

THE ASIAN AGE

7 DECEMBER 2024

Fadnavis govt must follow coalition dharma in Maha

It is a fresh start for Devendra Fadnavis in his third term as chief minister of Maharashtra when he can look forward to a longer "innings" than in his short-lived second term which began under a cloud of manipulation and midnight manoeuvring and ended swiftly. It is with an absolute mandate of the people that his government starts afresh with the BJP alliance having swept 230 of 286 seats with his party the dominant partner among the triumvirate of BJP, Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP.

The signs of stability are solid this time than in a preceding period of about five years of uncertain alliance politics, opportunistic coalitions and parties splitting. The swearing-in of the chief of the new government also came after a period of ambiguity with Mr Shinde said to be reluctant to take the step down from CM to deputy CM, but which he had to accept to keep his finger on the pulse of Maharashtra after having personally brought down the Uddhav Thackeray regime and then stolen a march over his party in the recent Assembly polls.

The management team, ushered in the presence of business and Bollywood celebrities, is the same as the top with Mr Fadnavis as CM joined by Mr Shinde and Ajit Pawar as deputy CMs but only after the BJP had had to learn a few lessons along the way in coalition politics and the art of managing a diversity of opinions and priorities. The administering of the country's biggest state in terms of GDP whose metropolis is the financial capital of the nation itself will not come without challenges.

Going forward, there may be further testing of the coalition dharma, but the team has a record of having managed the state capably enough for 30 months under Mr Shinde's stewardship. The sharing of ministerial berths is yet to be sorted and that could be the first big test for the parties and their three leaders who have formed the government.

In a state of clashing caste and community interests, Mr Shinde may have played his hand cleverly when he was at the helm. However, the challenge of dealing with a demand for Marathas that may never die down and other pressures that are bound to come up after the latest election cycle brought up issues like a demand for a caste census and changes in quotas is bound to make the matter of managing societal aspirations thorny.

Cash handout under the popular Ladki Bahin Yojana, which is to go up to ₹2,100 from ₹1,500 a month, will not come without stretching the exchequer. Mr Fadnavis has already assured that the resources would be found for the raise in stipend for underprivileged women. This is the new reality for the BJP which may have liked to believe it is one party that does not do freebies as liberally as the others who promise loads of them at poll time but discovered the pain of delivery only when they gained power.

RBI still cautious, but cuts CRR

The RBI-led Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) continued its cautious approach by keeping the repo rate unchanged for the 11th time. However, it did try to give a boost to the economy through increasing liquidity in the banking system.

The RBI has slashed Cash Reserve Ratio — a percentage of deposits that the banks have to keep in the form of cash or cash equivalents — by 0.5 per cent, infusing ₹1.16 lakh crores into the economy. The banks could lend this money to companies or the general public. The fresh lending will increase private consumption, which of late was under stress.

It has also raised the limit for collateral-free agriculture loans from ₹5 lakh to ₹2.2 lakh per borrower. The move will enhance credit availability for small and marginal farmers and boost spending in the rural economy.

The central bank has also allowed small finance banks to extend credit lines through UPI, which typically target borrowers of small ticket size loans. Lower middle class, which is said to be badly hit by low wage growth, will benefit from this measure.

The decision to increase the interest rate cap on foreign currency non-resident bank deposits could make Indian banking system more attractive to Indians staying abroad, which will further increase the flow of foreign currency into India, potentially easing pressure on the rupee.

While RBI continues to believe that inflation could potentially see a spike because of food prices, seasonal corrections and foreign developments, it has continued its neutral monetary stance.

The fact that two of committee members voted to ease monetary stance compared to the previous one member shows the growing support in the committee for a growth-focused policy as against the current one that focused on inflation, sparking speculation about a repo rate cut in the RHI review in February.

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Subhani



Women in command: Key for Army is how to adapt



Syed Ata Hasnain

**The general officer is entirely within his rights and responsibility to pen down his personal thoughts on the subject after the passage of a reasonable span of time after the adoption of the policy on command by women officers**

**G**ender issues in the Army must be seen as a constant work in progress without attaching sensitivity to them. I consciously avoided stepping in with any opinion when the environment recently exploded around the content of the leaked demoficial (DO) letter of the GOC 17 Corps of the Indian Army addressed to his superior officer. In the last few days, advice, opinion, critique and more have all been extended by relatively less informed people and that too with unnecessary emotion and lack of sensitivity. Firstly, the general officer is entirely within his rights and responsibility to pen down his personal thoughts on the subject after the passage of a reasonable span of time after the adoption of the policy on command by women officers. When any major change is under execution, the Army, much like any other organisation, wants progressive feedback. It is a command responsibility of the general officer to obtain feedback, verbal or otherwise, align it with his own perception gathered during visits to units and formations so affected, and holistically advise his superior officers about the same. This is what he has done through this communication. Those of us who are aware of the system and the way it works in the Army, are fully conscious of the fact that this won't lead to an overnight decision to amend or change anything in the way things are progressing on the issue of women officers in command. There is a probation period for everything. In fact, in most policies of the Military Secretary (MS) Branch a date is also incorporated to indicate that a review would take

place thereafter. So, nothing is going to happen in a hurry without a full run of the policy through one or two command tenures of the incumbent and subsequent women commanding officers (COs), that could run as long as five to six years, unless, of course there are judicial interventions which is something which cannot be planned for.

Many people have felt perturbed about the leakage of the letter. That is a side issue, but nevertheless important because the Army cannot have policies with sensitive content being discussed in public. It unnecessarily puts the leadership under pressure and uninformed opinion places unwarranted pressure on the system as well. That lapse needs to be investigated and counter-measures adopted, if women officers should not become a red herring.

Now, for the main issue of women COs, I too have an opinion and it comes from years of field command and handling of officer career management policies at both the functional and directional levels. My experience tells me that there will be extensive differences of opinion based upon their potential. I, for one, have had a very positive experience, but earlier generations like mine never looked upon women officers in command positions of units. We grooned the male officers and did their appraisal based upon their potential for command because the Indian Army prides itself in being called a "command oriented" force. You may be the finest and most meticulous staff officer, or the best technical brain, but if you do not have it in you to perform in command of troops, you can only remain second best.

LETTERS  
DOG AND BONE

George Soros has become some kind of villain in a Bond movie orchestrating events that would spell doom for India. What is his beef with India? Is his beef with India is yet unclear. Soros is now 94 years old. The BJP is calling Rahul Gandhi a traitor for being a lackey of Soros in bringing economic devastation to a fast growing India. Is it mere coincidence that anybody pointing fingers at Gautam Adani is made to face the music? Think of Rahul Gandhi, Mahua Moitra, Sanjay Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal. The government and Opposition seems to be playing a game of dog and the bone, the bone being Adani, while the people can only watch helplessly from the sidelines.

Anthony Henriques  
Mumbai

TEMPLE AT RISK

THE ATTACK on SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal at Golden Temple is shocking to say the least. It is not only a breach of security but raises serious questions over safety of the Swarn Mandir complex which receives on an average 1,00,00 pilgrims every day. Thanks to the prompt action of the police personnel deployed on plus security for Badal, his life was saved, but a thorough and time bound investigation must take place and the whole complex should be thoroughly sanitised and checked for any security loopholes. The Punjab government can not be lax on such a sensitive matter.

Bal Govind  
Noida, UP

BILLS IN HINDI

THE HABIT of the current dispensation to christen bills in Hindi is unwarranted. It is a disservice to the Hindi speaking states as such names can be quite a mouthful even for Hindi speakers. The government ought not to use this as a tactic to thrust Hindi on non-Hindi speakers either and thus widen the linguistic faultlines between communities. It is advisable that the primary medium of naming bills remain English while Hindi can be used as the secondary medium. The Central government need not open this can of worms and should instead start working on pressing issues.

Aanya Singhal  
Noida, UP



Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings

"An 'Aunty' who lived in Mumbai  
Cultivated a romantic sigh  
Thinking to seduce  
Young men on the loose  
Who rejected her, saying "nice try!"  
But this 'Aunty' recovered apace  
Like the tortoise and hare in the race  
Her romantic sighs  
Applied to mature guys  
Who offered her all shades of embrace."

— From The Diary of Rosemary Marlowe, by Raschhoob

Of gaps in history; and a remarkable absence of graffiti in India's big cities

**O**n my recent sojourn of several Indian cities — Mumbai, Bengaluru, Goa, Delhi and the city of eternal selfish, Agra, I noted, a complete of categorical absences — pause and cause for thought. The first notable absence in all these cities is that of graffiti on vacant spaces.

None. Yes, there were commissioned pictures on the city walls, some possibly attempting to give pictorial expression to the supposed soul of the city, others historically or simply decoratively striking.

Try London, Berlin or any Western city where every inch of available space, even the sides of bridges which one would imagine were impossible to access, plastered with names, abuse, crude slogans, undecipherable (to me and other non-members of some fraternity) codes and mes-

sages. They are all assertive in one sense or the other. It was Norman Mailer who first wrote a poem to graffiti in the magazine *Squire*, calling it a tide of urban art. Mailer calls himself the Aesthetic Investigator (A.I.) and his second paragraph reads thus: "As I'm talking to CAY in the famous CAY from 161 Street, there at the beginning with TAKI 183 and JUNIOR 161, as famous in the world of wall and subway graffiti as Giotto may have been when his name first circulated through the circuits of those who wrote and added through Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael. Whew! In such company CAY loses all name although he will not necessarily see it that way."

"Whew!" indeed. I recall that I read Mailer's rambles in 1974 but at the time didn't consider sending that paragraph and, in the same vein, the rest of the article to the satirical British fortnightly *Private Eye* which runs a column called "Pseudo's Corner" and solicits pretentious quotes from readers who may have come across and noted them. At the time, in my short and happy innocence, I regarded Mailer as one of my literary heroes and publicly labelling it "pseudo" would have been the deepest sacrilege. But... one grows up.

It is of course said that CAY and perhaps all the others who put their imprimatur on walls, on gravestones, on railway carriages parked in the sides of elevated highways and the girders of rail and road bridges, do so to mark out gang territory. It's the sort of thing dogs do on lampposts to claim them.

I must admit, gentle reader, that I have always been intrigued as to how and when graffiti of the sort — or any non-commissioned sort — is done. It's obvious that it's done at night when the streets and railway sidings and bridges are quiet and deserted. But how and even why do the graffiti artists do it? I have heard that they have heard them (called "taggers") brave heights and detection to do it? Yes, they mark their territory and some of them detour the attention and mark of the graffiti on an internationally uniform black font. How did this almost mandatory graffiti font spread from one continent to the other?

Despite Mailer's pretentiousness, very little graffiti now appeals as art, though some of the black lettering does give way, in appreciable instances, to illustrative art.

In the case of the secretive Banksy, one can even see its distinctiveness and emotional appeal — a rat in a room as a symbol of hope or aspiration perhaps? So, why then is there no amateur graffiti in Indian cities? There certainly are nasty gangs of youth and of the not-so-youth but they don't seem compelled to mark out their territory.

Perhaps the profits from selling Ganja, or even detoxed cocaine, which has been smuggled into the country in condoms along with the smugglers' backside, have caused the sort of territorial gang-murder that one sees in London, Manchester or New York.

Or perhaps the Indian youth regard going out at night and expending the effort on painting graffiti to assert that they were there as unpaid hard work? The professional, commissioned artist graffiti does do any writing. Even the notices that I used to see in my youth no longer exist. I recall the most prominent in Pune and Chennai (then Poona and Madras) were signs saying COMMIT NO NUISANCE, which didn't mean don't play rummy. New Hindi speaking states have used as the secondary medium. The Central government need not open this can of worms and should instead start working on pressing issues.





# oud



While the past few days seem better because of the wind and the sky looks bright and blue, the AQI is still well over 200. **ARVI KHAN**

newsflash on TV: PM2.5 monitors had "broken" in Delhi. "The air quality index had hit 999 (micrograms per cubic metre), the highest limit, for the first time ever. This was around the time the yearly stubble burning had started in Punjab."

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana have long burnt crop stubble, but starting 2009, groundwater conservation policies in Punjab mandated a delay of rice transplantation to mid-late June to coincide with the advent of the monsoon, for groundwater replenishment. Consequently, the harvest period moved to early November, shrinking the time they had before planting the next crop.

"This compelled the farmers to practise widespread stubble burning in early November for the quick and easy disposal of crop residue. Unfortunately, this short window coincides with the change of seasons over northern India," says a 2023 research paper co-authored by Prof. Tripathi and published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology Letters*. This is when the air turns denser and chillier over northern India.

In 2012, Nasa released a satellite image of stubble-burning fires that caught the world's attention—the crop fires resembled forest fires that had raged in the US and Australia. Various studies by Indian scientists followed, stating the crop burning was exposing people in the densely populated plains to high levels of air pollution.

Air pollution finally garnered enough attention for the Central Pollution Control Board to start regular monitoring of air quality levels in 2016. At present, Delhi has about 44 air quality monitoring stations; in 2016, there were 20. Over 550 similar stations exist across the country.

Kartika Negi, lead climate impacts, at research-based consulting and capacity building initiative Climate Trends, has been studying the pollution levels across the country since 2016. "We are making new records every year," she says. "The pollution levels peaked from 2016-19. During covid, there was a steady decline between 2020-21 (since most activity had stopped), but 2022 onwards it started rising again. 2023 was worse than 2022." With Delhi AQI crossing 1,100 last month, the 2024 readings have already made a record.

When it comes to the causes, the culprits are vehicle exhaust, construction, crop burning, household fires, industrial emissions, among others. The other big but lesser talked about factor is climate change. IQAir's 2023 World Air Quality Report makes it clear: "Climate change, primarily driven by greenhouse gas emissions, plays a pivotal role in influencing concentrations of PM2.5 air pollutants through various pathways, including the impact of wildfire smoke and pollen-based allergens. Fossil fuel emissions account for 65% of global CO2 emissions and are the primary cause of majority of PM2.5-related deaths, highlighting the interconnected relationship between air quality and climate change."

The climate change impact is also visible in the lack of rainfall during winter months in northern India. Usually, by the end of the year, the Indo-Gangetic Plain, spread across the northern and north-eastern part of the subcontinent, gets a few spells of winter rain and snowfall. "But due to the absence of any strong western disturbance in the Himalayas (owing to rising temperature), rains have been evad-

ing no plants," explains Negi. "There has been almost no winter rain so far this year."

Given the way climate change is harming the environment, Negi predicts days with 1,000 AQI to become more common in the future unless strict measures are taken.

## BEYOND THE CITIES

Even in hilly places like Himachal Pradesh or Uttarakhand, the air is not what it used to be. Delhi-based Madhukar Varshney, founder of Rise Foundation, which is working towards building a zero waste society in the country, was recently in his hometown of Rishikesh. "The AQI there is reaching 200," he says. "It was unthinkable five years ago, but tourism, city dwellers settling here, increasing population, construction work, the whole concretisation has impacted Rishikesh."

Since starting Rise, Varshney and team have planted, in collaboration with corporates and other organisations, over 50,000 native trees in Delhi and neighbouring cities, and in Bengaluru, using the Japanese system of mini-forests in urban spaces, commonly known as Miyawaki forests, to help in carbon sequestration, reduce temperatures within urban heat islands and support local wildlife. "You can't just blame winter months, firecrackers or stubble burning for the air pollution rise," he says. "Clearly, we are doing something very wrong that the air is bad every where throughout the year."

Even cities like Mumbai with the benefit of a coastline, where the sea breeze helps disperse pollutants, are recording AQI over 200.

Writer Akriti Muddalaha, 26, finds herself in a bit of a bind. She's moved to Mumbai from Delhi this October, but the construction work in her locality is making the air unbreathable. "It's not as bad as Delhi," she says, "but I keep my windows closed most of the time to avoid breathing in the dust."

So does Rutuja Pardeshi, a 22-year-old journalist. Since moving to Mumbai from Nashik in June, she's almost stopped going out unless it's related to work. "The first month, I had a severe cough," says Pardeshi, who suffers from bronchitis. "I don't wear mask during peak traffic hours. I immediately have breathing and throat issues." Her monthly spend on cabs is ₹5,000-6,000, which she says, "is too high on a journalist's salary."

Life in the garden city of Bengaluru isn't much better. For the past six months, Sameer Rathod, 24, a software engineer, has been trying to grow plants in his balcony in the hope of surrounding himself with some fresh air.

Three months ago, he was coughing non-stop for a week. The doctor told him that had air was affecting his health—he lives in an area with heavy traffic and multiple construction sites.

"I can't change my house; I don't make enough money to move to a greener area. So, this is my solution," he says over a video call, showing the 15 plants he's trying to grow in his veranda. "I am known to be a plant killer among my friends," he laughs. "But now, for sake of my health, I am trying to be a good plant parent."

While there are no specific numbers, such as air pollution-related health cases are rising in Bengaluru, says Dr Rajani Surendar Nath, consultant (interventional pulmonology and palliative medicine), at SPARSH hospitals in Rajarajeshwari Nagar, Bengaluru. "There's definitely a spike in respiratory problems," she says. "We have seen more people come with airway diseases in the past five years. Our general advice is not to step out too much in highly polluted areas and wear a mask as much as possible."

These are stop-gap solutions, though. As is Rathod's decision to grow plants. Phiroze Mehrotra's "airbubble", Kumar's handkerchief, or Gulati's plan to relocate. Ditto for the government's decision to shift school classes online, or demand offices to shift to work from home, and halt construction work for short periods of time.

Phiroze Mehrotra understands that his isn't a solution. "I have the hope that my children are breathing clean air. That gives me some peace of mind."

What is really needed, however, are drastic steps. For starters, there needs to be more awareness. "People still think if the sky is blue and sun is bright and shiny, the air is clear, when it actually is about 200-300. High AQI has become normalised in metros," says Varshney. "Why can't we have AQI readings as alerts by authorities on mobile phones and newspapers every day like stocks?"

The change has to happen at the policy level, believes Dr Tripathi. "Cities like Beijing and San Francisco have also dealt with high pollution levels, but managed to limit it after imposing strict restrictions, and it happened after enough pushing by the NGOs and citizen groups."

The onus is as much on citizens. "People continue to burn waste during winter. Greenhouse gas emissions is rising. We are still not using clean energy as much as we should. Vehicular traffic is increasing. Buildings continue to be constructed without the mandatory green cover," says Dr Puri. "For any change to happen, the effort has to be made from both sides; you can't blame the government and then sit in your room with air filters on, which is, in many cases, not running on clean energy."

It is a reminder, if one were needed, that not everyone is breathing the same air—but then again, they are. While Phiroze Mehrotra does his commute to office in his air-purified car, authorickshaw driver Kumar, with his handkerchief-mask, uses the same Ring Road to drop customers. At some point, both are absorbing more pollutants than most people in the world.



Coastal cities like Mumbai may soon become uninhabitable due to sea level rise and intense cyclones.

DEBASISH DUTTAGUPTA

# How climate change impacts Indian cities

While Delhi is in the news for its soaring pollution levels, no big city in India is safe from the future impacts of climate change

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The National Capital Region (NCR) is beset by problems, with the unbearable amounts of atmospheric pollution being the most acute. But the crisis of livability that the city faces isn't just confined to this. There's the annual heatwaves, the severe monsoon flooding, the horribly polluted Yamuna, and a brewing groundwater crisis. Delhi isn't a pleasant place to live in—to put it mildly—for much of the year.

In some ways, however, Delhi is a microcosm of the threats facing India as a whole. As multiple studies have pointed out over the years, India faces multiple imminent threats due to the climate crisis. Heatwaves, supercharged storms, cloudbursts, drought, melting Himalayan glaciers, falling water table, drying rivers, increasing aridity, sea level rise. There isn't a climate impact that India isn't already suffering from. And with every passing year, the magnitude of these impacts is only going to get more acute.

## URBAN HEAT: DELHI, MUMBAI, KOLKATA, BENGALURU

Climate change places additional pressures on cities, especially since India is one of the fastest urbanising countries in the world. According to the *United Nations World Urbanization Prospects* report from a few years ago, the number of Indians living in cities is expected to grow to 871 million by 2050. In the next six years, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad are set to join Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru as cities with populations of over 10 million.

While this massive rise in urban migration raises the spectre of basic infrastructure-related problems, what may actually be of greater worry is heat stress. Cities typically are hotter because of the extensive heat island effect, and good urban planning—which can alleviate some of the problems—is sorely lacking in India.

A study titled *Cities, Climate Change and Chronic Heat Exposure*—found that Indian cities are a magnet for the most lethal form of heat: humid heat. Extreme high temperatures plus high humidity is a lethal cocktail which the human body just cannot stand. Measured as wet-bulb globe temperature (WBGT), anything above 30 degrees Celsius (while accounting for temperature, humidity, wind speed, solar radiation and sun angle) is lethal.

The study found that Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai are already on the threshold of this limit. These three cities were classed as "Very Hot (Danger)", while a fourth city, Bengaluru, fell into the "Warm (Caution)" range. The worry is that as global temperatures continue to soar—2024 is on track to becoming the hottest year ever recorded, with an average heating of over 1.5 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times—Indian heatwaves will get stronger and last longer. These will be felt even more intensely in cities.

## SEA LEVEL RISE AND EXTREME STORMS: MUMBAI, KOLKATA, CHENNAI

Although our understanding of climate change impacts is formed purely by what we experience

on land, the real story of global heating lies in the ocean. According to the World Meteorological Organization's 2024 *State of the Climate* report that was released last month, over the past 50 years, 90% of the extra heat trapped by excessive greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere has been absorbed by the ocean. Since 1960, the ocean has been heating up, and this process has only accelerated in the past 20 years. From 300 zettajoules (ZJ) in 1960 to 1332T in 2023 is a massive jump.

What is the effect of this overheated ocean? It's causing longer and more severe marine heatwaves that bleaches and kills coral reefs, which sustain 25% of the global ocean ecosystem. This, along with increased ocean acidification will put a greater strain on seafood catch. But for human beings, the biggest effect of excess ocean heats is that Indian Ocean cyclones are becoming stronger every year.

Megacities like Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai lie in their path. The recent Cyclone Fengal may have missed Chennai by a whisker when it made landfall on 30 November, but it was neighbouring Puducherry that faced the brunt. As of the time of writing, some 19 people had lost their lives in India and Sri Lanka, while Puducherry experienced its heaviest rainfall in 24

hours in 30 years. When Cyclone Dana made landfall in Odisha in late October, Kolkata was paralysed with flooding. In each case—the most infamous being that of Cyclone Amphan in 2020—the storms became intensely strong in just a few hours because of high sea surface temperatures.

Connected to this annual hazard is the fact that with the gradual collapse of the Arctic permafrost and summer sea ice, along with rapidly melting Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, global sea levels are rising in an alarming manner. Since 1993, satellites have been monitoring this rise, and in the past 30 years, global sea level has risen by over 10cm, and rose twice as fast in the past decade that it had in the first decade. In certain coastal regions, like around India, the rate of sea level rise is higher than the global rate.

Not only does this spell trouble for coastal cities in the long term, even in the short term, higher sea levels can spell disaster when cyclones make landfall. Whenever the latter happens, there's something called a storm surge, where the force of the storm carries sea water inland in huge waves. During Cyclone Amphan, there was a storm surge of about 14ft. It was the Sunderban mangroves that prevented the storm surge of being even higher, as much as 25ft. If the time a cyclone makes landfall coincides with high tide and higher sea levels, storm surges would be higher and lead to greater flooding. As cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai systematically destroy their mangroves and wetlands, they are increasingly without defences for the climate change future.

So while Delhi has been in the news recently due to its unmanageable pollution levels, there's hardly any city in the country that isn't facing environmental or climate-related threats of some kind or the other. And as India continues to urbanise at a rapid pace, the pressure is going to only increase.



Choppy seas in Chennai before the landfall of Cyclone Fengal.

APF







# RBI's balanced approach to manage growth, inflation

**A**MIDST recessionary trends in the economy and persistently high retail inflation rates, fuelled by food prices, the Reserve Bank of India has acted prudently and avoided "any jolt reactions" in the words of its Governor Shaktikanta Das. The central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to keep key benchmark interest rates unchanged. In doing so, the RBI has not heeded calls for Repo rate cut from public as well as key figures in the government. There have been calls from Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and the Finance Minister himself, Nirmala Sitharaman for reducing borrowing burden for businesses. The CEA even demanded that food items

be taken off retail inflation basket, contending that monetary policy does not impinge on them. However, the central bank feels otherwise. It acted strictly as per its legal mandate, said Das on Friday. The repo rate is retained at 6.5% for the 10th consecutive time since February 2023. Repo is the rate at which commercial banks borrow money from the central bank. A lower repo rate brings down the cost of borrowing for them, thereby inducing them to lend more. Though lower rate trigger more spending, and greater economic activity for businesses, it can potentially exacerbate inflationary pressures. A high inflation will eat into purchasing power of consumers, slowing spending on non-essential goods,

which could in turn drag down economy growth. Central banks will tend to raise rates to rein in inflation, which can further depress consumer spending, while making borrowing more expensive for both businesses and individuals. This factor seems to weigh on the RBI MPC. However, taking cognisance of the liquidity tightening in the system, the cash reserve ratio (CRR) - the percentage of cash required to be kept in reserves against the bank's total deposits - has been cut by 50 basis points to 4%. This may inject Rs 1.16 lakh crore liquidity into the financial system. Why is there liquidity tightening in the financial system, one may wonder. In the quarter ended June 2024, bank deposits grew at 11.7%, credit expanded by 15%.

This wide gap has been seen to be causing asset-liability mismatch at the banks end. The RBI will now wait for the high food prices to cool before deciding on any rate cut in the future at its next MPC meeting in February. The inflation surged to a 14-month high of 6.21% in October as against the RBI's upper tolerance band of 6%. The Q2 GDP figures show that sluggishness is plaguing manufacturing and mining sectors. With the urban demand stagnating, the rural demand is not simply enough to offset the imbalance. Unless, the government takes remedial measures, analysts fear the economy could be heading for a cyclical slowdown. High inflation will deter investments by industrialists and investors. Keep

in mind that the inflation forecast has just been revised upward to 4.8% for this fiscal with the likelihood of 4% in the second quarter of FY26. The RBI's downward revision of its GDP forecast by 60 basis points to 6.6% points to headwinds for the economy in the second half. As Das said, a growth slowdown - if it lingers beyond a point - may need policy support. Add to the government measures, a healthy rise in agricultural output should ease inflation, facilitating a rate cut in February. In all, the central bank has taken a decision in the long-term interests of the country, even as it tweaked CRR to address the short term liquidity mismatch. It is heartening that the RBI is alive to the challenges.

# LETTERS

**Recall supreme sacrifices of armed forces**  
THE Armed Forces Flag Day is an annual event organised on 07 December in India to honour the brave uniformed soldiers, veterans, and paying homage to martyrs of the Indian Armed Forces. It is a day of gratitude, respect, and support for the armed forces personnel who selflessly protecting the nation round the corner. Initiated in 1949, it is celebrated nationwide with activities that foster a sense of unity, patriotism and gratitude towards soldiers by collecting contributions by selling small flags, stickers, and tokens. It will also bridge the gap between civilian population and defence forces, who work tirelessly to keep the nation secure and prosperous. Flag Day brings to the forefront our commitment of looking after our war disabled soldiers, brave women and families of martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for the country. War is not just a shower of bullets and bombs from both sides but also a shower of blood and bones on both sides. Let's salute those soldiers because of whom Indian population are breathing fresh air and peaceful living.  
Capt Dr Burra Madhusudan Reddy, Karimnagar

**What does explain our mediocrity?**  
PROPOS 'Are we a nation of under achievers'. The obsession with the past is nothing but an attempt to bask in the reflected glory of our ancestors who made huge contribution in all fields. Is there a single achievement of which we can be proud of in the last few centuries? A bronze medal in the Olympics can have us screaming from the rooftops. This only goes to show our lack of glory in the sports disciplines. Maybe we have had a few artists and painters of note, but in the madness of religion have persecuted them. In the olden days, kings would patronise painters and sculptors so they could concentrate on their art without bothering too much about their daily needs. This is no longer the case. While the world of science is exploding with new ideas and theories, our attitude is "we have everything we need in our ancient texts". Indians who live in the West perform better. Is there something in the air which produces nothing but mediocrity mostly?  
Anthony Henriques, Mumbai

**Are we under achievers?** No, not at all. There are excellent educational institutions across our country. The meritorious students have been proving their excellence. Unfortunately our country has the highest number of illiterates. Many educated youth are yet to enter their career path. All their parents irrespective of their earnings provide consistent support for the best possible education. Our Prime Minister often focusses on "VIKSIT BHARAT @ 2047". I request his kindness to rename it as "VIKSIT BHARAT FROM 2024". He and all Chief Ministers are requested to fill up all pending vacancies. Similarly there are several pending projects. Completing them will create many jobs.  
G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad

**The article raises a crucial question that warrants introspection and discussion among citizens, policymakers, and educators.** It rightly points out that despite having a large pool of talented individuals, we often fail to translate this talent into tangible achievements. One of the primary reasons for this underachievement is our education system, which often focuses on rote learning rather than encouraging critical thinking and innovation. Moreover, lack of adequate infrastructure, resources, and opportunities in many parts of the country hinders the growth and development of our youth. However, it's not all doom and gloom. To unlock our true potential, we need to work collectively to address the systemic issues that hold us back. This includes reforming our education system, investing in infrastructure and resources, and creating opportunities for our youth to grow and develop.  
Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

**India's stature soars in space sector**  
ISRO successfully launched ESA's Proba-3 mission from Sriharikota, marking a major collaboration. The two-satellite system will study the Sun's corona from a highly elliptical orbit, enabling advanced solar observation and crucial space weather research. Notably this is the first time ESA (European Space Agency) has partnered with ISRO for a satellite launch in 23 years after launch of Proba in 2001. ISRO's contribution to this ambitious project underscores its rising stature as a global leader in space exploration. The joint efforts between ESA and ISRO not only promise to unlock new discoveries about the sun but also reinforce the importance of global partnerships in pushing the boundaries of human knowledge. The Proba-3 is a technological marvel. Its successful launch highlights India's growing reputation as a reliable partner for cutting edge space mission.  
P Victor Sebaraju, Tirunelveli

thehansreader@gmail.com

# BENGALURU ONLINE

**JD(S) to counter Congress with huge convention in Mandya**  
MANDYA: Following Congress' massive convention in Hassan, the home district of former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, where the party (JD(S)) is planning to stage a counter-offensive. The JD(S), which woke up to the Congress' display of power, is now gearing up to organise a massive convention in Mandya on December 15, coinciding with the felicitation program for Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy. December 16 marks the birthday of Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy, and the JD(S) plans to capitalize on this occasion by holding the felicitation event at Sri M.V. Stadium in Mandya. Party leaders are aiming for a turnout of over one lakh workers at the event. Sources close to the JD(S) suggest that this large-scale gathering is aimed at boosting the morale of workers, particularly after the party's defeat in Channarayana. The convention is also expected to include BJP leaders and workers, signaling the JD(S)'s intention to solidify its position in the Old Mysore region and maintain its dominance in the area.  
Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

# US rejects Amnesty report on Israel's genocide in Gaza

Amnesty International found through its research and legal analysis "sufficient basis to conclude that Israel committed, during the nine-month period under review, prohibited acts under Articles 1 (a), (b), and (c) of the Genocide Convention, namely killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part"



ELOISE GOLDSMITH

A U.S. State Department spokesperson told reporters on Thursday that the United States disagrees with Amnesty International's new report accusing Israel of carrying out genocide in the Gaza Strip. "We disagree with the conclusions of such a report," spokesperson Vedant Patel said a day after the human rights group released the document. "We have said previously and continue to find that the allegations of genocide are unfounded." The Israeli government has vehemently rejected the findings in the report. "The deplorable and fanatical organization Amnesty International has once again produced a fabricated report that is entirely false and based on lies. The genocidal massacre on October 7, 2023, was carried out by the Hamas terrorist organization against Israeli citizens. Since then, Israeli citizens have been subjected to daily attacks from several different fronts. Israel is defending itself against these attacks acting fully in accordance with international law," wrote the Israel Foreign Ministry in a post on X. In a statement, the Israeli branch of the organization—which reportedly did not take part in the funding, research, or writing of the report—said, "The scale of the killing and destruction carried out by Israel in Gaza has reached horrific proportions and must be stopped immediately," per 'The Times of Israel'. However, the groups does not believe the events "meet the definition of genocide as strictly laid out in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." In the 296-page report released Wednesday—titled, "You Feel Like You Are Subhuman": Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza—Amnesty International found through its research and legal analysis "sufficient

# Revanth carves out a niche as CM of Telangana

**BOLD talk**  
V RAMU SARMA

He knows that he has many challenges to face in the next four years. He must prove himself in the local body elections and the GHMC polls and implement over 400 promises made as part of six guarantees. He has toned down his sharp criticism of the BRS and BJP and is talking more about what his government had achieved and is giving due credit to his cabinet colleagues.

He also has been able to showcase his achievements like bringing Silk University, laying foundation for fourth city, a major partnership with Google to establish India's first Google Space Engineering Center (GSEC) in Hyderabad and launching of developmental works in Warangal so that it can become second Hyderabad and most importantly, he is highlighting the need to protect Hyderabad from turning into another Delhi in terms of air and water pollution. This certainly is very important and one aspect which all had ignored. The BRS and BJP continue to oppose the rejuvenation of Musi River more for the sake of appeasement politics. Another important step Revanth had taken was to hold talks with the AIMIM leaders, address their issues and sanction the developmental activities they wanted. Though the BRS and BJP organized some Deekshas claiming that the government had failed in implementing its promises, it did not have any impact.

The main opposition in Andhra Pradesh is also following the BRS style. Neither KCR has attended the Assembly as leader of opposition nor did Jagan and his team of ten had gone to Assembly. Now Jagan also wants to hold meetings in districts with the slogan that the government had failed just like BRS. He still feels giving cash doses to women would do wonders. If the mood of the people of AP is any indication, the opposition YSRCP is in for disappointment.

He started his journey in a very aggressive manner and brought out various alleged scams like the phone tapping issue, corruption in Kaleshwaram project, released white paper on states critical financial situation and was unparrying in his criticism of the previous regime and the BJP as well.

All his speeches whether they be from any public platform or in the Assembly, were full of caustic remarks which made one feel that he was speaking more like a PCC president than as a CM. But then he himself said that he had no option because he had a formidable opposition party which had polluted the political language in last ten years and they do not understand soft words.

Maybe he is true to certain extent as the BRS leaders themselves felt that Revanth's remarks were indeed very caustic and they started talking about decency in public speaking though from their side there is still no change in usage of the words against Congress and Revanth. Comparatively, the sting in the BJP's criticism is less. Now that the honeymoon period is over, during past 15 days, there has been a sudden change in Revanth Reddy's speeches, his style of public address and the language.



**Though Revanth had no administrative experience, he knew that he had a difficult path ahead and had been working out his strategies carefully and succeeded in winning the people's confidence who brought the party to power. He also knew that it would not be easy to prove his mettle and that the six guarantees that were announced before elections would pose a real challenge to him**

The question is, does not the LOP for not speaking in Parliament and tear into the Government. Rahul was seen holding the copy of the Constitution when he was stopped at the borders and said it was his Constitutional right to go to Sambhal. The unfortunate aspect is everyone speaks of Constitutional rights, but no one refers to the Constitutional duties which are mentioned in it. I wonder if anyone of them even knows the intricacies of the Constitution.

All the so-called big leaders whether it be Rahul Gandhi or the top leaders of Congress or other parties including the AAP, which is in power in Delhi is not bothered on how to alter the dangerous pollution levels of Air and Water in Lutyns Delhi which was once considered to be the best green and most livable city.

Unfortunately, the political myopia of the leaders of all parties and BJP is no exception has led to converting Delhi into a city where people dread to live. In fact, recently one of the NRIs who wanted to go there for holidays to meet his parents commented, "I grew up there but I am scared to go to Delhi. I have a small kid and I can't take the risk of exposing him to the dangerous levels of pollution," he said.





THE GOAN EVERYDAY

Leadership is influence John C Maxwell

# Goa can't afford to ignore the vexed stray dog issue

In recent years, cases of stray dogs attacking visitors and tourists along the beach belts have surfaced with several questions being raised on the safety of those frequenting the beaches on one side and ways to address the issue on the other. In the past week alone, three senior citizens, including two foreigners, were attacked along the beaches of South Goa, according to a press release by Drishti Marine. In another case, a Karnataka tourist was attacked by three dogs while he was entering a shack.

The problem of stray dog attacks is not new, having intensified since the pandemic began. The reasons for dog attacks have been long identified. One of the primary reasons cited for dogs turning violent or aggressive is due to lack of food. Very often, stray dogs roam along roads and beach stretches, uninitiated by human presence, in search of food. While much has been spoken of the effect of these attacks on tourism and tourists visiting popular beaches, not much has been done to address the root cause of the issue.

There is no denying that such incidents not only endanger public safety but could have serious implications on the tourism economy and its reputation as a welcoming destination for global travellers. People have witnessed some of the most vicious attacks that have left tourists mauled and bleeding with multiple bites. Interestingly, the issue figured prominently in the Legislative Assembly with local representatives seeking help from the government to remedy the situation. In turn, the government had assured to explore solutions after consultations with stakeholders and local bodies.

While the government has recently initiated a dog census to take stock of the ferocious dogs or foreign breeds in the State against the backdrop of a series of lethal attacks by Rottweilers and Pitbull breeds, very little has been done to address the issue of stray dogs. In fact, a solution to the stray dog issue should have been the priority because it is a more pressing issue. We can understand that the government alone may be unable to address this problem, but then, somewhere it has to be initiated. A concerted effort involving local authorities, animal welfare organisations, and communities is essential. Instead, we often witness sporadic initiatives that lack the necessary resources or follow-through.

We must understand it is not only about stray dogs; it is an intertwined issue involving environmental responsibility and animal welfare. We cannot ignore the well-being of these strays—many of whom are homeless, suffering and have nothing to feed on. Solutions must take a humane approach that benefits both humans and animals. Governments and stakeholders can work collaboratively to create safe environments by implementing proactive animal welfare programmes alongside community safety initiatives.

The recent incidents of stray dog attacks in coastal Goa are a grim reminder that we cannot ignore the issue. The longer we wait to address this issue, the more we will prolong the agony. It is evident that discussions and consultations, while necessary, are insufficient on their own. The local government must prioritize this emerging crisis, develop a comprehensive strategy, and invest in its implementation. Pending any substantial progress, we risk conditioning both residents and tourists to visit our famed beaches through a cloud of fear—a dire outcome for a state renowned for its warmth and hospitality.

## OPEN SPACE >>

### Tackling stray dog menace on Goa beaches

The news report 'Stray dog menace continues to plague south Goa beaches' (TGE, Dec 6) adequately testifies to the fact that stray dogs are once again on the prowl on Goa beaches. Only last week, three senior citizens, including two foreign nationals, were badly bitten on Mobor beach by a pack of stray dogs. Earlier, there was the case of two foreign tourists, a French woman and a Russian woman, who were attacked by a pack of 10-12 dogs on Benaulim beach while walking and cycling. All this goes to prove that the Goa government has failed miserably to make our beaches safe and free of stray dogs. What memories will the foreigners take back when they return to their country in such a frightful scenario?

I wonder what has happened to the earlier plans to provide dog shelters on the beaches to feed and house the stray dogs. Or has the experiment failed due to lack of support from NGOs, dog lovers, and the Animal Welfare Board? It is time to get our priorities right and take urgent steps to rectify the situation before more people are bitten, and Goa's image as a safe tourist destination becomes further tarnished.

AF NAZARETH, Alto Porvorim

# Can we convert crisis into opportunity?

## India has a robust and vibrant democracy. We don't have to be defensive about our governance challenges



DR JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

The author is the founder of Lok Satta movement and Foundation for Democratic Reforms

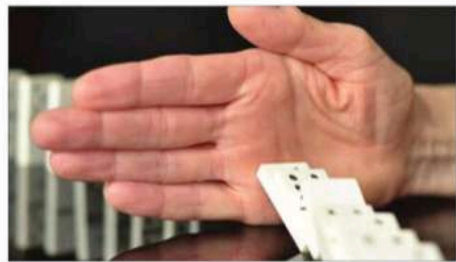
The charges levelled against the Adani group of Companies by the US federal prosecutors and the Security Exchange Commission pose a formidable challenge to the Indian establishment. India's large corporate groups — Ambani, Adani and Tata — are our national champions, critical for India's growth ambitions over the next three decades. India needs a massive infrastructure push, and these three groups alone have committed over \$250 billion investment in the coming years.

The license-permit-quota raj institutionalised until 1991 fed a system of massive corruption and rent seeking. In the post-1991 era, with economic liberalisation, competition among producers and choice for consumers became the norm. However, the Indian state failed to dismantle the political economy of rent seeking. Corruption is fuelled by greed for personal gain through abuse of power. The vast, unaccountable bureaucracy used the political vulnerability to extort money from businesses, as well as hapless citizens.

Payment of bills due to a supplier, power purchase agreements and contracts even after competitive bidding, allocation of natural resources like land and mines, the myriad of regulatory powers, routine service delivery to which citizens are entitled, release of subsidies, registration of property transfer, tax assessments and many other business-government and citizen-government interactions are mediated by corruption.

Surveys indicate that over half of the households of India are forced to pay a bribe for some service or other in a given year. Corrupt politicians and extortionary bureaucracy are in cahoots in this system of rent seeking. Many politicians and civil servants are personally honest and incorruptible. But politicians preside over an electoral system that increasingly depends on vast, unaccounted, illegitimate expenditure for voter inducements, and even honest politicians are victims of this systemic imperative. If honest civil servants resist corruption too aggressively, they are quickly sidelined, or are neutralised by their peers and lower bureaucracy.

Given this background, our political system now has to confront the challenge posed by the Adani indictment. The ear-



lier socialist era bred a culture of vilification of entrepreneurship and wealth creation. If we destroy the few industrial houses who are more often victims of extortion than villains, we will do irreparable harm to our growth prospects. But if we continue with a business-as-usual approach, there could be real harm to growth prospects.

The central question is, can we convert the crisis into an opportunity and pave the way for probity in public life, genuine competition and ethical corporate governance, and transformation of our political culture?

The Adani crisis exposes some of our vulnerabilities. Already the negative fallout of this case is apparent. The Adanis had to suspend bond sales of \$600 million. TotalEnergies, a French multinational energy company, has announced freeze on further investment in energy sector in India. Kenya revoked the projects worth about \$2.6 billion for redevelopment of Nairobi airport and upgradation of power lines undertaken by the Adanis. Two global rating agencies downgraded the Adanis' credit rating. Clearly India should act decisively to end the political economy of corruption and send a strong signal to the country and global community.

Surveys indicate that over half of the households of India are forced to pay a bribe for some service or other in a given year. Corrupt politicians and extortionary bureaucracy are in cahoots in this system of rent seeking

India has a robust and vibrant democracy. We are proud of our political freedoms, free electoral competition, fair regular, and periodic elections, peaceful transfer of power, genuine federalism, independent judiciary and many other democratic institutions and practices. We defied all prophets of doom and preserved our liberty and democracy.

We also have several unfinished tasks. Mass poverty, low citizen awareness, weak local governments, poor bureaucratic accountability and first-past-the-post system make an explosive combination. We don't have to be defensive about our governance challenges.

The UK had terrible corruption and auctioning of public offices in the

mid-nineteenth century. Gladstone and other leaders understood the political malaise and reformed the British system by the end of 19th century. The US had Tammany Hall politics in New York, machine politics in many states and clientelism, and Jim Crow laws of segregation well into the twentieth century. The US establishment confronted these challenges and systematically reformed their party system, elections and segregation practices over decades. Now the time has come for India to reform its politics and rule of law.

Two years ago in these columns (October 23, 2022) I raised a provocative question - can 19th century politics and 21st century economy coexist? We need to investigate the allegations of corruption energetically both by the CBI and state anti-corruption agencies.

SEBI must act speedily and firmly to penalise the violations of law including disclosure norms. Let due process prevail in a transparent and verifiable manner, and let all recipients of bribes be awarded exemplary punishments in special courts constituted for the purpose.

The Parliament, under Article 253, should swiftly create strong Lokayuktas in states on par with the Lokpal. Lokpal and Lokayuktas must be given the personnel and resources, and CBI and State anti-corruption bureaus must be brought under them. This will send a strong signal to the country and the world.

The Prime Minister should take the initiative to generate a debate and build a consensus on electoral reforms needed to eliminate the need for unaccounted, illegitimate expenditure for voter inducements. There are many options we can consider. But only a strong leader with incorruptible personal image like Narendra Modi can lead this process. Sustained, rapid economic growth is well within our reach. But India must bring our politics and governance in alignment with our economic aspirations. India awaits the second set of reforms after 1991.

FPI

## THE INBOX >>

### Tourism Dept should promote rock concerts instead of EDMs

This refers to Adelmo Fernandes' letter in your column titled 'Promote rock concerts instead of EDMs' dated 21st December. I fully agree with the views expressed on the topic. Today, even smaller states like Meghalaya are inviting legendary rock bands such as Europe and Mr Big to perform live in front of packed audiences. Why can't Goa do the same, especially when so many Goans have grown up listening to iconic rock artists and bands like Robbie Williams, Bon Jovi, Pink Floyd, Guns N' Roses, Scorpions, Metallica, Iron Maiden, and Judas Priest?

One of the brightest spots this month is that the legendary Canadian rock star Bryan Adams is set to delight Goan audiences with his classic hits and his new album 'So Happy It Hurts' at the Bambolim Athletic Stadium on 17th December 2024. Considering the love Goans have for international music, I believe the Tourism Department should focus on promoting rock concerts by international artists and bands. These events would genuinely entertain both international tourists and Goa's live music enthusiasts. It would be far better than fully supporting controversial, drug-fuelled EDM festivals, which mainly attract fake music lovers and drug addicts from neighbouring states.

JERRY FERNANDES, Saligao

### Submarine-boat collision: Some pertinent questions

Recently a tragic collision between the Indian Navy submarine (INS Karan) and a fishing boat left two fishermen dead, while 13 others survived. The crash reportedly caused Rs 10 crore worth of damage to the submarine, and the fallout has raised some big questions.

### Was action against traffic cops justified?

I refer to your December 5 report about traffic police officers being transferred and facing action after issuing challans to influential tourists in Anjuna. Politicians and influential individuals should avoid interfering in minor traffic violations, as such interference can lead to accidents and loss of life. Tourists and motorists with rented or out-of-state vehicles often complain about harassment by traffic police, tarnishing Goa's reputation. Meanwhile, serious issues like traffic congestion, illegal parking, and reckless driving are frequently ignored. Some believe officers face pressure to meet fine targets, leading to overzealous enforcement. There are also allegations of officers accepting bribes to let violators off without official challans, reportedly demanding even more money in some cases. Reports suggest that the Anjuna incident may have involved such bribery, prompting senior authorities to act. If true, this action is commendable and should deter others. It appears the officers did not realise the tourists had influential connections and acted as they allegedly do in similar cases. Accountability measures like this are essential to maintaining trust in the traffic police.

JOSE MARIA MIRANDA via email

The fishing vessel, which had a crew of 13, collided about 70 nautical miles northwest of Goa, near Malvan. The families of the two fishermen who died blamed Navy's negligence, and demanded compensation for the families of the deceased fishermen, and a government job for a member of the family. Be that as it may, it is learnt that an FIR has been registered and the Tandel (captain) of the fishing boat was booked in connection with the death of the two fishermen. The question that arises is why did the Navy file an FIR against the fishing boat's captain? Only a thorough investigation will throw light on the accident. But the incident raises some pertinent questions. How did the submarine with all the sophisticated modern technology not detect the fishing boat on its radar? How could a submarine, which is capable of

detecting a warship several miles away, not prevent a collision with a fishing boat? A submarine operates below water level and cannot be seen on the surface by the fishing boats. The big question is how can a collision with a mere fishing boat cause Rs 10 crore worth of damage to the submarine?

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

### Better to be an ant & enjoy sugar

The BJP believes its allies should follow its lead. Eknath Shinde wanted the Home Minister's post, but the BJP did not grant it to him. This seems to have caused some tension between the BJP and Shinde, which is evident from his body language. In contrast, Ajit Pawar appears content with the roles he has been given, as reflected in his cheerful demeanor. This situation shows it is often wiser to be like an ant and enjoy the sugar, as Ajit Pawar has done, rather than take on heavy burdens like an elephant breaking wood.

SUDHIR KANGUTKAR, Thane

### Difficult task ahead for Fadnavis

Devendra Fadnavis' return as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra signals the end of one chapter and the start of a new one in the state's politics. In his first major test, he successfully persuaded Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar to accept the positions of Deputy Chief Ministers. However, the new government faces significant governance challenges. Issues like unemployment, the rural crisis, rising food prices, and falling crop rates are expected to resurface. Early attention is crucial for addressing agricultural distress and promoting industrial growth.

GREGORY FERNANDES, Mumbai



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





A landslide killed seven people in VOC Nagar in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu. The rescue operation involved 170 personnel, including members of the National Disaster Response Force. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

# The cyclone that battered Tamil Nadu

Cyclone Fengal has wreaked havoc in Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, claiming 12 lives and affecting 14 districts. While the Tamil Nadu government says it was prepared for heavy rainfall, the complex and slow-moving cyclone posed a challenge to weather experts and the administration alike. **K. Lakshmi and D. Madhavan** report on how the cyclone changed course, leaving a trail of destruction

In the evening of December 1, a family of four and three of their neighbours huddled together under a metal roofed single-room house, in VOC Nagar, a residential area at the foot of the Arunachala hill in Tiruvannamalai district. They listened as torrential rains brought by Cyclone Fengal pounded the district in interior Tamil Nadu.

S. Meenakshi, 27, who lives opposite the house, recalls the tragedy that occurred shortly after. Her sister, R. Meena, 26, and Meena's husband, N. Rajkumar, 32, both brick kiln workers, had returned home the previous evening as their workplace, located 20 kilometres from the temple town, had flooded. Meenakshi says the couple had been working in the brick kiln for a few years and had often stayed there for weeks to complete tasks before returning to VOC Nagar.

That Sunday was special for Rajkumar as he had come back to his children — 9-year-old Goutham and 7-year-old Iniya — after working tirelessly for a month at the kiln, she says. Meenakshi's daughter, Ramya, 13, had also gone to Rajkumar's house along with two neighbours — Vinothini, 14, and Malia, 10.

"Around 4.30 p.m., we heard a deafening sound. Meena called out to me and I rushed out," says Meenakshi. "The next few moments were a blur. A heap of mud, boulders, and debris came rolling down the hill. Meena rushed inside to bring the children out but it was too late. My sister's home was buried," she says, sobbing.

All the seven occupants were instantly killed. Other houses in the neighbourhood were completely or partially destroyed. Relatives searched for loved ones in the slush amid relentless rains until a rescue team, led by Tiruvannamalai Collector D. Baskara Pandian, reached the site. They evacuated nearly 250 families from the hills, moved them to community halls in Tiruvannamalai town, and gave them food and medicines.

The seven bodies were recovered after a nearly 20-hour operation by a 170-member team, including 35 personnel of the National Disaster Response Force, and a sniffer dog the next evening. "When the team retrieved two bodies from the spot, they saw that Rajkumar had been holding Iniya tightly," recalls a senior official.

## A trail of destruction

While heavy rainfall during the northeast monsoon is common at this time of the year in Tamil Nadu, the State and the Union Territory of Puducherry did not expect Cyclone Fengal to cause such widespread devastation when it crossed the eastern coast on the night of November 30. On December 1, unusually heavy rainfall (40 cm to 50 cm) was recorded in many places in Puducherry and the northern and northwestern parts of Tamil Nadu. Among the coastal districts, Chennai was less affected.

The cyclone then slowly drifted westward, dumping rains, causing floods, submerging acres

**We need to map landslide susceptibility in all the districts so that we are better prepared for such disasters**

G. SUNDARARAJAN  
Poovulangi  
Nambargal

of crops, damaging civic infrastructure, and displacing thousands of people. When it later moved inland, it pummeled several districts. Maillam in Villupuram district received 51 cm of rainfall on December 1 and Uthangarai in Krishnagiri district received 50 cm on December 2. Some areas of Villupuram such as Kedar and Soorapattu received more than 33 cm of rainfall on a single day.

D. Vasanthkumar, 51, of Muthu Nagar in Nellikuppam, Cuddalore district, spent an entire night on the stairway leading to his terrace as floodwater had entered his house. "Local officials gave us flood alerts at 8 p.m. asking us to evacuate the street. But the water level rose rapidly in the area and a few of us were stranded. It took two days for the floodwater to recede," he says. While Vasanthkumar managed to salvage important documents that were lying in his loft, he lost most of his electronic devices.

In his letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi this week, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said 12 lives were lost in the cyclonic storm that had wreaked havoc in 14 districts. Villupuram, Tiruvannamalai, and Kallakurichi received more than 50 cm of rainfall in a single day, which was equal to an entire season's share. He noted that more than 2.11 lakh hectares of agricultural and horticultural land had been inundated and nearly 963 cattle had died. About 9,500 km of roads, 1,847 culverts, and 417 tanks had been damaged. Stalin said that the cyclone had overwhelmed the State's resources and requested the Centre to release ₹2,000 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund to assist rehabilitation efforts.

Besides compensation for damaged crops, the Tamil Nadu government announced relief of ₹2,000 per family in the districts of Villupuram, Cuddalore, and Kallakurichi on December 3. Sta-

lin also donated one month's salary towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to execute relief measures in the six worst-affected districts. On December 6, the Union Home Ministry approved the release of ₹944.80 crore to the Tamil Nadu government as the Central share from the State Disaster Response Fund to help the people affected by the cyclone.

Puducherry Chief Minister N. Rangaswamy announced relief assistance of ₹5,000 to all ration cardholders affected by the cyclone in the UT and ₹30,000 per hectare to affected farmers.

## Crops under water

Four days after the rains subsided, Villupuram, a predominant agricultural district, is struggling to return to regular life. Nearly 80,520 hectares of crops are damaged, many lakes have breached their banks, and the Malattur and Then Pennai rivers are brimming with floodwater.

V. Tamilarasi, 64, of Pillur village in Villupuram taluk, is searching for someone to help her clear the deposits of sludge that cover her agricultural land. Flash floods in the Then Pennai river submerged crops. She has also lost two goats.

"I cultivated black gram and casuarina plantations in three acres. The crop is submerged under six feet of water. I spent ₹2 lakh for cultivation. I don't know how I am going to manage the loss," she worries.

Villages such as Pillayarukuppam and Arasamangalam have become small islands. They did not have power and communication networks for three days, which left many stranded or confined to their houses without water or food.

"The district previously experienced such large-scale floods in 1972. This time, I was caught unawares. While village administrative officers helped us, officials and elected representatives came much later," Tamilarasi says.

The situation was no different in the urban stretches of Villupuram. S. Neela, 55, of Ashukulam, spent nearly a day cleaning the muck and waste that floodwater had brought into her house on December 1.

"Our street had waist-deep water. My family of four managed with 20 litres of packaged water for three days. We had to put up with the sewage that had mixed with the stagnant water for three days. We all worked together to drain the water as we didn't get immediate help," she says.

R.T. Murugan, district secretary, Tamil Nadu Vivasayi Sangam (All India Kisan Sabha), says, "Crops in various parts were on the verge of drying for want of water until the downpour. We have not seen such water flow in the Malattur and Then Pennai rivers in December. I was preparing for paddy harvest for Pongal and recently



Flood warnings did not reach the villages close to the riverbanks. Residents assumed it would be another normal rain spell. Many left behind their belongings and cattle to save their lives

G. JAYAKUMAR  
Panahuppam, Villupuram district

sowed black gram in an acre. I face a loss of ₹50,000 as floodwater marooned my land. Poorly maintained water bodies in villages too led to quick damage."

Several residents say they want Villupuram to be declared as a disaster-affected district.

## Floodwaters in Puducherry

Puducherry heaved a sigh of relief after the storm passed through the region on December 1, but was hit by another disaster when water was discharged from the brimming dams of Tamil Nadu, particularly the Sathanur dam in Tiruvannamalai on December 2.

The discharge of 1.68 lakh cubic feet per second (cusecs) of floodwater from the Sathanur dam sparked a political debate. The Opposition parties blamed the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government for the deluge in the northern districts without prior notice. Refuting the claims of a self-created disaster, Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan noted that sufficient flood warnings had been given and flood discharge was planned considering the safety of the dam and the lives of the people.

The Water Resources Department noted that uncontrolled Then Pennai river catchment worsened the flood situation. Record-breaking rainfall in Krishnagiri and flash flood in tributaries such as Korayar and Kallar accelerated flow in the river that was already in spate. There is no mechanism to gauge rainfall or the floodwater generated in the Then Pennai's tributaries.

A senior Water Resources Department official says Sathanur reservoir received an inflow of 40,000 cusecs within four hours from December 1 night. The reservoir did not have sufficient storage capacity to store the entire inflow, the official adds. "We adhered to the rules and there was no lag in flood warning. After 1972, when the dam discharged nearly 2.57 lakh cusecs, this is the second time that such a high quantum of surplus water was released," the official says.

However, G. Jayakumar of Panahuppam, Villupuram district, who helped people reach relief camps, says, "Flood warnings did not reach the villages (A.K. Kuchipalayam and Kallipattu) close to the riverbanks. Residents assumed it would be another normal rain spell. Many left behind their belongings and cattle to save their lives."

When the Water Resources Department team visited Villupuram, they were aghast at the damage. "We could not identify boundaries of water bodies and roads. The district is generally mostly dry in December. The teams are now assessing the damage," the official says.

In Sathanur village, S. Arul, president of the village panchayat, rescued several elderly residents from huts that were submerged in floodwater and shifted them to a school. "They also lost important documents in the floods," he says.

## Predicting the path of a cyclone

Many officials say it is difficult to be fully prepared for a cyclone that causes such extensive damage. This is especially because it is difficult for weather models to pick up extreme weather events at a particular place, according to meteorologists.

Cyclone Fengal remained a low-pressure system after forming in the far eastern Indian Ocean on November 14 and became a depression in the Bay of Bengal only after 10 days. It moved relatively slowly for another week before the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said it had become a cyclone. On November 28, the IMD announced that Cyclone Fengal would cross the north Tamil Nadu-Puducherry coasts on the morning of November 30. The cyclone moved at a leisurely pace. While fast-moving cyclones tend to retreat quickly, slow-moving ones weaken into a deep depression, dumping unprecedented amounts of rainfall.

S. Balachandran, Additional Director General of Meteorology, Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, says the cyclone had undergone changes in its intensity over the ocean due to multiple factors. "The Regional Meteorological Centre had given sufficient forecasts and rainfall alerts for north Tamil Nadu on November 30 and December 1. Most of the forecasts were accurate. But in Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri, the prediction on rainfall intensity went off the mark," he says.

The storm remained stalled over the ocean for six hours. It moved slowly towards the north and then slightly towards the east before moving towards the west and crossing the coast.

"The reason for the cyclone remaining stationary is a bit obscure and there are no immediate explanations for it," says Y.E.A. Raj, former Deputy Director General of Meteorology, Chennai. "Though the clouds associated with the cyclonic storm were floating over the land, the centre of the cyclonic storm was close to the ocean and was able to draw a lot of moisture from the ocean. Since it got fed with all that moisture, it retained its intensity. This triggered a high amount of rainfall."

Pointing out that the global warming and climate variability are likely to increase such unpredictable local weather patterns, G. Sundararajan of Poovulangi Nambargal, a group advocating environmental protection in Tamil Nadu, says, "There is an urgent need to bridge gaps in last mile communication on flood warnings and weather alerts. We also need to map landslide susceptibility in all the districts so that we are better prepared for such disasters."



Vehicles in the Uthangarai area of Krishnagiri following heavy rainfall on December 2. P11





[OUR TAKE]

Stalled demand, sluggish growth

There is no crisis in the Indian economy, but structural drivers of growth must be reinvented

Markets got the September quarter GDP number wrong when it came in at 5.4% instead of the widely expected 6.5%...

Macron may have thought he bought himself valuable time when he appointed the experienced Michel Barnier...

To be sure, RBI's latest growth projection is still in the ballpark of 6.5-7% which is what the 2023-24 Economic Survey projected in July this year...

Can economic policy do anything else to break this vicious cycle apart from urging private capital to change the class distribution of the value it creates?

Fiscal policy would like monetary policy to take on the baton now. The former has already entered consolidation mode and it must continue to do so...

To be fair to RBI, it is only doing what it has been asked to do under India's inflation targeting framework which treats benchmark inflation as the target...

Is there a larger takeaway? There is no crisis in the Indian economy at the moment. Both fiscal and monetary policy can afford to be hawkish in their cyclical outlook...

Left-right tango leaves France in governance limbo

The political crisis in Paris could not have come at a more inopportune moment for the country and Europe

In retrospect, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, took a huge gamble in calling for snap parliamentary polls in July this year...



Mohan Kumar

Macron now has the dubious distinction of being the premier for the shortest possible time in French history. For President Macron, it is back to square one and he will have to look for another premier without any delay.

At the root of all this was the budget for the forthcoming year. France has lived beyond its means for several years now. What this means in technical parlance is that the French fiscal deficit as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has ballooned out of control...

year, attracting disciplinary proceedings from the European Commission. In all fairness, did the sensible thing in his budget which is to suggest 40 billion euros in spending cuts and 20 billion euros in tax increases...

In the event, she too voted in favour of the no-confidence motion. The million-euro question was what would Marine Le Pen do?

President Macron finds himself in a soup. He has ruled out resigning, saying he was voted in by the French till 2027. The most probable thing he will do, therefore, is to find a replacement for Barnier. That is not going to be easy because there is no guarantee the next premier will not face the same fate as Barnier...



At the root of the crisis was the budget for the forthcoming year. France has lived beyond its means for several years now. What this means in technical parlance is that the French fiscal deficit as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product has ballooned out of control

should that happen, Macron will face immense pressure to resign and call for fresh presidential elections. His preferred option, therefore, will be to hang on somehow, even with a technical government, till July next year, when he can again call for legislative elections.

Why is the budget such a big deal in France? Well, the average French person has a degree of entitlement and expectation from the government that is unparalleled in Europe.

PRESIDENT MACRON FINDS HIMSELF IN A SOUP. HE HAS RULED OUT RESIGNING, SAYING HE WAS VOTED IN BY THE FRENCH TILL 2027. THE MOST PROBABLE THING HE WILL DO, THEREFORE, IS TO FIND A REPLACEMENT FOR MICHEL BARNIER

vacation which is the envy of all. Above all, they expect the government of the day to rein in inflation, keep unemployment in check and provide free health care and education. To say this is a tall order for any government in the world today would be an understatement.

In terms of geopolitics, the political crisis in France could not have come at a worse time. For one thing, it comes close on the heels of the crisis in Germany. France and Germany are really the locomotive of the EU and the fact that they are both in a state of crisis does not bode well.

France has a reputation for being ungovernable. French politicians seem to be doing everything they can to ensure that their country lives up to that reputation.

Mohan Kumar is a former ambassador to France and is currently deputy professor at OP Jaiswal Global University. The views expressed are personal.

Case for a quiet, well-lit, free space to read, reflect

The Khirki branch of Delhi's Community Library Project is filled with books for people of all ages, provides computers with internet for those who lack access at home, offers story time and literacy programmes for children...



Emily Drabinski

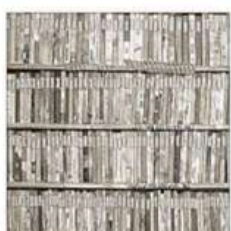
When libraries are affordable to access due to distance or disability, they are particularly important for those who are poor, elderly, and who can afford transit fares, are served. In each case, a public good — the library — is privatised, limiting its use only to those who can afford it.

Libraries are not just a library, we mean that the library belongs to the people, all of the people. If it is to belong to all of the people, particularly and especially in the context of economic inequality and other forms of discrimination, the public library must be free. Any imposed cost is an exclusionary barrier.

Apprenticeship charges take two forms. First, some argue that libraries are expensive, and, therefore, users must contribute to the funding of these institutions. It is true that libraries have costs, from the building and land they occupy to the book and journal collections that only get costlier as publishers consolidate across the United States (US) and Europe...

Others argue that charging fees promotes personal responsibility. When we ask users to pay for library service, some say that they will take greater care of the books they borrow. Such an argument imagines that monetary exchange is what produces a sense of commitment to us and each other, when it is the opposite that is true. We value and care for what belongs to us, what we understand to be our own. Our children receive our best attention not because of what we pay for their food and clothing but because we see them as a part of who we are. The public library belongs to those who are invited and welcomed through their doors. If such libraries are to be valued by everyone, they must be open to everyone. This requires abolishing exclusionary measures, including fees for service.

Since the late 19th century, libraries in the US have enjoyed broad support for their public mission. Very few charge fees for service, and the vast majority work every day to expand



The public library must be free. Any imposed cost is an exclusionary barrier

their offerings to the public. In New Lebanon, New Hampshire, a library circulates garden beds each growing season and a seed library that ensures public access to food and flowers. In Donnelly, Idaho, a library circulates a cotton candy machine — an example of decommodification, the making public of a commonly private good — so that every child in this community that faces ever-deepening poverty can enjoy a birthday party. In Brooklyn, New York, libraries host monthly dinners for people returning from incarceration, providing free access not just to food but to fellowship.

But, as Angela Davis, the great American activist and author, reminds us, freedom is a constant struggle. Encroachments by capital threaten our ability to do our work. Our fundamental commitment to the public guides our organising against these threats. The movement to protect and expand access to the public good must be a global one. At the heart of this struggle are the library workers whose daily labour expands access to reading and literacy, to quiet and well-lit spaces, to a sense of community and camaraderie that can be more and more difficult to access as our elected officials divide us and then exploit those divisions for private profit.

As we work toward a future where all are meaningfully included in public life, the public library manifests that future in the present. Through those open gates to Khirki and through the doors of my home library, the Windsor Terrace branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, we can find the world we want and the world we need, a world in which all of us and our libraries, are free.

Emily Drabinski is an associate professor, Queens College, City University of New York. The views expressed are personal.

[ANOTHER DAY] Namita Bhandare

The misguided debate over declining fertility

In his concern over declining fertility and prescription for women to have more children — at least three please — Rash-triya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat joins the chief ministers (CM) of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. If Bhagwat's stated apprehension is the fading away of languages and culture with dwindling populations, the CMs know a smaller population could impact both budgetary allocations and parliamentary representation. The angst might seem premature in the

world's most populous nation of 1.4 billion people. Yet, around the world, from South Korea, which has the world's lowest fertility rate at 0.78, to the European Union, where the number of births in the 27 member States has fallen to its lowest since comparable data was first collected in 1961, alarm bells are ringing.

Urban women, says Anurita Nandy, author of Motherhood and Choice, are typically choosing to have fewer children, or none at all. These women are discovering new, traditional ideas of fulfillment. Children and family are not all that they derive happiness from. There is a positive correlation between lower fertility and education, economic and political participation, and better health outcomes. Those who've witnessed generational struggle, seen their grandmothers and mothers fight for education, the right to work, to have a greater say in households, might not want to give up their hard-earned freedoms. We're nearly at 2025 but women's fertility

continues to be a preserve of patriarchy with male politicians determining policies to either curb it or spur it. China is now pushing the message for women to have more babies. Other countries are using a variety of bait from tax breaks (France) to subsidised housing deposits (Singapore).

I understand the anxiety about the economic impact of dwindling numbers. But that cry cannot be borne by women alone. There is also the nagging suspicion that advice to have more children stems from an impulse to control the bodies of women. If the concern was deeply felt, rather than dictating to women, how many kids they ought to have, a more fruitful conversation would have been on how the State plans to adapt to changing demographics — raising retirement age for instance, allocating greater resources to childcare that help women who choose to be mothers, and changing policy.

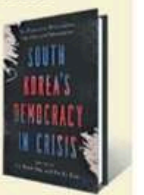
A good place to start? Equal paternity leave. Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal.

[EDITOR'S PICK]

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

POLITICAL BRINKMANSHIP IN SEOUL

South Korean lawmakers have begun impeachment proceedings against President Yoon Suk Yeol after vetoing his martial law order. Impeachment needs two-thirds of the Parliament to vote for the motion before the country's Constitutional Court decides. South Korean dictators often resorted to martial law, before democracy emerged in the country in 1987.



South Korea's Democracy in Crisis: Gi-Wook Shin, Ho-Ki Kim. Year: 2022

This week, we recommend South Korea's Democracy in Crisis. The book argues South Korea democracy entered a state of regression in the past decade with the polarisation of society. It blames an upsurge of populism, driven by persistent inequalities and globalisation. It examines symptoms of democratic decline — denigration of political opponents, erosion of democratic norms, and the whittling away of judicial independence. It traces the sources of liberalism and examines how polarisation is plaguing the party system. The volume shows how civil society and the courts have become politicised and looks at the roles of inequality, education, and social media in the democratic decline.

The Tribune ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Just not sport

Use of stadia for concerts, rallies deplorable

THE indiscriminate use of two prominent stadia in the national capital for non-sports events is a bad advertisement for a country that aspires to host the Olympic Games in 2036...

The sorry state of affairs was glaringly highlighted when popular singer-actor Diljit Dosanji's concert, held at Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium on October 26-27...

The SAJ, set up 40 years ago with the objectives of promoting sports and achieving sporting excellence at the national and international levels...

THE GREAT GAME JYOTI MALHOTRA

FOREIGN Secretary Vikram Mishra's visit to Bangladesh for foreign office consultations early next week is not one second late in coming...

Adityanath's remarks are hardly unique. The RSS recently called on the 'government of Bharat' to prevent atrocities on Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh...

Not is Adityanath the first big BJP leader to speak his mind. Back in 2018, then BJP president and current Home Minister Amit Shah described Bangladeshi migrants into India as 'termites'...



ABSURD: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath pays homage to BR Ambedkar on his death anniversary. The CM's 'same DNA' remark has stirred a row.

When Adityanath and Shah are seen as spokespersons of the ruling party...

to the unhealthy mixing of Hindu-dominant politics with a strategic insensitivity, especially since India's all-important neighbourhood is in question...

not comprehend why Bangladeshis want to wilfully erase today the memory of icons like Mujibur Rahman and dump it in the ignominious dustbin of history...

Reviving Aravallis

Project to reclaim vanishing hills takes shape

THE Aravalli Green Wall Project, an eco-restoration initiative by the Union Environment Ministry, promises to be a turning point in combating land degradation and desertification...

Inspired by Saudi Arabia's green initiatives, the Green Wall Project aims to reverse this destruction. Indigenous species and community engagement lie at its core...

However, the project's success depends on enforcing conservation laws to prevent illegal mining and encroachments. Preserving legal safeguards, such as the Punjab Land Preservation Act, is crucial...

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1924

Reforms and the Lee report

AT the time of writing, we do not have before us the official communication concerning the decision of His Majesty's Government on the Lee report, which was to be issued on Friday evening...

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds. - Thomas Jefferson

Doing one's bit for a noble cause

OP GARG

IN recent decades, our society has become increasingly materialistic. Ethical and moral values are on the decline. There is a mad race to accumulate money and possessions...

It disturbed me that an institution that had saved my mother's life was on its deathbed. I wrote a letter to the hospital authorities, offering my assistance. In his reply, the medical superintendent said he and his wife had joined the hospital 26 years ago...

Things went from bad to worse after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the hospital was allowed to spend only 20 per cent of the money received from patients having Ayushman cards...

It has given me great satisfaction to contribute to a noble cause. Money is not an issue for me since I am getting a handsome pension. Our society would regain its humane essence if more and more well-off people come forward to bail out those institutions which helped them become successful and prosperous.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Choose less water-intensive crops

Apropos of 'Groundwater crisis', Punjab and Haryana are facing a looming water crisis due to decades of over-extraction for irrigation...

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

Create awareness among masses

Apropos of 'Groundwater crisis', water depletion has reached alarming proportions due to scanty rainfall, sustained groundwater pumping to meet the growing population's needs...

DS KANG, HOSHPUR

Choose rainwater harvesting

Refer to 'Groundwater crisis', the depletion in the groundwater levels is a matter of concern for agriculturalists amid over-extraction for paddy farming...

ARPITA ANAND, CHANDIGARH

BJP reoriented its strategy

With reference to 'BJP all the way', the safe-party's emphatic win in Maharashtra indicates that it's a force to reckon with. It also shows that the Modi-Shah duo's magic is going from strength to strength...

RAVI SHARMA, DHARWAL

New CM an asset to the party

Refer to 'The importance of being Fadvanis (Trysts and Turns); the picture showing Devendra Fadnavis in the driver's seat says it all. What he deserved has been restored to him. More than Eknath Shinde realising the truth about his depleted bargaining power...

LALIT BHARADWAJ, PANCHKULA

Focus diverted from real issues

Apropos of 'Politics behind 'redress' of waqf property rows', the resolution of waqf property disputes, often entangled with religious and cultural sensitivities, has become a focal point in the contemporary political discourse...

MAHIMA KWATRA, DELHI





A sea in focus

The Malaysia-Vietnam upgrade sends a strong signal of shared priorities as both sides recognise that a fragmented Asean only benefits those who wish to dominate the South China Sea...



Countries across the globe have started recalibrating their foreign policy priorities ahead of a second Donald Trump administration...

friendly talks, which in effect means that others must accept its terms. China's envoy has told the Association for South East Asian Nations...

What has led to the slow progress of the negotiations for a COC is that there are differences among the Asean member states and China...

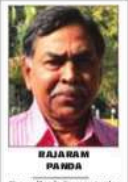
the South China Sea. The move to lift Malaysia to the top tier of Vietnam's partnerships - an eight-strong group...

The region that is destined to hog the limelight is the South China Sea. This is seen as a major flashpoint as there are many Asian countries which have competing claims...

the South China Sea, as well as 'peaceful resolution of disputes without resorting to threats of use of force'...

that Malaysia lodged a rare protest over Vietnam's alleged expansion of the Asean bloc...

the Philippines may be encouraged to deepen its own partnership in light of Malaysia's Asean chairmanship...



Rajaram Panda, former senior fellow at ICFP-ISA and ICFP, New Delhi, is also a former ICFP chair professor at Datta University, Jaipur

As an insurance to such possible escalation of tensions and potential conflict, Vietnamese Communist Party chief...

At the joint press conference, Lam reiterated the call for restraint by 'all relevant parties' and committed to the early adoption...

The timing of the understanding between the two countries is equally important. There are concerns that when Trump returns to the White House...

China is best advised to consider the sensitivities of the South-east Asian nations with interests in the South China Sea...

Bitcoin's Moment

Bitcoin's climb past the \$100,000 mark is a watershed moment in the evolution of crypto-currencies, symbolising their growing acceptance as a legitimate asset class...

Bid on Badal

The attack on Shriromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Sukhbir Singh Badal at the Golden Temple in Amritsar has sent shockwaves through Punjab's political and religious landscape...

Both sides upgraded diplomatic ties and elevated bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership in a clear step towards easing tensions...

Beijing has alleged that the US-Philippine task force is fanning the flames in the South China Sea. As tensions continue to rise in the area...

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Congress must shift focus

SIR, This has reference to your editorial 'Priyanka ascends' (27 November). Priyanka Gandhi Vadera's spectacular maiden electoral win from Wayanad...

and hold it accountable to the public on critical issues. After Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra energised the party...

Though Wayanad has been a Congress bastion since its creation in 2008, her charismatic personality, eloquence, organisational and political skills...

But the Congress could not maintain its momentum and suffered serious setbacks in the recent Haryana and Maharashtra assembly elections...

Despite the BJP's constant criticism of the Congress for perpetuating dynastic politics, Ms Vadera's debut in electoral politics is very significant...

It is time for the Congress to introspect and evolve. The leadership should mend past mistakes, develop ideological clarity and improve the party's weak organisational structure...

UN MUST ACT

SIR, Bangladeshi Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das was denied bail and is on an opportunity to be heard before the Court as his lawyer appeared to represent him in fear...

The attack on minorities in India reflects the previous situation of Bangladesh under Pakistani rule. The Muslims of Bangladesh have just forgotten the history of their Liberation War...

Yours, etc., Manas Mukhopadhyay, Chinsurah, 4 December.

and the Fed will need to sustain high key rates...





Plunging into instability

France's political instability and economic crisis deepens as Prime Minister Michel Barnier ousted in a rare no-confidence vote

In a dramatic turn of events, French Prime Minister Michel Barnier was ousted in a no-confidence vote on December 5, 2024, marking a rare political upheaval in France's post-war history.



Emmanuel Macron, who now faces daunting challenges in appointing a successor capable of navigating a polarised parliament.

However, finding someone who can secure cross-party support is a tall order. If the situation gets worse Macron could rely on emergency measures to extend the 2024 budget provisions or pass the 2025 budget by decree.

PICTALK



Tourists on an elephant safari at the Kaziranga National Park, in Golghat

From chaos to comfort: Reflecting on Delhi's transit transformation

Once reliant on rickety DTC buses plagued by poor service, Delhi now boasts a state-of-the-art metro network, revolutionising travel and making commuting a breeze

Can you drop me at the Dhaulai Kuan Metro Station in your car? I must catch the 1800 hrs train from there, requested my colleague, Madhu Jasra, as we were leaving the office in the Bhikaiji Cama Place complex.



exposure to this horrible service was limited, as I had the privilege of travelling on the school bus.

stamped ensued. In the melee, there was an exchange of choicest Punjabi abuses, fistcliffs, an occasional physical altercation, lucrative business for pickpockets and chain snatchers, and worst of all, a field day for eve-teasers.

India's maritime legacy: Lessons from history



Revisiting India's maritime legacy can drive advancements in naval strength, trade security and regional cooperation, paving the way for a strong maritime future

India has a rich history dating back to the Indus Valley civilisation. People of ancient Indian empires such as Mauryas and Cholas were active seafarers who undertook long and arduous voyages for trade, cultural, religious and political causes.



Mauryan empire. The adoption of a new naval ensign inspired by the spirit of Shivaji's maritime endeavours is a step in this direction that needs to be ingrained in the ethos of all maritime and naval endeavours of the nation.



OTHER POWERS THAT AROSE IN THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT SUCH AS SATAVAHANAS, PALLAVAS, PANDYAS, CHOLAS AND MANY OTHERS CONTINUED THE RICH MARITIME TRADITIONS OF THE INDIAN CIVILISATION WELL PAST THE DECLINE OF THE MIGHTY MAURYAN EMPIRE

deep draught British ships with shallow water crafts, utilising the shelter of shallow natural harbour and fortress with mounted heavy guns were akin to typical sea denial and littoral warfare operations practised by modern navies.

Ancient Indian Maritime Culture As India strives for its rightful position on the global stage, we need to revive and study the historical and indigenous Indian maritime strategic thought.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SOUTH KOREA REJECTS MARTIAL LAW Madam — South Korea escaped the martial law imposed by President Yoon Suk Yeol on Tuesday night, within just 6 hours, for the first time since 1980.

Workplace woes for women



It is sad but true that the workplace can be a problem for young working women. Though most places are safe, there are a few exceptions. India has seen over 400 cases of sexual harassment at work every year since 2018.

or about 35 per month, were reported in the country in 2023. There could be more unreported ones. That year, Himachal Pradesh recorded the highest number of sexual harassment cases at the workplace (97), followed by Kerala (83), Maharashtra (46), and Karnataka (43).



APS MALHOTRA

were flouted with impunity, without fear of the law — seats reserved for women, the elderly and the physically challenged, hardly, if ever, went to those for whom these had been earmarked.

and order. This incident, involving a former terrorist armed with a sophisticated weapon, highlights glaring inadequacies in security protocols at one of India's most revered religious sites.

OCCASIONAL NOTE

It is a tradition of melodrama that the tragic motif should be lightened by a certain amount of serio-comic relief. This purpose is being served in connection with the Egyptian tragedy by the resumption of power to utilize the Gezira irrigation system in the Sudan up to its full capacity without any limitation on the quantity of water to be stored. It was obvious from the British ultimatum that the reference to the Gezira scheme was part of a policy which had been maturely considered, and that its inclusion in the terms submitted to the Egyptian Government was a diplomatic afterthought. The situation is elucidated by the official explanation published elsewhere, proving incidentally the lengths to which British diplomacy was ready to go a few years ago in order to placate Egyptian sentiment. The Makbar dam, the centre piece of the Gezira project, never would or could make any difference to the quantity of water reaching Lower Egypt via the Nile; but because of Egyptian clamour Lord Allenby, who is by no means a weak man, actually bound the Sudanese Government to limit the irrigated area to one tenth of its possible extent. The injustice of this arrangement had obviously been brought home to the British Government some time previous to the tragedy of last week, and the artificial restriction would have been removed in any case. The Egyptians may themselves be thankful that it has been got rid of summarily rather than by friendly negotiation.

NEWS ITEMS

FORCE SURROUNDED SPANISH LOSSES IN REAR GUARD ACTION

A PARIS message from Tangier says that the withdrawal of 15,000 Spaniards to Tetuan has occasioned keen anxiety, notwithstanding that the evacuation of Spanish troops was accompanied by the evacuation of the rear-guard was attacked when it reached Daracoba, with heavy Spanish losses, and General Berenguer was wounded immediately by a rifle on the battlefield. The troops then struggled to Souk-el-Harbi, where they were surrounded. They were subsequently forced to retreat along mountain paths and their communications were cut. Hasty preparations are being made at Tetuan to assist the men in retreat.

INDIAN STATE TROOPS POTENTIAL AUXILIARY OF GREAT VALUE

SPEAKING at a banquet at Rajkot yesterday His Excellency the Viceroy said: "I shall hope on some other occasion to make more extensive visits to the States in this agency and to see the sea-ports of Bhavnagar and Porbandar, Dwarka and its salt works, the Setruj hills of Palitana, and many other places and important cities of which you are rightly proud— Let me take this opportunity of expressing my deep appreciation of the splendid services which the States in this part of India rendered to the Empire in the Great War. These services were of a piece with your martial traditions and that high reputation for loyalty to the Crown which it has been the pride of the Indian States to maintain and cherish. "I am glad to learn that some of the young relatives of the ruling families of these States have adopted military careers in the Indian Army, and I trust that this connexion will continue and be extended, and that boys of this stamp in the rising generation will turn their attention to studying at Dehra Dun with a view to qualifying themselves to enter Sandhurst and receive King's Commissions. I am glad to hear that the Indian States Forces' scheme has been approved by a number of Durbars and has been adopted in many States. Well organized State troops form a potential auxiliary of great value to the forces of the Empire. In addition, though the old days when bandits and dacoits infested Kathiawar are happily past, troops of this character within the States themselves form a powerful insurance against any serious outbreak of disorder, and are an effective weapon for dealing firmly with any sporadic defiance or breach of law and order which may occur. "Her Excellency has been greatly touched by the kind reference His Highness the Maharaja Jan Sahib has made on your behalf to her and her work and asks me to express her gratitude."

CHICAGO MURDERS

MORE THAN ONE PER DAY

(TIMES'S SPECIAL SERVICE.) CHICAGO holds an enviable murder record. The Times Chicago correspondent says that the official statistics show that, in less than six years, 1,500 murders were committed. In the first ten months of 1924 there were 294 as against 270 in the whole of 1923. In October, the last month for which figures are available, murders were committed at the rate of more than one per day.

Perspective

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

'Dream big, but work hard'

Born in the small village of Bayang in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district, state minister O P Choudhary's journey is a testament to resilience, determination, and remarkable achievements. Overcoming early hardships, including the loss of his father at the age of eight, he cleared the UPSC examination at just 22, becoming one of the youngest IAS officers in the batch. His tenure in the Indian Administrative Service was marked by innovative governance, which earned him the prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. A key figure in the BJP's campaign during the Jharkhand election, Choudhary transitioned to politics and joined the saffron party in 2018. Persevering through electoral challenges, he emerged victorious in 2023 as a member of the Legislative Assembly from Raigarh. Currently serving as the youngest minister in Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai's cabinet, Choudhary handles critical portfolios such as Finance, Commercial Tax, Housing and Environment, Planning, and Economics & Statistics. Choudhary's trajectory reflects his deep commitment to public service. In an exclusive interview with Shishir Roy Choudhary of The Statesman, he discusses his inspiring journey, the challenges of governance, and his vision for Chhattisgarh's future.

Q. Your journey from a remote village in Chhattisgarh to becoming one of the youngest IAS officers is remarkable. How has your early life shaped your approach to governance and public service? A. Growing up in Bayang, a remote village in Raigarh, taught me the value of resilience and determination. The hardships my family and I faced made me deeply empathetic towards the struggles of others, especially those in rural areas. As an IAS officer, I focused on grassroots governance, ensuring that the benefits of policies reached the most marginalized sections of society. This commitment continues to guide my political journey, where I strive to bring transformative changes to people's lives through innovative policies and transparent governance.

Will Gwadar become another Hambantota?

Although its history offered nothing more than a seemingly unchanged continuity, Makran's 20th-century resurgence assumed a significance for global superpowers. To them, the Arabian Sea became a paddling pool in which they could float their boats and play war games. The beachheads of Gwadar and Ormara assumed a new significance. In March 1972, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as president, sent a proposal to US president Richard Nixon offering "port and tracking station facilities along the Arabian sea coast near Karachi". Secretary of State W. Rogers advised Nixon that the US did not "envisage a need for such facilities but remained open to any specific proposals in port expansion". Bhutto persisted. Before his meeting with Nixon a year later in September 1973, Henry Kissinger briefed Nixon that Bhutto's main motive in seeking a Balochistan port was probably "to help him bring more commerce and jobs and win more support in the backward, sparsely populated, chronically unstable, opposition-dominated province". During their meeting, Nixon admitted to Bhutto that "the (Gwadar) port proposal that you made intrigued me. We cannot say anything definitive on this today. [D. Kissinger will look into this. So far, we have put everything in that area on Diego Garcia. It might be useful to have access to a port as well".

Q. You have seamlessly transitioned from administration to politics. What has been the most challenging part of this shift? A. The transition from administration to politics is both challenging and rewarding. As an IAS officer, I operated within a defined framework, implementing policies set by the government. In politics, however, the scope is broader, and the responsibility to connect with people on a personal level is immense. The most challenging aspect is managing public perception while staying true to one's core values. Politics demands balancing long-term goals with immediate needs, but it also offers a unique platform to shape policies from their inception. I see this as an opportunity to amplify my impact and serve people in a more dynamic capacity.

Q. How is Chhattisgarh addressing economic growth in agriculture, infrastructure and livelihoods? A. In Chhattisgarh, we have consistently worked to empower the agriculture sector. As I mentioned earlier, we are purchasing paddy at the rate of Rs.3,100 per quintal. We are also focusing on irrigation projects and ensuring the availability of quality seeds and fertilizers for farmers, which have benefited them significantly. Under the infrastructure sector, the double-engine government has been approving national highways, four-lane roads, and flyovers. Simultaneously, our government has ensured that there is no shortage of funds for basic amenities like roads and water.

Recently, Union minister Nitin Gadkari approved projects worth INR 20,000 crore for Chhattisgarh. While the previous government had stopped the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, we have now restarted constructing homes for more than 18 lakh poor families. We are developing



Naya Raipur and Atal Nagar as capital city. There is a plan to develop SCR on the lines of NCR. This will link Raipur, Durg-Bhilai, and Rajnandgaon, creating a more integrated urban landscape. Q. How has Chhattisgarh attracted investments and ensured industrial growth? A. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Sai, Chhattisgarh recently launched its new Industrial Development Policy for 2024-30. The policy has been designed with a focus on employment generation and is aligned with the vision of building a developed India by 2047. For the first time, subsidies for industries will be linked to employment creation. If an industry provides jobs to over 1,000 youths, additional incentives will be provided under the BE-SFOKE policy. The new policy also encourages investment in sectors such as tourism and healthcare. Q. What are Chhattisgarh's financial goals for the next five years? A. Our goal is to double Chhattisgarh's GDP in the next five years.

We are focusing on policies that will promote job creation and improve resource management. We aim to strengthen the services sector, which currently contributes 35 per cent to the state's GDP, while the national average is 55 per cent. We are working to bring the services sector's contribution in line with the national average. Our focus is on enhancing sectors like engineering services, research and development, healthcare, tourism, entertainment, pharmaceutical and electric vehicles (EVs). Q. What is your vision for Chhattisgarh's economy, and how do you plan to achieve it? A. Our vision is to make Chhattisgarh a self-reliant, industrially vibrant state focused on sustainable development. This will be achieved through innovation, investment in infrastructure and the implementation of progressive policies. We plan to promote sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, information technology, and manufacturing all of which have significant potential for job creation. Additionally, we are

focusing on emerging sectors like IT, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and data centers, which will further strengthen the economy. We are also prioritizing industries where future employment opportunities are expected to arise. Through this approach, we aim to provide jobs to youths and promote Chhattisgarh as a hub for marriage and conference tourism. Q. You are often seen as a youth icon in Chhattisgarh. How do you engage with the younger generation, and what message do you have for them? A. I firmly believe that the youth are the architects of a nation's future. Whether during my administrative tenure or now in politics, I have consistently emphasized engaging with young minds and encouraging them to actively participate in nation-building. For the youth, my message is simple: Dream big, but back those dreams with hard work and perseverance. Whether it is acquiring new skills, innovating, or participating in democratic processes, their contribution is pivotal to creating a stronger India.

CROSSWORD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION crossword grid with filled-in letters.

ACROSS 1 Harry Blaisefont and I entertaining member of crew (11) 2 Ask about Jamaican male (3) 3 Joke about extremely unethical prison camp (5) 4 Scratching an ace copper plate fish (9) 5 I was food (5A) 6 Believe lecturer's cleared of deceit and this (5) 7 Characters occasionally dropping son on Nan, near my sister's house (7) 8 Close market (4) 9 Time bomb filled to open vault (4) 10 Present greeting bishop in doorway (7) 11 Shipped by flipping extreme domestic device (5) 12 School again discover Greek coin before start of excavation 13 British Liberal politician embracing International reactionary part (5) 14 Help in calypso style (5) 15 Playing 17, hung, without a bit of strife? It could be the big game (10,3) 16 Down 1. Legislative body's sub-par elements limiting government bond (8) 2 The Outchman, say, regularly loses dog since 1980s (4,4) 3 Surf, wet and touring enjoy (5) 4 After crashing car the man goes by railway to get to sport (7) 5 Exploits work's weakness (7) 6 Little sweeper turned lab fan - initially left back's taken in (9) 7 Fast cooker with a recipe for cow's heart (6) 8 Ancient lead of Entertainment dividing a TV channel (5,3) 9 Online business is drug trafficking (1,9) 10 Smash and grab, I find grazing (6) 11 It might accompany Harry Blaisefont - troupe's outsiders must visit Italian city on the way back (5,3) 12 How a boxer might read poem to the radio - its lines are, crucially, of different sizes (7) 13 Why ease off moonshiner? (7) 14 Strange times, son, Moonbeam-muncher! (6) 15 Remedies contemporary apartment second (6) 16 Half your cotter turned up in town (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)