the "growth" model. Infrastructure should be climate resilient and above board. Losing the youth to avoidable tragedies is unacceptable.

Pria Hema, New Delhi

BLUES, BLUER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Pioneer of Blues' (IE, July 27). John Mayall revived blues rock in Britain and the US. Legends like Muddy Waters popularised electric blues rock. While Eric Clapton calls him a surrogate father, several great musicians were re-born in Mayall's cradle of music. Even as musicians came and went, he continued in the pursuit of his performance, undeterred even at 90. For the work that he has done, and all those he has influenced, he barely got his due. He will be deeply missed.

Raja Bandopadhyaya, Vadodara

ZERO TOLERANCE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Justice for Faizan' (IE, July 25). A 23-year-old man being subjected to such brutality by the Delhi Police underscores the spread of communal propaganda even among the men in khaki. His mother alleged that he was denied medical care. The Court's remarks about the probe as "too little and too late" is apt. One hopes that the perpetrators will be brought to book without further delay now that the case is with the CBI. There must be a zero tolerance policy against officers who misuse their position to target specific communities.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

GOOD START ON JOB CREATION BUT MORE STEPS ARE NEEDED

ENDING years of handwringing, the NDA government has finally decided to tackle the issue of high unemployment in the country. Last week, presenting Budget 2025, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gave job creation the greatest shot of adrenaline, rolling out five new schemes with an unprecedented outlay of ₹2 lakh crore. The proposed package is expected to facilitate employment and provide skilling for over 4 crore youth over the next five years. The schemes have several moving parts, but broadly, they are aimed at fresh hires, who are being lured with direct cash transfers, and employers, who are rewarded with monthly EPFO reimbursements for two years for every additional employee added to the workforce. Then there are initiatives to incentivise job creation in manufacturing, besides programmes to enhance skilling, women workforce participation, support to MSMEs and others.

Skilling has been one of the biggest problems as our youth are simply not employable. Some 65% of India's fast-growing population is under 35, but many lack the skills needed, according to the Economic Survey. Shockingly, one in every two coming out of college is not readily employable. Perhaps this is where the Budget's internship programme comes in handy. The top 500 companies are given a gigantic task to create one crore internships in five years. By way of support, the government vowed to foot the bill, mostly, but the scheme's success depends on whether India Inc has the courage to commit. Few believe they will oblige. The other initiative to upgrade 1,000 industrial training institutes in collaboration with states and industry is expected to benefit 20 lakh students, but the scheme isn't stamped from any nobler metal than existing collaborations.

The other schemes namely the employment-linked incentives are clearly aimed at increasing formal sector employment. As official data showed, India's informal sector alone employs over 11 crore and this is an area the government is attempting to streamline. Both the cash transfers and employer incentives are linked to EPFO database, but the outcome of these schemes is like forecasting whether a tossed coin will come down as a head or a tail. For, companies simply won't increase hiring based on financial incentives, but depending on their demand and supply growth projections. In sum, it's a good start, but as they say, the first pancake is always lumpy and so subsequent budgets must build on these schemes to make them work.

DELIVERABLES IN MODI'S PROPOSED UKRAINE VISIT

As optics go, the widely speculated visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Ukraine next month could draw the biggest global eyeballs, especially after his Moscow trip earlier this month drew negative vibes from the Western bloc. Moscow was Modi's first port of call after beating anti-incumbency for the third consecutive time to lead the nation, a rarity in a functioning democracy. His warm embrace of President Vladimir Putin that day turned out to be a PR disaster as a Russian missile had by mistake flattened a children's hospital in Ukraine hours ago. Outspoken Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had shared his dismay over Modi's timing, saying it was a devastating blow to the peace efforts. US diplomat Donald Lu, too, expressed disappointment, drawing a loaded barb from the Indian foreign office, which said the country was free to decide whom it wanted to connect with. If Modi's one-liner last year to Putin saying this is not the era of war, was universally hailed, this time around he said peace does not flow from the battlefield. A Kremlin spokesperson had shared that Modi floated some peace proposals during his dialogue with Putin but didn't elaborate. The prime minister can be expected to bring them up if he were to land in Kyiv, his first to the war-torn country since the Russian invasion in 2022. Foreign minister S Jaishankar is said to have already done some spadework for the Ukrainian bilateral.

After more than two years of bloodshed, both sides realise they are locked in a bruising war neither can decisively win. Putin's Western isolation has not harmed him and his economy. But his continuous pounding of Ukraine hasn't broken its spirit either. The tough part now is to formulate win-win rules of disengagement. While Putin intends to stay put on the grabbed land, Zelenskyy wants complete withdrawal of the occupation forces. Ukraine's NATO door is also wide open.

Hungarian premier Viktor Orban did some shuttle diplomacy in Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing, but was discarded by the West as a Putin stooge. China suggested the setting up of a Russia-Ukraine talks table. But it's not a neutral player. Besides, if Donald Trump were to win the US elections, it could change the Ukraine dynamics. Modi's proposed visit would come amid such complexities. If he could yet find an acceptable middle ground, it would serve the global good.

QUICK TAKE

BALL IN BRITAIN'S COURT

AFTER more than a decade of conversations and two years of focused work, India and the US signed a pact last Friday to facilitate the return of smuggled artifacts. It created a framework for bringing back the stolen antiquities and preventing future pilferage. While the US has been a big market for such goods in recent decades, the largest loot of Indian treasures is obviously in Britain. Unlike in the US, the UK's museum treasures belong to its people. That's a legal shield Britain has used to avoid giving them back. But it's for the country's new government, eager to close a free trade deal with India, to get around.

WHAT the government needs is a change in its mindset. The enactment of the three new criminal laws made effective from July 1, 2024 suggests that this government's mindset is far more damaging than that of our colonial masters.

I would have thought after almost 75 years of the making of our Republic, especially in the context of Supreme Court's iconic judgements on the importance of our freedoms, the government would have rationalised our criminal laws in tune with contemporary liberal thoughts. Instead, the new criminal laws have expanded police powers and rather than getting rid of the colonial legacy, perpetuated it. Prior to independence, the Code of Criminal Procedure allowed the police to arrest a person based on suspicion and keep him in custody for 15 days from the date of arrest subject, of course, to the orders of the magistrate. This was a unique anti-democratic provision that the colonial masters used to imprison, threaten, extract confessions and strike terror in the minds of people. In no other country in the democratic world is there a criminal law with comparable provision. If this government really wanted a change and unburden itself from the legacy of such provisions, it would have deleted the very concept of police custody of 15 days after arrest.

The new Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), instead stipulates that the 15-day police custody will not be counted from the date of arrest, but can be spread over 40 days, where a chargesheet is to be filed within 60 days. Where the chargesheet is to be filed within 90 days, it can be spread over 60 days. The added caveat is that such a procedure will not disentitle the accused to move for a bail. We all know that in the midst of an investigation, no judge and I mean 'no judge' will ever grant bail. So the consequence is that the fate of a person arrested is sealed for at least 60 or 90 days, during which he will not be granted bail, even if ultimately it is found that there is no case against him.

The other major change in the new code is that a police officer anywhere in India is entitled to arrest a person, even if the offence is committed outside his jurisdiction. That is not all. Such a police officer can investigate an alleged offence and upon its completion, will have to file a charge sheet before the magistrate within whose jurisdiction the offence was committed. Simply said,

The new criminal codes have expanded police powers. Rather than getting rid of the colonial legacy, they have perpetuated it. The quicker these laws are shelved, the better it is for the nation

THE NEED FOR BETTER CRIMINAL LAWS AGAIN

KAPIL SIBAL

Senior lawyer and member of Rajiya Sabha



SOURAV ROY

an offence in Uttar Pradesh can be investigated by the Gujarat police and upon investigation, the charge sheet will be filed before the magistrate in Uttar Pradesh. This violates the federal principle enshrined in our Constitution. Given this government's mindset, they will direct the police to investigate offences all over the country and target who they want. This is anathema to any acceptable principle of criminal jurisprudence.

Let's now move on to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS). Some of its provisions also display this government's feudal and autocratic mindset. Under section 152, a person is liable to imprisonment for life or a term that may be extended to 7 years if he "by

words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or by electronic communication or by use of financial mean, or otherwise, excites or attempts to excite, secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities, or encourages feelings of separatist activities or endangers sovereignty or unity and integrity of India". Such words that cannot define particular acts are obviously liable to be misused. This covers print media, electronic media, hoardings and all other forms of expression. I can't imagine how this government is proclaiming that by making these changes, it is getting rid of colonial legacy.

Even worse are provisions that define a terrorist act. Under section 113, any

RECLAIMING GOD'S NAME TO PROTECT AGAINST FAKE TEACHERS

CROOKED babas sometimes shame Hinduism whereas the religion's uniqueness is followers are considered capable of forming an independent relationship with God. Saints have repeatedly stressed that 'naam' or 'God's Name' is the only *kavach* or protection in this epoch of *Kalyug*, an era in which *dharma* or right conduct drops to its lowest proportion. Anticipating the festival season that restarts next month with Janmashtami, let's recall some *dharma* points from Indian spiritual heritage.

Followers of *Sanatana Dharma* consider the *Mahabharata* the *saar* or essence of the four Vedas, which is why this *itihasa* or epic is called 'the Fifth Veda'. Not only does the *Mahabharata* contain the *Ramayana* retold, but also five conversations cherished as the *Pancharatna* or Five Gems. Vyasa's version of the *Ramayana* appears in the *Vana Parva* or forest section. It is one of the most popular passages in Indian literature, describing the 12 years the Pandavas spent in the forest and their adventures there.

Rishi Markandeya visited the Pandavas twice in exile, once in the Kamyaka forest to the west of the Kurukshetra plain, and another time in the Dvaitavana forest on the border of the Thar Desert. One time, his visit coincided with Krishna's. This rishi was a favourite as he was an excellent storyteller. They liked to sit around him and enjoy story sessions. One time, Draupadi was kidnapped by Jayadratha and rescued by Bhima and Arjuna, and Yudhishtira sadly wondered if any man was ever made to suffer as him. That's when he was told the story of how Sri Rama, a much worthier hero, was deprived of his kingdom, after which his wife was kidnapped.

Incidentally, another tale we ironically neglect is the epic of Utanka's error: We find this episode in the *Aashwamedhika Parva*. As Krishna returned to Dwaraka in his chariot, he passed through "a desert ill-supplied with water", where he chanced on a wandering ascetic, Utanka, described caustically by Vyasa as "the foremost of the learned". You shiver in anticipatory fear as master-narrator Vyasa, with his killer instinct for '*chiaroscuro*' or light-and-shade, just has to be setting up this seemingly incidental person for a big fall.

Krishna and Utanka exchanged fond greetings. Utanka asked for news. He was devastated to hear about Kurukshetra and wanted to curse Krishna for letting it happen. Krishna patiently explained his ava-



RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

tar's purpose of restoring *dharmic* balance and Utanka was pacified. He begged to see the *Visvarupa*; Krishna let him! So besides Arjuna at Kurukshetra and partly Yashoda when she looked into Krishna's open mouth, it's Utanka who beheld "Vasudeva's universal form, endowed with mighty arms, blazing with the fire of a thousand suns, filling all space, with faces on every side". And Utanka said, "O You, whose handiwork is the universe, I bow to You. O parent of all things, You fill the firmament."



X.COM

Hinduism is sometimes shamed by crooked babas. The uniqueness of the religion is that followers are considered capable of forming an independent relationship with God. Saints have repeatedly stressed that God's name is all the protection we need

Krishna granted Utanka a parting boon that he would always find water when thirsty, if he thought of Him. Desperately thirsty soon after, Utanka called to Krishna, but no sparkling fountain manifested. Instead, a Chandala (outcaste) appeared, who invited Utanka to quench his thirst from his gourd. Outraged, Utanka refused. Despite many pleas and protestations by the Chandala, Utanka furiously said no, so finally the apparition vanished. Alas, it was none but Indra, lord of the celestials, who, when asked by Krishna to give Utanka a drink of *amrita*, the nectar of immortality, insisted Utanka be first put to an appropriate test. "Your fault has been great," said Krishna to the weeping Utanka, who, understanding nothing, not even the sig-

nificance of *Visvarupa-darshan*, let Krishna down. "However," said Krishna, "I will keep my word. Sudden clouds will shower water in the desert; they shall be called 'Utanka-clouds'." And they are: a stark reminder to transcend false divisions.

Just so, the Five Gems are greatly prized as they are mini-compendiums of spiritual teachings. The *Pancharatna* passages are called the *Yaksha Prashna*, the *Vidur Niti*, the *Sanat Sujatiyam*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vishnu Sahasranamam*.

The *Yaksha Prashna* is the famous 'riddle test' on philosophy and morals that a lake spirit disguised as a crane asks Yudhishtira. This episode is a thought-provoking passage on life choices. The spirit is actually Yudhishtira's heavenly father, Yama, disguised to test his son's values and morals.

So, in the middle of a war story we hear the question, "What is the highest duty in the world?" and Yudhishtira's moving answer; "To abstain from injury is the highest of all duties." Yudhishtira's insightful nature shines through and sets a gold standard of behaviour worthy of a '*Dharmaputra*'.

The *Vidur Niti* is the conversation between wise Vidura and King Dhritrashtra about best practices in managing worldly affairs and preparing for the afterlife. The *Sanat Sujatiyam* is a follow-up conversation, a *dharma* capsule about immortality as disclosed to Dhritrashtra by a celestial sage summoned by Vidura. The complex *Bhagavad Gita*, revealed by Krishna to Arjuna, is the best-known of the Five Gems. But in some places, it is exceeded in popularity by the simpler *Vishnu Sahasranamam*.

The battle of Kurukshetra is over. Yudhishtira is now king. He asks Krishna some very precise questions about God. Krishna directs him to where Bhishma lies on his bed of arrows. Bhishma answers with the *Vishnu Sahasranamam* and says, "The Person I've described is right here; He's Krishna." Four generations in South India have been thrilled to have M S Subbulakshmi's recording of this paean. Isn't it time we reclaimed this *Naam Granth* to protect ourselves from fake teachers?

(Views are personal) (shebaba09@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Historic visit

Ref: *Speculation rife on Modi's August visit to Ukraine* (Jul 28). PM Narendra Modi's planned visit to Ukraine is historic. While India has not explicitly condemned the Russian invasion, it called for an international probe into the 2022 Bucha massacre.
P Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai

Multipolar world

PM Modi's visit to Ukraine will be historic as it will be the first ever visit by an Indian PM to the country after it became independent from the Soviet Union. Earlier, his visit to Russia attracted a lot of criticism from the US and European nations, but India stood by its stance that in a multipolar world, all countries have the freedom to choose allies.
M Pradyu, Kannur

Childish behaviour

Ref: *Didi walks out of NITI Aayog meeting* (Jul 28). West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee walking out of the NITI Aayog meeting for not being allowed to speak beyond five minutes is highly childish and irresponsible. Her allegation of her mike being switched off during her speech sounds similar to the allegation made by Rahul Gandhi when he complained of the same in the Lok Sabha.
K R Parvathy, Mysuru

Didi's complaint

Mamata Banerjee walking out of the meeting doesn't augur well for her stature. It is the norm to press the bell to remind the speaker to end the speech. There is an option to register one's dissent, which she could have done. Others have no issues about the conduct of the meeting, so Didi's complaint is beyond what meets the eye.
HP Murali, Bengaluru

Exacerbating divisions

Many political leaders have emphasised the importance of conducting state-specific caste surveys in recent times. How can caste-based surveys, reservations and initiatives help eliminate caste in society? Surveys on social, educational and economic backwardness can identify individuals who require government assistance. Caste-based initiatives would exacerbate social divisions and create conflict.
K Venkatasubramanian, Coimbatore

Money waste

The recent move of the Odisha government to spend crores to rebrand welfare schemes named after former CM Biju Patnaik is preposterous and a waste of money. One cannot wipe away the former CM or his son Naveen Patnaik's role in the state's development merely by renaming or rebranding the schemes introduced by them.
R Sriramprasad, email

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Hubbub of Spokes That are the States

Bigger infra spenders outgrowing less-enthu peers

At the 9th governing council meeting of NITI Aayog on Saturday, the prime minister's exhortation to states on becoming more proactive on development has fiscal authority behind it. New Delhi is committed to spending big on physical infrastructure and wants states to match it in commitment. States, particularly ruled by parties in opposition to BJP, may differ on the particular development route the Centre is offering through accelerated capital expenditure. At different points in their development journey, states need the freedom to decide on their individual social outlays. No one, however, faults the logic of infrastructure leading to greater economic activity. Supply of a road creates demand for the road. Evidence also favours an aligned development approach. States that are more committed to infrastructure spending are outgrowing their reluctant peers.

So far as social outcomes go, the Centre is again backing



ing its targets with more money. It is in sight of the end to chronic development blights such as poverty, and is in a position to step up resources as the scale of the issue diminishes into isolated pockets. On other issues such as unemployment, however, it needs the states to be on board with governance, reforms and skilling. Here, too, access to funding, both internal and external, is tied to a national view of development that leaves little scope for departure by the states. This curbs the political space for parties in power on the basis of regional aspirations.

Yet, the objective metrics of development are not in dispute. New Delhi has more resources to share with states both for infrastructure and welfare. States will have to fall in line with a national development course and evolve their specific roles depending on their resource endowments. The New Delhi consensus has been decades in the making with states contributing enormously to shaping the development agenda. As parts of that agenda reach fruition, states will have to build on those gains to evolve strategies for further development that may very well be vastly superior to the common minimum programme.

Caring On a Need To Let Go Basis

Last week, Britain introduced a bill to allow terminally ill adults with six months or less to live seek medical assistance to end their lives. Such a procedure would need approval from two doctors and a high court, and is limited to those mentally capable of making the decision. Assisted dying is legal in Canada, Spain, Portugal, 11 US states, most of Australia, Switzerland and the Netherlands. In a sense, it's the true test of a society ensuring dignity to the individual.

In India, the legal stance on euthanasia has evolved through three key cases: Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (1996), Aruna Shanbaug v. Union of India (2011), and Common Cause v. Union of India (2018). In Common Cause, the Supreme Court distinguished between active and passive euthanasia, with the former involving administration of lethal substances and the latter involving death from disease following withdrawal of life support. The court provided guidelines for advance directives (ADs), detailing patients' treatment preferences and designated decision-makers if they become incapacitated. Although guidelines were eased in 2023 to broaden AD implementation, they still impose a heavy burden on applicants. Each AD requires approval from two medical boards, and their decisions can only be contested via writ petitions under Article 226.

The current passive euthanasia framework largely burdens patients' families with a stringent bureaucratic process to implement ADs, which must be notarised and signed before a judicial magistrate. This is understandable, but errs in being over-protective. Also, awareness about ADs remains low. Both these hurdles need to be tackled, with checks against abuse in place, especially in a country where hospice care is costly and limited.

JUST IN JEST
Mamata Banerjee continues an old Marxist tradition of the Grand Whine

When Others Get, And You Don't Want

Beware the fury of a CM scorned. Mamata Banerjee, arch critic of central governments when she isn't part of them, has followed an old Bengal tradition. This tradition of blaming the central government for all ills and shortcomings of the state was honed and sharpened by the card-holding Marxists who preceded her (Trinamool is Marxist without holding a card or candle). Seeing Didi pick up the baton in response to the Union budget last week was both reassuring and beguiling at the same time. 'It is an anti-poor, anti-people budget, and Bengal has been deprived,' was her pithy reaction, adding for effect, 'I don't see any light. It is dark, dark and dark.'

The paradox in her 'anger' was also interesting: 'Bengal has been deprived, though we do not need anything.' The state, not known yet for its talent for wealth-creation since jute became out of fashion, if one gets Banerjee's message right, wants supply even if it has no demand. Almost pre-empting what we may have had in mind in terms of marking her as a jealous CM, she said that despite her ire, she did not have any objection that Andhra Pradesh and Bihar have got money. But you cannot discriminate against others.' Like the colleague who insists he doesn't need more money but can't understand why others have got a bigger raise, Didi is upset that politics plays a part in economics.

Unlike Biden, Harris is feared by Republicans – and clicking the Democrat machine into motion

Kamala Bloom into POTUS?



Seema Sirohi

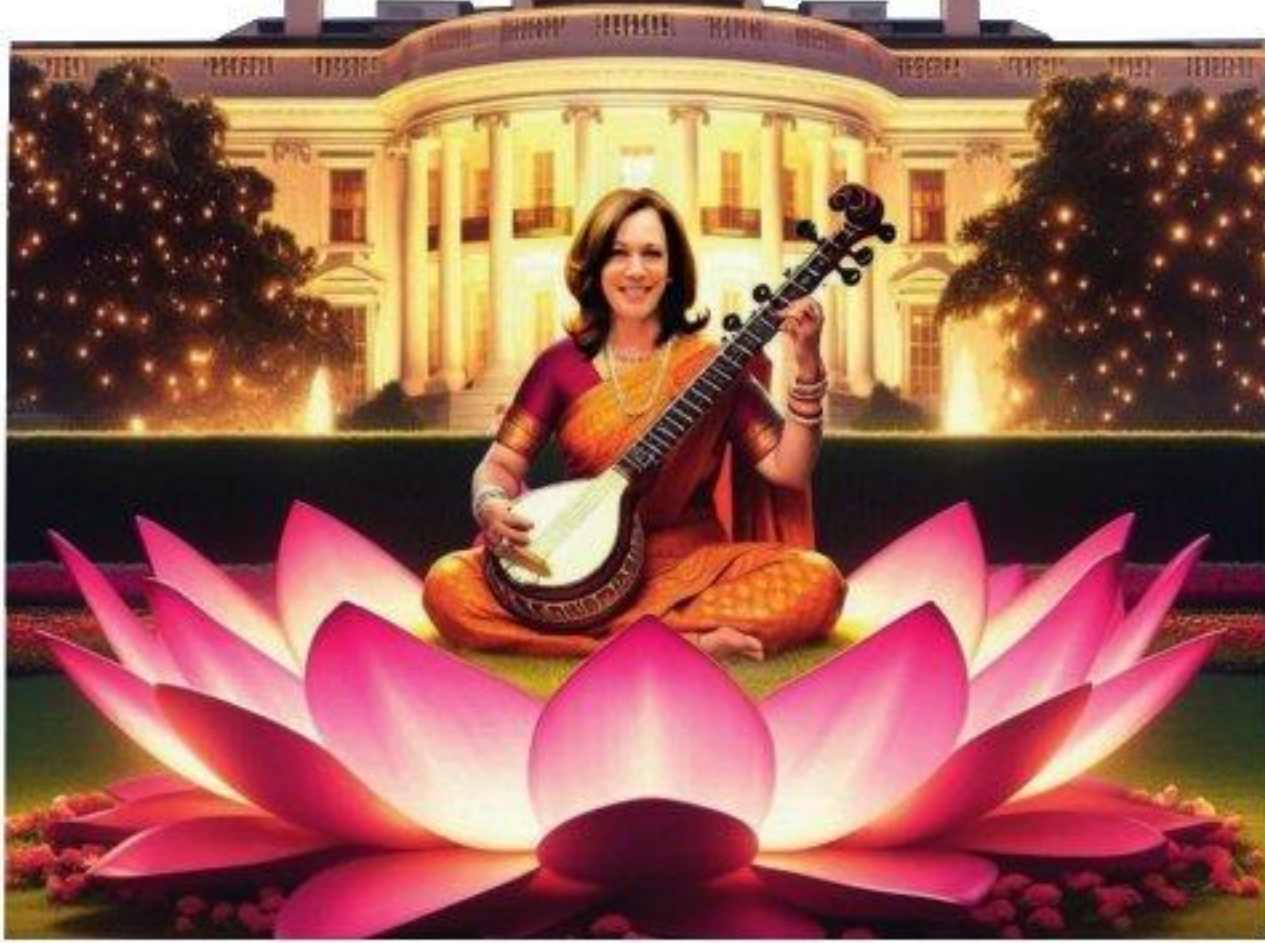
The US presidential election just got real. Democrats have a fighting chance with Kamala Harris as the presumptive nominee. She has landed in a burst of enthusiasm from the long dejected, and a pot of money from the newly generous. Potential rivals and party grandees have buried all doubt and endorsed her. St Obama has blessed her.

Harris is riding the 'meme wave' to young hearts, clocking a remarkably fast rate of acceptance among Gen Z voters who were switched off and tuned out. They are now her soldiers on TikTok — yes, the Chinese info op is their preferred medium — and her force multipliers on Instagram. The memes are happening organically without interference from that campaign staff because that would be totally 'cringe'.

The 'Kamalanomenon' has turned Harris' word salads and cackling laughter from fodder for derision to endearing traits of authenticity. Black Twitter has offered a new slogan — MALA — Make America Laugh Again. It contains part of her name. A new Axios/Generation Lab poll of Gen Z and younger millennials done after Joe Biden withdrew from the race shows Harris with 60% support and Donald Trump at 40%.

She is closing in on Trump in the latest Wall Street Journal poll of registered voters, which shows the race is essentially tied. She gets 47% support and he 49%, but that's within the margin of error. Biden trailed by six points in the last WSJ poll as candidate.

Trump is now the 'old man' in the sea who must battle a younger woman. The escape from an assassin's bullets and the clenched fist worked better against Biden, an older, more feeble rival. Against Harris, not so much. She can punch back. Trump's vice-presidential choice of JD Vance is already prov-



Orange in the new White?

ing somewhat burdensome. Vance has talked of a national ban on abortion, discussed women in a pejorative way and generally had a bad landing.

Republicans didn't fear Biden. But they do fear Harris. She is clicking the vast Democratic Party machine into motion. Energised local networks, support groups, the Obama coalition of Black, women and young voters coming together along with multiple streams of donors can outperform Republicans. In the end, it's about the ground game to get the vote out. Question is: will the young actually turn up, or just meme away?

As the political weather changes, Republicans are racing to define Harris before she can define herself. She is an uber-California liberal, a DEI hire (a beneficiary of 'diversity, equity and inclusion' policies) and not deserving of her position. For Vance, who is married to an Indian American, Harris is 'a childless cat lady'. Trump's abusive language is in full flow —

he called her 'a radical left lunatic', 'Lying KaMaala Harris'. Deliberately mispronouncing her name to stress her non-Whiteness is a political tactic, not a disability.

Republican rhetoric will get harsher as they confront the reality of a race that is suddenly tight. The election is no longer in their pocket.



The latest WSJ poll has Harris with 47% support and Trump 49%, the latter now the 'old man' in the sea who must battle a younger woman

on some issues. As Biden's vice-president, she is the inheritor of his malady — illegal immigration, inflation, high gas prices at home and two wars abroad, to say nothing of the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. She will have to own some, disown some. On the positive side, she is still a largely unknown figure for voters and has



Harris can bring in Republican women, secret anti-Trump voters who soured on him after Roe v Wade was overturned. But she also has to attract White men in swing states and solidify the Indian American vote again

the space to fashion her image. But time is short.

Current exuberance aside, it's worth remembering that Harris' presidential bid in 2020 collapsed miserably. Republicans will cite chapter and verse from her campaign and emphasise her thin political history. Her record as California's attorney general has controversial baggage that will be opened. As vice-president, she alienated staff and many left in anger. For now, she is using Biden's campaign operation for the most part.

On the plus side, Harris can cite the administration's impressive legislative record — funding for infrastructure, hi-tech manufacturing, expanded background checks for guns and the Inflation Reduction Act. And go all out on abortion rights — Trump's weakest point. That's one issue she has forcefully championed, and it's one on which she sounds eloquent, not forced.

Harris can bring in Republican women — the secret anti-Trump voters who soured on him after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade. African-American men and women are already uniting behind the 'sista' in large numbers. But Harris also has to attract White men in swing states and solidify the Indian American vote once again for the Democrats. Yes, there's been a 19% drop in Indian American support. But it hasn't necessarily gone to Trump, according to a survey of Asian American attitudes.

Harris' electoral fate will depend on a wide coalition. Kam she?



The Power Of Thought

V BALASUBRAMANIAM

The Yog Vasisht says that Sankalpa, or thought, generates this universe through its power of discrimination. Our thoughts create words and actions. The quality of our thoughts will always determine the quality of our lives. Our thoughts not only shape our existence but also define our essence. The way we think governs how we live and defines who we are.

Thoughts generated in the mind send out vibrations to the world. The stronger your thoughts are, the stronger the vibrations will be. A monk used to stroll on the beach. When he rested, seagulls would come and sit on his shoulders. They never felt threatened. Non-violence radiated from his whole being.

One day, his son requested him to catch one of the seagulls. The next day, the monk went for his usual stroll. He was determined to catch one of the seagulls for his son. This day, however, none of them came anywhere near the monk. The monk was surprised. Then he realised that his thoughts had communicated to the birds before he could act on them.

It is not the event but your thoughts that trigger the chain reaction of feelings, actions and consequences. Krishn says, 'No man rests a moment inactive.' We always act on the thought plane even when inactive on the bodily plane. Therefore, if we observe ourselves, we can easily mould our thoughts. If our thoughts are pure and noble, our actions will follow. If our thoughts are filled with hatred and greed, our actions will be the same.

Chat Room

Real Estate Loses Inflation Vaccine

Appropos the Edit, 'Could Render Home Not-So-Sweet Home' (Jul 26), the abolition of indexation for LTCG on property sale is not only a regressive measure but also negates the basic principle of taxation. Indexation is neither a concession nor a benefit. It is the most scientific method to assess the real capital gains, sans the inflation impact. Taxes should be levied on actual income or gains and not on arithmetic derivations. In the name of simplification, GoI is causing tremendous harm to the entire real estate sector. This ill-conceived move will impose a huge burden on the public who are aspiring for value realisation on sale at an opportune time. It is essential for GoI to review the decision.

RAJARAO KUMAR
Bengaluru

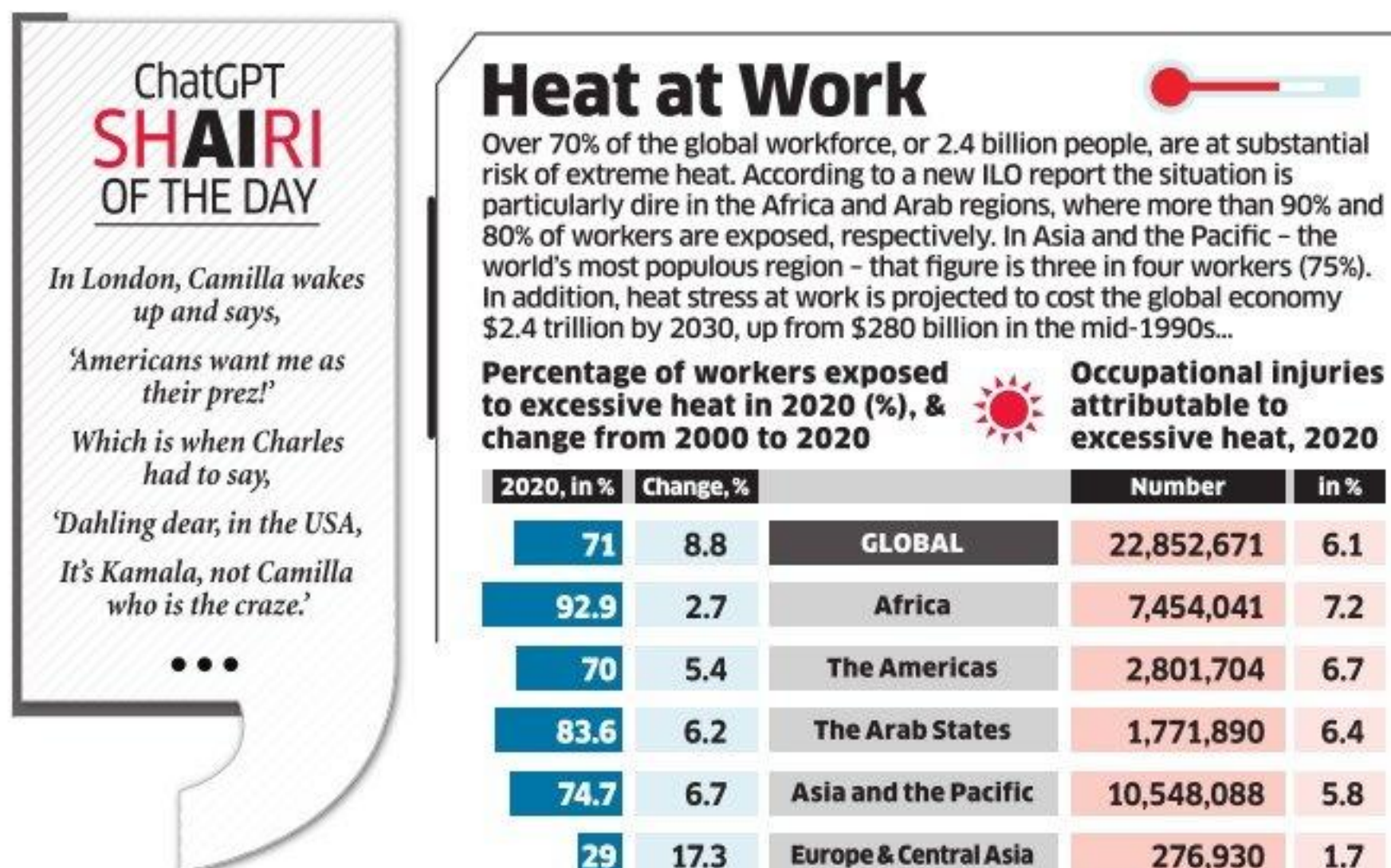
The Union budget has dealt a massive blow to those who bought housing property after 2001 by withdrawing indexation benefits, ostensibly under the guise of simplifying LTCG. Selling equity is easy, fast and cheap. Proceeds realisation is short, within a maximum of two days. On the other hand, selling one's house is difficult since it is influenced by size, design, location and several other factors relating to the property. It is also expensive (stamp and registration fees), cumbersome and time-consuming. Equating the two asset classes, equity and property, is like comparing mango and bitter gourd. So, taxation rules relating to investing in the two have to be different. This injustice must be rolled back.

UDAY NENE
Thane

Green Wins 2024 Paris Olympics

The Paris Olympics 2024 has taken a significant step forward in acknowledging and addressing the climate change crisis with a vow to halve carbon emissions to 1.75 million tonnes, by focusing on recycling, reusing, reducing and relying on renewables. While the Olympics is accompanied by a boom in the construction industry, the Paris Games set a new trend by using existing buildings in the city to host 95% of events. Concerted efforts towards making the world's greatest sporting event more sustainable are welcome and must be replicated by other major sporting spectacles.

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Singularity Not Dur Ast



Rohit K Singh

Futurist Ray Kurzweil's latest book, The Singularity is Nearer: When We Merge With AI, presents a compelling vision of humanity's future, dominated by rapid technological advancements set to transform our existence. Kurzweil explores the convergence of genetics, nanotechnology and robotics (GNR), which will lead us to a pivotal moment. This moment, when machines surpass human intelligence — singularity — promises profound changes that could redefine our lives in thrilling and unsettling ways. Kurzweil's Law of Accelerating Returns (LoAR) underscores the exponential nature of technological advancement. India is uniquely positioned to harness this momentum with its thriving tech sector, vast pool of talented engineers, and a young, digitally connected population. Singularity may seem like a distant horizon, but Kurzweil suggests it's closer than we think. For India, the implications are profound.

► **Rewriting code of life** Imagine a world where diseases like cancer are a thing of the past, ageing is slowed or reversed, and humans can augment their natural capabilities. Kurzweil anticipates significant genetic breakthroughs, enabling us to manipulate the code of life. Advances in CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats) and other gene-editing technologies will allow us to eradicate genetic diseases, extend human longevity, and enhance our physical and cognitive abilities.

For India, ability to tackle endemic diseases, improve agricultural yields through GM crops and enhance health could drive benefits. However, these possibilities also raise ethical and societal questions. Who will have access to these

technologies? How will we address the potential for genetic inequality? Kurzweil acknowledges these challenges, but remains optimistic that humanity will find ways to navigate them responsibly.

► **Atom by atom** Nanotech is another key area of focus. Kurzweil predicts that nanobots — microscopic robots that are 50-100 nanometres (a billionth of a metre) wide — will become commonplace, performing tasks ranging from medical procedures inside our bodies to environmental clean-up. Nanotech could lead to the development of new materials with extraordinary properties, driving innovation in industries such as energy, manufacturing and electronics.

Adopting nanotech could be a game-changer for India. The country's strong pharma industry, coupled with its growing emphasis on clean energy and environmental sustainability positions it well to harness the benefits of nanotech. Developing policies that encourage innovation while ensuring safety and ethical considerations will be crucial.

► **Super-smart machines** Perhaps the most provocative aspect of Kurzweil's predictions is the rise of super-intelligent machines. He predicts that this will happen by the 2040s, leading to a profound transformation of society.

Kurzweil's vision of the future is exhilarating and daunting. The potential bene-

fits of these technological advancements are enormous. But so are the risks.

Developing frameworks for ethical and responsible use of tech will be crucial. This includes robust regulatory mechanisms, international cooperation and public engagement to ensure benefits of technological progress are widely shared. Education and workforce development will also be key. As tech transforms industries and jobs, we must prepare for a future where the nature of work is fundamentally different. This means equipping people with skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world and ensuring that social safety nets are in place to support those displaced by automation and AI.

For India, this means a renewed focus on STEM education, fostering a culture of innovation, and building an ecosystem that supports startups and technological advancements. Initiatives like IndiaAI Mission, Digital India and Skill India are steps in the right direction.

Kurzweil's optimism is grounded in the belief that humanity has always risen to the challenge of technological change. He points to historical examples, such as the Industrial Revolution, where initial disruptions gave way to prosperity and improved quality of life. The key, he argues, is to approach the future with a sense of agency and responsibility, actively shaping the trajectory of technological progress rather than passively reacting to it.

Kurzweil's vision of the future is one where the lines between human and machine blur, where tech augments our capabilities and opens new possibilities. As we stand on the brink of this transformation, the choices we make today will determine whether we harness the power of tech for the greater good or succumb to its risks.

For India, a country poised to be a global leader in tech and innovation, singularity is not just nearer; it reflects our aspirations and potential as a nation. The future demands our attention, creativity and collective wisdom.



Looking into the charmed circle

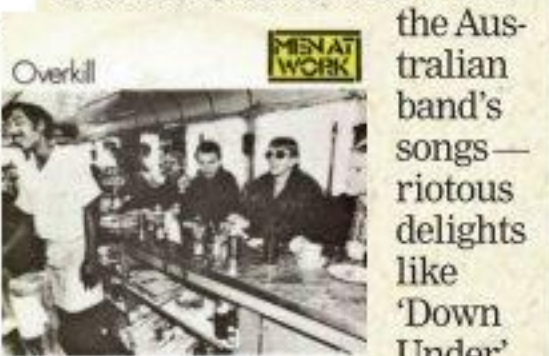
The writer is former secretary, GoI



Overkill Men at Work


The sax beginning to this gem is truly plaintive, wistful, while remaining whimsical. And, then, the song 'Overkill' starts in earnest. Singer Colin Hay starts as if scratching an itch: 'I can't get to sleep / I think about the implication / Of diving in too deep / And possibly the complications.'

The hangdog, tipsy charm of this 1983 number from Men at Work's second album, Cargo, is best heard in the quiet of night, where the song can only accompany distant traffic sounds. Quite unlike most of the Australian band's songs — riotous delights like 'Down Under' —



and 'Who Can It Be Now?' — this is contemplative, swaying between vulnerability and swagger. Hay's signature vocals — smooth as chocolate buttercream frosting with that hint of a stutter — invites us to jump down the shelters and escape the mundane. Day after day it reappears / Night after night / My heartbeat shows the fear / Ghosts appear and fade away.' The melancholy seeps into the night air.

At least there's pretty lights, the song says with a few drops of irony. And though there's little variations / It nullifies the night / From overkill. 'Overkill' is a quiet, wistful rejoinder to the OTT, hyperbolic world we have become. Savour it.



A thought for today

It is not money that makes you well dressed: it is understanding

CHRISTIAN DIOR

Be Federal

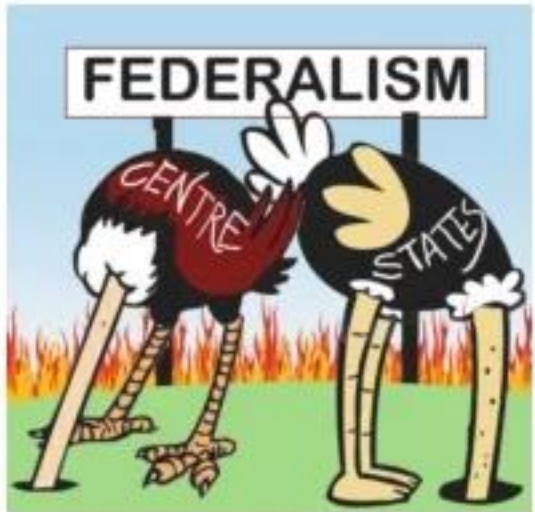
Niti meeting minus oppn CMs shows neither INDIA nor BJP has realised what voters told them during elections

The “absence of fiscal federalism” – not enough funds to states – and the Centre’s “prejudice” against opposition-governed states were reasons 10 opposition-state CMs boycotted the Niti Aayog meeting, the first after Modi-led NDA govt’s first budget. The sole opposition CM who attended, Bengal’s Mamata Banerjee, walked out alleging her mike had been switched off. The verbal fisticuff with the Centre that followed was as banal as it was unsavoury.

Politics unstuck | Opposition’s boycott, in itself, was one more “event” around which INDIA allies showed they stick together, demonstrating how gluey is their alliance. This is not without its own vulnerability. The boycott also re-emphasised opposition’s deep distrust in Centre-led matters. States where Congress is in office accused GOI of the budget benefitting only NDA allies TDP and JDU. On the agenda of Modi-chaired Niti Aayog meeting was drinking water, electricity, health, schooling, and, land and property issues. It’s hard to see how a boycott can help any of these matters along. Such a break in Centre-state ties hits normative federalism, and is an unsustainable opposition tactic – not all states can hold out or join boycott calls. To that end, INDIA brass must know it shouldn’t hang its unity on how states individually engage with the Centre – autonomy is paramount.

GOI needs bonding | It’s for GOI to recognise the mandate pushed for federalism, coalition and cooperation. BJP calling opposition politicians names didn’t stop voters from making INDIA a strong opposition. Despite GOI talking up official jobs data, the budget had to effectively concede there’s a jobs problem, an issue that came front and centre during elections. Long-term livelihood is the core concern for India’s majority. The number of people who need govt help in one form or another is not coming down. These are very visible craters on the road to being a developed nation by 2047.

Public needs governance | Instead of concrete Centre-state discussions, what one gets is talk. It’s ultimately the public that suffers. The decay in governance markers, from policy to practice – farms to higher education, urbanisation to jobs, climate adaptation to water crises – is evident. Both govt and opposition need to snap out of vitriolic campaign mode. For, the mandate also showed voters lukewarm to both NDA and INDIA’s ability to govern meaningfully. What the 18th Lok Sabha has demonstrated so far, with the budget followed by the boycott, is that GOI and opposition are playing Tweedledum and Tweedledee – simply twiddling.



Flying Dangerously

Message from survey on pilot fatigue. DGCA must implement its new norms, never mind airlines’ objections

Results of a survey highlighting fatigue faced by pilots in India make for alarming reading. Prolonged flying duties, consecutive night shifts, rapidly changing weekly rosters, among other things, are taking a toll on those who man cockpits. To take one yardstick, as many as 70% of pilots surveyed said flight duty periods exceeding 10 hours had a profound impact on onset of fatigue. This figure is borne out by Nasa and EASA studies that recommend a maximum 10-hour duty period.

A special category | To treat airline pilots like regular professionals is downright dangerous. For, theirs is a job that often entails decision-making in double-quick time, with lives of hundreds of passengers at stake. We had an experience of this in the 2010 Mangalore air crash that cost 158 lives. The official inquiry blamed the accident on a disorientated Air India pilot who was dozing in the cockpit prior to touchdown. In fact, a study found that 20% of commercial aviation accidents in US occurred during pilot duties lasting 10 hours or more.

Change mindset | It’s not just about pilots. There needs to be a complete change in how the issue of working conditions for those who man the wheels in transport sector is approached. For instance, loco pilots entrusted with thousands of lives have to deal with long, stressful and irregular working schedules. The Railways does not even provide them a urinal in the cabin. In the road sector, there are few regulations related to working conditions of those driving commercial vehicles, though trucks, category-wise, account for the third largest number of accidents.

For airline pilots, DGCA issued new pilot duty norms earlier this year. These were put on hold following representations from airlines, which sought more time. The latest survey shows DGCA must tell airlines to get in with it.



Visa divas

How desis can get even with snooty consuls

Bikram Vohra

My friend tried hi-octane influence and has managed an interview for a western nation’s visa 75 days down the road. In Oct, that is. He is all chuffed about the success of his mission and snobbishly says others must wait four months, he is one of the lucky ones though it cost a bit more. I tell him it is ridiculous that we need to plan so absurdly in advance and why would we want to go to a country that so patently is thumbing its nose at us and clearly doesn’t want us. And if you fall ill on that day or have a crisis, what do you do, wait another three months.

And I am thinking what if Indians just stopped travelling. Like imagine it’s faux Covid and refuse to fly to these countries. Use Zoom or Meet or the Web but do not go. In weeks, the millions of diaspora plus the millions who seek to visit foreign shores for work or fun every year would start getting even. There would be waves of panic.

Imagine all those snooty agents who look at you like you were the pits coming to work and no clients, that would be fun. And in those embassies where the suited-booted umpires of global travel interview you, imagine the visa consul parking his car and gleefully rubbing his hands in anticipation of playing god. Walks into the embassy and asks, ‘So how many of the great unwashed lined up?’ The great interrogator checking out a 55-year-old Indian like he was a criminal, ah, the pleasures of the visa inquisition. Except none. ...No one.’

‘Sorry, What did you say?’ ‘There is no one, no one came, not one.’ ‘That’s not possible, I was so looking forward to destroying lives, dashing hopes, making people squirm, this is unacceptable.’

Then the domino principle would kick in. In days, tourism would start to droop like a wet noodle and hotels would soon be affected as tour groups stayed put. Empty rooms, no bookings to Disneyland and the Great Falls. The song’s lyrics would shift swiftly from ‘we don’t want the Indians’ to ‘where are the Indians, we need them.’

And the airlines are suddenly faced with seats and no butts on them...badly need those noisy tour groups we hate so much. We will lower the price, anything you want, just travel again. In double quick time these countries would begin to review their systems and damn right, too. You see, we may not have a very strong passport, but we sure do have power in our numbers. Let’s use it.



WE ARE LOSING COUNT

Too much depends on Census to put it off any longer • New towns aren’t identified • Welfare scheme coverage is on estimates • Delimitation is stalled

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Back when seat belts were mandatory in Delhi but not in neighbouring UP or Haryana, anyone hiring a car to go to Noida or Gurgaon would find their driver freeing himself of the safety belt the minute he crossed the border. It never would strike drivers that seat belts aren’t to be fastened merely because the law demanded it, but because it was for your own good. A similar mindset seems to have gripped some senior bureaucrats who’ve been quoted in reports saying the law doesn’t mandate the Census be held every 10 years, that this is – or more accurately was till very recently – mere convention.

Too much delay | The unnamed “senior officials” are, of course, pedantically right. The Census Act, 1948 says GOI can notify a Census “whenever it may be necessary or desirable to do so”. But is the Census scheduled for 2021 not happening because GOI has decided it is neither necessary nor desirable to do so now? GOI notified its intention of conducting the Census in March 2019, presumably having determined that it was either necessary, desirable, or both. The point about what the law says is really a red herring here.

So, why haven’t we had a Census yet, more than halfway through 2024? And why does the budget for the current fiscal not provide for one, thereby signalling that it is not to happen anytime soon? Ministerial pronouncements can’t be faulted for lack of consistency.

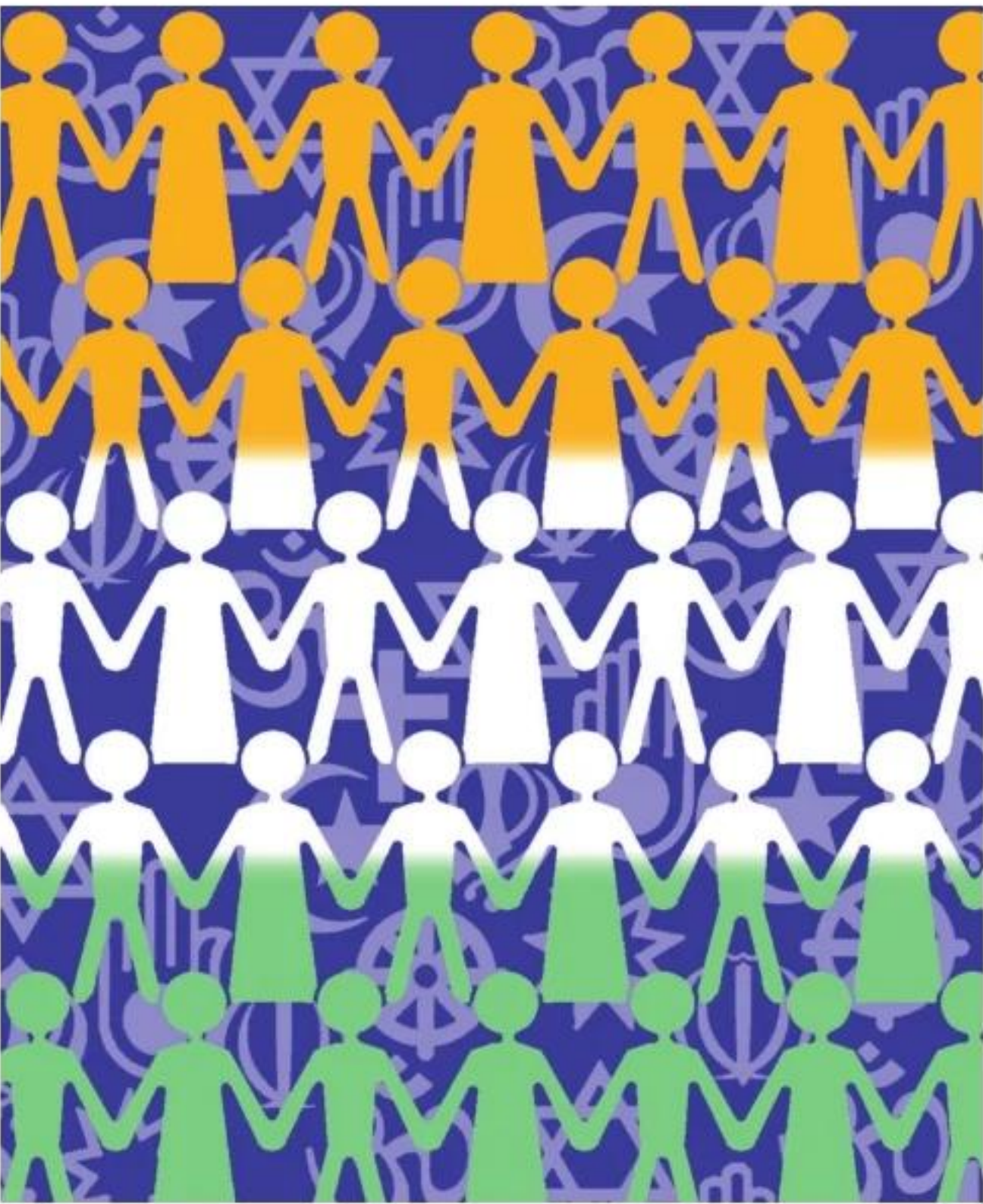
No clear reason | Junior home minister told Parliament in July 2020 that “Census-related field activities have been postponed till further orders due to Covid.” In Feb this year, the same minister once again replied saying: “Due to...Covid, the Census 2021 and related field activities have been postponed.”

In July 2020, it was entirely understandable that the Census was postponed given the pandemic. But in Feb 2024? UN Population Fund’s Global Census Tracker shows that while national censuses were impacted by Covid worldwide, only three countries have postponed it with no fresh date assigned – the other two being Thailand and Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Only data source | It can be asked, of course, what’s the big deal. Does it really matter whether we count our population down to each individual? But the Census

does much more than just a headcount.

Here’s what then Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner Vivek Joshi wrote in a circular issued in Feb 2020: “The Census is the only source of providing the basic benchmark data on housing condition, facilities available to the households and the state of human resources at various administrative levels up to the villages in rural areas and towns/wards in urban



areas. It is widely used for planning and formulation of policies and effective public administration by the central/state/UT govts. Apart from this, Census data is used for delimitation and reservation of Constituencies for parliamentary, assembly, panchayats and other local bodies.”

Notice the circular does not say the Census is a source of benchmark data, but the **only source** of such data.

No actual numbers | That’s not hyperbole. Every significant survey, like National Family Health Survey, or those conducted by National Sample Survey Organisation, uses the Census as basis to structure samples. Without that basis, they wouldn’t know whether their samples represent the population or not. Of course, if the samples are not representative, any conclusions drawn from them would be misleading.

Also, National Food Security Act stipulates that up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population shall be covered under the Act and that allocations “shall be calculated on the basis of the population estimates as per the Census of which the relevant figures have been published.” Using the 2011 Census, this translates to about 81.5cr who could be covered under NFSA. A similar calculation based on the projected population for March 2024 would put that number at nearly 93cr; which means the delay could be denying more than 11cr Indians free or subsidised grain.

Lost in limbo | Another important consequence of not holding the Census is that areas recently urbanised may still be governed as villages. That means inadequate infra of the kind that towns need but villages don’t, and absence of zoning laws. That can mean that by the time they do get officially notified as towns, unplanned expansion could have made providing requisite infra much more complicated. Every Census throws up thousands of “Census towns”, areas that have populations of over 5,000, population density of 400 per sq km or more and where 75% or more of the working age male population is occupied in non-agricultural activities. Identification of these informs state govts to notify them, thereby making them statutory towns, and setting up urban local bodies before it’s too late.

No delimitation | Census data underscores the delimitation exercise, which redraws boundaries of parliamentary, assembly and local body constituencies. Such periodic redrawing ensures all constituencies within a legislative body, at each level, contain roughly equal populations. Without a Census, there’s no way of undertaking this exercise, one that’s fundamental to the democratic principle of every person’s vote carrying equal weight. Remember also that reservation of one-third of seats for women in Parliament and state assemblies is contingent on delimitation being carried out.

So, yes, the Census getting inordinately delayed is a big deal for very many reasons.

India’s Fashion Weak In Paris. And Where Was The Ikat?

That our Olympians wore embarrassingly unfashionable threads in the world’s couture capital speaks to a larger aesthetic malaise in public life

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Paris was blasé – it shrugged away a downpour to turn a city into a spectacle and a river into a running track where laughing athletes floated past in merry boats. The ridiculously rad opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics overturned the stiff march-past associated with sporting events and had everything from menage a trois to a headless Marie Antoinette to a missing Mona Lisa to a drag take on The Last Supper to a cauldron that took to the sky. You could love it or hate it, but you could not forget it even two days after the event. And yet in the middle of this mélange of eye-grabbers, there was something unfun and forgettable – the Indian contingent’s wetter-than-wet blanket look. We managed to pull it off even in a sea of plastic raincoats.

Our finest sportspeople were clad in the most pedestrian of designs – white saris with saffron and green borders and unflattering high-neck blouses for women, and white kurtas with jackets that had saffron and green fringes, plus pockets and epaulettes as some add-ons, for men. How to quickly incorporate the national colours into clothes – add saffron and green to white outfits – is the design lesson every schoolkid and their parents showcase every year on Independence Day. Do India’s top fashion designers have nothing more to offer than a school skit’s Aug 15 uniform? Is this the limit of their imagination in creating an outfit that wears patriotism on its sleeve for the world’s biggest sporting spectacle?

Designer Tarun Tahiliani who created the outfits said the prints were “inspired” by Ikat. There isn’t a traditional textile pattern that looks more modern than Ikat – it’s inspiring in itself – and yet one had to rush for a non-existent magnifying glass to spot the boldness of that pattern anywhere in that costume.



There was no sense of occasion, for sure, nor was there of vehicle or weather. The design sensibilities seemed to have sidestepped the fact that this was meant to be worn on a boat on a possibly rainy Parisian evening. The golden sneakers they wore were possibly the only redeeming element, but were thoroughly invisible on the deck of a boat.

While India managed to be unfashionable in Paris, of all places, we have been unimaginatively formal in the previous editions of the Games as well – navy blue suits for men and navy blue-and-golden saris for women at Rio 2016, followed by metallic browns in Tokyo 2020, but that was in the middle of the pandemic when the only accessory that mattered was the mask. At London 2012, though, India was striking in its choice of colour – golden-yellow – although we stuck to saris and pagris.

The failure of fashion points to two things. One, the inability to push the aesthetic envelope for national events, which by convention, is weighed down by conventionality and solemnity. It is as if a governmental nod would be easy to come by if we create a design that provokes no conversation. We allow no playfulness, no experimentation, nothing out of the ordinary. This is why some of our contemporary public art and architecture,

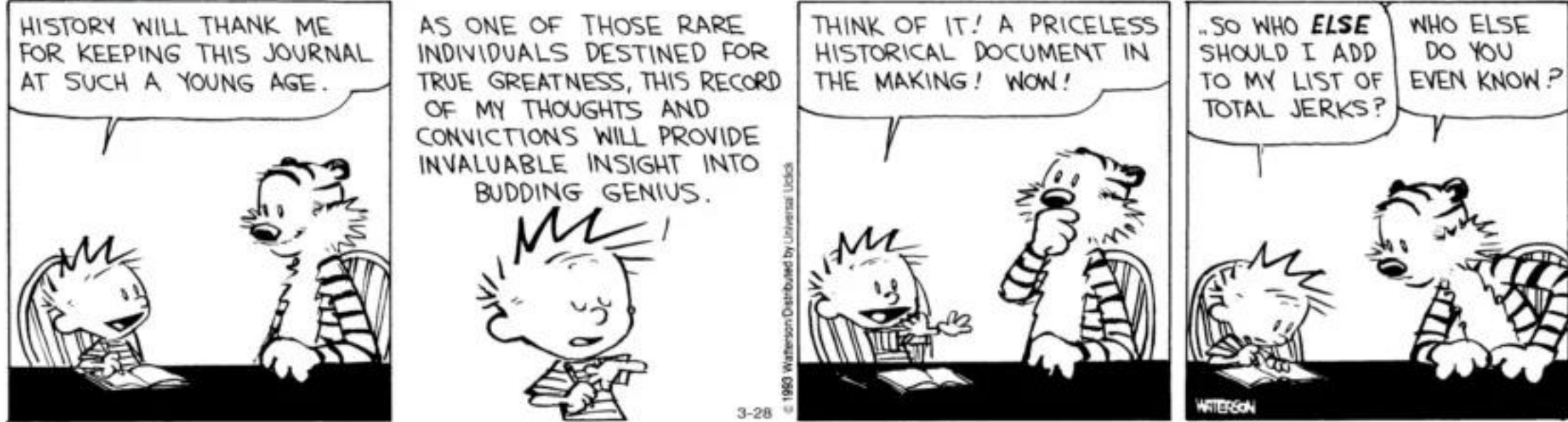
including the new Parliament building and the Pragati Maidan-turned-Bharat Mandapam, is staid.

Two, we weigh fashion in terms of how many crystals are on a lehenga, how many threads of real gold are woven into a bandhgala, how many embellishments have been stitched into a ghagra. If July ended with a sartorial disaster at the opening ceremony of the Games, it began with clothing excesses at a wedding – and the differences cannot be starker. If designers boasted of spending hundreds of hours on a wedding ensemble, they showed their inability to imagine minimalism and athleticism for our sportspeople. Indian fashion needs to rescue itself from a surfeit of embellishments and wedding aesthetics and dare to stand out in new cuts and silhouettes that capture the times.

Thankfully, it’s not clothes that define sportspeople. It is what they do when they climb out of that uncoolness and step into the tracks and courts and arenas. The ancient Greeks knew clothes were an obstacle. No wonder they ran naked at the archaic Games. We may be too Victorian for that but, by Zeus, our sportspeople should have better threads to wear at Los Angeles 2028.



Calvin & Hobbes



Is Jnan Marg One Of The Most Challenging Paths

Kishore Asthana

Jnan means knowledge. Jnan Yog, the path of knowledge, is one of the paths prescribed for attaining enlightenment.

Of all the paths, Jnan Yog is considered the most challenging path. However, this difficulty is not inherent in the path itself. It occurs partly because of a fundamental misunderstanding about the term’s meaning. Jnan Yog is knowledge of the Self. However, most seekers misunderstand it to mean knowledge of the scriptures.

In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.4.5, Yajnavalkya explains Jnan Yog to Maitreyi. He says that no one loves anyone else or anything else for the benefit of the object of his love. He loves anyone or anything for the benefit of his own self. He even says, “It is not for the sake of the gods, my dear,

that they are loved, but for one’s own sake that they are loved.”

Yajnavalkya mentions this to emphasise that the Self is all that matters. Then he explains how this Self can be realised. He says, “The Self, my dear Maitreyi, should be realised – should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realisation of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known.”

Hearing refers to gaining knowledge at the feet of the Guru. Reflection is thinking over what was read or heard. The final step is meditation. Reading and hearing provide the foundation. Reflection provides the solid base on which meditation, the ladder taking us higher, is positioned. It is not merely thinking about the

meaning of the words; it is about mulling over how these words apply to one’s life and what they mean in practice. Meditation is how the practice is to be implemented.

These three steps describe the transition from the external to the body, the mind, and the heart.

Most seekers on the Jnan Marg find it difficult to achieve their objective because they stop at Shravan, hearing, and reading and do not go to the reflection stage.

Even those who go to the reflection stage find it difficult to move on to the meditation stage. This is because when one goes to the meditation stage, one does not consciously keep thinking about scriptural knowledge. At that stage, knowledge sits passively inside oneself. It has done its work of bringing

the seeker to the ladder. If the seeker tries to keep one step on the foundation while trying to climb the ladder, he can never go higher. Yet, most seekers try to do precisely that.

Some seekers are also addicted to knowledge. They forget the Hitopadesha directive, ‘Vidya dadati vinayam’ – knowledge brings humility. They become proud of their learning and want to flaunt it.

There’s a critical difference between knowledge of adhyatma and other subjects. When we try to learn about astronomy, we do not become astronomy itself. In the case of adhyatma, the objective is to become the knowledge itself.

When this difference is not appreciated, the search becomes redundant. As the Gita points out, it is a journey from the vyakta, which is manifest, to the avyakta, which is formless.

Sacred space



The point is that we can dissolve the sense of dualism between us and them.

between this and that, between here and there, by moving toward what we find difficult and wish to push away.

Pema Chödrön



THE SPEAKING TREE

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Step towards peace

Jamaat-e-Islami eyes political resurgence

THE announcement by the Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JeI-J&K) of its intention to return to the political mainstream, provided the ban imposed on it is lifted, marks a significant moment in the region's tumultuous history. The socio-religious party, which has been a key force in Kashmir for decades, has now expressed its readiness to re-engage with electoral politics. Senior JeI-J&K member Ghulam Qadir Lone has underscored the party's commitment to serving the people and operating within the democratic framework. This shift from a banned entity with alleged militant links to a political contender indicates a strategic recalibration, possibly influenced by the changing geopolitical dynamics and internal pressures within Kashmir.

Allowing the JeI-J&K to re-enter the political arena could have profound implications. It may provide a legitimate platform for the party's substantial support base, reducing the appeal of militancy by offering a peaceful means to pursue political objectives. This move could also signify a broader strategy by the government to integrate disenfranchised groups into the democratic fold, thereby stabilising the region.

However, this transition is fraught with challenges. The legacy of the JeI-J&K's affiliations with militant groups and its pro-Pakistan stance raise concerns about its commitment to India's sovereignty and democratic principles. Also, there is the risk of rifts emerging within the party and a potential backlash from headline elements opposed to this political shift. Despite these constraints, the party's climbdown could be a step towards peace and stability in Kashmir. As the region stands at a critical juncture, the actions of both the JeI-J&K and the government will be pivotal to shaping the political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir.

Agnipath row

Govt must thoroughly review the scheme

THE Agnipath scheme has been under intense scrutiny ever since it was launched two years ago. From time to time, retired defence officers have voiced concerns over the scheme for short-term recruitment into the armed forces, flagging issues such as inadequate retention — only 25 per cent of the Agniveers will be absorbed in the permanent cadre — and manpower shortage. Recent incidents of Agniveers reportedly being involved in criminal activities are worrisome, even as questions remain over the prospects of recruits after they are released from service. Some veterans have even stated that the time-tested recruitment system should not have been tinkered with.

Apart from the disagreement within the military community, Agnipath has become a bone of contention in the political arena. In his address on Kargil Vijay Divas last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi not only stoutly defended the scheme but also accused the Opposition of playing politics over the recruitment process. Asserting that Agnipath was aimed at making the forces younger and fitter, he trashed the claims that the scheme was launched to save pension money. Led by the Congress, several Opposition parties have demanded that the scheme be scrapped. Notably, some allies of the ruling BJP, especially the Janata Dal (United), have sought its comprehensive review.

The government cannot afford to let things drift as the lack of consensus will have a bearing on the combat preparedness of the armed forces. Several BJP-ruled states have announced reservation or preference for former Agniveers for jobs in uniformed services like the police. However, this may not be enough to silence the naysayers. The Centre must be receptive to the feedback and take pains to remove the scheme's shortcomings. An inflexible attitude can be counter-productive, as shown by the year-long protests that followed the enactment of the three Central farm laws (which were eventually repealed). At stake are national security and the morale of the troops. Political grandstanding must take a back seat.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, JULY 29, 1924

Hakim Ajmal Khan's statement

IT must be admitted that beyond certain general observations permeated by a true spirit of nationalism, there is nothing in the greater part of Hakim Ajmal Khan's statement on the Delhi riots which can be said to be of immediate practical value. The one thing which the public is most anxious to know on the morrow of such happenings is, who or what was immediately and directly responsible for them? Where the happening is a communal one, the first question that is invariably asked is, which community was the aggressor in the case or was more to blame? Hakim Sahib's statement scrupulously avoids answering the question. It has much, almost everything, to say about the "pre-disposing causes", so far as those causes were general. They were "sectarian intrigues, narrow, selfish prejudices born and bred in a general atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion and of mischievous machinations of interested individuals and parties". The evil, says the statement, had been in existence for long and was growing worse day by day, when Hakim Sahib, who had been away from Delhi since April on account of his daughter's illness and his own bad health, visited the city during the last week of June. To quote from the statement, "I considered it my duty to warn the responsible leaders and workers of both communities that unless these objectionable and inflammatory publications were forthwith effectively curbed, a breach of the peace and the breaking of heads was inevitable. The warning, with all its serious implications and the advice offered, I am extremely grieved to say, was not listened to."

OPINION

Shifting realities of India-US ties

Seeing Delhi as a strategic ally and also criticising its alleged human rights violations is contradictory



G PARTHASARATHY
CHANCELLOR, JAMMU CENTRAL
UNIVERSITY, & FORMER HIGH
COMMISSIONER TO PAKISTAN

EYEBROWS were raised in the Western world over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Moscow at the invitation of Russian President Putin just when the NATO alliance was meeting in Washington to take decisions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Like his past visits to Russia, this one was successful in addressing a number of issues — most importantly, energy and defence cooperation. The trip came weeks after the US Department of State published a report on alleged human rights abuse in India. The report described India as a country where human rights were violated routinely. It asserted that Manipur had been shaken by instances of rape, armed conflict and assaults, accompanied by the destruction of homes, shops and places of worship.

The US report noted that activists and journalists in India had reported violence in the northeastern state. This can happen in any democracy when sections of the people take to arms. Media coverage of such happenings is not new in India. The media is free to cover incidents across India. The Modi government predictably deployed security forces to enforce curfews in response to the growing violence in Manipur. The Supreme Court has also intervened over the developments in Manipur, calling for effective measures for restoration of peace.

The violence in Manipur,



MOOT POINT: It remains to be seen whether Kamala Harris, if she wins the presidential race, will focus on the strategic ties that have taken the US-India relationship to a new high. PTI

which is located near the border with China, has largely ended. There has been criticism of the government's policies in Manipur by the Opposition. Such issues are resolved within the framework of the country's Constitution, with the active participation of the Opposition and often the involvement of the Supreme Court. The US report on the developments in India, however, appears one-sided, unrealistic and undiplomatic. It can only be described as an ill-advised effort, set to lead to a downward spiral in the India-US relationship.

The main question for India now is whether Kamala Harris, if she wins the presidential race, will follow the confused and somewhat less-than-friendly path of her mentor Joe Biden or focus on the strategic ties that have taken the US-India relationship to a new high. One can only hope for a new beginning in India-US ties.

Interestingly, *The Wall Street Journal* has noted: "Democrats are newly energised as they rally behind Kamala Harris for President." One has to take note of the growing readiness

One has to take note of the growing readiness and confidence of the Democratic Party to confront Trump in the presidential elections.

and confidence of the Democratic Party to take on former President Donald Trump in the presidential elections.

The US Administration's major attention in the coming months will be on the Russia-Ukraine conflict; the Western world, led by Biden, continues to pour in money, arms and ammunition to the Ukrainian government. According to a German institute, the US and the European Union have

pledged or provided "more than \$380 billion" in military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine since 2022. The impact of the Ukraine conflict is being felt across Europe. Even Azerbaijan has supplied bombs to the conflict zone via Sudan. Not to be left behind, Pakistan has also reportedly provided Ukraine with Kamikaze drones, man-portable air-defence systems and surface-to-air missiles. One wonders how long this conflict will continue, with the loss of lives mounting. This is a war that will go on, unless Trump, who has opposed US involvement, is elected President. Trump has left no doubt that he is not interested in spending US taxpayers' money on the conflict in Ukraine.

There are, however, serious challenges ahead if Harris chooses to continue the Biden policy of pouring in money and armaments into a seemingly unending conflict. While Russia may be willing to cede some territory it has taken over, it will never agree to a settlement without retaining a firm control of its access to the

sea, which it has historically controlled. The Russian military intervention in Ukraine started only after it became evident that Ukrainian President Zelenskyy was joining the US in measures which would compromise Russia's territorial integrity and national security.

India certainly has no interest in getting drawn into the rivalry and ambitions of European powers. But it cannot afford to turn the other cheek when a foreign power seeks to promote a propaganda barrage against it. New Delhi has, after all, been dealing with a ruler (Biden) in Washington, who, as Vice-President, had chosen to travel all the way from Islamabad to Rawalpindi to call on a Pakistani four-star General.

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, meanwhile, commenced his reference to human rights from the days of his July 2021 visit to India. He had then said: "There are few relationships in the world that are more vital than the one between the US and India. We are the world's two leading democracies and our diversity fuels our national strength... Both of our democracies are works in progress. Sometimes that process is painful. Sometimes it's ugly. But the strength of democracy is to embrace it."

It is not clear how Harris will run the State Department if she becomes President. One hopes that the people in Washington realise that there is a contradiction between referring to India as a strategic ally on the one hand and then criticising its alleged human rights violations in official documents on the other.

Interestingly, Harris has moved ahead with campaigning against Trump, whose candidate for Vice-President is 39-year-old Senator JD Vance; the latter's wife is Indian-origin Usha Vance. We are headed for interesting times as the election gathers steam.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A great democracy must be progressive or it will soon cease to be a great democracy. —Theodore Roosevelt

The myriad ways of destiny

SATISH KUMAR SHARMA

WITH Joe Biden finally bowing out of the US presidential race, Kamala Harris has declared her candidature for the top post. Of the 49 vice-presidents the US has had till now, 15 went on to become the President. There are many instances when destiny went out of the way to make a winner of the most unlikely candidate.

Mary Todd was a young woman living in Springfield, Illinois, in the 1830s. It is said that one day, she declared to someone proudly, 'My husband will be the President of the US.' The boast was not entirely an empty one because one of her suitors was Stephen A Douglas, a brilliant lawyer, orator and politician with a bright future. But as things turned out, Mary married Abraham Lincoln, a lesser-known lawyer. Destiny, however, proved Mary right when Lincoln won the 1860 presidential election in a four-way contest in which Douglas was also a contestant.

Gerald Ford's rise to presidency was even more curious. In 1973, he was a Congressman looking forward to retirement when Spiro Agnew resigned from vice-presidency. To fill the vacancy, then President Richard Nixon appointed Ford as his VP. Not long afterwards, Nixon resigned as a result of the Watergate scandal. So, within eight months, a Congressman rose to become the US President without contesting any election.

Closer home, Narasimha Rao had packed his bags to leave New Delhi around April 1991 because Rajiv Gandhi had denied him the ticket to contest the General Election. But within two months, the situation changed dramatically in his favour and he became the Prime Minister who served his full term despite the Congress being short of the majority.

In the early 1990s, when I was serving as an IPS officer in Gujarat, we had a DGP who was kind to young officers and was not averse to opening his heart before a junior. One day, he confided in me, 'God has been very kind. You know there was no chance of my becoming the DGP of the state.'

When I asked him how it had happened, he said he belonged to the first batch of the IPS in Gujarat after the state was carved out of the state of Bombay. There were four officers senior to him in service but younger in age in the state. Seniority used to be sacrosanct in those days. So, it was nearly impossible for him to reach the top. But as luck would have it, of the four officers ahead of him, one quit and took up a job in the private sector, another got his cadre changed and yet another resigned and joined politics.

I asked him what happened to the fourth officer senior to him. The DGP became grim. He said, 'His case was very unfortunate. A few years into service, he got fed up with the police job. He resigned and tried his luck in business. He succeeded initially but later suffered heavy losses. He went into depression and committed suicide.'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Key sectors given short shrift

With reference to 'Health & education are nobody's baby' (*The Great Game*); it is unfortunate that despite several recommendations by experts across the world for investing more in the key sectors of health and education, the government continues to give them short shrift. For years, India has been one of the lowest spenders in the world on health. Further, funding for education as a share of the GDP has only gone down. While it is easy to point fingers at the ruling dispensation and Opposition parties for the neglect of the sectors, the mainstream media also bears responsibility for its failure to adequately highlight the poor state of healthcare and education facilities in the country.

CAPT AMAR JEET (RETD), KHARAR

Health, education get sidelined

The government's neglect of the health and education sectors is glaring (*The Great Game*). Despite all the grandstanding on national security, the Budget reveals a stark truth: health and education are not high on the list of priorities of our decision-makers. The paltry increase of 1.9 per cent in the Health Ministry's budget is not enough to ensure the elimination of tuberculosis by 2025 or facilitate universal child immunisation. Besides, the allocation for the education sector remains well below the global benchmark of 4 to 6 per cent. Both the ruling regime and the Opposition are to blame for the sorry state of affairs. India deserves better than this. All political parties must prioritise health and education.

AMANJOT KAUR, MOHALI

PM played politics over Agnipath

A war memorial stands as a solemn reminder of the valour and sacrifice of our martyrs. It is a place for citizens to honour those who laid down their lives for the nation. PM Narendra Modi was wrong to bring up the controversial Agnipath recruitment scheme during his address on the 25th anniversary of the Kargil Vijay Divas. His politically charged remarks on the sombre occasion were uncalled for. PM Modi's defence of Agnipath, which has been met with opposition from several quarters, shifted the focus from the sacrifice of our martyrs. Our leaders must learn to refrain from playing politics with the

memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the country.

LT COL GURPARKASH SINGH VIRK (RETD), BY MAIL

Drowned in a coaching centre

It is shocking that three students drowned in the basement of a UPSC coaching centre in Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar on Saturday after it was flooded following heavy rainfall. Coaching centres are being run from basements illegally. It also raises questions about the failure of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to desilt the drains. Strict action must be taken against those responsible for the avoidable tragedy. This kind of grave negligence must not go unpunished.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWANA

Steps to simplify tax system flawed

The reduction in long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax on property and gold and the removal of the indexation benefit seem like flawed efforts to simplify the tax system. A better approach would be to give the sellers and buyers a choice between two tax options: 20 per cent with indexation and 12.5 per cent without it. This would prevent the sellers from demanding extra cash to cover taxes, check the use of black money and help those with moderate means secure property loans. The owners of inherited property would not benefit from the policy changes, despite their long-term investment in maintenance. Further, the new policy might push the middle class to trade property more frequently to avoid the LTCG tax of 12.5 per cent. Adjusting income tax exemptions and slabs for inflation would create a more fair and effective tax structure.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Stop youth from going astray

Most youngsters these days seem to lack discipline. They remain glued to their phone screens for much of the day. They often stay up past midnight and wake up late in the morning. This not only adversely affects their academic performance but also takes a toll on their physical and mental health. The onus is on their parents and teachers to ensure that the youngsters mend their ways. The need of the hour is to engage them in productive activities.

LYSHA KAUSHAL, FARIDKOT

IPKF did the job in Sri Lanka despite heavy odds



MAJ GEN ASHOK K MEHTA (RETD)
FORMER GOC, IPKF (SOUTH)

IT was exactly 37 years ago (July 29, 1987) that the India-Sri Lanka Accord was signed; under its mandate, the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) was formed and Operation Pawan was launched. It took the Sri Lankan security forces another two decades to end the civil war.

Last week, the country celebrated 25 years of the Kargil 'skirmish', the official term used for the limited campaign that was launched to throw out Pakistani intruders — at an avoidably high cost. The war was fought during the BJP-led government's term; it exposed major deficiencies in intelligence and higher defence management that triggered off the biggest defence reforms through the Kargil Review Committee report. But India's first out-of-area force projection, masked as a pacifying force to subdue a deadly guerrilla force (LTTE), has been consigned to oblivion. IPKF veterans have been urging the government for the past few years that they be permitted

to 'officially commemorate' the sacrifice of 1,172 brave-hearts (and 3,000-odd wounded) at the National War Memorial with the authorised panoply of ceremonial honours. Their pleas have fallen on deaf ears; as a former GOC, IPKF (South), I am adding my voice to theirs.

On a visit to Colombo some years ago, I met the then Sri Lankan Army Commander, Gen Hamilton Wanasinghe, who told me: "Your boys did a splendid job. Our task was made easier as you had broken the back of the LTTE despite your mission getting mired in domestic politics of Colombo and New Delhi. Thanks to the IPKF we managed to defeat LTTE in 2009, even then not without Indian assistance."

On May 14, 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs extended by five years the ban on "a disintegrated LTTE". It is instructive to recall the deeds and dilemma of the IPKF, which, despite a mission-creep mandate and the absence of strategic guidance (armed with a British tourist map), achieved its military and political objectives.

After initial setbacks in Jaffna following LTTE supremo Prabhakaran reneging on the Delhi agreement, the IPKF, which constituted the military component of coercive diplomacy, succeeded in creating a security environ-



PEACE ENFORCERS: The IPKF was formed under the mandate of the India-Sri Lanka Accord, which was signed on July 29, 1987. FILE PHOTO

ment conducive to holding the first-ever provincial as well as parliamentary and presidential elections in the merged northeastern region, enabled by the 13th amendment of the Sri Lankan Constitution. Restoring the democratic process in insurgency-rocked provinces entailed systematic marginalisation of the LTTE, including pushing its members into the jungles. Taking over security duties in the north-east, the IPKF freed the Sri Lankan security forces to eliminate Marxist JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) rebels in the south. By

A grateful Sri Lanka has raised a war memorial honouring the gallant Indian soldiers who shed their blood for its security.

degrading the LTTE's capability and motivation, the IPKF prevented the creation of the Eelam (separate homeland for the Tamils), thereby protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka. All this was done despite the severe handicap of a regime change in Sri Lanka and India. Then President Jayewardene was replaced by Premadasa, who had engineered a secret deal with the LTTE to evict the IPKF. He served a notice on the IPKF to vacate Sri Lanka, a move that was endorsed by then Prime Minister VP Singh, who

succeeded Rajiv Gandhi.

This double jeopardy represented a clear failure of coercive diplomacy and political intelligence. But conveniently, the IPKF was made the scapegoat. The Sri Lankan imbroglio required a political antidote, and as PM Narendra Modi recently told Russian President Vladimir Putin: "The solution to any war does not lie on the battlefield". Op Pawan was the first triservice campaign with a joint command and overall force commander. In their new book on the IPKF, Valiant Deeds - Undying Memories, Col Atul Kochhar and Col Ravi Nair recall the gallantry and bravery of the force. One Param Vir Chakra and 98 Vir Chakras, besides other medals, were won by the force consisting of four infantry divisions (70,000 personnel) supported by the artillery, a tank regiment, special forces, paramilitary forces, combat helicopters, the IAF and the Navy. A grateful Sri Lanka has raised a war memorial honouring the gallant Indian soldiers who shed their blood for its security.

A group of committed veterans has been waging another battle in the corridors of South Block, calling for recognition of Op Pawan

as an honourable and successful military campaign where Indian peacekeepers became peace enforcers. The performance of soldiers is measured by acts of valour and gallantry, which are commemorated regardless of victory or defeat. The British-led campaign in Gallipoli during World War I was an acclaimed fiasco. Yet, Australia and New Zealand (Indian units were also involved) commemorate it on April 25 annually. The US honours its brave soldiers who fought in Vietnam on March 29; Russia, Ukraine and Belarus commemorate the Afghanistan expedition on February 15. And the list goes on. Op Pawan was a military success, even though there was a political and diplomatic failure. In India, the wars of 1971 (liberation of Bangladesh) and 1999 (Kargil) are officially commemorated and celebrated.

IPKF veterans recently wrote to the Service Chiefs and the Minister of State for Defence and have received the reply: "the matter is under consideration". They want 'official recognition' and declaration of July 29 as the date of commemoration, besides an enlisted bugler to play the Last Post in memory of their fallen comrades. Operation Pawan was definitely neither a minor operation nor just a skirmish.

Stagnation impeding Railways' efforts to address new challenges



SARABJIT ARJAN SINGH
FORMER GM, RAILWAYS

THE political justification for merging the railway budget with the Union Budget in 2017 was ostensibly to streamline the financial framework of the government. It was expected to improve financial planning and the allocation of resources across different sectors. It would potentially lead to the synchronisation of railway policies with other infrastructure sectors, resulting in the coordinated development of transport infrastructure, which is crucial for holistic economic development.

To what extent these objectives have been achieved is still an open question, but it has made the Railways a full partner in the infrastructure development initiative. This has led to the investment of ever larger sums in the Railways, with the objectives of enhancing freight growth, infrastructure upgrades and safety enhancements.

As part of this infrastructure development initiative, this year's railway budget has a capital expenditure allocation of Rs 2.62 lakh crore, the highest ever. It is nearly 0.8 per cent of the GDP. A similar sum was

provided in last year's budget. These allocations are significantly above the Rs 28,174 crore provided in the 2013-14 budget. Such large investments should have shown up in an increase in the market share of the Railways, but that has not happened. Nor has the situation improved in the passenger sector. Waiting lists still remain, and coaches continue to be overcrowded even though the passenger market share of the Indian Railways (IR) is falling. The railway budget makes no mention of how these issues, especially the steady erosion of market share, will be addressed.

Why the huge investment has not shown up in a rise in the market share of the IR is a bit of a mystery. On the other hand, when it comes to roads, a similar level of investment is visible in a larger and improved road network. In the 1950s, the market share of the Railways stood at 85 per cent. It was, however, clear that this was nothing but the concomitant outcome of the undeveloped road network and would start shrinking as the economy grew and the road network expanded. Based on the experience of some developed countries, it was felt that the Railways should move to holding on to 40 to 50 per cent of the share by evolving appropriate marketing and network development strategies. To enable the Railways to maintain a market share of 40 to 50 per cent, the incremental loading growth rate had to be about 1.5 per cent above the economic



LIFELINE: The Railways, the main mode of transport after Independence, has helped build the economy. ISTOCK

growth rate. If the Railways had been able to achieve this, its market share would have stabilised around 40 to 50 per cent. This change should have taken place in the 1990s. But it did not, and the growth continued to be 1.5 per cent lower than the economic growth rate, resulting in a steady decline in the Railways' market share.

In 2001, it was around 36 per cent. And today, it is hovering around 25 per cent. And it seems that the government, despite pumping in huge amounts, is unable to reverse the trend. This is quite a serious issue because, in order to reduce logistic costs and carbon emissions, the Railways needs to move at least 40 per cent of the in-land freight demand by 2030. This is a huge challenge for the reason that the consolidated in-land freight demand forecast for 2030 is 8,220 MMT (million

Without a vision, the Railways cannot determine which of the past methods and rules it should retain and which it should jettison.

metric tonnes). And if the Railways is targeted to move 45 per cent of it, the IR will have to ramp up its capacity to moving 3,700 MMT from the current 1,539 MMT by 2030. This requires the IR to grow by 15.7 per cent CAGR (compound annual growth rate). This is a tall order. The budget documents give no clue on how the IR proposes to achieve this or why the huge capital expenditure fails to increase the market share.

The problem of falling market share seems to be perennial. It has been declining since the 1960s, suggesting that the Railways has some broad structural problems that need to be fixed. In a way, these have been recognised. The IR is one of those organisations that has been the subject of study by numerous committees and commissions before and after Independence. The first one was the Robertson committee

of 1902. And the last one in the series of panels was the 2014 Bibek Debroy committee on railway reforms. Where do we go from here? It is one of those difficult questions, especially when so many expert committees have not been able to find an answer to get the IR out of the rut. This does not mean that all is lost. But it does bring home the need to re-look at what the IR has been doing right and what it is getting wrong.

The IR, the main mode of transport after Independence, has helped build the economy. It is still capable of doing so, provided its structure is adapted to confront the novelty of the new technologies and the resultant complexities. It is clear that there has been a drift that has led to stagnation because of a lack of vision on how to address the novelties.

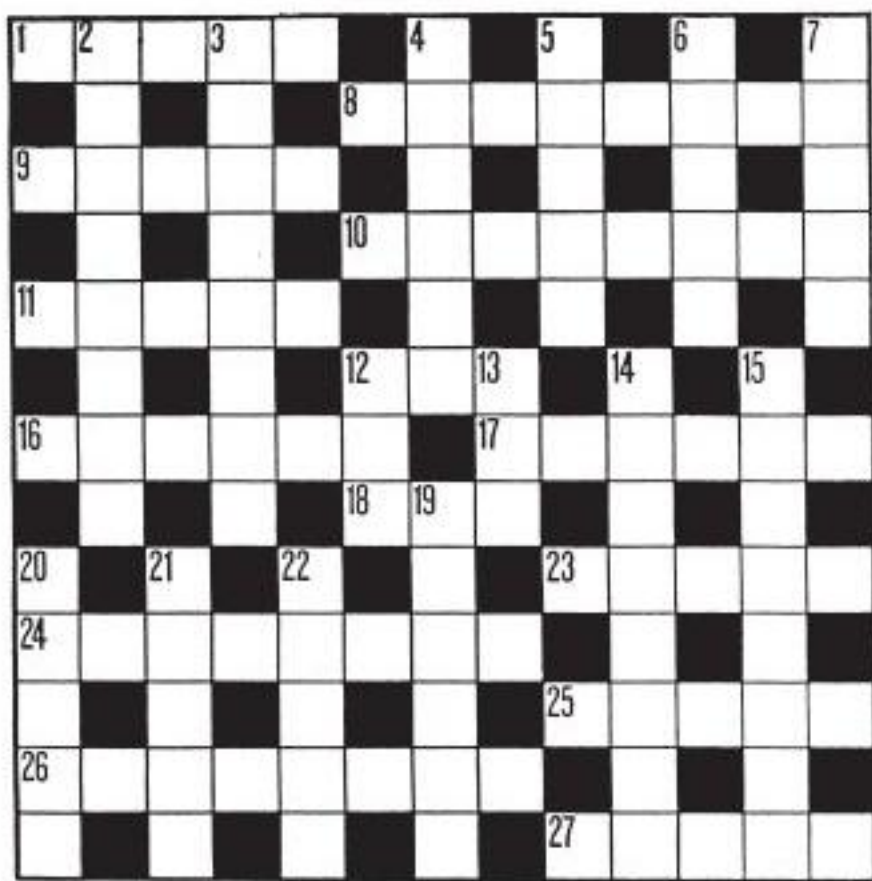
Without a vision, the Railways cannot determine which of the past methods and rules it should retain and which ones it should jettison to become the premier mode of transport of the 21st century.

This lack of vision is perhaps one of the reasons why the Railways has not been able to address the issues, restraining it from playing its due role in the economic development of this country and raising the market share. What should this vision centre on? It should focus on changing the rule structure of the organisation. After all, it is rules, formal and informal, as Nobel laureate Douglas North puts it, that constrain human behaviour.

And these rules evolve in accordance with the intentionality of those who make them. Intentionality is the product of social learning and how it shapes the structural foundation of the organisation and its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.

The IR suffers from various instabilities. They come from the very short tenures of the board members and the constant change in ministers, which is inevitable in a democratic system. A new minister brings in his or her own intentionalities, which have an impact on how the rules are interpreted. It may explain why the market share has been eroding. The current Railway Minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, is confronted with the problem of addressing the endless novelty of issues arising from the increasing complexities of the IR's evolving technical and market environments. These problems will only mount as new technologies like AI (artificial intelligence) bring in fresh complexities. He is already facing that problem with new signalling systems, which have led to accidents. Besides, many decision-makers do not even understand the 'true' nature of these issues. A challenge for the minister, hence, is to bring in new decision-makers, who have a better understanding. How he addresses these issues will determine, to a great extent, how successful he will be in reversing the trend of the falling market share.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Move aimlessly (5)
- 8 Maintain momentum (4,2,2)
- 9 Find pleasure in (5)
- 10 To label at a lower price (4,4)
- 11 Persian Gulf state (5)
- 12 Beseech (3)
- 16 Highly ornamented (6)
- 17 An imagined perfect state (6)
- 18 Route (3)
- 23 Robust (5)
- 24 Not intervening directly (5,3)
- 25 Desire eagerly (5)
- 26 Accelerate (4,2,2)
- 27 To guide (5)

Saturday's solution

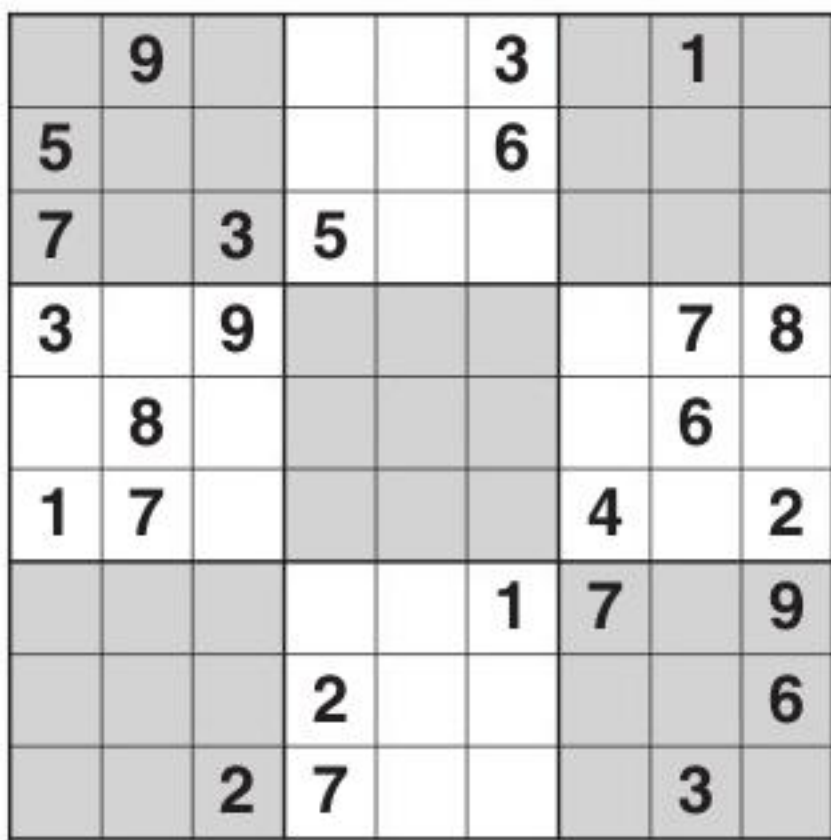
Across: 1 Foursquare, 6 Gall, 10 Model, 11 Cut across, 12 Guidance, 13 Baton, 15 Notably, 17 Traduce, 19 Hideous, 21 Radiate, 22 Sauna, 24 Colombia, 27 Antichoke, 28 Trial, 29 Earn, 30 True to type.

Down: 1 Fume, 2 Undoubted, 3 Solid, 4 Uncanny, 5 Retreat, 7 Aloft, 8 Los Angeles, 9 Scabbard, 14 On the stage, 16 Buoyancy, 18 Unanimity, 20 Succour, 21 Relieve, 23 Utter, 25 Motto, 26 Clue.

DOWN

- 2 To desert (3,3,2)
- 3 Right across the spectrum (4,1,2,1)
- 4 To slander (6)
- 5 Very large nail (5)
- 6 Characteristic spirit (5)
- 7 Disburse (5)
- 12 Gesture of respect (3)
- 13 Make fun of (3)
- 14 Would you like (3,5)
- 15 Imagination (5,3)
- 19 Concern (6)
- 20 Pursuit (5)
- 21 Theatrical backer (5)
- 22 English royal racecourse (5)

SU DO KU



HARD

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

JULY 29, 2024, MONDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Shravan Shaka 7
- Shravan Parvishle 14
- Hijari 1446
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 9, up to 5.56 pm
- Ganda Yoga up to 5.55 pm
- Bhumi Nakshatra up to 10.55 am
- Moon enters Taurus sign 4.45 pm

FORECAST

SUNSET: SUNRISE	MONDAY TUESDAY	19:18 HRS 05:40 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	29
New Delhi	36	28
Amritsar	33	30
Bathinda	37	30
Jalandhar	35	29
Ludhiana	35	28
Bhiwani	36	28
Hisar	37	27
Sirsa	38	30
Dharamsala	29	20
Manali	29	19
Shimla	25	17
Srinagar	32	22
Jammu	32	26
Kargil	38	20
Leh	34	16
Dehradun	33	25
Mussoorie	23	18

TEMPERATURE IN °C

Enough is enough

The tragic deaths of three students in basement flooding is a repeat story of administrative apathy and negligence

The incident is both tragic and surreal. It is difficult to comprehend that three students could lose their lives in a coaching centre operated in a basement that gets flooded. In a heartbreaking incident that has once again spotlighted the glaring deficiencies in urban infrastructure and governance, three civil service aspirants tragically lost their lives due to flooding in a basement. This avoidable disaster raises serious questions about official apathy, the flouting of safety norms, and the recurring nature of such incidents. On a fateful evening, heavy rains lashed the city, overwhelming the already inadequate drainage systems. The basement, where the students were studying, was rapidly filled with water. Despite desperate attempts to escape, the rising water levels led to the tragic drowning of the three young lives. The basement, meant for commercial storage, was illegally converted into a coaching centre. With no proper ventilation, emergency exits, or drainage systems, it became a death trap during the downpour. This



incident underscores a stark reality faced by many urban dwellers who are forced to live in substandard and unsafe accommodations due to high real estate costs and inadequate housing policies. The deaths of these students could have been prevented had there been stricter enforcement of building codes and timely maintenance of drainage systems. However, the incident has laid bare the apathy of the authorities responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens. Residents in the area had repeatedly complained about the poor drainage and the illegal conversion of basements into living spaces. Despite these warnings, no significant action was taken. The inaction of municipal authorities and the lack of accountability have resulted in yet another tragedy. After the death of three students, it is time for the crocodile tears to flood on the social media. A big section of political class would rather do nothing but just be concerned about such incidents. Indeed it is the nexus between the local politicians, bureaucrats and business owners of dubious credentials to indulge in flouting the norms and make a fast buck. They do not mind playing with the lives of innocent people. The incident is not an isolated one, similar incidents have happened in the past. This is part of a disturbing pattern where safety norms are routinely flouted by the powerful. Illegal constructions, unauthorized conversions, and poor maintenance of infrastructure are rampant in many urban areas including the capital city. Builders and landlords often bypass regulations, compromising the safety of residents for profit. Such incidents are alarmingly frequent, each time highlighting the same issues of poor infrastructure, negligence, and lack of accountability. Despite the public outcry and media attention that follows each tragedy, there seems to be little systemic change. Again, a customary enquiry would be instituted which would give its report when the incident is all but forgotten from the public memory and we as a nation wait for another one to happen.

PICTALK



'Kanwariyas' carry Ganga water during their pilgrimage in the holy month of 'Shravan', in Haridwar

PTI

How generative AI is transforming the workplace

The rapid advancements in generative AI are revolutionising the workplace, reshaping job roles, and redefining the future of work

Automation has been at the core of human evolution since the beginning of time. Humans have always sought out ways to make their jobs faster and easier. From physical labour to mechanized tools and now artificial intelligence, the unprecedented rate at which this sector has evolved has been transformative. With every upgrade, the next set of expectations is demanded immediately. This leads us to the conclusion that the future of work is NOT in the future; It is NOW!

This continuous evolution is significantly impacting the workplace, redefining the nature of work, the role of workers, and the environment in which they operate. As we navigate this transformation, HR and business leaders must understand the implications of AI on the future of work. As I reflect on the developments in the field of AI and its impact on the future of work, I see the following 6 implications that every HR and Business leader must know: **Job Transformation Over Displacement:** There is a widespread concern that AI will lead to massive job loss-



es. However, historical precedents show that technological advancements tend to transform rather than displace jobs. AI is no different. It will change how we work, introducing new methods and enhancing collaboration between humans and machines. According to a report by SHRM and The Burning Glass Institute on Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Workforce, the impact of Gen AI will be less about automation and more about augmenting workers' productivity and effectiveness. According to a Global Report by Thomson Reuters, 77% of professionals believe AI will significantly impact their work within the next five years.

The 'War for Talent' Will Be Fought on Newer Terrains: The traditional paradigms of skills and talent acquisition

are evolving rapidly. Organizations must look beyond conventional talent pools to find the right candidates.

Competitive Edge through Generative AI: A growing number of organizations are already incorporating generative AI into their HR processes, and many are exploring its potential in other functions. organizations have already introduced the use of Generative AI in their HR processes, and many organizations are exploring possible uses.

Human Creativity: The Ultimate Differentiator As generative AI becomes more accessible, human creativity and ingenuity will become even more valuable. While AI can process data and provide insights, it is human attributes such as creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking that will set organizations apart. The ability to connect disparate ideas and develop innovative solutions beyond AI's capabilities will be crucial. Human ingenuity will be the key differentiator in a world where AI is a common tool. The case for Reverse

Augmentation AI's potential is best realized when combined with human intelligence (HI). This synergy enables more effective and differentiated applications of AI, resulting in higher return on investments. By leveraging the strengths of both AI and HI, organizations can achieve superior outcomes and drive innovation. **Investing in Leadership Development:** As generative AI enhances operational efficiencies, the focus on developing leadership talent will become increasingly important. Leadership development will require targeted investments to ensure they are equipped to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing environment. Organizations must prioritize investments in both technology and human capability development to remain competitive. Organizations must stay agile, continuously adapting to the changes brought about by AI. The foresight to navigate these changes will be the key to sustaining growth and achieving long-term success.

(The writer is CEO SHRM India, APAPC and MENA; views are personal)



ACHAL KHANNA

Honour the unsung heroes of operation Pawan

The lack of public commemoration for the 1,171 soldiers killed in action during Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka highlights a troubling apathy

India's future path to greatness shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA during Operation 'Pawan' in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during inevitable future military confrontations. To recall Operation 'Pawan,' the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operation in Sri Lanka, was the largest joint services military operation conducted by India, in the 1971 War. It led to the establishment of Headquarters IPKF, a Corps-size tri-service organisation with nearly 100,000 troops from the three services under its command. Had the proposed Maritime Theatre Command been in existence, Operation 'Pawan' would have come under its ambit.

The intensity of this 32-month-long 'politico-military peace keeping' operation, undertaken from 29th of July 1987 to 24th of March 1990, is best gauged from the gallantry awards won and casualties suffered by this force. 1172 Indian soldiers were Killed In Action (KIA), and more than 3500 soldiers suffered grievous injuries. The IPKF was awarded 1 Param Vir Chakra, 6 Maha Vir Chakras, 98 Vir Chakras and scores of other gallantry awards. The ghost of the political failure to see through to the end of its first geopolitical foray in near abroad continues to impact Indian policy establishment even in the present times.

As of now, against the backdrop of a sustained Chinese presence in Sri Lanka, India is struggling to adopt a coherent strategy to deal with the continued intransigence by the Sri Lanka Government to implement the political solution of devolution to the Tamils enshrined in the Indian Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) of 29th of July 1987. India is bound to invite hostility from the dominant geopolitical forces in its neighbourhood. This will mandate it to be prepared for Out-of-area military operations to secure its economic and geopolitical interests. India's



future path to greatness therefore shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during the inevitable future military confrontations. The Government is very vocal in pronouncing its nationalist credentials but sluggish in putting money into building deterrent capabilities. Last week's defence budget was a green signal for China to race even further ahead under the illusion there will be no war. Still, policy pronouncements are not enough unless backed by a revitalised and reorganised military competent to safeguard its economic interests, all aspirational talk is mere rhetoric. Building National War Memorials is one thing; honouring the fallen braves appropriately is quite another matter regardless of the outcome because victory or defeat on the battlefield is never complete unless it is surrendered as in 1971. This is where the IPKF comes into the picture because it was not permitted to complete its military mission. Its contribution to the preservation of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity is fully acknowledged; in Colombo especially. New Delhi must honour its sacrifices on 29 July as a tribute to



THERE IS ANGST AGAINST THE INJUSTICE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ARMED FORCES NOT OFFICIALLY COMMEMORATING THE IPKF OPERATIONS AT THE NWM AS IS DONE FOR THE 1971 AND KARGIL WARS

the valour of the fallen brave. The political parameters of the ISLA had been achieved by the IPKF by December 1988. The ethnic Sri Lanka Tamil predominant Northern and Eastern Provinces were amalgamated into a unitary Northeastern Province, general elections to the North East Provincial Council were successfully conducted, with a duly elected EPRLF-led government sworn in. Had the IPKF stay been extended to tame the LTTE, the military mission could have created conditions for implementing a political solution short of Elam.

This would have secured national interest, but the new Indian government should not have endorsed the new Sri Lankan government's demand to withdraw IPKF from the island in August 1989. Ascribing the failure of ISLA to IPKF, which was just a corollary to ISLA, is unfair. The failures lay in the diplomatic and government policy, which the establishment wishes to cover up by laying the blame at the doorstep of its military.

The ISLA had weak foundations. The contingency of Sri Lanka and LTTE renegeing on the ISLA was not thought through. The withdrawal of IPKF left India without decisive influence to oversee the implementation of the promised political package by Sri Lanka to remove the discriminatory state practices

against its ethnic Tamil minority, impacting Indian policy towards Sri Lanka even in the present.

The provision of weapons and allied support by R&AW to the LTTE even when militarily engaged against IPKF, and the availability of physical infrastructure support to LTTE in Tamil Nadu, was against national interests. Similar primacy to political interests can be sensed by the refusal of the Indian state to commemorate KIA of Operation 'Pawan.' There is angst against the injustice of the government and the armed forces not officially commemorating the IPKF operations at the NWM as is done for the 1971 and Kargil wars. Graves of some of the Indian soldiers killed during Operation 'Pawan' are still in Sri Lanka. It is hard to understand the dichotomy of the Indian leadership, both political and military, paying public tributes at the IPKF war memorial in Colombo, in the heart of Sri Lanka, but failing to honour those KIA during Operation 'Pawan,' at the NWM at New Delhi. The IPKF war veterans are ever hopeful that the Govt will realise the injustice and consent to a befitting annual national homage to 1171 of its Bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice during 'Operation Pawan.'

(The writer won Sena Medal in an Operation 'Pawan' veteran; he is strategic thinker, and author; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM MODI'S WARNING TO PAKISTAN

Madam — This refers to the report "Modi warns Pak on terrorism," The Pioneer, Jul 27. PM Narendra Modi, while addressing the 25th Kargil Diwas celebrations, has warned Pakistan against continuing its futile policy breeding and sponsoring cross-border terror. Both the message and the timing were perfect. PM Modi has given voice to the frustrations of most Indians, and was echoing the viewpoint of the entire Indian polity and the Parliament by expressing the national consensus that Kashmir belongs to India. No policy of terror or initiation of war-like action will ever deter India was his clear pronouncement. He also reflected our national resolve strongly that India would not think twice about doing all it takes to protect its territory and people. Nevertheless, as Mr Modi rightly said, Pakistan has not learnt its lessons. It continues to wage war in the garb of terrorism and proxy wars. And it still continues to be a sanctuary for anti-India terrorists, if the recent surge in attacks in Jammu is any indication. Indian leaders have time and again sought to mend relations with Pakistan and have made genuine overtures for peace. But each time we have received only deceit and backstabbing in return. In the last 25 years, the differential between India and Pakistan in terms of economic prosperity and global reputation has sharply widened. But Pakistan has still not grown out of its desire to be hyphenated with India and is, in the process, only harming its own people.

N Sadhasiva Reddy|Bengaluru

EMPOWERING MINERAL RICH STATES

Madam — Due to historic verdict on mining royalty and taxes now the state government is empowered to levy taxes on mining companies and due to this reason concerning States will be hugely benefited and the financial state of these States will be improved. and it is due to a landmark judgment on July 25, a nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court which upheld the right of States to levy taxes on mining activities, recognizing that 'royalty' and

The historic rise of women leaders



If Kamala Harris wins, she will become the first woman President of the USA. If Donald Trump wins, he will become the second president to serve non-consecutive terms (45th and 47th), following Grover Cleveland, who was the 22nd and 24th president. Franklin D. Roosevelt is the only U.S. president to have served three terms. Whether anyone will surpass that record remains a long-term puzzle. All eyes will be on

November 5th, 2024, ballot day in the USA. As of July 27, 2024, 29 nations around the world have women as heads of state or government (Presidents or Prime Ministers).

The history of women heads of state and government is fascinating. The world's first woman president was Maria Estela 'Isabel' Perón of Argentina (1974 to 1976). The first elected woman Prime Minister was Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka in 1960, who served three terms. In the 1970s, three women Prime Ministers—Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), and Golda Meir (Israel)—were known as the 'Iron Ladies Trio.' Later, Margaret Thatcher, the 'Iron Lady No. 4,' became the Prime Minister of the UK.

P V Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

'taxation' are different recognizing both as separate. In the case of Mineral Area Development Authority vs Steel Authority of India, the nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court gave this decision in an 8:1 split. Eight judges including Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud voted in favor of this decision while Justice B V Nagarathana disagreed. The decision, pending for more than 25 years, finally clarifies that States can levy additional taxes on mining activities and land used for such purposes.

The decision is a significant development in empowering States to generate more revenue, which can be used to meet local needs and mitigate the adverse effects of mining. The distinction between royalties and taxes was at the centre of the court's decision. Royalties are payments made by mining leaseholders to the lessee on the basis of a specific agreement as stipulated under Section 9 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDRA). These payments are made in exchange for the right to extract minerals and are thus seen as compensation for the

use of land and resources. Taxes, on the other hand, are more commonly imposed by governments and used to fund public services and infrastructure.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

MODI'S OLIVE BRANCH TO RSS

Madam — In the lead-up to its 100th year, Narendra Modi just gave a birthday gift to the RSS. Amidst speculations of a deepening rift between the RSS and the Modi-Shah-controlled BJP, the NDA government withdrew the order dated 1966 that prohibits government employees from participating in RSS activities. Is this an olive branch, considering the inexplicable statement made by J P Nadda, almost declaring independence from the RSS in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections? This comes on top of several grants and appointments going to people and organisations belonging to or close to the RSS.


C K Ramanathan | Mumbai

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FIRST COLUMN

A PATH TO PERSONAL LIBERATION

With unwavering determination and faith, one can conquer even the most persistent habits




RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

We are what we repeatedly do, said Aristotle... If we have a look at the dictionary meaning of habit, then it says 'something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it.' To define it simply, habits can be described as involuntary actions. They are a kind of 'automatic behaviour' as it were, for one does not do them after much thought. There is no doubt in it that almost everyone in this world has one or other bad habit. Don't we all have? Like, many people have the bad habit of smoking. But, if you tell them that it is a bad habit, some of them will bring in a little bit of philosophy and some would try to support it with medical opinion also.

They will say, "Smoking is very exhilarating. It is good for my brain because it brings me concentration." Others will say, "Smoking keeps my bowels free." Others still will confess that it is a bad habit that they find hard to give up. Little do most people realise that it is a bad habit that pollutes their physical system and the atmosphere and causes diseases like cancer. Similarly, some people have the habit of talking too much. They just can't keep quiet even for a couple of minutes. Little do these people realise that much breath and energy is wasted on useless talk.

This could usefully be spent in silent meditation. But the problem is that he who talks and talks is, today, considered as a smart, clever and wise person, and a person who talks less is thought to be lacking in general knowledge or to be deficient in the art of conversation! Such examples of bad habits can be multiplied, but, what we need to understand from these examples is that, in most cases, people do not realise that it is a bad or a harmful habit and where this truth is realised, there isn't the strong desire to get freed from its grip and that is why some people philosophically say; This habit of mine will die only when I die.

So what is the solution to get over one's bad habits? Is it practically possible? Yes! With a little effort and attention, it is indeed possible. To start with one needs great enthusiasm which is very essential for leaving bad habits. There is a well-known proverb in English: "Well-begun is half done". So, after realising that the habit which you have decided to give up is



really bad, you should put up a brave and enthusiastic fight against this evil. From the very outset, call forth all your latent energies not only to cut its root and branch but also to destroy its seed, for if the seed remains, the tree is likely to grow up again. When a house is on fire, how promptly and energetically the inmates react? At that time, they are fully concentrated and they use all the means to extinguish the fire.

Put your resolve into action immediately. Secondly, remove the words 'impossible', 'difficult', 'I cannot' etc. from your mind. These are the expressions of a weakening or a timid person. Cheer yourself up. Realize the truth that the evil habit is your own creation, you have given birth to it and nourished it to bring its growth and now you should not say with a weak will that it is difficult to control it.

Always remember! habits are not your original nature; they are your second nature. You have acquired them and you say that you cannot give them up? You are their Master and you believe yourself to be their slave? 'Faith, it has been rightly said, "can move mountains and this your habit is only a molehill. Therefore, rise and take up the bow of endeavour and become an instrument to the Divine to shoot this devil—your bad habit—for, God is with you as He always is on the side of the virtuous. But, remember! A mere wish or desire to eradicate evil is not enough. You must have pure and strong will besides a definite aim and purpose. Wish or desire is a small, temporary ripple in the lake of mind but Will is the power that executes the desire to fulfilment. There is nothing impossible for a man of strong willpower to achieve. So let's make a resolve that we will liberate ourselves in the true sense.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist views are personal)

Budget is pro-growth but stability concern remains



UTTAM GUPTA

Major expenditure items may go out of control, raising concerns about the budget's feasibility; moreover, the Government's gross tax revenue target of Rs 38.40 lakh crore is overly ambitious



On top of a GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 8 per cent plus for three consecutive years, the Union Budget for FY 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 23, 2024, has all the ingredients to sustain the momentum during the current year as well. For the current year, she has proposed capital expenditure at Rs 111,111 crore, which is 17 per cent higher than the revised estimate (RE) for FY 2023-24. In her Budget for 2019-20, she had laid a roadmap for catapulting the Indian economy to US\$5 trillion by 2024-25. In sync with this target, she had projected an investment requirement of over Rs 100 lakh crore to build the infrastructure over five years.

Out of this, 39 per cent or Rs 39,00,000 crore was to come from the Centre and states each and the balance was Rs 22,00,000 crore from the private sector. The Centre's capital spend during the previous four years was 2020-21: Rs 439,000 crore; 2021-22: Rs 554,000 crore; 2022-23: Rs 750,000 crore; 2023-24: Rs 1000,961 crore. This adds up to Rs 2700,000 crore. Add to this Rs 111,111 crore for 2024-25, the total over five years comes to Rs 3800,000 crore which is more or less close to the amount the Centre intended to contribute. The Central government has also been helping the states to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans. During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current year, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore.

To promote investment in the private sector, the Centre has reduced the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms has been reduced from extant 40 per cent to 35 per cent. With this and assuming that private consumption/demand remains strong (a relief of around Rs 17,500/- in personal income tax or PIT resulting from the change in tax slabs under the New IT regime and increase in a standard deduction by Rs 25,000/- will give some boost) besides exports getting a leg up, courtesy



THE GROSS TAX REVENUE TARGET OF RS 3840,000 CRORE IS OVER-AMBITIOUS AND THE BUDGET ASSUMES RECEIPTS OF RS 50,000 CRORE FROM DISINVESTMENT OF GOVERNMENT SHARES IN PSUs, A PROGRAM IT HAS DECIDED NOT TO PURSUE. EVEN MAJOR EXPENDITURE ITEMS COULD GET OUT OF CONTROL

rebound in the US economy, India could achieve growth even higher than 6.5 – 7 per cent projected in the Economic Survey for 2023-24. But, there is a flip side to it. This has to do with the fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts). Sitharaman has set it at 4.9 per cent of the GDP which is 0.2 per cent less than a target of 5.1 per cent fixed in the interim budget. This has been made possible due to a mammoth dividend transfer of Rs 210,000 crore by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the Central Government from its operations during the FY 2023-24 which is Rs 130,000 crore higher than the provision of Rs 80,000 crore made in the interim budget. It won't be easy to achieve the 4.9 per cent target during the current year. This is because the gross tax revenue (GTR) target of Rs 3840,000 crore is over-ambitious and the budget assumes receipts of Rs 50,000 crore from disinvestment of government shares in PSUs, a program it has decided not to pursue. Even major expenditure items could get out of control as the year progresses.

For instance, the 'fertilizer subsidy' is budgeted at Rs 164,000 crore during 2024-25. This is based on the assumption that the declining trend in the international price of fertilizers and raw materials used in their production seen during 2023-24 continues during the current year as well. It takes a small disruption in the global supply chain (given the current highly uncertain geo-political situation, this is quite likely), for this assumption to go haywire. That apart, to go down from 4.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent next year set by the FM her 2021-22 budget (this by itself is far more generous than FD of 3 per cent that was to be achieved in 2020-21 as per the amendment to the FRBM Act, 2018) can be daunting, all the more when the

RBI is unlikely to repeat its bonanza/gift to the Center. During an interactive with the press, Sitharaman alluded to the Centre's plan to design fiscal trajectory in a manner such that from FY 2026-27 onward, its debt to GDP ratio starts declining. Sans target setting, this may not instil confidence. Yet, she won't set the target as these are often missed. The Centre's debt-to-GDP ratio is currently around 57 per cent against the 40 per cent mandated for 2024-25 under the FRBM Amendment Act (2018).

Meanwhile, to address the concerns on employment, MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and agriculture, the budget has proposed several initiatives. For MSMEs, it proposes a new credit guarantee scheme to facilitate term loans to enable them to purchase machinery and equipment without requiring collateral or third-party guarantees (a self-financing guarantee fund is mooted that could provide each applicant with guarantee coverage of up to Rs 100 crore); increase in the limit of Mudra (Micro Units Development Refinance Agency, a subsidiary of SIDBI) loans to Rs 2000,000 for those who have repaid previous loans; expanding SIDBI branches to provide the much-needed access to credit and additional support for further growth.

The initiatives on employment all aligned to the EPFO (Employees Provident Fund Organization) enrollments include Scheme A: a one-month wage payout of up to Rs. 15,000 per month (payable in three instalments) to first-timers in the workforce, with all formal sectors with an eligibility limit of a salary of Rs 100,000 per month. Scheme B: meant for creating 'additional' jobs in the manufacturing sector linked to first-time employees; it includes an incentive to employees and employers con-

cerning EPFO in the first 4 years of employment. These schemes are expected to benefit 240 lakh youth. Scheme C meant support to employers to enable them to give additional employment in all sectors for those earning up to Rs 100,000 per month. The government will reimburse employers up to Rs. 3000 per month for two years towards EPFO contribution for each additional employee. This Scheme will benefit 50 lakh persons. To make the youth employable, Sitharaman has announced a new centrally sponsored scheme for skilling in collaboration with States and industry. 2000,000 youth will be skilled over five years under this scheme. One thousand industrial training institutes (ITIs) will be upgraded in the hub and spoke arrangement, with course content aligned to the skill needs of the industry. In agriculture, the measures include initiating 10 million farmers into natural farming in the next two years; releasing 109 climate-resilient new seed varieties across 32 field and horticulture crops in the next 100 days; Jan Samarth-based Kisan Credit Card in five States to give a boost to shrimp farming and export; launch a national cooperation policy; digital public infrastructure (DPI) to create a registry of 60 million farmers with the details of their land over the next three years; developing large-scale vegetable clusters closer to major consumption centres; promoting FPOs, cooperatives and start-ups for vegetable supply chains; pursuing the mission for pulses and oilseeds production etc. All the above announcements sound like the proverbial 'Many a slip between the cup and the lip'. For instance, on employment, Sitharaman clarified 'the government can only nudge private firms.'

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Flying towards sustainability: The aviation industry's tryst with carbon neutrality

Through technological innovation and green solutions like adoption of sustainable aviation fuel, the aviation sector is becoming environment friendly

The global aviation industry is undeniably a significant contributor to carbon emissions, accounting for about 2.5 – 3.0% of the world's carbon output. Recognising this impact, initiatives like IATA's "Fly Net Zero" are crucial steps towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Airlines are actively pursuing various strategies to reduce their environmental footprint, with fleet modernization being a cornerstone. One key pillar of the industry's sustainability strategy is investment in a modern, fuel-efficient fleet. Jazeera Airways, for instance, has invested in the Airbus A320 neo aircraft, known for its 20% reduction in fuel consumption and emissions. The



ROMANA **PARVI**

airline was also the first to order over 2000 of the world's lightest aircraft seats from Expleseat. These seats will contribute to a weight saving of 1.2 metric tons per aircraft resulting in enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced emissions per flight. Beyond fleet upgrades, airlines are implementing carbon offsetting programs as part of their sustainability efforts. These programs allow passengers to mitigate the environmental

impact of their air travel by investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. Jazeera Airways' carbon offsetting initiatives specifically support projects in renewable energy and reforestation, allowing passengers to contribute to environmental conservation efforts directly linked to their flights. Technological innovation also plays a pivotal role in enhancing operational efficiency and passenger experience. Airlines are increasingly adopting digital solutions such as paperless ticketing, digital baggage tracking, and personalized sustainable travel options. These technologies not only streamline operations but also minimize waste and carbon emissions associated with traditional paper-based processes. Addressing plastic waste is another important aspect of the industry's sustainability efforts. Airlines are replacing single-use plastics with biodegradable alternatives and exploring sustainable options like Palmade products made from palm leaves. Energy efficiency is another critical focus area for airlines, extending to both aircraft operations and airport infrastructure. State-of-the-art airport terminals are designed with sustainability in mind, incorporating energy-efficient lighting, climate control systems, and renewable energy sources. The airline industry is actively leading the way towards a more sustainable future for air



travel, setting a precedent for environmentally responsible practices that extend beyond its operations. The adoption of CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) marks a substantial advancement in its commitment to mitigating environmental impact and combat-

ing climate change. CORSIA ensures that international aviation contributes to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while continuing to support global connectivity and economic growth. Additionally, the development and adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and the utilization of

advanced software solutions like those offered by NAVBLUE are critical milestones in the airline industry's efforts to achieve net-zero emissions and address climate change. Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 requires collaboration among airlines, governments, and passengers. Through ongoing innovation, investment in sustainable technologies like SAF, reduction of plastic waste, and improvements in operational efficiency, the aviation industry is actively leading the way towards a more environmentally friendly future for air travel. These efforts not only aim to reduce the industry's carbon footprint but also set a precedent for sustainable practices that can inspire broader global initiatives beyond aviation. Aviation industry today is dedicated to collaborating closely with partners, passengers, and communities to foster a greener and more sustainable future for air travel. This commitment drives us to innovate and implement initiatives that reduce our environmental footprint, promote sustainable practices, and contribute positively to the global effort against climate change. Together with our stakeholders, we aim to lead by example and inspire lasting change in the aviation industry and beyond.

(The writer is regional manager South Asia - Jazeera Airways; views are personal)

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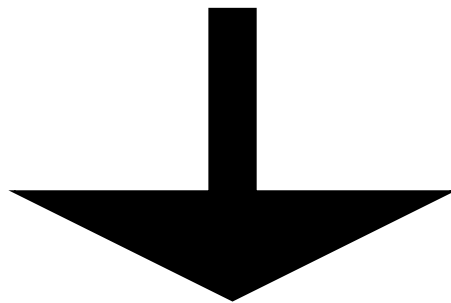
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