





# Politics behind 'redress' of waqf property rows



AJAY K MEHRA  
POLITICAL SCIENTIST

**U**NION Home Minister Amit Shah asserted on November 15 the determination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to amend the Waqf Act, 1995, despite resistance from key Opposition leaders. The Union Government's push to amend the Act is ominous. The apparent intention behind the move is to reduce the Waqf Board's control over its assets, which are the third largest in the country, after those of the Railways and the defence establishment.

The glaring politics behind the thin veil of noble intentions of redressing the issues and challenges in regulating and managing Waqf properties, as the government's statement on the issue, is evident from the recent events.

The claims of there being temples beneath historic mosques and shrines — from Sambhal in UP to Mūin al-Din Chishti and Adhai Din Ka Jhonpra in Ajmer, Rajasthan — are affectations of a concerted

otherisation. A distinct intensive effort to tar the Muslim community of the country as one carrying the historical legacy of temple demolitions for constructing mosques and, in recent history, sitting on enormous land assets and still winning is conspicuous.

Originating from the Arabic word 'waqfu', meaning to detain, hold or tie up, waqf is the permanent pledge by a Muslim person of his property, movable or immovable, for a pious, religious or charitable purpose under the Islamic law. Once pledged, such a property can neither be sold nor donated or used for any other purpose. Allah being an inchoate and ethereal entity, a waqf creating a waqf for the benefit of the people appoints a 'mutawall' for the management of the waqf. Once the waqf transfers the property to Allah, it becomes irrevocable.

Waqfs, however, are not universal to all Islamic countries. Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Tunisia and Iraq do not have them. The history of waqf is traced back to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Islamic countries that fell under this empire have waqf in some form or the other.

Waqf in India goes back to the period of the Sultanate, to the reign of Sultan Muizuddin Sam Ghaore in the late 12th century. He dedicated two villages for



OMINOUS: The Union Government's push to amend the Waqf Act, 1995, despite opposition from various sections, is a bid to reduce the Waqf Board's control over its huge assets. FILE PHOTO

the upkeep of the Jama Masjid of Multan. With the consolidation of the Muslim rulers in India, waqfs and properties under them expanded.

During the British rule, a dispute over a waqf property in the late 19th century landed in the Privy Council. The Bench of four British judges declared the waqf invalid, describing it as 'a perpetuity of the worst kind'. However, that decision was not accepted in India. The Mussalman Waqf Validating Act, 1913, retained the institution and the waqfs continued after

The claims of there being temples beneath historic mosques and shrines are affectations of a concerted otherisation.

Independence. The Government of India's statement attributes the strengthening of waqfs since the Waqf Act, 1954, under which the Central Waqf Council of India was created in 1964. It says that the Waqf Act of 1995 made it 'even more favourable to Muslims'. It led to the strengthening of the waqf council, the state waqf boards, the chief executive officer and the duties of mutawall. Further, the waqf tribunals were deemed to be civil courts.

An amendment in 2013

made the management more efficient and transparent. The Waqf Repeal Bill, 2022, and amendment to the Waqf Act, 1995, tabled in the Rajya Sabha on December 8, 2023 are efforts towards doing away with the waqfs or neutralising their roles in the ownership and management of such large chunks of land and property.

The Waqf Bill, which is currently with the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), has the following four main features:

- The Bill changes the composition of the Central Waqf Council and waqf boards to include non-Muslim members.
- The survey commissioner has been replaced by the collector, granting him powers to conduct surveys of waqf properties.
- Government property identified as waqf will cease to be waqf. The collector will determine the ownership of such properties.
- The finality of the tribunal's decisions has been revoked. The Bill provides for direct appeal to the high court.

Clearly, as put in the historical context in the government's statement, the waqfs have been portrayed as an Islamic legacy — the legacy of the invaders.

The stress on including non-Muslim members conveys the impression that these bodies, with such rich assets, are prone to misusing the resources.

The inclusion of different sections of Muslims, women in particular, would certainly create a representative set-up and is desirable.

However, replacing the survey commissioner with the district collector concerned for conducting surveys of waqf properties is a move meant to create a close and day-to-day surveillance mechanism under the respective state governments.

The phrase 'government property identified as waqf' creates an impression that the waqfs are prone to encroachment of public land. If there are individual cases of such impingement, they must be checked. But to put it in a legal instrument demonstrates an institution linked to a community which has been under pressure for over a decade.

Finally, while the provision for an appeal to higher courts is fine, the weakening of the sanctity of the tribunals is problematic.

The JPC has not been able to finalise the Waqf Bill for obvious reasons. While the objections of the opposition MPs are not known, the reason why it faced rough weather can be surmised.

Whether the JPC's extension will eventually iron out the differences is not known, but the Opposition has its task cut out. It must challenge the demonisation of the Muslims, as attempted by this legal instrument.

# What Trump 2.0 means for India's economic aspirations



SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN  
SENIOR FINANCIAL JOURNALIST

**E**VEN before being formally anointed as US President, Donald Trump's pronouncements are creating ripples in global economies. Recent salvos on tariffs and the dollar have sparked concerns over the prospect of trade and currency wars in the coming days. Policymakers in both developed and developing countries are voicing concerns over the impact of his new plans. While some fears are valid, given the track record in his previous tenure, others are not. Some comments are in a serious vein while others seem to be aimed merely at reasserting the primacy of the US in the world economic order.

For India, the reality is that having a stable economic relationship with the US is critical to its growth and development. This is the country's biggest trading partner in tandem with China. But there is a significant difference between the ties with the two economic superpowers. There is a trade sur-

plus with the former and a yawning deficit with the latter. Other disparities in the bilateral ties include the fact that investments from the US are expanding, especially as the China Plus One strategy is gaining ground. In contrast, investments from the northern neighbour have slowed down considerably recently due to strained political relations. As for the China Plus One policy, it may be one of the factors for the foreign direct investments having perked up this year. From April to September, the FDI inflows are reported to have risen by 45 per cent — from \$20.5 billion to \$29.79 billion.

The tariff hikes being proposed by Trump, on the other hand, could have a dampening effect on this country's exports to its biggest market. Till recently, India had been excluded from the list of countries against which the President-elect was planning to levy higher import duties. In specific terms, so far, he has declared that a 10 per cent tariff hike would be levied on China, with an even higher 25 per cent levy on imports from the neighbouring Mexico and Canada. One reason cited is the inability of these countries to curb drug smuggling into the US.

His latest acerbic comment, however, has been against the BRICS group, of which India is a founding member. Threatening to levy 100 per cent tariffs, he has taken



ALTERNATIVE CURRENCY? The suggestion that the BRICS group would float a new currency to replace the dollar has little chance of becoming a reality, experts

exception to reports that an alternative currency would be floated by the group to bypass the dollar.

The rancour against the BRICS group stems from Brazil's proposal, at the last summit, to develop an alternative currency to reduce reliance on the dollar. The annoyance seems hugely out of proportion as the suggestion has little chance of becoming a reality. Wide differences in ideology and outlook among member countries militate against the formulation of such a scheme. Undoubtedly, there has been concern over the sanctions imposed on Russia after the Ukraine war kept it out of the worldwide financial settlement system known as SWIFT. This creat-

On the positive side, this could be just the push needed for this government to shift from its recent policies of hiking import tariffs.

ed obstacles in doing business with that country. Alternative ways are, thus, being explored to evolve a new international transaction system, but they are still at a nascent stage. As for India, it has been using a rupee payment mechanism for oil purchases from Russia, but this is merely a continuation of a long-standing arrangement banking back to the Soviet era.

Setting this issue aside, therefore, one must examine the real problems on the tariff front. On the negative side, the prospect of a global trade war could lead to recessionary conditions in some of India's key markets. To that extent, this could affect exports, especially to Europe and the Americas. There is also a possibility that tariffs

could be raised on exports to the lucrative US market. In retaliation for the relatively higher duties imposed on imports here, Trump has repeatedly cited the instance of Harley Davidson, which was unable to enter the Indian market due to high tariffs. It is inevitable that easier access to the sizable domestic market would be sought by the new US administration, as has been done in the past. The difference now is that there is a real likelihood of retaliatory tariffs.

On the positive side, this could be just the push needed for this government to shift from its recent policies of hiking import tariffs. The process has been continuing gradually for the past few years in the guise of launching the 'Make in India' programme. This has raised the real danger of protectionism in the form of tariff walls to insulate the domestic industry, as was done in the Licence raj era. While some sectors may genuinely need protection, by and large, the Indian industry is at a more resilient state than ever in the past. Besides, if this country is to plug into the global supply chains, it must rethink the entire strategy on import levies. Raising revenues should not be the rationale for putting a high tariff regime in place.

The other advantage that could arise from Trump's plans to hike tariffs on goods

from China is that Indian exporters could gain a competitive edge. Several studies have emerged highlighting the potential for growth in sectors like textiles, information technology and pharmaceuticals. Apart from these gains, it is possible that investors will shift out of China to avoid the punitive tariffs imposed on imports from there. Though some of this movement may benefit smaller economies like Vietnam and Indonesia, larger ventures would prefer India for relocation. It has the benefits of low cost labour and availability of skilled manpower, especially in high-tech areas.

India, thus, needs to review its own inward-looking policies while considering the way forward in dealing with the tectonic shift in tariffs envisaged by the incoming administration. It may not be easy going as Trump has already pronounced this country to be an abuser of tariffs. There are bound to be tough negotiations as the US seeks greater access to the temptingly large Indian market. Dealing with more aggressive trade diplomacy will mean adopting a more flexible approach, especially as this country cannot afford to continue raising protectionist walls in a globalised world. This may be a radical change from the past, but it could ultimately benefit trade and industry in the long run.

<p><b>QUICK CROSSWORD</b></p> <p><b>ACROSS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Abscond (6)</li> <li>4 Canny (6)</li> <li>9 List of ingredients (7)</li> <li>10 Wrong (5)</li> <li>11 Under way (5)</li> <li>12 Final stages in chess play (7)</li> <li>13 Perceive some prospect of solution (3,8)</li> <li>18 Perpendicular (7)</li> <li>20 Rise to great height (5)</li> <li>22 Temporary stop (5)</li> <li>23 Regular procedure (7)</li> <li>24 Detective (6)</li> <li>25 Genial (6)</li> </ol> <p><b>Down</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Provide money to pay (6)</li> <li>2 Item of bric-a-brac (5)</li> <li>3 On horseback (7)</li> <li>5 Amass and put away (5)</li> <li>6 Tomb inscription (7)</li> <li>7 Scatter (6)</li> <li>8 Captivate totally and at once (4,2,5)</li> <li>14 Along the way (2,5)</li> <li>15 Maintaining communication (2,5)</li> <li>16 Uproar (6)</li> <li>17 Of one's own accord (6)</li> <li>19 Pre-eminent (5)</li> <li>21 Querulous lone (5)</li> </ol> <p><b>Yesterday's solution</b></p> <p><b>Across:</b> 1 Lift-off, 5 Let-up, 8 Turn the corner, 9 Sloop, 10 Execute, 11 Radish, 12 Sprint, 15 Panacea, 17 Acra, 19 In all weathers, 20 All in, 21 Speckle.</p> <p><b>Down:</b> 1 Lotus, 2 For good and all, 3 Octopus, 4 Foelet, 5 Loose, 6 Tongue-in-cheek, 7 Perfect, 11 Replica, 13 Prattle, 14 Caress, 16 Colon, 18 Aisle.</p>										<p><b>SU DO KU</b></p> <p><b>YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>8</td><td>7</td><td>9</td><td>6</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>6</td><td>8</td><td>1</td><td>4</td><td>9</td><td>7</td><td>5</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>7</td><td>9</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>8</td><td>1</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td>4</td><td>2</td><td>9</td><td>3</td><td>1</td><td>6</td><td>8</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>9</td><td>8</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>4</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>6</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>8</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>4</td><td>9</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>7</td><td>5</td><td>9</td><td>8</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>8</td><td>3</td><td>6</td><td>4</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>7</td><td>9</td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>9</td><td>4</td><td>7</td><td>6</td><td>3</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>8</td></tr> </table> <p><b>CALENDAR</b></p> <p>DECEMBER 6, 2024, FRIDAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shaka Sarnat 1946</li> <li>Margheesh Shaka 15</li> <li>Margheesh Shivakshi 21</li> <li>Hijab 1446</li> <li>Shukla Paksha Tithi 5, up to 12.08 pm</li> <li>Dhruva Yoga up to 10.43 am</li> <li>Shavan Nakshatra up to 5.19 pm</li> <li>Moon enters Aquarius sign 5.07 am</li> <li>Panchak start 5.07 am</li> </ul>										4	5	1	3	8	7	9	6	2	2	6	8	1	4	9	7	5	3	3	7	9	2	5	6	8	1	4	7	4	2	9	3	1	6	8	5	9	8	5	6	7	4	2	3	1	6	1	3	8	2	5	4	9	7	1	2	7	5	9	8	3	4	6	8	3	6	4	1	2	5	7	9	5	9	4	7	6	3	1	2	8	<p><b>FORECAST</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>CITY</th> <th>MAX</th> <th>MIN</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Chandigarh</td><td>26</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr><td>New Delhi</td><td>26</td><td>07</td></tr> <tr><td>Amritsar</td><td>24</td><td>07</td></tr> <tr><td>Bathinda</td><td>28</td><td>07</td></tr> <tr><td>Jalandhar</td><td>25</td><td>07</td></tr> <tr><td>Ludhiana</td><td>26</td><td>08</td></tr> <tr><td>Bhivani</td><td>26</td><td>09</td></tr> <tr><td>Hisar</td><td>26</td><td>06</td></tr> <tr><td>Sirsa</td><td>27</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Dharamsala</td><td>23</td><td>06</td></tr> <tr><td>Manali</td><td>15</td><td>02</td></tr> <tr><td>Shimla</td><td>18</td><td>08</td></tr> <tr><td>Srinagar</td><td>14</td><td>-02</td></tr> <tr><td>Jammu</td><td>23</td><td>09</td></tr> <tr><td>Kargil</td><td>06</td><td>-08</td></tr> <tr><td>Leh</td><td>04</td><td>-08</td></tr> <tr><td>Dehradun</td><td>24</td><td>08</td></tr> <tr><td>Mussoorie</td><td>16</td><td>07</td></tr> </tbody> </table>										CITY	MAX	MIN	Chandigarh	26	12	New Delhi	26	07	Amritsar	24	07	Bathinda	28	07	Jalandhar	25	07	Ludhiana	26	08	Bhivani	26	09	Hisar	26	06	Sirsa	27	10	Dharamsala	23	06	Manali	15	02	Shimla	18	08	Srinagar	14	-02	Jammu	23	09	Kargil	06	-08	Leh	04	-08	Dehradun	24	08	Mussoorie	16	07
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The Tribune ESTABLISHED IN 1881

BJP all the way

Party shows allies who's the boss in Maharashtra

IN the end, all that outgoing Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde managed to do was to delay the inevitable. He tried hard to punch above his weight, but the BJP had too many aces up its sleeve. In last month's Assembly elections, the BJP-led Mahayuti had recorded a thumping victory... Shinde's fate was practically sealed when his Shiv Sena faction ended up with only 57 seats, not even half the tally of the saffron party...



TRYSYS AND TURNS JULIO RIBEIRO

TWELVE days after the BJP-led Mahayuti's spectacular victory in the Maharashtra Assembly elections, Devendra Fadnavis has been sworn in as the Chief Minister. One would have expected celebratory fireworks after the runaway success...



IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT: Devendra Fadnavis has taken over from Eknath Shinde (right) as the CM.

Shinde, who broke away from his party, the Shiv Sena, on Fadnavis' prompting and formed his own faction to head a BJP-mentored government, felt that he was entitled to continue in that role. But the BJP got 132 of the 288 seats, whereas its allies, the Shiv Sena (Shinde) and the NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) got 57 and 41 seats, respectively.

He is far more intelligent than Shinde and more capable of plotting political moves. He was the Chief Minister from 2014 to 2019, and a very successful one at that. He concentrated on the development of infrastructure and did not interfere too much in the day-to-day working of police stations...

RSS sanyamsethaks played an important role in the BJP's victory, particularly in Vidarbha.

Shinde being reluctant to join the government and only promising to support it from the outside. If that had happened, Ajit and his NCP faction would have enhanced their bargaining power in the government. With his party's 41 seats, he can provide stability...

Groundwater crisis

Can Punjab and Haryana reverse the decline?

PUNJAB and Haryana are on the brink of a groundwater crisis that could jeopardise not only the region's agricultural backbone but also the nation's food security. Recent data from the Central Ground Water Board paints a grim picture: Punjab's Stage of Groundwater Extraction (SoE) stands at a staggering 163.70%, while Haryana follows closely with 135.74%.

There are no personal sympathies in politics. -Margaret Thatcher

Shop at any cost till you drop

LALIT MOHAN

THE Black Friday fever, an affliction that has its origin in the US, is catching on in India as well. Newspapers in some of the bigger cities carried large advertisements in the last week of November of special 'sales' to mark this event. In America, this is the day when shoppers go into a discount-driven frenzy to buy whatever they can lay their hands upon...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Radicalism rears its ugly head

Apropos of 'Cowardly attack', Sukhbir Badal had a narrow escape as a militant tried to assassinate him at the Golden Temple while he was performing 'aesus' to atone for his sins. The attack has evoked condemnation in the strongest possible terms from across the political spectrum...

Government must remain vigilant

Refer to 'Cowardly attack'; the attack on former Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal was foisted by the alacrity shown by ASI Jasbir Singh and others. It is disturbing that Sukhbir, who is being protected by Z-plus security, was attacked outside the Golden Temple. It is rightly stated in the editorial that radical elements are hell-bent on disturbing peace in the state...

ASI saved the day

With reference to 'Cowardly attack'; the assassination attempt on Sukhbir Singh Badal has sent shockwaves across the state. It also reveals that extremists are apparently still active in Punjab. To nip the evil in the bud, this attack needs to be condemned by all. Strict rules need to be made by the Golden Temple authorities and the district administration so that no one dares to carry weapons inside or around its holy precincts...

Politics, religion shouldn't be mixed

Apropos of 'Hope for a reset in Akali politics', the punishment awarded to Sukhbir Badal and others is inadequate, considering how Sikh sentiments were hurt by the decision of the SAD. Sukhbir not only opposed right-thinking people of Punjab but also left no stone unturned in justifying the decision of the ruling class. The Akali Dal must refrain from meddling in the affairs of the Sikhs, more so in matters concerning the Akal Takht, which is the temporal and spiritual seat of the Sikhs...

Ensure regular cleaning of nullah

Apropos of 'Civil society leads'; the fundamental right of humans to live a healthy life has been ignored collectively by polluting industries, the government and the pollution control board. It is shameful that people have to protest for a clean-up of the toxic Buddha Nullah in Ludhiana. How can the government ignore court orders and funds approved for the rejuvenation of the nullah? Lack of seriousness, pressure of industrial tycoons and the pollution control board's inaction have led to the present situation...

World must support ICC's efforts

With reference to 'Israel scrambles for support to counter ICC warrants'; the International Criminal Court (ICC) warrants against Israeli PM Netanyahu and his aides mark a pivotal moment in holding leaders accountable for crimes against humanity. The Gaza genocide demands not just condemnation but also prompt and decisive global action. The international community, including non-signatories to the Rome Statute, must support the ICC's efforts to ensure justice. As a champion of non-violence, India must lend its voice to the call for just actions. Only through collective action can we ensure that perpetrators like Netanyahu are brought to justice to restore faith in international law and prevent crimes against vulnerable people.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

LAHORE, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1924

A clash of conferences
THE Punjab Provincial Conference meets today under circumstances at once the gravest and the most auspicious in its history. Except for a brief period in 1918 and 1919, the relations between the two principal communities in the province have never in recent years been anything else than strained. But never since the Lucknow pact have they been really so bad as now. One single fact will show how far the process of estrangement has gone. The Khulafat Conference, which ordinarily meets in the same city as the Congress, is, in the present case, being held not at Lahore, the place where the Provincial Conference meets, but at Amritsar; and is being held simultaneously with the latter. It was hoped at one time that by earnest representation, this collision should be averted, but the hope has been frustrated. Not only so, it is a practical certainty that with a few exceptions, no leading Mahomedan of the province will participate in the proceedings of the Provincial Conference, whether as an active worker or a member of the Reception Committee or as a delegate. The most extraordinary part of the thing is that the very men who are thus standing aloof from the Provincial Conference, in spite of strenuous attempts to make them join it, are and have always been loud in their complaint about the Congress being a Hindu organisation. What else can it be, so far as its personnel are concerned, if in spite of the catholicity of its constitution and of its membership being equally open to all communities, none but Hindus will join it in large or even substantial numbers?

# How tuberculosis destabilises the mental moorings of patients

TB is stigmatised due to the fear of contagiousness, association with poverty, and unhealthy behaviour. This leads to both social and self-stigma, which leads to mental health challenges. These mental health issues cause hopelessness, despair, and impaired decision-making skills

Chapal Mehra  
Lancelot Pinto

In 2022, 2.42 million Indians were diagnosed with tuberculosis. A silent crisis, TB is associated with a deep stigma, and those affected have stories of being ostracised and mistreated by families, communities, and even the health system. All of this has a significant impact on the mental health of those fighting TB. In truth, TB and mental illness are co-epidemics.

Evidence suggests that people with mental health issues are more likely to develop TB. Also, TB-related stigma adversely impacts a TB-affected individual's mental health from diagnosis through treatment and its side effects. TB-related mental health issues also significantly diminish an individual's quality of life.

Why does this happen? TB is stigmatised due to the fear of contagiousness, association of the disease with poverty, and unhealthy behaviour. This leads to both social and self-stigma, which leads to mental health challenges. These mental health issues lead to general feelings of hopelessness, despair, and impaired decision-making skills, which can also lead the individual to lose hope in recovery, not be able to follow medical advice, discontinue treatment, etc.

## Physical scars

TB treatment is long and comes with extreme side effects. This leads to several mental health issues that affect the individual but sometimes even families who are providing care. Those affected see changes in physical appearance, extreme side effects from rashes to psychotic episodes, and lose self-confidence. It comes as no surprise that the mental toll often parallels the physical damage. Up to 84% of patients with TB have concomitant depression.

It's important for policy and programmes of care in TB and mental health is bidirectional. While the TB stigma, prolonged treatment, and adverse side effects can have deleterious effects on an individual's mental health, poor mental health can also predispose a person to TB. A weakened immune system known to be associated with mental stress and depression possibly contributes to vulnerability. In addition, addiction to tobacco, alcohol, and narcotics, all associated with mental health disorders, has been associated with a high incidence of TB, suggesting a causal association. The global burden of disease study estimates that in 2017, 197.3 million (95% UI 178.4-216.4) Indians had mental health disorders, making such persons a sizable TB high-risk population.

Standards of care in TB now mandate screening for diabetes and HIV infection among those diagnosed. Shouldn't we also screen for depression and other mental health issues? In a global survey of national TB programmes (NTP's) of 26 countries, it was found that only two NTPs included routine screening for any mental disorder, four assessed alcohol or drug use, and five had standard protocols for the co-management of disorders.

India needs to lead the way with a comprehensive framework and policy on TB and mental health. This should incorporate mental health screening as



A patient is examined at a TB hospital in Gauhati, Assam.

part of TB care. Studies have used simple questionnaires to screen all patients with TB at the time of diagnosis and these have yielded a good sensitivity. These questionnaires can be self-administered, or administered by community health workers or DOTS providers. Offering psychological support during treatment should also be a standard of care, with the knowledge that treatment can be arduous and stressful.

## Screening for mental stress

Offering mental health supportive services is needed not only from the perspective of the individual patient, but also from a perspective of arresting TB transmission. Studies have demonstrated that those with unaddressed mental health disorders are less likely to adhere to treatment, more likely to drop out of the treatment programme, and have a higher risk of poorer outcomes.

Once screened, we need to address the need for psychological support. While the challenges of limited personnel numbers remain, multiple studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of remote digital therapies such as cognitive behaviour therapy for mild depression. App-based solutions, augmented with artificial intelligence, have been

promising. India could leverage smartphone penetration to deliver such services if they are not available locally. As is the case for most community-based mental health interventions, we need to move out of hospitals and deliver such services close to communities.

There is also an urgent need to engage with communities not just to be spokespersons but also work with those affected through support groups and informational support both to affected individuals and families. This has been done successfully in certain small experiments but now needs to be expanded at a national level to create community-based support systems and destigmatize mental health and TB. The community needs to be stakeholders at all levels in policy and programme design.

When care needs to be escalated, pathways for early referral to psychiatrists and prompt initiation of treatment need to be in place. This is likely to be challenging, considering the dearth of psychiatrists in the country. Given the magnitude of the burden of mental health disorders in the country, training more psychiatrists to serve an unmet need needs to be prioritised.

We cannot eliminate TB from India unless we comprehensively address the

**Mental health support is needed not only from the perspective of the individual but also to arrest TB transmission. Studies have demonstrated that those with mental disorders are less likely to adhere to treatment, more likely to drop out, and have a higher risk of poorer outcomes**

mental health care needs of TB-affected individuals. Addressing the intersection of TB and mental health demands a collaborative and comprehensive approach. Policymakers must focus on creating integrated policies that provide mental health (MH) support. They also need to allocate resources and prioritise MH services within TB programmes. We need to start by recognising that TB and mental health are commodities, and the integration of mental health care in TB care is needed at every step of the TB care cascade.

(Chapal Mehra is an independent public health consultant; Lancelot Pinto is a consultant pulmonologist and an epidemiologist at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai; lance.pinto@gmail.com)



The Institute of Mental Health Eragadda in Hyderabad. FILE PHOTO

## Why mental health patients continue to stay in institutions after rehab?

Snehal Mutha

On a rainy September morning in Karjat, near Mumbai, 25 patients from the Regional Mental Hospital (RMH), Yerwada, arrived at the Shradha Rehabilitation Centre, run by an NGO, to be reunited with their families. Among the patients was Lukhi, a woman in her 40s. Lukhi was brought to the RMH in 2016 and lived there for eight years, though she was ready to be discharged within a year.

Lukhi's is not an isolated case. Hundreds continue as residents of government-run mental health institutions for years across India, even after completing treatment, experts and activists say. Last year, the National Human Rights Commission stated that over 2,000 patients who were fit to be discharged continued to remain at 47 government mental healthcare institutions. The NHRC report states: "None of the institutes have taken effective and long-term measures to ensure that a mentally ill person can exercise his right to unfettered community living."

In 2022, Mumbai-based psychiatrist Harish Shetty filed a petition in the Bombay High Court, taking up the matter of a woman who had been a resident of the Regional Mental Hospital, Thane, for 12 years. His plea said that this was a violation of the provisions of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, and also violated the rights of the individual. He said families must be kept engaged throughout, and the process should ensure patients return

**Hundreds continue as residents of government-run mental health institutions for years across India, even after completing treatment**

home as soon as treatment is completed.

Most patients of mental healthcare institutions are brought in by families who do not have access to mental healthcare in their hometowns, are unable to care for their loved ones, or are found wandering. While some get treated and rejoin their families, others remain at institutions for years or even decades. Under the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017, a person cannot be admitted to a hospital/mental health institute for more than 90 days. This admission can be extended, or the patient can be readmitted for up to 90 days in cases of patients who still require care, but the State's Mental Health Review Board (MHRRB) has to review these cases. But in practice, the law is often not implemented, say experts.

Mumbai-based psychiatrist Swarali Kondwilkar said institutions do contact families of patients when they have their details, but when patients from other cities/States are involved, this may be neglected. "The institution does not have the will to go the extra mile and find the family. Many families lack the resources to travel and find their relatives. In some of these cases, it is assumed that the patient is abandoned." Language is also a barrier in several cases. In some cases, the patients remain because they have nowhere to go.

Families are often overwhelmed by the process of seeking treatment and caregiving, and acceptance of a diagnosis of a mental illness does not come easily to many, said Padmavati Ramachandran, director, Schizophrenia Research Foundation, Chennai. "Sigma continues to persist against persons with mental illnesses. Families may be afraid to allow relatives to mingle. When this continues, the caregiver also starts withdrawing from social activities; the whole family is then affected and may feel that leaving the patient at an institute is their only choice."

## THE SCIENCE QUIZ

### What is universal healthcare?

Ramya Kannan

On December 12, the world will observe International Universal Health Coverage Day, and nations will dust off their old promises to provide universal health coverage for their populations. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) encompasses equal access for all to good quality health services and affordability for all. Here's some trivia to update your knowledge of UHC.

**QUESTION 1**  
Primary healthcare is the fulcrum of UHC, at the very root. When did the World Health Organization embrace PHC as a part of its goal of health for all?

**QUESTION 2**  
The British National Health Service (NHS) was an early forerunner of healthcare for all, with

comprehensive provision and free services to all. When was the NHS launched?

**QUESTION 3**  
One American President attempted twice to establish UHC in the United States and failed both times. Who was this?

**QUESTION 4**  
The U.S. government claims it is the largest payer of healthcare in the United States, covering nearly 90 million Americans. What are the various insurance schemes through which it does this?

**QUESTION 5**  
In 2018, India launched the Aushman Bharat scheme as its path to reach UHC for its people. It was launched with two components: one was the setting up of a vast network of health and welfare centres delivering comprehensive primary health care. What was the second?

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



Visual: We all know who this is. Your question is: What is his link with UHC in the US? GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

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





THE GOAN EVERYDAY

Civilization began the first time an angry person cast a word instead of a rock. Sigmund Freud

# Fadnavis in driver's seat, but faces huge challenges

**D**evendra Fadnavis is finally in the saddle after taking oath as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra on Thursday ending the 12-day suspense as the wheels of the Mahayuti 2.0 government started to move. Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar took oath as deputy CMs at a grand ceremony at Azad Maidan in Mumbai on Thursday evening. The event, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several Union ministers and chief ministers of various states besides thousands of supporters had all the making of a gala political extravaganza. The ceremony was not bereft of drama. Shinde veered off-script launching into a speech thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, and also praising Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray, taking many by surprise. We wonder what that meant -- whether it's a sign of contentment or an outward expression to deceive onlookers.

Fadnavis sits in the CM's chair for the third time and would certainly hold better confidence after the roller-coaster second tenure which lasted for a few days. This time around, his government is expected to be stable with 132 MLAs in the 288-member house. In 2019, BJP had 105 while in 2014 its tally was 122. Through the years, Fadnavis has certainly mastered the tricks of the political trade, but despite the comfort in numbers, he has monumental challenges ahead.

For one, the BJP has made lofty election promises despite the debt crisis the State is facing. There is a baggage of the past that is haunting, and it is growing bigger by the day. Fadnavis will have to do a fine balance between financial stability, growth, and demands. The BJP may have tried to placate allies with deputy chief ministerial positions, but delivery would still be the key. Fadnavis would be closely watched on how he manages coalition politics and administration because there are a lot of promises to keep.

Shinde may have heaped praise on Modi and Amit Shah, but the BJP will be wary of his political ambitions. The Maharashtra government formation was taking time because there was indecisiveness over leadership. Ajit Pawar too comes with aspirations. There is an unpredictable combination at the top and that makes it all the more difficult for Fadnavis to negotiate.

Besides fiscal balance, Maharashtra is grappling with unemployment and agricultural distress. Successive governments have not managed to take a stranglehold over these issues, and for the promise shown by the BJP in the build-up to this election, there will be high expectations from Fadnavis. The downsides of coalition governments are about satisfying partners and meeting their, sometimes outrageous, demands. In a desperate attempt to keep allies in good humour, leaders remain handicapped and delivery suffers.

The new chief minister will have to carefully evaluate existing programmes and consider a pivot towards initiatives that encourage entrepreneurial growth, provide vocational training, and address skill shortages. By fostering an environment conducive to business and job creation, Fadnavis could work to alleviate the unemployment crisis while bolstering Maharashtra's economic foundation. But even before he gets there, he will have to do some hard bargaining for portfolios because the demands of allies would be something the new CM will have to ponder.

There is a lot at stake and much to prove. Fadnavis's leadership skills and ability to maintain friendships with allies will be tested this time.

# Umpire who doesn't seem to be playing fair

It is true that a large section of the voters subscribe to the idea that there is something wrong with the EVM



The writer is Co-Founder, SatyaHindi.com, and author of Hindu Rashtira

ASHUTOSH

India is heading towards an electoral crisis. And if this crisis is not dealt with in time then India's election process will lose its legitimacy and consequently, India's democracy will be in peril. This question has become serious after the Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Haryana. These are the two states where the INDIA alliance was expected to win easily, but the results have stunned members of the Opposition and civil society. Even political pundits and pollsters are astounded and shocked. Now, the Congress party officially has decided to raise the issue of alleged manipulations in electoral process.

The party and its alliance partners in Maharashtra, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) were dismayed with the margin of victory for Mahayuti and the success rate of the BJP in particular. Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, in fact, within two hours of counting had questioned the veracity of the results and hinted that there was something wrong with the EVMs. Congress leaders also joined the chorus and alleged that the EVMs have been manipulated or hacked, though no evidence was offered. Social media has witnessed a few visuals in which members of a village in Maharashtra were protesting that though the village was a supporter of the Congress, the results did not reflect that. Now Sharad Pawar has also said that democracy is being undermined by the electoral process.

Similar sentiments were expressed after the Haryana assembly elections. This was the election in which everyone -- including BJP leaders of the state -- had predicted a huge victory for the Congress, but results were totally contradictory. The BJP leaders who were demoralised in the morning of the counting day could not believe their eyes when by 10am trends projected a big win for the party. Privately, many leaders and political analysts confessed to the author that there was something wrong, but no one had proof.

This is a good situation for the country to be in. Questioning the legitimacy of the EVM is very old. BJP stalwart I. K. Advani had raised serious questions



about the EVM just after the defeat of the BJP in the 2009 general elections. He not only held a press conference but also wrote an introduction when his party colleague J V L Narasimha wrote a book about the efficacy of the EVM. It was a BJP MP, Subramaniam Swamy, who took the EVM issue to Supreme Court and consequently the Supreme Court had ordered that VVPAT should be used along with the EVM to annul any doubt about the functioning of the machine.

It is also a fact that there are a few elections whose results are difficult to comprehend. When, soon after demonetisation, more than a hundred citizens died standing in queues to get their money from the banks and ATMs the country had to face untold misery due to withdrawal of 85 per cent currency from the daily circulation, the BJP won 312 seats in the UP assembly election in 2017. The scale of the BJP's victory in UP was unprecedented and many political pundits were astounded by its success. For them the victory defied logic. Similarly after the MP and Chhattisgarh elections in December 2023, in which BJP won with a massive margin when there was almost a consensus that the BJP would lose both the states, there was disbelief and questions were raised whether the EVMs were manipulated to ensure a BJP victory. The BJP and the Election Commission rubbished these charges. It is also true that except for anecdotal experiences no concrete proof was ever offered to prove that EVMs had been manipulated.

But it is also true that a large section of the voters subscribe to the idea that there is something wrong with the EVM. During the parliamentary elections CSIS asked voters a question if the ruling party can manipulate EVM to win elections, and the results are for

everyone to see -- 17% said that EVM can be manipulated, 28% were of the opinion that EVM can be manipulated upto a certain extent whereas 11% responded that not much can be done. Only, 16% were convinced that EVM can't be manipulated. Data shows that approximately 56% respondents had doubts about the integrity of the electronic voting machines. Their accusations and allegations were never answered with alacrity by the EC.

The EC's conduct is alarming. It seems that for the EC, the Opposition has no role to play in a democracy. For the EC the opposition is not a stakeholder at all, and only the ruling party that is the BJP is a legitimate player in the elections. The Opposition has been aghast to see that EC made no effort to stop the brazen communal campaign in the Parliamentary elections. The prime minister openly called Muslims 'infiltrators' but the EC maintained a royal silence. In one of the most bizarre steps, for the first time in India's electoral history, the EC did not issue notice to the offenders, that is the prime minister and Rahul Gandhi but to the presidents of respective parties that is the BJP and the Congress.

The EC is there to provide a level playing field to all the contestants and parties. The EC in the last few years has brazenly sided with the government. It entertains no complaints against the opposition parties and answers no questions. In Parliamentary elections and later in Assembly elections serious anomalies have been witnessed between the votes polled and votes counted, but EC did not make any effort to explain the reason. That is why today the EC's credibility and integrity is being questioned and it is being said that the umpire who is expected to play fair is playing on behalf of the ruling party. -- PFF



In Parliamentary elections and later in Assembly elections serious anomalies have been witnessed between the votes polled and votes counted, but EC did not make any effort to explain the reason

## THE INBOX >>

### Bank deposits are proving to be a reliable support

Since October, the ongoing decline in the stock market has resulted in investors losing Rs 47 lakh crore in wealth. On September 27, the total market capitalization of companies in the market was Rs 477.90 lakh crore, which has now reduced to Rs 430.60 lakh crore. Increasing uncertainty and apprehension in the market have driven investors back to banks. According to data released by the RBI, deposits in banks surged to Rs 2.35 lakh crore in the second fortnight of October. Before the Sensex hit a record high, total bank deposits in the second fortnight of August were around Rs 215.50 lakh crore. In the first fortnight of September, there was a decline of Rs 45,000 crore in total bank deposits. By the end of September, a phase of market decline began, during which bank deposits started to rise. In October, total deposits in banks reached Rs 2.90 lakh crore. Thus, in the face of uncertain market risks, Indian banks are perceived as a safe haven by investors. For investors affected by market risks, bank deposits are proving to be a reliable support. **DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR, Mumbai**

### Mapping Panaji's drainage network need of the hour

Before the monsoon, the Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IP-SCDL) had desilted two Portuguese-era stormwater drains, situated between the market and Old Education Department building and from the Church Square to Custom House. Decades of accumulated silt had reduced the carrying capacity of rainwater from Alinho and other areas to the Mandov River. This regularly led to water-logging in Panaji. In a letter it was suggested that the IPSCDL should identify and locate the network of drains (TGE 3.4.2024). Finally, the work of mapping Panaji's 112-km-long drainage network

### Mum on Sunburn, minister stands exposed

Sudin Dhavalikar, Minister for New and Renewable Energy and Housing while speaking to reporters on Wednesday was seen refusing to comment on Sunburn and claiming that the decision to hold the above festival rests exclusively with the government of Goa and no one can challenge it. Now, in which world Dhavalikar is living today and why can't anyone challenge the government's decision in Goa? Aren't we Goans living in a democratic country or are we living in a fundamentalist country like Afghanistan, if not Syria? Well, when Dhavalikar can speak against other people's clothes and those wearing bikinis on Goa beaches then why not on Sunburn? Or is it because he knows that if he goes to say anything against Sunburn then he will be unceremoniously kicked out from the cabinet? I think Dhavalikar should henceforth stop interfering in other people's personal affairs, i.e. eating/dressing habits etc and giving his own big lectures about the importance of preserving one's own 'culture' if he cannot utter a single word on controversial Sunburn. **JERRY FERNADES, Saligao**

interesting piece from Yiren Ren about how music can change how you feel about your past. Yes, it is true, how a particular song can bring back a flood of memories of the past. The Bridal Special at your wedding for instance, can carry you back in time, to your emotions and feelings at that point of time. It can be quite painful though, in the absence of your spouse. But yes, music has the power to change our thinking of the past and our perception of life in the future. In the meanwhile, the first line of the opening of Shakespeare's play, 'Twelfth Night' comes to mind. 'If music be the food of love, play on', although it was to portray the frustration of the character in the play. We could adapt to the situation and take it in the positive sense. Let the music play.....

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA, Mumbai

### Has the utopia of tech capitalism gone wrong?

Indian YouTuber Ishan Sharma was an X post calling San Francisco often hailed as the tech hub of the USA -- "the most unsafe place" he has been with. With the post, he shared a video showing a few individuals sprawled across sidewalks, one appearing incapacitated, struggling to hold himself upright. "This is San Francisco," Sharma wrote. "The tech capital of America. Home to the world's brightest minds and the biggest tech companies. Half of the streets are filled with homeless, mentally unstable, high on drugs or a combination of all, gun violence and car break-ins are so common. Theft at an all time high. Zombie-like people walking on the streets." He also asked, "It is the utopia of tech capitalism gone wrong. Why can't this be fixed? Fed up with these vices and driven into loneliness, many in the West are now turning towards Hindu culture. In countries like England, Germany, and Russia, there is a growing fascination with Hindu culture." **SAGAR SHIRODKAR, Via email**

## OPEN SPACE >>

### Traffic police must wear body cams for accountability

Traffic cops are expected to strictly enforce traffic rules. However it is learnt that traffic cops of the Anjuna Traffic cell were reportedly shunted for issuing challan to "influential tourists". It has become a common feature in the state that when a person is apprehended in traffic violation, the violator calls up some influential person on the mobile in order to direct the traffic cop on duty not to issue the challan. For the traffic cops to perform their duties without fear or favour, it is vital for them to wear Body-Worn Cameras (BWCs). It is pertinent to note that the Goa traffic cell has reportedly procured several body-worn cameras recently in order to bring accountability and transparency to police work. These compact devices are designed to capture audio and video recordings during interactions between the cops and the public. It serves as a deterrent against unruly behaviour and dispels allegations against traffic police by traffic violators. A traffic cop needs to activate the camera while interacting with violators. The recordings ensure that neither the cops nor the citizens suffer injustice. **ADELMO FERNADES, Vasco**



Send your letters to us at editor@thegoan.net. Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location

IN THE LIMELIGHT



GETTY IMAGES

# Critical measures: should film reviews on social media platforms be banned?

In a post-internet world, the know-how of film criticism is scattered but accessible, and the growing passion for movies has enabled audiences to read films more sensibly. Therefore, a gag order on a platform censors every voice, good or bad

Bhuvanesh Chandar

Earlier this week, the Tamil Film Active Producers Association (TFAPA) filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court, seeking a ban on movie reviews on social media for the first three days of release. The counsel representing the TFAPA listed three reasons that necessitated the request – review bombing through reviews shot in cinema theatres, stage-managing fake reviews by purchasing bulk tickets, and intentionally propagating a negative image of the film through fake social media accounts.

These are pivotal concerns that need redressal and creators must be protected from targeted harassment. Paid reviews are real and, as Tapsee Pannu recently quoted Shah Rukh Khan as saying, are nothing more than advertisement spaces for sale. And so when the said space is used to unfairly demean a film, a business, or an entity, the legislature needs to step in and protect the affected parties. However, concerns also arise about the apparent discrepancies in how film chambers navigate these issues; like the ambiguity in using terms like 'reviewers'; the irony in how YouTube reviews are used when favourable and flattering; and who is referred to as a 'reviewer'.

**Who is a reviewer?**

Every time a star film that had promised big bites the dust, we are reminded of the times when the filmmaking ecosystem

tended to pride itself on one key aspect – that audiences have the final say and that the industry respects their judgement.

Closely observing recent discourses paints a startling picture of the idea of film criticism that remains. You exit a cinema hall on a Friday afternoon and are faced with a mike-borne journalist asking for your review – an industry-propagated technique used in post-release campaigns. Or you are an independent YouTube reviewer shooting a video review for your portal. If you shower praises on the film, it can be used to further promote the title; if you criticise it in a language the makers deem offensive, you might be slapped with a defamation suit or a copyright strike. Or, as a recent example showed, the partner of the film's leading man would label you a pawn of a larger 'propaganda group'. The very people who empower the audiences as 'kings' strip away their powers to decide for themselves.

A star like Vijay Deverakonda might argue that his film *Family Star* was a victim of review bombings, and Jyotika might have evidence to call the *Kangana* debacle the handiwork of Suriya haters, but refraining from specifically calling out these fake accounts or nefarious internet entities serves no purpose or change.

Instead, it suggests an attitude of intolerance towards criticism. Calling these reviews the work of a homogeneous group called 'reviewers' or 'social media reviewers' also adds to the woes of the industry's favourite scapegoat – traditional film critics. From being

stigmatised as a profession as immoral paupers to being denounced as the killers of a 'creator's child', the film critic has always been the film industry's favourite punching bag to vent its shortcomings.

Pensiveness, insight, and the ability to read films and write incisive pieces that celebrate and propagate film appreciation are what the pundits claim differentiate a critic. But in a democratised post-internet world, the know-how of film criticism is scattered but accessible, and the growing passion for movies has enabled audiences to read films more sensibly. In the competitive media space of today, the passion and resolve it takes to make film criticism a profession, build experience over time, and sharpen said skills are what sets apart a film critic from a film buff with a blog. In all their steps to tackle abusive trolls, film producers have maintained that their steps protect the interests of sensible reviews, but one wonders who the adjudicator of reviewing sensibilities is. A gag order censors every voice, good or bad.

Read the finer lines of TFAPA's writ petition and you sense a genuisness towards critics from notable newspapers and online portals, "who provide constructive criticism." But what confidence does an ecosystem that attacks one section of the audience's freedom of speech instil in others? In the past, names like Kairam Vashi and Anol Kamral have been attacked for their unfavourable reviews. The irony is in how producers who claim to stand by noteworthy newspapers and portals,

pigeonhole such critics as 'niche' and offer other film-related opportunities like interviews to the same sensationalist YouTube media they claim need regulation.

The industry believes that promotions and reviews, positive or negative, certainly influences the opinion of the audiences. Introspectively, even if film critics are shielded from any future censorship, a gag order on platforms meant for all would disrupt the quiet in an ecosystem that both film producers and film critics depend upon.

**The law's reaction**

From what transpired at the Madras High Court during the hearing of the TFAPA's arguments, one is certain that the court stands against curtailing free speech, lending an ear only to guidelines that can keep online platforms safe from targeted attacks and intentional review bombings. Earlier, in 2021, in hearing a petition to ban film reviews for seven days of the release, the Kerala High Court appointed an amicus curiae, who suggested a few regulations for movie reviews, including a 48-hour cooling-off period; avoiding spoilers in reviews; avoiding disrespectful language, personal attacks, or derogatory remarks; and constituting a dedicated portal to resolve grievances related to review bombings.

How the Madras High Court might navigate TFAPA's complaints remains to be seen, but the ambiguous usage of terms by the producers' body does raise concerns about censorship.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

K. Subramanian  
Upendran

"Here is the 'wood interdental stimulator' you wanted."

"Wood interdental stimulator! A very long name for a toothpick, don't you think?"

"What's in a name?", said Shakespeare."

"A lot actually. Last week, you called a pencil 'a portable, hand-held communications inscriber.' And today you call a toothpick, 'a wood interdental stimulator'. It all sounds crazy."

"It does, doesn't it? It's called the language of 'doublespeak.'"

"Doublespeak?"

"Yes, and the purpose of doublespeak is to only pretend to communicate."

"What do you mean 'pretend to communicate'? You mean it actually doesn't?"

"No, it doesn't. Doublespeak is the kind of language that is ambiguous or obscure."

"You mean it's like the kind of language politicians use?"

"It's not just politicians who indulge in doublespeak. Everyone makes use of it. Advertisers, bureaucrats,..."

"Can you give some examples?"

"When the U.S. invaded Grenada in the 1980's, it didn't call it an invasion. The Government announced that there had been a 'pre-dawn vertical insertion.'"

"But who would understand something like 'pre-dawn vertical insertion?'"

"That's exactly the point. No one is expected to understand it. You see the aim of doublespeak is to make the bad appear good, the simple appear complex, the unpleasant, attractive..."

"So instead of saying there are lots of poor people in India, I would..."

"...Say, there are many 'fiscal underachievers.' Or you could refer to them as 'economically non-affluent.'"

"Economically non-affluent! Sounds very impressive."

"One of the aims of doublespeak is to make things sound impressive. For example, instead of saying our roads are full of potholes, we could say there are many 'pavement deficiencies.' And if a patient dies because the doctor gave him the wrong treatment..."

"...Something which happens everywhere."

"Then the doctor could say it was a 'diagnostic misadventure of a high magnitude.'"

"And what about the poor patient?"

"Well, he 'merely failed to fulfil his wellness potential.'"

"His 'wellness potential?'"

"Well, you'd better get used to it because doublespeak is becoming a part of our everyday life. Just look around you. Teachers are beginning to call themselves 'learning facilitators' or 'classroom educators.'"

"Stop, Stop! I think I've heard enough. And irregardless of what you..."

"Irregardless?"

"Yes, irregardless. And don't tell me the word doesn't exist, because I've heard it being used."

"It's used, all right. But it's considered substandard. 'Regardless' is the standard."

Published in *The Hindu* on May 3, 1994.

THE DAILY QUIZ

## The President of South Korea declared martial law and was forced to withdraw the decision. A quiz on some instances of martial law being imposed across the world

Radhika Santhanam

**QUESTION 1**

This liberal was once Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party. When he died, thousands mourned him and demanded that his legacy be recognised. The mourning soon turned into protests against the corrupt and repressive one-party rule, and soon, martial law was declared in Beijing. Name this leader, who China rehabilitated in 2005.

**QUESTION 2**

This Irish officer ordered martial law in most parts of a particular region in India following a bloody incident under British rule. He was assassinated by a revolutionary, who was played by Vicky Kaushal in a 2021 film. Who was this officer and who was the character played by Kaushal?

**QUESTION 3**

In 1978, soon after martial law was declared, security forces fired on a large protest at the Jaleh Square killing at least 100 people. This event led to the abolition of the monarchy in that country less than a year later. What is it known as?

**QUESTION 4**

In the 1900s, Hawaii spent three years under martial law since military officials doubted the loyalty of at least one third of its residents. After what incident did Hawaii suddenly wake up to this announcement and who were these residents?

**QUESTION 5**

X has been under martial law since 2022. The UN urged X to take a "compassionate and humane" approach to the enforcement of martial law after reports emerged that the men of X are defying orders to stay and were attempting to cross into neighbouring countries to claim asylum. Name X.



**Visual question:** This Chief of Army Staff was also Chief Martial Law Administrator. He went on to serve as President. Name him.

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:**

1. Nelson Mandela's birthname. **Ans: Rolihlahla**
  2. Nelson Mandela's nickname inspired from a popular novel about a hero with a secret identity. **Ans: The black pimpernel**
  3. The island where Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years in imprisonment. **Ans: Robben Island**
  4. This man shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mandela. **Ans: F.W. de Klerk**
  5. The movie in which Mandela appeared in a guest role. **Ans: Malcolm X**
- Visual:** The connection between Mandela and this flower. **Ans: It is named after him as Paravanda Nelson Mandela**
- Early Birds:** Rajib Ganguly| Rahul Nair| Dhruv Yadav| Jose Joji| Giselle Pulikkodan

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

## Word of the day

**Complaisant:** showing a cheerful willingness to do favours for others

**Synonyms:** obliging

**Usage:** He was a complaisant worker.

**Pronunciation:** newth./lev/ complaisantgro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /kəm'plæzənt/

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# Text & Context

THE HINDU

**NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**The delivery time of M-Now, Myntra's quick commerce service**

**30** minutes. Fashion and lifestyle e-commerce platform Myntra on Thursday announced the launch of its quick commerce service 'M-Now', which promises delivery within 30 minutes. In November, Myntra piloted M-Now in select pin codes of Bengaluru to test its feasibility.

**Srinagar's night temperature drops to season's lowest**

**-2.1** degrees Celsius. Cold conditions intensified in Kashmir as the minimum temperature settled below the freezing point across the valley, with a few places experiencing the season's coldest night. The city registered a low of -2.1 degrees Celsius on November 28 as well.

**The solar electricity contract signed by Meta with Invenery**

**760** MW. Meta Platforms Inc. announced a deal to buy green credits from four large U.S. solar energy projects that will help it meet its clean electricity goals. Meta signed four contracts with energy project developer Invenery for 760 MW of solar electricity.

**NHAI's special purpose vehicle to raise funds via green bonds**

**1,000** crore. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) said its special purpose vehicle DME Development Ltd. will raise ₹1,000 crore through green bonds to implement climate-friendly measures on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway project.

**The economic losses due to natural disasters in 2024**

**310** billion. In a year set to be declared the hottest on record, natural disasters caused \$310 billion in economic losses globally in 2024, as climate change increasingly takes its toll, Swiss Re said on Thursday.

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## Is Syria's Assad regime in danger?

What was the role of Russia in the Syrian civil war back in 2016? How was the Bashar al-Assad regime able to recapture Aleppo then? Who are the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and what is their connection to the al-Qaeda? How were the militants able to make such extensive territorial gains?

**EXPLAINER**

Stanly Johny

**The story so far:**

Islamist militants in Syria's northwest launched a surprise attack last week against the forces of President Bashar al-Assad and made dramatic territorial gains. The Syrian civil war, which broke out in 2011 amidst Arab Spring-inspired anti-government protests, had entered into a frozen stage in late 2016 after the regime recaptured most of its territories. There was relative calm, but no real peace in the Arab republic. With the latest clashes, peace has been broken and hot war has resumed.

**How has Syria's control map changed in the span of a week?**

In 2015, before Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to send troops to Syria, the Assad regime was on the brink of collapse. He had lost most of the population centres, except Damascus and the Alawite-dominated coastal cities. There were multiple rebel and jihadist factions such as the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda's Syria branch) and the Islamic State (IS). The IS was controlling eastern Syrian cities of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor as well as the ancient city of Palmyra. Al-Nusra and the Free Syrian Army were controlling parts of Idlib in the northwest. Other militant groups were controlling Hama, Homs, and even some neighbourhoods of Damascus. In the south, Daara and Quneitra were restive.

The Russian intervention played a pivotal role in turning around the civil war. While Kurdish militias, backed by the U.S., fought the IS in the east and in the Kurdish border towns, the Syrian army, backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, fought other rebel groups, recapturing lost territories. For example, by December 2016, more than a year after the Russian arrival, the regime retook Aleppo, Syria's second largest city and its commercial capital. The militants continued to hold on to Idlib when the war got frozen.

Last week, the rebels launched their offensive from Idlib. Their initial objective was to capture the western neighbourhoods of Aleppo. But the ease with which they pushed the regime forces out of Aleppo's suburbs prompted them to expand the scope of the offensive and march towards the city. Within days, they captured Aleppo. They have now entered Hama, a regime stronghold. In the northeast of Aleppo, militants have captured territories from Kurdish rebels. In less than a week, the Idlib militants have more than doubled the territories they hold.

**Who are the main actors?**

There are three main actors in Syria today. The most important actor is the regime, which is backed by Iran and Shia militias from Iraq and Russia. The second player is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is basically an umbrella militia group involving the People's Protection Forces (YPG), the main Syrian Kurdish militia that controls Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava). From the early stages of the civil war, the regime and the YPG had entered into a detente. The Kurds, who got their relative autonomy, and the regime forces stayed away from targeting each other. The third actor is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the main anti-government force that is in control of Idlib. The Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army, which is today called the Syrian National Army



**Dramatic offence:** Militants of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham drive along a street in al-Rashideen, Aleppo province, Syria on November 29. REUTERS

**THE GIST**

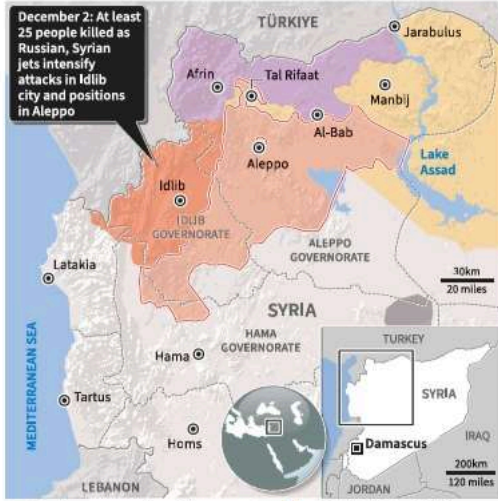
Islamist militants in Syria's northwest launched a surprise attack last week against the forces of President Bashar al-Assad and made dramatic territorial gains.

The HTS is led by Abu Mohammad al-Julani, a 42-year-old Syrian militant. Julani had moved to Iraq in his early 20s to fight the American occupation of the country (2003) and joined the al-Qaeda. When the al-Qaeda in Iraq was commanded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Julani emerged as one of his close lieutenants.

Without direct support from Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, Syria's troops were vulnerable. The militants, reportedly backed by Turkey, made use of that vulnerability and made swift advances to capture the whole of Aleppo.

**The extent of the militants' advance**

It took four years for Bashar al-Assad to recapture Aleppo in 2016. It took just four days for him to lose it to the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The regime faces a full-blown civil war, with Syria getting ready for another prolonged spell of bloodshed



(SNA), is practically a sidekick of the jihadist HTS. The ongoing offensive is led by the HTS, along with the SNA.

**What is HTS?**

The HTS is led by Abu Mohammad al-Julani, a 42-year-old Syrian militant. Julani had moved to Iraq in his early 20s to fight the American occupation of the country (2003) and joined the al-Qaeda. When the al-Qaeda in Iraq was commanded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Julani emerged as one of his close lieutenants. When Baghdadi decided to send a contingent of al-Qaeda jihadists across the border to Syria to fight President Assad after the civil war broke out, he chose Julani to lead the pack. He set up Jabhat al-Nusra. Later, Julani fell out with Baghdadi as the former wanted al-Nusra to join the Islamic State. Julani wanted to retain his group as an autonomous al-Qaeda branch in Syria. When the world's focus shifted towards the Islamic State, Julani stealthily built his

empire in Idlib. The Islamic State was defeated and Baghdadi was killed, but Julani emerged as the face of the anti-regime Syrian militancy. He first changed the name of al-Nusra to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. Later, the name was changed again to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) as he sought to distance his group from al-Qaeda — through the HTS never renounced its Islamist ideology. Over the years, Julani's men built a parallel state in Idlib. Julani is a U.S. designated terrorist, but, after establishing his rule over Idlib, he declared that his fight was against Mr. Assad, not against the U.S. He has not faced any major attacks from the U.S., which still has hundreds of soldiers in eastern Syria.

**Why did the militants attack now?** Julani had always said that bringing down the Assad regime was one of his objectives. The Syrian regime wanted to attack Idlib and recapture the governorate. But it could not have carried

out such an attack against an enclave of 3 million people without Russia's active support. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan staunchly opposed any offensive at Idlib, saying it would trigger another refugee influx into Turkey. This was also the time Russia's Mr. Putin and Mr. Erdogan entered into an entente. Russia forced Syria to accept a ceasefire, leaving Idlib in the hands of the HTS and the SNA. This led to the tense calm in Syria.

However, geopolitical dynamics have since shifted. Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Moscow is today preoccupied with the ongoing war, and has also withdrawn thousands of soldiers from Syria. During the height of the civil war, Qassem Soleimani, the charismatic Iranian Quds Force General, was in charge of organising and deploying Shia militias in Syria that fought the anti-regime militants. Gen. Soleimani was assassinated by the Americans in January 2020. Over the past year, several senior Iranian Generals were killed in Syria by Israeli air strikes. Hezbollah, which fought on the frontlines against the rebels during the early phase of the civil war, is today busy reorganising itself after months of direct fighting with Israel. Israel's repeated air strikes in Syria over the past several years have substantially weakened Iranian, regime and Hezbollah positions in the country. These geopolitical developments provided an opportunity for the militants to launch their offensive. Without direct support from Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, Syria's troops were vulnerable. The militants, reportedly backed by Turkey, made use of that vulnerability and made swift advances to capture the whole of Aleppo.

**What happens next?**

It took four years for Mr. Assad to recapture Aleppo in 2016. It took just four days for him to lose it to the HTS. This is an embarrassing setback for the regime. On December 5, the militants entered Hama, the central city. They are now likely to march towards Homs. The collapse of the regime forces in the north has reignited other smaller rebel groups elsewhere in the country who started attacking government positions, especially in the south. The regime faces a full-blown civil war. It's too early to rule out Mr. Assad, who survived a years-long civil war once. His regime has deep roots in the coastal regions and among the country's minorities. After the initial setback, regime forces are now coordinating with Iran for reinforcements. Thousands of fighters from Iraqi militias such as Kataib Hezbollah and Badr Organisation have already joined the battle. But the regime's inability to arrest the militant advances should set alarm bells ringing in Damascus. The militants on the other side sense a great opportunity in expanding their territorial control. Syria appears to be getting ready for another prolonged spell of bloodshed.

# Is Israel's war in Gaza putting the global order at peril?



**Navtej Sarna**  
served as India's envoy to the United States, Israel and the United Kingdom



**Trita Parsi**  
Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute in Washington, and author of books on Iran-U.S. relations

PARLEY

**N**early 400 days since the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel that led to the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, West Bank, and Lebanon, more than 43,000 have been killed, mostly civilians. Despite calls by the United Nations (UN) for action to address the humanitarian crisis; an International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict on the risk of genocide being perpetrated in Palestine; and warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military leader Mohammed Deif for alleged war crimes, there seems no let-up in the violence. Is Israel's war in Gaza putting the global order at peril? Navtej Sarna and Trita Parsi discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Subhasini Haidar. Edited excerpts:

**When it comes to global institutions, why is the world so polarised? In particular, what explains the policy of the U.S. on enforcing rules on Israel?**

**Trita Parsi:** Put simply, this is a genocide and we can see it happening live, on our phones. The *Lancet* estimates the toll to be over 1,86,000 because 43,000 is only the number of bodies that have been counted in hospitals. So, I'm not surprised by the world's outrage in comparison to what was felt over [Russia's invasion of] Ukraine. Roughly, 700 children were killed in Ukraine through Russian bombardment over two-and-a-half years. More than 20,000 children have been killed in Gaza in about a year already. The intensity of this exceeds anything we have seen in any modern war.

What is surprising is America's reaction. The Biden administration, in particular, has violated its own regulations to allow the Israeli government to do exactly what it wants. This has never happened before. The U.S. is shifting away from supporting the same international institutions, regulations, and laws that it played a crucial role in establishing. The first shift was away from international law to what it calls the "rules-based international order". The rules-based order is not centred on law; it is centred on rules, and it is unclear who makes those rules. In reality, it ends up being a coalition or a willing partnership of countries, mostly allies, which is not universally accepted or applicable. This is what we are seeing when it comes to the ICC warrants as well.

**Navtej Sarna:** The U.S. has a sort of umbilical relationship with Israel. The U.S. has treated Israel as if it is a part of the U.S. which needs to



A man holds the body of a child who was killed from shrapnel following an Israeli strike in Gaza. AFP

be protected at all costs. Now the protection is for strategic reasons, but also because Israel represents a sort of a moral burden. It is the Jewish homeland, and after the Holocaust, there is a need to protect all Israelis and not let them lose the homeland. In the view of the U.S., Israel is also a democracy, a vulnerable democracy in a very hard neighbourhood, the only democracy in West Asia. While it is unstated so far, Israel is also believed to be a nuclear power, and one that can be a deterrent against another potential nuclear power that could be Iran. Now there are some contradictions: Israel's democracy comes up against the fact that it has also been an occupying power and it is no longer vulnerable. But that has been overlooked because of the U.S.'s need to protect Israel for the other reasons I mentioned, particularly after the October 7 terror attacks by Hamas.

**Israel has said the ICC warrant makes no sense because it is not a member state of the ICC, much like how India isn't, and doesn't submit to its jurisdiction. Can a warrant still be issued against Prime Minister Netanyahu?**

**TP:** Of course it can, because Israel is conducting war crimes in another country's territory [Palestine]. This was an issue that the ICC had to address before taking up this issue.

**NS:** More than the ICC warrant, it is necessary to look at what has been done to international humanitarian law on the ground. Countries may react to the warrants one way or the other, but the sad part is that international humanitarian law has been flouted for months in [full] visibility of the world. Therefore, everybody has a responsibility to bear for allowing the [bombardment of Gaza to continue]. The U.S. has simply been putting up a diplomatic performance. If it really wanted to stop this, it could have.



Things are going to get worse, but there is going to be a tipping point in which a critical mass of countries will recognise that it is in their interest to have a functioning global order and effective institutions that help uphold international conventions and laws

**Why didn't India join the ICC and what is its position on this warrant now?**

**NS:** The ICC has only 124 member states. India participated in the negotiations in the preparatory stages that led up to the setting up of the ICC in 2002. India participated in the negotiations of the Rome Statute. But it did not sign it or ratify it. India negotiates in good faith and when it finds that it can't agree to some of the terms, it doesn't sign. It is better than signing and flouting the terms. The reasons for not signing at the time were many. The Indian government felt that the ICC did not give sufficient power for national administrative and judicial institutions to deal with such crimes and it did not recognise the use of nuclear weapons and the use of other weapons of mass destruction as a crime which could be punished. It also did not recognise terrorism as a punishable crime against humanity, which, I think, was probably the breaking point for India, which had been a victim of terrorism for decades. Regarding the present ICC warrants [in the cases of both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Mr. Netanyahu], India has made it clear that it does not have much faith in the ICC.

**At the UN Security Council (UNSC), there has been a logjam over votes involving Israel and Russia. Even in cases where the UNSC has passed resolutions, such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, the regimes in power are flouting directions with impunity. Are we reaching a point where the international world order, as is defined by these institutions, is unable to function? What would it take to make states including Israel compliant?**

**NS:** It is clear that UNSC resolutions don't mean a thing any more. In the case of Israel, the U.S. veto is used almost automatically. Naturally, Russia is going to use its veto for its own purposes, to protect itself, as it has in the past few years. The fact remains that the situation in which the UN was formed has changed from 1945. So even if the UNSC believes it can still deliver, the truth is it cannot. Every country has decided to live on a transactional, immediate

short-term policy paradigm. There are no 'value-based international relations' today. It is not as if countries did not work in national interest earlier, but the brazenness with which we see 'realpolitik' used is at a different level. Until this situation changes—and I don't see any signs of that—this kind of breakdown of international systems will probably increase.

**TP:** I agree that we are in a very bad situation. However, I don't think there is a collective desire not to have any rules and laws that will guide state to state conduct at this point. We can point to all of these examples in which clearly the system has not worked, but those are perhaps 5% of the situations. Of the interactions that are taking place in the world, there are many in which laws are being followed.

The UNSC absolutely needs reform. It has become a joke and at some point, it will become irrelevant. Things are going to get worse, but there is going to be a tipping point in which a critical mass of countries will recognise that it is actually in their interest to have a functioning global order and effective institutions that help uphold international conventions and laws.

**Do you see Israel being brought to account internationally, or a ceasefire in Gaza any time soon, especially given the upcoming change in U.S. administration?**

**TP:** There is a likelihood of a ceasefire because incoming U.S. President Donald Trump will take a tough position on ending the war. While he has shown little regard for global institutions, and sees transactional value in backing Israel, I think he does not want to see the U.S. get dragged into another war in West Asia.

**NS:** I think Mr. Trump's main motivation would be to show himself as the ultimate winner who can say he delivered on his campaign promise to stop the wars. But a ceasefire will not mean peace. Mr. Trump's next step will be to want to go back to the Abraham Accords, which will be more difficult than it was in Trump 1.0 (2017-2021). The landscape has changed considerably for the countries that signed the accords (the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco) and those that the U.S. was trying to bring on board (Saudi Arabia). There won't be a return to peace or negotiations until the heart of the problem is addressed, which is the need for the establishment of a Palestinian state.



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NOTEBOOK

## "Who is winning?": The inevitable question that reporters face

The unenviable job of prediction is best left to political pundits

Abhinav Deshpande

**F**or a reporter, it is always exciting and challenging to cover elections. There is plenty of ground to traverse, people to talk to, clues to pick up on, issues to report, and interviews to conduct. Reporting also involves observations and listening—for instance, to chatter in various places, such as tea stalls and village *kattas* (where people gather for conversations)—to gauge the mood. Before the recent Maharashtra Assembly elections, I heard diverse voices and issues across constituencies. Farmers spoke about crop losses, loan waivers, and Minimum Support Price. Young voters said they were frustrated about the job situation. Women spoke about inflation. In urban pockets, religious and caste polarisation, infrastructure issues, and the popularity of a few leaders dominated conversations. But to predict an outcome is a different game altogether. Yet, the inevitable question that journalists face from colleagues, family, friends, acquaintances, and even leaders during elections is "Who is going to win?"

At some point during this election, this became a common conversation starter as though reporters are privy to some secret knowledge about the numbers game. As voting day approached, the question was posed as a challenge—a friend even said, "If you are covering the polls, you should know the outcome, right?" I had some unhelpful stock replies: "Let's wait and see" or "It is a tough fight".

None of this is surprising, especially since TV journalists often wade into the tricky waters of election forecasting. When people pose this question, the (wrong) assumption is that journalists are not the chroniclers, but architects of history. But with experience, I have learned to refrain from getting too entangled in the arithmetic of polls or predicting outcomes; that unenviable job is best left to political pundits.

A seasoned journalist once told me, "In political journalism, the wind blows

where it pleases. Our job is just to catch its scent." While we managed to catch the scent—a broad spectrum of people, including women in rural areas, seemed to favour the Mahayuti alliance—predicting the scale of victory was trickier. It is safe to say that few imagined the scale of the Mahayuti's victory. This was the case during the 2024 Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections too. Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress Party won merely 11 seats out of 175, leaving many journalists and analysts stunned and scrambling to explain the extent of his defeat.

The BJP got a historic mandate in Maharashtra with 132 seats, exactly 10 more than what the party had secured a decade ago. I heaved a sigh of relief for surviving another election cycle without sticking my neck out too far. But predictable, the question shifted and people began to ask, "Who is going to be the Chief Minister?" This is a relatively simpler question to tackle. In Maharashtra, the political grapevine had been buzzing for days and the name of one leader was floating about. But it is necessary to be cautious in this regard too, as politics always throws up surprises. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, for instance, leaders who were not in the race were suddenly sworn in as Chief Minister. Again, I did not commit to an answer.

This is not to say that there is no temptation to predict the outcome or reply with some confidence. But doing so or reporting certain events and statements too early can backfire, especially in a profession where credibility is currency. As my editor says, "It is not about breaking news; it is about breaking it right." As the dust settles on another election, I know that it is okay to not answer some questions. Reporters are not here to speculate or foresee the outcome. We are here to report stories that matter the most to the people, to provide a balanced view of the political climate, and to catch the scent as it were.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

## A deluge that left a paper trail



The aftermath: The documents and certificates of students and staff at a private school, which were damaged in the rainfall brought by Cyclone Fengal, being kept in the open to dry, at the school premises at Arakandanallur in Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu. S.S. KUMAR

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 6, 1974

## Ban on company donations to parties to go

New Delhi, Dec. 5: The Union Cabinet today decided to lift the ban on donations by companies to political parties and to raise the permissible limit.

The Companies Act would be amended for the twin purposes possibly at the next session of Parliament.

It is not considered feasible to attempt this legislation at the current sitting which is to close on December 20.

The original ceiling fixed in the Companies Act (Section 293-A), prior to the imposition of the ban on donations to political parties, was Rs. 25,000 or five per cent of the average net profits of a company during the three financial years immediately preceding, whichever is greater.

Under the proposed amendment, the ceiling will be Rs. 50,000 or five per cent of the average net profits during the three preceding financial years.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 6, 1924

## Greek refugee loan

Leaflet (Oxford), Midnight, Dec. 5: The prospectus of the Greek Government seven per cent refugee loan issued under the auspices of the League of Nations is published. It confirms details previously announced. The amount offered for subscription is seven and a half millions sterling being part of the total authorised amount of twelve millions three hundred thousand.

Trees covered in dust from stone-crushing machines, near Khatoli Ahir village, in Haryana's Mahendragarh district. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



# Living under a dust blanket

In Haryana's Mahendragarh, stone cutting and crushing in the Aravalli mountain range impacts health and agricultural output. Ashok Kumar reports on the sufferings of the people who live in close proximity to the crushing machines. Their homes and crops are covered in dust so thick it looks like snow

**I**n the outskirts of Khatoli Ahir village in Haryana's Mahendragarh, an old banyan tree, spread with age, is covered with a thick layer of fine grey dust. Not far from the State boundary of Rajasthan, the tree that appears snow-clad, bears silent testimony to the ordeal of thousands of families across a dozen villages in the region. Here, people are constantly exposed to the harmful dust and noise emanating from the scores of stone crushers running with never a pause.

Seated on a cemented platform below the tree, 60-year-old Gyarsi Lal, diagnosed with tuberculosis a year ago, is resigned to his fate. "Court mein case jeeet liya. Mamla Supreme Court tak chala gaya. Phir bhi band nahi hue. Hamari kya aukat hai. Hum to mazdoor hain; hamari koi nahi manega (We won the case in court. The matter went to the Supreme Court, yet these units did not shut down. What is our status? We are labourers; no one will listen to us)," says Lal.

His family is among the 80-odd Scheduled Caste families in Khatoli Ahir, who were allotted free plots by the Haryana government on panchayat land on the outskirts of the village in 2012. This was under the Indira Gandhi Awas Yojana, a social welfare programme to give marginalised communities free land.

Of these, only about 20 families shifted into houses they constructed on these plots. They are the worst hit with a crusher unit across the road from where they stay. "This crusher was set up in 2019. It has been five years. It stops only when there is a power cut. We keep the doors and windows shut, but the dust enters through the cracks. Everything inside, even the utensils in the kitchen, remain covered with layers of dust. We don't just breathe this dust in, but also end up eating it," says Suresh Kumar, sitting next to Lal. He claims that tuberculosis has claimed two lives. "Sab dus saal pehle mar jayenge (Everyone will die 10 years earlier)," he adds.

After villagers went to court in 2018 against the crushers, Mahendragarh district officials submitted a joint committee report before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2019, saying there were 158 crushers in the district. "Following this, the NGT ordered closure of 72 units. But another report two years later said there were 162 crushers with 107 in Nangal Choudhary sub-division," says Tejpal Yadav, 32, who belongs to Khatoli Jaat village, but works as a teacher of mathematics at an IT coaching institute near Jaipur in Rajasthan.

He has been fighting against the crushers both inside and outside court for almost a decade. He says that there were only three or four villages with crusher zones in Nangal Choudhary in 2015, but by 2021 they were spread across 10 villages.

The Regional Officer of the Haryana State Pollution Control Board, Mahendragarh, Krishan Kumar, claims there are currently only 81 stone crushers in the district. "Many crushers have shut down in compliance with the Supreme Court and NGT orders," he says, adding the department also shut some down for violations. He says there are regular inspections and units are fined if they are found not complying.

## Health hazard

Vijender, 55, another resident at the settlement, got a skin allergy three years ago, like many fellow villagers. "I sneeze all day. My eyes are always watery and my nose is constantly running. This crusher was running last night as well despite the Supreme Court ban due to high pollution levels in NCR," he says. Up to 55% of Haryana falls un-



I often get to hear that the deceased, mostly the elderly, had a breathing issue. If a proper medical check-up is done, I am sure more of the population in the region will be diagnosed with tuberculosis  
**TEJPAL YADAV**  
Teacher activist

der the National Capital Region that experienced high pollution levels in November, with GRAP IV restrictions kicking in, putting a pause on running diesel-fuelled vehicles and construction-related activity.

People across ages at the settlement show symptoms of dust-related ailments, including laboured breathing, itchy eyes, and skin allergies. Sifting through a heap of prescriptions from different hospitals, Bharat Singh, 34, says his five-year-old daughter has developed a kidney-related ailment, which doctors say could be caused by constant exposure to the harmful dust.

A daily wageer, he has worn his financial resources thin to ensure the best possible treatment for her, and has been consulting paediatricians in Jaipur. "Antim also experiences difficulty in breathing after meals. She develops red spots on her skin sometimes. A couple of children from 8 to 10 years in the neighbourhood too have eye-related issues. We don't have the income and the resources to shift elsewhere," says the father. Manisha, 27, says her two children too have developed skin allergies. "The doctor advises us to keep them away from the dust. But we have nowhere to go," says the mother.

Babli, 42, a mother of three, says she is tired of dusting and cleaning. "At least two people must clean all day long. First with a dry cloth, then with wet cloth," she says, with the women around her nodding.

Talking with her face covered with a veil, Nirmala, 37, says rising health bills have messed up their budgets and they are forced to cut all other expenses to pay for medicines and doctors' fees. "A few big landlords have made fortunes by renting out their land to these stone-crusher units. They live in palatial homes while we suffer," she says. Nirmala recalls the summer of 2023, when the women blocked the road seeking closure of the crusher unit next to their settlement, but the police threatened them and forced them to lift the dharna.

"Sagai wale aate hai aur chai pekar wapas chale jate hain. Kehte hai yahan to unki ladki mariz ho jayegi (People come with marriage proposals, but return after drinking tea. They say that their daughter will become a patient here)," quips Sunita, 45, as the women around her burst into laughter.

## Stone dust everywhere

The road to Dholera, a village next to Khatoli Ahir, is dotted with trees on both sides, all co-

vered in thick layers of grey stone dust. Just a kilometre away from a stone-crushing zone with about 50 units, the round-the-clock movement of dumper trucks carrying construction material from the crushing units and mines has damaged road, making it difficult for small passenger vehicles to ply.

Here too people say they wake up to thick layers of dust inside their houses and on the terraces, with the village surrounded by the crushers. There is a permanent haze in the air throughout the year. Many families – at least those who could get jobs – have left the village over the years, to settle in less polluted places.

Many like Rajender, 52, a farmer, sitting among a group of villagers outside a barber's shop, have no choice. "This is not possible without the patronage of the local authorities and politicians. The dumpers are overloaded and uncovered, and water sprinklers are not used at crushing sites," he says.

The National Civil Surgeon's report to the Haryana State Pollution Control Board in 2021, conceded that the number of air-borne diseases almost doubled in this region within a span of nine years. While 2011 saw 21,329 cases, there were 42,309 cases in 2019, a couple of years after stone crusher units started mushrooming in Mahendragarh district, especially the Nangal Choudhary sub-division.

The report was prepared in compliance with a 2020 NGT order, after the court heard a host of petitions against stone crushers, including that of Tejpal vs State of Haryana and Others. Tejpal disputes the district health official's numbers, saying that the actual number could be far higher. He says that breathing-related ailments are a common cause of death among the elderly in this part of the district. "At condolence meets, I often get to hear that the deceased, mostly the elderly, had a breathing issue. If a proper medical check-up is done, I am sure more half of the population in the region will be diagnosed with tuberculosis," says Tejpal.

## A fight for survival

Besides health and the environment, stone cutting impacts agriculture and the Aravalli mountain range. People living in Nangal Choudhary, across villages, claim that the thick layers of dust settle on crops, more so in winter. It has impacted agricultural output despite the land being fertile and well-irrigated.

Ravinder Singh, president of the Mahender-

garh Crushers and Labour Association, an unregistered body representing a dozen units, denies charges of pollution and violation of environmental rules.

"Most units are run by locals and adhere to norms like sprinkling water. It is the only industry in this region and also a source of employment for people." He blames dumper trucks from crushing sites in Rajasthan that pass through this region, claiming they are overloaded. "Our share of dumpers on this route is only one-fourth, but we are blamed," he says.

Tejpal's older brother Ajay Yadav, a former journalist, chuckles. "Our fight against the powerful stone crushing and mining mafia can be made into a documentary. It is a mass movement." He talks about how the duo went from village to village to hold meetings and distribute pamphlets to create awareness.

"After every NGT order, we had to hold demonstrations to get it implemented. We were first lured with money, but when we did not budge, we got death threats," he says. He laments that this region has no history of mass movements, except Rao Tula Ram from Rewari, whose rebellion against the British was a part of the 1857 revolt. "We did not get the kind of support from people as we thought we would," says Ajay.

The duo got sucked into a long battle against the stone crushers in 2016 when Tejpal, teaching at a coaching institute in Rajasthan's Sikar, noticed the gradual mushrooming of these units and growing pollution levels in the region. "When I would come home on my motorcycle over the weekend, I began to notice the dust. I worried about the people living here. It motivated me to fight," he says.

"To begin with I mobilised people here against it. We held demonstrations, wrote to the authorities and political representatives. When all our pleas fell on deaf ears, I decided to move the NGT in 2018," he remembers. His strategy was to first get a closure order in his village and then, based on those orders, seek directions against illegally run stone crushers across the district.

In a first major victory for the duo, the NGT, in its order on July 27, 2019, based on the report of the local authorities that 72 stone crushers were not complying with the sitting norms, directed the "immediate closure of all illegally operating polluting stone crushers in the area and initiation of action by way of prosecution and recovery of compensation".

In December 2020 and January 2023, the NGT observed the citizens' right to breathe fresh air. It fixed ₹20 lakh compensation against each stone crusher operating in the area on the "polluter pays" principle. "But the orders are yet to be implemented fully even as stone crushers continue to play havoc with the lives of inhabitants, their livelihood, and the environment," says Tejpal.

While the battle continues, Tejpal says his weekends and holidays are devoted to preparing for the legal battle ahead and holding *mukkaad sabhas* (neighbourhood meetings) to create awareness. "A substantial chunk of my earnings also goes towards this fight, including the fee for the lawyers," he says.

"I also contested the Assembly election from the Swaraj India party in 2019 at the insistence of political activist Yogendra Yadav, who contacted me after the NGT order in 2019 was widely reported," he says. While he lost the election, he took the opportunity to visit 140 villages, whereas earlier he had gone to about 35, to spread awareness among people in the area.



A stone-crushing machine in Haryana's Mahendragarh district, one of over 200 that causes dust to cloud the air. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Korean crisis

President Yoon Suk Yeol briefly declared martial law, a move that ignited domestic outrage and international condemnation

A brief martial law was imposed in South Korea, a country known to have a stable democracy and prosperity to vie for. The South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol took this extreme step to preserve his position amid falling popularity. He faces the toughest challenge of his presidency after a controversial decision to impose martial law backfired spectacularly, plunging the nation into a deep political crisis. The fallout has sparked widespread protests, calls for his resignation, and even moves toward impeachment. Yoon declared martial law, citing national security concerns and the need to eliminate "anti-state elements." However, many viewed the measure as a desperate attempt to consolidate power amid mounting political and personal scandals. The backlash was immediate and severe, with lawmakers rushing to overturn the decree and protesters gathering en masse in the streets of Seoul. Within hours, Yoon revoked the order, but the reversal failed to quell public anger.



The damage was done. Yoon's presidency, which began with a narrow 2022 election victory, has been riddled with controversy. His platform, focused on gender neutrality and hawkish stances on North Korea, initially appealed to younger male voters. However, a series of missteps and scandals—ranging from allegations of corruption involving First Lady Kim Keon Hee to tensions with the opposition-controlled National Assembly—have steadily eroded his approval ratings. The Democratic Party's landslide win in April's parliamentary elections further isolated Yoon politically. With an emboldened opposition, efforts to impeach the president with limited room to maneuver. The martial law declaration was a last-ditch effort by a president grappling with dwindling support and mounting resistance within his own party. Indeed the move was a miscalculation, a desperate attempt which backfired miserably with significant political fallout. The incident has intensified efforts by the opposition to impeach Yoon, with some members of his party now openly calling for his resignation. Protesters have taken to the streets in unprecedented numbers, with labour unions threatening nationwide strikes unless Yoon steps down. The crisis has raised alarm among South Korea's allies, including the United States and Japan have expressed serious concerns. Their worst fear of course is that North Korea may exploit the internal chaos to escalate tensions with the South, further destabilising the region. For South Korea, this moment represents a critical test of its democratic resilience. The swift revocation of martial law suggests that institutional checks and balances remain robust. However, the path forward will require careful navigation to prevent further polarisation and ensure stability in one of Asia's most vibrant democracies.

key government officials linked to Yoon's administration gained momentum, leaving the president with limited room to maneuver. The martial law declaration was a last-ditch effort by a president grappling with dwindling support and mounting resistance within his own party. Indeed the move was a miscalculation, a desperate attempt which backfired miserably with significant political fallout. The incident has intensified efforts by the opposition to impeach Yoon, with some members of his party now openly calling for his resignation. Protesters have taken to the streets in unprecedented numbers, with labour unions threatening nationwide strikes unless Yoon steps down. The crisis has raised alarm among South Korea's allies, including the United States and Japan have expressed serious concerns. Their worst fear of course is that North Korea may exploit the internal chaos to escalate tensions with the South, further destabilising the region. For South Korea, this moment represents a critical test of its democratic resilience. The swift revocation of martial law suggests that institutional checks and balances remain robust. However, the path forward will require careful navigation to prevent further polarisation and ensure stability in one of Asia's most vibrant democracies.



Flamingos at the Pulicat Lake with backwaters brimming to the full, near Sriharikota

PICTALK

## Sexual and reproductive health can drive economic growth

By prioritising sexual and reproductive health in workplace policies, the private sector can be a powerful catalyst for change and lead the way

India stands poised on the brink of a transformative era, with unprecedented opportunities for economic and social progress. Yet, one critical area remains starkly underdeveloped: women's participation in the workforce. Despite notable strides in various sectors, women's workforce participation in India stagnates at a concerning 20 per cent. This is not just a social inequity but a pressing economic challenge. The private sector, which is experiencing rapid growth and evolution, holds immense potential to address this imbalance. By integrating sexual and reproductive health (SRH) into workplace policies, India can pave the way for greater gender parity, enhanced productivity, and accelerated economic growth.

**Women and Workforce: Bridging the Gap**  
Women constitute nearly half the global population, yet workplaces often fail to accommodate their needs adequately. According to the UNFPA report *Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Private Sector - The Case for*

The care economy, encompassing both paid and unpaid caregiving roles, is a cornerstone of workforce participation, particularly for women. Many women are compelled to leave the workforce or transition to part-time roles due to caregiving responsibilities. Affordable childcare, eldercare, and flexible work arrangements provided by businesses can significantly alleviate these challenges. Investing in the care economy is more than corporate social responsibility; it is a sound economic strategy. When women are supported in managing their dual roles, they are more likely to remain in the workforce, contributing to economic growth and workplace inclusivity.

**Strengthening Social Protections**  
Robust social protections are fundamental to ensuring women's economic security. Enhancing maternity benefits, broadening health insurance coverage, and providing mental health support can create a workplace culture where women feel valued and supported. Such measures are crucial to fostering gender equality and inclusivity.



SHAONLI CHAKRABORTY

**Fostering Inclusivity**  
An inclusive workplace requires more than offering flexible hours or equal pay-it demands a cultural shift. Companies must actively combat discrimination and harassment, creating environments where women feel safe and supported. Initiatives like vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes can also help close the gender gap.

**Creating a Supportive Ecosystem for SRH**  
Effective SRH initiatives require a supportive ecosystem that promotes awareness and access to resources. This includes regular training, accessible services, open dialogue, and confidential counselling for employees.

**Ensuring Accountability**  
To maximise the impact of SRH policies, businesses must establish clear metrics for monitoring and evaluation. Regular progress reports promote transparency and accountability, building trust among employees and stakeholders.

(The writer is CEO, UpFront, member of UNFPA's Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business; views are personal)

**Elevating the Care Economy**

## G20 Rio summit: A new voice for the Global South



SUDHIR HINDWAN

The summit addressed pressing global challenges such as economic disparities, environmental degradation, food security and poverty alleviation

The nineteenth Summit of the G 20 held recently in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil holds a lot of significance in raising the voice of the Global South. In addition to the 19 member states, this summit also had two more members which included the African and the European Unions. Amid uncertainty on account of West Asian crises and the ongoing Russian-Ukraine conflict the summit focused on two pertinent issues: the increasing economic disparities and the degradation of the environment besides, the question of food security and poverty alleviation have also become paramount topics of the agenda for a stable and peaceful world order.

In the wake of the economic crisis of 1997, the G-20 Group was formed in 1999 with the basic purpose of uplifting the economies from economic doom and since then economic agrandizement has been the central point of discussions in all the G-20 summits. The Group of 20 includes an amalgamation of the most powerful as well as the developing countries of the global order like: the United States, France, China, India, Japan, Germany, Russia, the UK, Brazil, Canada, Italy, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, Argentina, Australia.

Adding Spain as a permanent guest of the G20 and the recent inclusion of the African Union and the European Union has extended its scope and area of influence.

The latest meeting of G 20 is important from the point of view that now countries of the south started giving a major push to their innate aims and the latest in the series is the idea of green industrial planning and strategies. The increasing demand for bringing about a few reforms in the major international monetary and governing institutions such as the World Bank, IMF the WTO and the Security Council of the UNO indicates the changing dimensions of the Group as now there seems to be a shift towards a more transparent and inclusive world system beside the Cultural Contiguity and exchanges about



energy resources are some new take away of the G 20 meetings. On the other hand, the member countries have increasingly realised the need for sustainable development along with increasing concern for deadly spikes of increasing temperature across the globe. The fullest utilisation of modern technology in the economy such as the digital economy remains another important topic that can play a magnificent role in upgrading the old pattern to save valuable time. The rich experience of India in promoting brotherhood and uplifting standards particularly from developing countries to undoubtedly a developed nation is a lot to learn from.

India's remarkable progress in the IT industry has opened new doors for Indian companies, which are now aggressively expanding into overseas markets.

The country's compliance and regulatory authorities have ensured that foreign investments are secure and economic transactions are monitored thoroughly. Despite the challenges posed by a tough global economic climate, India's G20 Presidency during 2023 had already provided it with an opportunity to position itself as a key player in global manufacturing and a reliable partner in various sectors. The cooperation among G20

DESPITE THE CHALLENGES POSED BY A TOUGH GLOBAL ECONOMIC CLIMATE, INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY DURING 2023 HAD ALREADY PROVIDED IT WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO POSITION ITSELF AS A KEY PLAYER IN GLOBAL MANUFACTURING AND A RELIABLE PARTNER IN VARIOUS SECTORS

nations has also fostered the development of new strategies to meet the needs of vulnerable countries, fostering a more inclusive global society. This cooperation could promote a positive shift in international relations, promoting greater harmony and collaboration.

India's impressive progress is largely attributed to its incredibly foresighted leadership, immense talent and superb foresight. The setting up of the International Solar Alliance, the Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre, One Sun One World One Grid, and the Global Biofuel Alliance along with the waste-to-energy efforts of India speaks volumes of its being the front leader among G 20 countries. Prime Minister Modi has very well highlighted the remarkable efforts and achievements of India in his speech.

He is undoubtedly the most respected and popular leader of World Politics who has made India the leading voice of the Global South. Gradually the scope of G20 partnership has expanded to include critical areas such as disaster management, digital infrastructure, and climate change, making it a multifaceted initiative with both security and development dimensions as these are also some issues that are raising concerns about the international community,

However, the G-20 countries are also navigating through social and political pressures and their success will depend on how these countries maintain growth momentum amid numerous challenges. By addressing these challenges on account of social, cultural economic and political pangs, the G 20 can further solidify its position as a global economic powerhouse, capable of driving growth not only among member countries but also to create an inclusive world order. By fostering diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution mechanisms, the G 20 group members may also promote stability while ensuring economic prosperity for all member nations. The group's shared strategic vision is vital in shaping a multi-layered, multilateral strategy for dealing with not only economic but also security challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.

The G 20 can also become a platform for fostering development in fields such as education, science, biotechnology, and strategic planning, further strengthening the bonds between its members and slowing the entire world community and India is playing front runner's role with the ablest leadership at the helm. (The writer is a professor and expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Assassination bid on Badal



The attack on SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Chahal at the Golden Temple complex is the surprising incident. Sukhbir Singh, who is fulfilling his religious punishment given by Akal Takht, has been targeted by the lone wolf attacker, Narain Singh Chaura. The open fire

and China. There is no point in soliciting the UN Peacekeeping force in Bangladesh, as the UN failed to stop even the bloodiest wars in West Asia and Ukraine.

**Water as 'HIGH-RISK FOOD'**  
Madam — The food regulatory body of India, FSSAI, has categorised packaged drinking water and mineral water as "high-risk food." According to FSSAI, high-risk foods are those that pose a high risk of food poisoning due to contamination, poor storage, or poor handling. These require closer and regular inspections to safeguard consumers from food poisoning and other health issues. Consumption of drinking water that is not fully purified can lead to cholera, diarrhoea, typhoid, amebiasis, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, and various other health issues. Also, if the containers used to store water are unsafe, it can lead to chronic health issues. According to the FSSAI, manufacturers of packaged drinking water will have to pass mandatory inspections before getting a license, and packaged drinking water

incident within the Harmandir Sahib Golden Temple Complex is a sheer breach of security and raised concerns over the safety of the Gurudwar complex.

Although Sukhbir Singh is safe now, thanks to the Z-plus protection, the police in plain clothes rescued him from the intended act of the assassination. Amidst the bullet-firing attack, it is regrettable that security failures happened, although the alertness of the police personnel halted any misdeed, and every worshipper is safe, including Sukhbir Singh. But somewhere the security breach at the golden temple complex yet remains a question. Meanwhile the investigation is initiated, and police are probing for the real guilty for this whole act; the government must step in to enhance the security of the pilgrim's complex so that future such incidents can be avoided.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

M Pradyu | Kannur

**FRAUDSTERS TARGET SENIOR CITIZENS**  
Madam — Increasing cybercrime frauds are a nightmare for senior citizens. The senior citizens are not tech-savvy enough to operate a smartphone, which they prefer to use mostly for communicating with their near and dear ones. The fraudsters target the senior citizens who are lonely and carry on their vices, resulting in losing their hard-earned savings. Banks may exercise adequate caution in honouring the transfer requests by delaying a day or two by instituting the sufficient checks on the destination account before carrying on the instructions. The telecom authorities also may advise the service providers to institute sufficient firewalls on the spam callers.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

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







## OUR VIEW

## MY VIEW | TECH WHISPERS



## Bhopal haunts us with lessons left half learnt

The shock of that gas leak 40 years ago should've ended industrial disasters in India and fended off air pollution as a threat. We should go the EU way on environmental regulation

On the night of 2-3 December 1984, 40 tonnes of deadly methyl-isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from Union Carbide's pesticide plant in Bhopal. Forty years on, it is widely considered the world's worst industrial disaster. Up to half a million people were affected by the leak. Some 3,000 of them may have died by a very conservative estimate. Tens of thousands were disabled—several thousand suffered permanent injuries to the eyes and lungs. A study of its long-term health effects (1985-1994) by the Bhopal Gas Disaster Research Centre of the Indian Council for Medical Research concluded: "The results show that the toxic gas exposes, for long after the exposure, continued to suffer from multisystem involvement but predominantly from respiratory, eye and gastro-intestinal disorders." Four decades later, it seems as if India has been sleep-walking through this grim anniversary year after year, although, given its horror, we should have long acted upon the lessons drawn. The biggest of these today is our need to open a conversation, and then reach a consensus, on how we can make our rapid economic growth more sustainable—or green. For, beyond corporate culpability and a stark failure of corporate governance, the Bhopal disaster was also about industrial support for agriculture. Do remember the Carbide plant produced carbaryl, a pesticide sold under the brand Sevin that's used to kill a range of insects. Even back then, there were companies making carbaryl without using MIC, and the leak exposed lax regulation and a lack of experts to guide what we now call green growth. India finally banned carbaryl only in 2018—34 years after Bhopal.

Have we seen the back of such disasters? Hardly so, if we take a broader view of the impact of air pollution caused by weakly regulated industrialization, transport emissions and another bad agricultural practice—of stubble burning. As with MIC gas in Bhopal, the foul air that turns hazardous every winter in northern India not only kills, but also causes health problems that can persist for years. The high level of tiny particulate matter in the air killed 4.2 million worldwide in 2019, according to the WHO, almost 90% of them in low- and middle-income countries like India. Indeed, the toll taken by seasonal air pollution is just as uncountable as the 1984 gas leak's. Taking a narrower view offers no great comfort. A 2023 paper by Mausami Prasad of IIT Kanpur and Lavanya Suresh of BITS Pilani shows there were 560 industrial accidents with reported environmental damage between 2010 and 2020; about 2,500 people died and another 8,500 were injured as a result. Although green solutions have been around, they've been spurred lately by a global focus on climate change. Perhaps India can borrow a leaf from the EU's playbook to combat this man-made scourge. Its regulatory thrust is pushing industrializing countries such as India to raise their game. Be it residual pesticides in farm produce or carbon-spewing steel and aluminium, these can no longer be exported to EU markets.

Forty years ago, Bhopal's gas-leak victims had no place to hide. Today, too, India's worsening air quality means we are largely defenceless against a proven cause of disability and death. As with Bhopal, this too is preventable with robust regulation and its fierce enforcement by a caring government. At the end of the day, prosperity should not come at the expense of health, livelihood and life.

INDIRA RAJARAMAN



is an economist

It astonishes sympathetic global observers that India, with its wealth of public policy experts, should be so inept at handling a major threat to the health and productivity of its population, affecting not just Delhi, but the entire northern belt of the country in the concluding months of every calendar year. In mid-November, Delhi achieved the distinction of being the world's most polluted city by Swiss agency IQAir's live rankings. Delhi had the top rank among polluted capital cities in the IQAir annual report for 2023.

If this is going to be an unsolvably predictable annual event, instead of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) responding behind the curve to close down construction sites and educational institutions and bar entry of trucks into the city, there should be a pre-announced construction shutdown at this time of year and a consolidated school vacation in November-December instead of separate holidays in summer and winter.

But the problem cannot be allowed to recur year after year as an outcome of political wrangling. Ajay Shankar, formerly in the power ministry in senior capacities, has presented a feasible plan for the farm fires problem, calling for payments to farmers for uprooting stubble, which can then be pelletized for use as fuel in power plants (*Hindustan Times*, 5 November 2024). The fiscal cost would be far less than the cost in terms of growth and fiscal revenues of continuing to limp along as we presently do.

Air quality was a problem in Delhi much before farm fires became a seasonal contributor. In the 1990s, Delhi passenger transport buses converted to compressed natural gas (CNG), a move hailed as the ultimate solution. Many private cars and auto-rickshaws also converted to CNG cylinders. The air did improve for some years before the pollution graph resumed its awful climb. Over the last two years, electric buses have replaced fuel-powered buses. But every time an electric bus passes by, it raises a cloud of dust that chokes pedestrians on the side of the road and adds to airborne particulate matter.

Rampant construction, with no controls on particulate emission, is bad for air quality. A number of low-rise government hous-

ing colonies are being replaced by high-rise apartments in central Delhi, involving demolition of earlier structures and deep scooping of earth for foundations. Although these sites are surrounded by high boundary walls of corrugated sheets, that only raises the height at which the particulate matter diffuses into the general atmosphere. There is an urgent need for capturing the dust and cement powder emitted by demolition and construction.

Then there is vehicular traffic. There have been *ad hoc* measures from time-to-time, like alternating days for even-odd licence plates, instead of a consolidated plan for the number of new vehicles that can be permitted in the national capital region every year, and the manner in which this containment could be achieved.

Emission reduction per car is not sufficient. Total emissions are determined by the number of vehicles on the road, stalled in traffic jams but still puffing

(even if reduced) emissions into the air.

Singapore, a land-scarce city-state, levies an upfront fee for operating a car which at one time equalled the purchase price of a car. The upfront operating fee can be graded according to the square-foot area appropriated by the car, since that is a measure of city land appropriated by the car owner whether it is running or parked.

If such a levy did hypothetically become law in Delhi, car manufacturers need have no fear. They can look for sales in tier II and tier III cities. But the policy can only take effect if it is concluded with the acquiescence of car manufacturers, the kind of consultative policy that is so rare, unfortunately.

The Delhi Metro is hugely successful, but its users are typically young people who have been moved out of buses, or at most two-wheelers, in terms of private transportation. Not enough owners of private cars jump instead into a metro, unlike Western

capital cities where even high-ranking officials travel to work using underground public transport.

The final trigger for end-of-year pollution is kicked off by the burning of Ravana effigies on Dussehra. Diwali firecrackers continue to be enabled by an unenforced ban. Firecracker sale outlets could easily be targeted, but they seem to have discovered survival techniques.

Aside from the pollution impact, there are the horrendous bodily injuries from firecrackers going off on different trajectories than those intended. There is a huge public stake in stopping this practice, since just about every family would know of at least one person who has suffered firecracker injuries, been blinded or worse.

Why is pollution not an election issue? When pollution is on, there can be no protest marches because the problem itself precludes that. But other forms of protest are not seen or heard, even in state or municipal elections. What moves voters? Policy in any sphere can be effective only when it is continually explained to the public at large, and its impact on their lives outlined in a manner that makes them shape their votes towards desired outcomes. Rage has to be replaced by understanding.



JASPREET BINDRA is a founder of AI&Beyond and the author of 'The Tech Whisperer'.

Coinciding with ChatGPT celebrating its second birthday last week, I spoke at two conferences on the impact of GenAI on marketing: D-CODE 2024 by the Ad Club of India and Google, and another at an MMA knowledge session. Even as we enter the age of AI in work and business, some functions and industries will be affected more than others. The functions in the immediate cross-hairs of GenAI are contact centres, creative functions, software development and, yes, marketing.

Marketing is a unique function that combines creative with quantitative facilities. A marketer's right brain needs to create strategies for advertising and positioning to engage the consumer in an ever-dynamic market. The left brain, meanwhile, needs to be on top of media buying and media-response analytics, even as it delves into the innards of the ad-tech algorithms that dictate buying search and social ads. AI has been all over the latter, with Google, Meta and others building AI into every piece of advertising they sell. The former, the creative part, has been a human domain so far, with advertisers creating unique and evocative messages to support their marketing strategies. While the latter is 'arithmetical', the former is 'language'. It is in the language part that marketers now have a competitor—GenAI and its Large Language Models, which are built on language and can spin out creativity

at will. Thus, it was not a surprise to see both nervousness and excitement writ large on the faces of the marketing professionals I met last week.

GenAI is the best thing that could happen to a marketer, but only if she is willing to grasp it and leverage its power to connect with the new customer emerging in this AI era. Marketers have gone through a wrenching change once before, as the internet, social media and search upended their lives and forced a shift from who could produce the best TV ad or choose the best boarding in town to who could master the arcane world of AdWords and real-time bidding. The pre-internet customer, who I call the industrial customer, gave way to the digital customer as Instagram, Google and other apps started dominating their lives. Now the digital customer will give way to the AI customer, as ChatGPT and other AI tools and agents invade themselves into our lives.

The industrial customer had limited and standardized choices, while the digital one reckoned with the abundant variety that Amazon threw open. The AI customer's choice will be infinite and hyper-personalized, as agents scour the internet to find what she wants based on her innate preferences.

Interaction with products was transactional and local for the industrial cus-

tomers, while it's social and omnichannel for the digital one; for the AI customer, chatbots will make this interaction conversational (as with another human) and digitally immersive as companies like Meta infuse AI into our visual and tactile environments. The industrial customer had minimal technology use, while the digital customer is more reactive and click-oriented as she incessantly clicks on apps; the AI customer will be proactive as a personalized AI assistant anticipates her needs, from the kind of food she'd like to where and how she would like to travel. Finally, the brand relationship that the industrial customer had was functional, while the digital one has social and emotional loyalty to cult brands; the AI customer will have a collaborative partnership as deeper relationships are developed with brands.

These revolutionary changes that AI will drive mean that marketers will need to change too. They must become literate in AI and use it to anticipate and follow their customers. They will need to learn that AI can be a friend when used right and can enhance both the left- and right-brain aspects of their job. It would not 'take away' their creativity, but enhance it.

In both conferences, I showed how Sam Altman teased Sora, OpenAI's text-to-video technology, by inviting impromptu prompts on X for videos to be generated. Entrepreneur Kunal Shah gave an intriguing one: "A bicycle race on ocean with different animals as athletes riding the bicycles with drone camera view." Sora produced a stunningly creative video ([bit.ly/3ZgGnHD](https://bit.ly/3ZgGnHD)). The question I then pose marketers is who was being creative here: Kunal Shah or Sora? The answer, inevitably, is Kunal. He could not have thought of such a creative prompt without having the right tool to execute it. This is how marketers need to think—of AI as a powerful part of their teams that can help them negotiate this wrenching change in their jobs as they enter the age of the AI customer.

## QUICK READ

Marketers face another big shift as the age of AI reshapes what people expect of businesses. Just as the online consumer differs from the industrial-age buyer, so will tomorrow's customer.

GenAI is the best thing that could happen to marketers if they embrace its power. It can help with the creative part of their jobs too, especially the task of customer engagement.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

Preservation of our environment is not a liberal or conservative challenge; it's common sense.

RONALD REAGAN

## MY VIEW | THE LAST WORD

## Air pollution hurts growth: It is time to try new ideas

## QUICK READ

It's astonishing that we haven't yet addressed this annual crisis although it's clear that it reduces the productivity of workers, the key to economic growth, and shatters the health of children.

We need tougher policies such as a construction dust capturing mandate and a Singapore-like vehicle usage fee, but these will work only if we run parallel public awareness campaigns in India.









## FIRST COLUMN

### US-CHINA TRADE WAR HEATS UP

Trump set to amplify Biden's tough stance with tariffs and export controls



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

The loaded guns are out for the two largest economies of the world, the US and China, even before the original hard hitter Donald Trump takes charge as the new President in January next year. In one of his last "Containing China" measures outgoing President Joe Biden has imposed additional export controls on high-end chips, chip-making equipment to China, which can be used as components or in the manufacturing of weapons as well. The new restrictions also directly target some of the largest chipmakers in China, thus throwing in as many road blocks as possible in the dragon's aggressive weaponisation programme. Not to be covered China imposed retaliatory controls on the export of critical minerals such as Gallium, Antimony etc, which are essential components of the chips.

Even as these measures were being announced, President-elect Donald Trump has been threatening the 9 member BRICS nations with severe 100 per cent tariffs, in case, they choose to create an alternate global currency to the dollar. Mr Trump has already threatened Canada, Mexico and the EU with the tariffs scalpel unless they come back to him with offers that are hard to ignore. Trump's third favourite world is tariffs, which he uses as leverage to negotiate trade deals with allies and enemies. The nations that have faced the latest threat of high tariffs from Donald Trump have already taken a cautious approach to negotiating with the tough business person. Canada and Mexico have sounded out that would be more interested in sweetening the deal with the US under Trump, than confronting him on the tariff issues. China knows that Trump would be higher on optics, than his predecessor Joe Biden, on issues where the



US considers them as a direct threat. In one of the recently published editorials in the Chinese government mouthpiece Global Times, the Internet Society of China, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, the China Semiconductor Industry Association, and the China Association of Communications Enterprises are quoted to have issued statements terming US chips as unsafe and unreliable.

It further states "The US has used this measure to greatly expand its power, affecting many countries and regions, including Japan, the Netherlands, Israel, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and China's Taiwan region. This will severely disrupt the stability of the global industrial and supply chains and undermine the international economic and trade order." Incoming President Trump is likely to have a harder stance on export controls and, high tariffs for China imports. The incoming administration is likely to focus on high decibels, high optics, and control China measures than what the Joe Biden administration has achieved. It would be worthwhile to note, that some of the restrictive measures against China introduced, during Trump's first presidency, have only been upgraded and made tougher under President Joe Biden.

Therefore at some level, there is bipartisan support for containing China in the US government. India has been watching this space carefully and knows well that it cannot escape the US tariff cannon for too long. It is also well aware that, there is a trade surplus with the US, which means it exports more than imports. Incoming President Trump even though has good relations with Indian PM Modi, is hardly going to miss this infraction. Obviously, the only safe prediction is a degree of unpredictability. Different countries have had their own experiences from the first Administration and would presumably draw from that to approach the second. Naturally, between two major economies, there will always be some give and take. When we look at economic or technology domains, the case for trusted and reliable partnerships have actually increased in recent years. A lot of what lies ahead would be in fashioning terms of engagement that are perceived as mutually beneficial. "A careful recalibration of India's trade relations is on the anvil, not just with the US, but also with its other allies."

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

# Charting Bharat's role in a multipolar world

Renowned Russian philosopher Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin advocates for civilisational revival and the decolonisation of the mind



BHABANI SONOWAL



Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin, the Russian philosopher, presents a compelling vision of a multipolar world that seeks to restore balance and harmony to international relations. His recent visit to India, during which he delivered an insightful speech at the Russian Centre in New Delhi on November 19, highlighted his ideas on the importance of civilisational revival. Listening to Dugin was a profound experience, as he articulated the need for great civilisations such as Bharat (India), Russia, and China to assume their rightful roles in shaping a new global order. Dugin's philosophy is deeply intertwined with the concept of State-Civilisation, which transcends the boundaries of the Nation-State model imposed by the Westphalian system. In this framework, civilisations are not merely political entities but repositories of spiritual, cultural, and historical identity. For Dugin, Bharat exemplifies this notion as it represents a civilisation rooted in ancient wisdom, from the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads to its rich traditions of Dharmic philosophy. He argues that this heritage uniquely positions Bharat to lead a process of decolonisation—not just politically, but mentally and spiritually. Decolonisation of the mind, Dugin asserts, is essential for nations seeking to reclaim their civilisational sovereignty. Bharat's re-engagement with its Vedic and Upanishadic traditions is not merely an academic exercise but a means of reconnecting with eternal principles that transcend the temporal constructs of modernity. In his view, traditional spiritual processes should be revived as living, evolving frameworks that can guide contemporary governance and social organisation. He draws a parallel with Russia's return to Orthodox Christianity, which he sees as a similar act of reclaiming spiritual identity in defiance of Western liberalism. The philosopher emphasises that the post-Cold War unipolar world order, dominated by Western hegemony, has exhausted itself. Dugin critiques the universalisation of liberal values, arguing that they are inherently tied to the Atlanticist worldview and therefore unfit to govern the plurality of human cultures. Liberalism, he contends, prioritises individualism and market ideology at the expense of collective, spiritual, and civilisational values.

As he wrote in The Fourth Political Theory,

"Modernity is a project that has exhausted itself. The future lies in the revival of traditional societies, metaphysical truths, and spiritual values." For Dugin, multipolarity represents an alternative to this unipolar dominance, offering a framework for civilisations to engage with one another as equals. This vision is rooted in dialogue rather than conflict, with each civilisation contributing its unique insights and values. Bharat, China, and Russia, he argues, form a natural triad that can anchor this new world order. He views these three civilisations as distinct yet complementary, with Bharat's Vedic traditions, China's Confucianism and Taoism, and Russia's Orthodoxy providing diverse philosophical and spiritual foundations for a balanced global system. Dugin's ideas resonate with contemporary geopolitical realities, as platforms like BRICS demonstrate the potential for collaboration among major civilisational powers. He sees BRICS not merely as an economic bloc but as a symbolic embodiment of multipolarity—a round table where civilisations can cooperate without succumbing to Western hegemony. Drawing on the Arthurian legend, Dugin suggests that the multipolar world should function as a round table, where all participants, including the West, have an equal seat, provided they relinquish hegemonic ambitions. Bharat's renaissance from India, in Dugin's view, exemplifies the philosophical and cultural depth of this multipolar project. He perceives this act as a profound rejection of the colonial narrative imposed by Western powers. For Dugin, names carry immense metaphysical significance, and "Bharat" embodies a self-affirmed identity that reclaims the spiritual and cultural essence of the civilisation. This aligns with his broader advocacy for civilisations to transcend the artificial constructs of modernity and rediscover their historical and spiritual cores. The philosopher

also stresses the strategic importance of Eurasia in achieving this vision. He argues that the geographic, cultural, and economic ties between Bharat, China, and Russia make them natural allies in reshaping global power structures. By aligning their civilisational and strategic interests, these three powers can mediate international conflicts and create a more equitable world order. As Dugin writes in Foundations of Geopolitics, "Russia's mission is to unite the peoples and nations of Eurasia into a single geopolitical space that rejects Western domination and promotes a multipolar world." Central to Dugin's vision is the rejection of Western universalism. He critiques the West's attempt to impose its values globally, arguing that this approach erases the distinctiveness of other cultures and leads to alienation. In contrast, the multipolar world Dugin envisions celebrates diversity, recognising the plurality of human experience and thought. Civilisations, he asserts, should engage in dialogue while preserving their unique identities. As he states in "The Great War of Continents," "The salvation of humanity lies in preserving the plurality of cultures and civilisations." This rejection of universalism extends to Dugin's critique of modernity, which he sees as a destructive force that undermines traditional values. He identifies a global trend toward the revival of traditionalism, noting that civilisations are increasingly turning to their spiritual roots in response to the moral and cultural relativism of liberalism. From Bharat's Vedic revival to Russia's Orthodox resurgence and China's embrace of Confucianism, Dugin sees a worldwide movement toward reclaiming heritage. "The return to tradition," he writes, "is not an act of nostalgia but a necessity for survival in the face of cultural erosion." Dugin views Bharat as a cornerstone of this traditionalist resurgence. Its

ability to mediate tensions, whether between China and the Islamic world or within the broader multipolar framework, highlights its potential as a stabilising force. Bharat's emphasis on spiritual heritage and cultural unity, he argues, sets an example for other civilisations seeking to harmonise their internal diversity with their external roles. The path to a multipolar world is not without challenges. Dugin acknowledges that the West's resistance to relinquishing its dominance could lead to conflicts, even escalating to dangerous levels. However, he remains optimistic about the long-term prospects of multipolarity, which he sees as a natural evolution of global history. This optimism is grounded in his belief that civilizational revival offers a more stable and equitable alternative to the power struggles of unipolarity. In Dugin's analysis, the future lies in the hands of civilisations willing to reclaim their spiritual and cultural identities. Bharat's role is pivotal in this transformation. By embracing its Vedic heritage and fostering philosophical and civilisational approaches to global politics, Bharat can help shape a world that values harmony over domination. As Dugin wrote in The Fourth Political Theory, "The multipolar world is not a competition of powers but a symphony of civilisations, each contributing its melody to the greater harmony." Dugin's vision challenges conventional paradigms of International Relations, offering a deeply philosophical and civilisational approach to global politics. By placing spirituality and tradition at the core of his analysis, he provides a framework for a world that celebrates diversity while striving for collective progress. Bharat's role in this vision is both profound and indispensable, symbolising the potential for civilisations to lead humanity toward a more balanced and equitable future. (The writer is an Assistant Professor at Bennett University; views expressed are personal)



**BHARAT'S RE-ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS VEDIC AND UPANISHADIC TRADITIONS IS NOT MERELY AN ACADEMIC EXERCISE BUT A MEANS OF RECONNECTING WITH ETERNAL PRINCIPLES THAT TRANSCEND THE TEMPORAL CONSTRUCTS OF MODERNITY**

# Financial literacy: The key to unlocking India's economic power

By teaching money management skills early, India can cultivate a generation of financially savvy individuals capable of driving economic growth

As we are about to wrap up 2024, it cannot be understated how important financial literacy is with changing trends of the economy, where education is pivotal in determining India's arrival as an economic superpower. Even now, with the growing financial awareness, only 27 per cent of Indian adults are financially literate, that number drops to a mere 16.7 per cent for students. Recognising the urgency for the skills of financial management, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 revolves around putting in place financial literacy from the early days of schooling in the country's educational system. Teaching children money management skills early in life helps develop financially responsible



AJAY LAKHOTIA

adults who can make sound decisions benefiting both themselves and the economy. In earlier times, financial education was largely informal. The previous generation was focused on accumulating tangible assets like gold and property. However, India's banking and financial system has undergone a vast transformation since the 1990s. With SEBI paving the way for new regulated asset classes for the common public - mutual funds, stocks, bonds, REITs and multiple other financial products are available for the common public to invest and grow their capital. The establishment of the Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI), has instilled confidence in financial markets and led to greater participation in investments. As India progresses towards a digital financial ecosystem, the demand for financial literacy has never been so crucial in navigating opportunities. Why Financial Literacy Needs to Start Early: Financial literacy goes beyond just education; it is a life skill and mindset that needs to be cultivated from an early age. All the education policies stress encourage students to be mindful and well-



read towards financial issues so that they can cope with anything ranging from budgeting to retirement savings. Students with such financial sensibilities provided that they have been exposed practically to these concepts, would be able to cope with investment volatility, financial contingencies and planning for a strong future. Building such a ground is vital for citizens to contribute towards building a balanced economy. Taking Inspiration across the globe: Switzerland, Japan, and South Korea have leveraged their core strengths—banking, technology, and manufacturing, respectively—to drive economic growth and establish distinct global identities. These unique specialisations have not only accelerated their eco-

nomical development but also secured their positions as global leaders in their respective domains. Following their example, India could prioritise financial literacy as a national initiative to enhance its citizens' saving and investing behaviours while increasing economic participation. This focus could yield significant social benefits: reducing poverty, narrowing income inequality, and improving the quality of life for millions. India's abundant advantages—from its tech-savvy youth to its robust educational infrastructure—position it favourably for global leadership in financial prosperity. However, these strengths alone are insufficient. Without proper financial knowledge, even the most talented individuals may struggle to maximise their potential, ultimately hindering economic growth. By combining financial education with India's technological expertise and expanding educational framework, the nation can nurture future entrepreneurs, investors, and professionals who will not only excel in their careers but also effectively manage and grow their wealth. A multi-pronged approach can

help to establish a financially literate India. The key steps to follow: Integrating Personal Finance into Curricula: Personal finance should be included as part of the school and college syllabus so that a strong foundation towards money management & finance for a lifetime. Nationwide Awareness Programs: Public campaigns on financial literacy will reach areas lacking financially literate communities, effectively democratising access to that knowledge as well as encouraging wider economic participation. Leveraging Technology and Partnerships: Public-private partnerships can make financial education accessible and attractive. By using technol-

gy, it is possible to cast interactive sessions and impart practical, real-life skills to a broader audience, regardless of their location. A Call to Action for all of us: It is now time to recognise financial literacy as an indispensable part of our journey towards education and the economic boom of India. Financial literacy, more than a skill, should be regarded as a strategic enabler to achieve personal growth. Through the infusion of financial education across all levels, which range from classrooms to boardrooms, we can unleash a superpower that will help our population bloom and lead us into the 21st century. (The writer is founder and CEO of StockGro; views are personal)