

# Valley Must Respect (Beverly) Hills

IPR protection for creatives is required in AI use

Tech companies are wading into copyright issues not only over the content they use to train AI but also over how it interacts with humans. Hollywood star Scarlett Johansson has raised the issue of informed consent and fair compensation after OpenAI launched a chatbot with a voice apparently similar to hers. OpenAI claims it has used the voice of another unnamed artiste for its Sky chatbot. But it has paused its rollout after Johansson's complaint. The AI company had initially approached her with a contract for use of her voice but she had turned it down — twice. The film industry has reason to be suspicious of AI and has kitted itself up with legal protection against improper use of creatives by the tech industry, particularly after a rash of deepfakes involving some of its biggest celebrities.

Creators of AI will have to be especially careful over copyright, given the scope for bias inherent in the technolo-



gy. Bias enters through human input. But AI can amplify it. Creative people lending names, faces or voices to such endeavour would be justified in seeking protection to their livelihood apart from regular compensation. This would also apply to content AI trains upon, such as the work of wri-

ters, directors and musicians.

Changes to IPR protection are required in countries where such systems are robust. Elsewhere, like in India, protection needs to be introduced and executed. The human interface of AI will multiply as it spreads across cultures and languages. The need for creative inputs will rise accordingly. The scope for consent and compensation infringement will grow as AI disperses through economic systems. Lesser brands than OpenAI and less famous celebrities than Johansson must have strong regulation to ensure livelihood and privacy are protected. Tech companies are fighting scepticism about the ethical development of AI, apart from its hugely disruptive impact. It needs celebrity endorsement to counter some of these suspicions. It makes sense for Silicon Valley to treat Hollywood with the respect it deserves.

# America, Sort Out the Student Visa Problem

The world may have opened up much more for Indians pursuing higher studies abroad than before, but the US continues to be their preferred destination. In 2022-23, the US issued over 1.4 lakh student visas in India, more than in any other country. A major jump is expected. A US visa appointment is, indeed, at premium, as students applying at the US Consulate in Hyderabad found out to their chagrin when 10,000 appointment slots were booked in five minutes. The demand-supply mismatch is unusually high in Hyderabad, a relatively new centre that saw exponential rise in applications in the Oct 2022-Sep 2023 cycle. It would be instructive to know the reasons behind the surge,

and the courses attracting students in record numbers. This



could provide some guidance for those driving this growth in demand. The US, on its part, needs to plan better, ensuring that its consular arrangements have the capacity to handle the y-o-y growth. Proposed offices in Ahmedabad and Bengaluru should help. The US recognises that students are an important component of

its bilateral relationship with India. Joe Biden asked US ambassador to India Eric Garcetti to expedite student visas. So, policy-wise, we're fine. Processing-wise, we have hiccups.

Changes in regulations for international students in Britain and Canada regarding intake numbers, ability to work offcampus, visas and employment options for accompanying family members, and concerns about safety makes the US an even more attractive destination. However, delays and uncertainties could propel Indian students to seek out different destinations, especially as many non-English-speaking countries are going out of their way to better their 'ease of onboarding international students' index.

A show-cause notice for not being 'enthu' may not be confined to politicians

# Shwirkers, Don't Skip Organisational Work

Shwirkers - workers who shirk work - beware. You may very well be issued a show-cause notice for 'not taking interest in organisational work'. Which is what the incumbent Hazaribagh MP and former central minister Jayant Sinha has been issued by his organisation, BJP. The notice elaborated that Sinha had not only slacked off from work on the poll campaign 'ever since the party declared Manish Jaiswal as the candidate from Hazaribagh Lok Sabha seat', but he had — horror of horrors! — 'did not even feel the need to exercise your vote'. One would imagine that Jai Prakash Bhai Patel, Congress candidate who left BJP two months back, must also be piqued. He would have understandably expected the two-time sitting MP to have voted for him in the privacy of the polling booth just to spite his party who has junked him. It didn't help that of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, Sinha's son recently walked into Congress'. Sinha Srhadearlier expressed his desire not to contest the elections so that he could focus on 'combating climate change'. Climatic change within his party seems to have, indeed, elicited a combative reaction from him. So, shwirkers, don't skip those office team-building get-togethers. You may get a notice from HR about how the company image 'has been maligned because of your conduct'.

India's electronic manufacturing service industry is humming – now to stick to the flight path

# A Tectronic Shift's Coming



**Anil Nair** 

The Edit Page

hree recent events have brought India's electronics manufacturing services (EMS) into sharp focus:

> On Tuesday, reports indicated that 1 lakh units of Google Pixel 8 smartphones will be made in India by Padget Electronics, subsidiary of Noida-headquartered EMS company Dixon. Of the 1 lakh phones, 25-30% will be exported.

In April, Apple pretty much doubled its exports of iPhones, produced by its EMS partners in India, from \$580 mn a year ago to \$1.1 bn.

► In May, Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran assumed an additional role — Tata Electronics chairman. The Tatas plan to allocate \$14 bn to the semiconductor business. This includes a chip fabrication facility at Dholera in Gujarat to serve global markets for semiconductors in automotive, computing, communications and AI, in collaboration with PSMC Taiwan. An OSAT (outsourced semiconductor assembly and test) facility at Morigaon in Assam is also part of the Tata plan.

India's EMS industry began in the early '60s, and grew rapidly as original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for electronic products started engaging smaller companies to handle their manufacturing. EMS companies soon started leveraging scale, exploiting their growing expertise for multi-OEM manufacturing, material procurement, resource optimisation and cost reduction.

This greatly benefited their OEM customers in respect of inventories and human resources, and to deal with fluctuatingdemand. Advent of surface-mount technology (SMT), where components are mounted directly on the surface of a printed circuit board, and wave/bulk soldering accelerated the industry.

▶ ET comes home Emerging technologies are reshaping EMS. IOT, which enables machines to connect with the internet and convey performance-related information has been game-changing, and EMS companies have been producing smart IOT components and devices. AI and ML have contributed



Plug and play

immeasurably to efficiencies, including for preventive maintenance, realtime defect detection, process and supply chain optimisation, as well as demand forecasting.

Robotics has increased precision in

component placement and soldering, improving both quality and output. Blockchain has enhanced trust in the supply chain and reduced counterfeiting by tracking origins of components and their movement. 3D printing is being deployed for ra-

pid prototyping and custom components. Use of advanced materials like graphene and polymers to enable lightweight components are producing breakthrough designs and much improved performance outcomes.

Chin-chin For decades, there was an over-concentration of manufacturing in China. During 2015-19, China accounted for 16% of global manufactured goods exports. As the US reworked its strategy to minimise dependence



Manufacturers will have to decide on nearshoring, to bring production closer to markets to mitigate potential supply chain disruptions

confronted with Covid-induced supply disruptions, highlighting the need for supply chain risk mitigation, countries and companies started embarking on the 'China

Plus One' strategy. MNCs have since been searching for countries with the skill and (political) stability to address this. Vietnam has made good progress, capitalising on its low-wage labour markets, its proxi-

mity to China, preferential taxation and multiple FTAs.

Schemes aim to curb

cheap imports, boost

exports and create jobs.

India's competitiveness will depend on continuing reforms, de-bureaucratisation, contract enforcement, effective dispute resolution mechanisms, last-mile facilitation, building of sectoral ecosystems, and governance law and order stability.

Goodness of goods According to MeitY, electronics manufacturing grew at a CAGR of 20.1% in FY23. It's expected to touch about \$300 bn by 2026. GoI announced a slew of schemes to push this for modified electronics manufacturing clusters in 2020, a PLI for large-scale electronics manufacture the same year, and one for hardware in 2021. PLI 2.0 for IT hardware was announced in 2023.

create jobs. The highest disbursal by far has also been for large-scale electronics manufacture. Further, GoI has recently signalled its interest in tracking consumption of recreational appliances and items for personal use like Play-Station consoles, AirPods, speakers, headphones, Bluetooth devices, curlers, power banks et al in its basket of goods. This, along with substantial increase in FDI in manufacturing, augurs well for industry. But there are challenges and bugs to fix:

These schemes collectively aim to curb cheap imports, boost exports and

The market is competitive, and it's global when it comes to vying for large

Keeping pace with rapid tech advancements will involve significant investments and skilling.

Not violating stringent environmental regulations in terms of material consumption and waste disposal are critical.

An eye will have to

be kept on rising wages. With the rate of growth in EMS being limited more by imagination and capacity, those who aim to

be successful will ha-

ve to make firm choi-

ces regarding: What geographies

to operate in. Nearshoring, to bring production closer to markets to mitigate potential supply chain disruptions.

What industry ver-The highest disbursal by far has been for large-scale ticals to address, wheelectronics manufacture ther it be EVs, telecom, industrial, healthcare, durables or wearables.

> Green energy sources, using environment friendly materials and processes.

> Workplace diversity and inclusivity. But the real winners are going to be those who can counter the inherent commoditised nature of the business by favouring a strategy-, solution- and design-led approach, built on a founda-

tion of compliance and automation. In an AI age, with integrated circuits (ICs) becoming photonic (leveraging light instead of electricity), PICs (photonic ICs) opening doors for new applications, and miniaturisation the norm, it will be interesting to see how EMS companies adapt to this tectonic shift that's around the corner.

tunities. Rise of fintech, ecommerce

► Infra-development projects, inclu-

ding smart cities, highways and RE ini-

tiatives, will attract substantial invest

► India's young and dynamic pop-

ulation is increasingly participating

investment inflows and sustained

in the stock market, leading to higher

▶ Favourable investment climate

Despite global economic challenges,

including supply chain disruptions,

is likely to attract more FIIs, further

propelling the market towards the

ments and boost economic growth.

and digital services is set to drive

market expansion.

market growth.

\$10 tn target

The writer is founder, ThinkStreet

# Another Feather in India's Mcap



**Nirmal Jain** 

India has achieved a significant milestone, with its market capitalisation crossing the \$5 tn mark on Tuesday. tripling in a decade of robust reform and economic progress. The most heartening features of this growth in wealth have been:

Fall in the share of foreign institutional ownership from 19.13% to 16.51%. accompanied by a corresponding rise in domestic ownership.

Small investors, typically participating through mutual funds, have seen their ownership rise from 3.33%

For the first time since opening to foreign investors, domestic investors have gained a larger share of incremental wealth.

India is set to become the world's third-largest economy, with GDP expected to reach \$5 tn within the next three years, and according to finmin

kable achievement highlights India's growth and resilience amid global uncertainties. Ten years ago, India was the 10th-

projections, \$7 tn by 2030. This remar-

largest economy with GDP of \$1.7 tn. Despite facing macroeconomic imbalances and a weakened financial sector, it has climbed to 5th position, boasting an estimated GDP of close to \$4 tn. A series of substantive and pragmatic reforms have fortified the economy against global shocks. Key reform areas include:

Governance improvements at district, block and village levels, making them more citizen- and businessfriendly, particularly in healthcare, education, land and labour reforms, where state governments play a crucial role.

 Public sector capital investment has surged from \$5.6 lakh cr in FY15 to ₹18.6 lakh cr in FY24.

With the goal of becoming a developed country by 2047, GoI is focusing on reforms and the active participation of states. India's economy has consistently grown at over 7% annually for the past three years, fuelled by strong domestic demand. The growth pace is expected to continue and potentially accelerate with ongoing structural refor-



On mission mode

ms and a robust financial sector, although geopolitical risks remain a concern. With the \$5 tn milestone achieved, the focus now shifts to the future. In the next five years, the Indian capital market has the potential to reach \$10 tn, as projected by the likes of Jefferies Group. India commands premium valuati-

ons due to higher growth, better prospects and a stable macro environment. The broader market at 20× one-year forward is only one standard deviation above the long-term mean valuation. This optimism is based on several key factors:

▶ Key reforms like GST and IBC are expected to enhance business efficiency and investor confidence.

talisation and technological innovation, are creating new growth oppor-

► Tech advancements, such as digi-

which have re-emerged in 2024, India's economic outlook remains positive. The journey towards a \$10 tn capital market is expected to result in substantial wealth creation, benefiting a broad spectrum of society. This growth will lead to job creation, improved living standards and greater economic opportunities for millions. Moreover, the expansion of the capital market will provide companies with the necessary capital to innovate, expand and compete globally.

The writer is founder, HFL Group

Making Independence Count



Lubna Kably

Sebi recently fined two independent directors (IDs)—a retired air vice marshal and a physical therapist — ₹10 lakh each for failing to fulfil their statutory duties as members of their companies' audit committee, and for not safeguarding interests of shareholders.

A former promoter of LEEL Electricals had assured them that their roles as IDs and audit committee members would not require specialised knowledge of finance. They were led to believe that audit committee meetings were routine.

In the past, Sebi has even fined and penalised IDs not part of audit committees. With increased shareholder awareness, the spotlight is on the role of IDs, a role not to be taken lightly.

CII's 'Appointment of independent directors and process of board evaluation' guidelines, released in February, took cognisance of the fact that the role of the independent director has evolved over the years and may now encapsulate crisis and risk management, internal controls, standards of conduct and sustainability, along with

traditional roles in strategy, finance and audit.

While these guidelines call for a robust mechanism for performance evaluation of IDs, it also points out the need to create legal and procedural safeguards relating to their personal liability. Also needed is availability of indemnity and/or insurance that may be formalised through appropriate written agreements.

While directors and officers (D&O) liability insurance is mandatory for the top 1,000 entities by market cap as per the Sebi listing norms, it may be advisable for all listed entities to, for starters, consider this protection for their directors, states the guideline. Sebi's decision regarding this penal-

ty imposition comes at a crucial time. Institutional Investor Advisory Services (IiAS), a proxy advisory firm,



Raising flags

states that the Companies Act had introduced a 10-year tenure rule for IDs from April 1, 2014. Given this, the tenure for a large number of IDs has just expired, or will expire in the com ing months.

IiAS highlights that many business

groups are resisting change by main-

taining old ties. They often reappoint IDs from one company to another within the same group, raising concerns about their true independence due to established relationships with the promoter group. Also, some companies replace an outgoing ID with a member of his or her family—quite often a father-son combination — or keep a seat for partners of particular professional firms.

IiAS also questions whether ex-employees can truly be independent. These practices may comply with law, but they undermine the purpose of rota-

So, how can efficiency of boards be improved via the ID channel? Countries such as Britain, Australia and Singapore have adopted the concept of lead IDs, where one of the IDs is designated as the 'lead'. In 2017, the report of the Sebi-appoin-

ted, Uday Kotak-chaired Committee on Corporate Governance acknowledged that IDs have equal fiduciary responsibility as other board directors. However, it added that their role was more defined and distinct, and that the appointment of a lead ID could facilitate better engagement of, and by, IDs. But Sebi didn't accept this recommendation.

The report had stated that a lead ID must be appointed by all listed entities where the chairperson is not independent. The role of a lead ID could include:

 Leading exclusive meetings of IDs, and providing feedback to the chairperson/board of directors after such meetings.

Serving as liaison between chairperson and IDs.

Presiding over board meetings at which the chairperson or vice-chairperson is absent. Having the authority to call meet-

ings of IDs. If requested by a significant number of shareholders, ensuring that he or she is available for consultation

and direct communication. In Britain, the lead ID serves as a crucial intermediary between chairperson, board and shareholders. This role provides an alternative communication channel for board members and helps resolve disputes, particularly when members feel their views are overlooked. Also, the lead ID is a key contact for principal shareholders to raise concerns or address issues with the chairperson, board or other

executives. The need of the hour may be to revisit the recommendations relating to the appointment of a lead ID.

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# THE SPEAKING TREE Give Up

### **DURGA CMISHRA**

Conflict

Possessiveness, ego and the hankering for power are causes of family disturbances, social evils and war. The very basis of a war is created at a personal level. Failing to understand dharma and a lack of empathy for others are reasons for discord. Each religion has given importance to nonviolence, love, compassion, goodwill and selflessness. But it is strange to see mankind involved with the opposites. It implies a

serious lack of common sense. In day-to-day life, we segregate stale vegetables while purchasing, ensure that we receive the right amount of currency while exchanging, and never forget to check the water quality before drinking. But we fail to apply our intelligence in matters of dharma. We are happy to follow others and conclude that since 'it is

said' or 'advised', it must be true. To become free thinkers, we should analyse the catastrophic effects of bad vrittis. The Buddha avoided war between the Sakyas and Koliyas arising from the water dispute of the River Rohini. After fighting the dreaded Kalinga war, Emperor Ashoka gave up violence and embraced peace and non-violence. The countries bevond his empire also accepted peace.

It is key to eradicate ego. We must make ourselves capable of introspection and understand that everything is anitya, impermanent. All things and experiences are due to some causes and conditions. They too, are subject to change, decline and cessation. This is vipassana—subjectively observing the body, feelings and chitta.

Today is Buddha Purnima

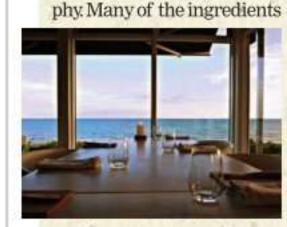


Kadeau Bornholm, Denmark

Kadeau is not an easy restaurant to reach. You'll have to take a flight or an overnight ferry from Copenhagen. But it's so worth the journey. This charming restaurant, once a beachside cottage, sits at the southern tip of the Danish island of Bornholm, overlooking a gleaming blue Baltic Sea. Helmed by chef Nicolai Nørregaard and his friends Rasmus and Magnus Kofoed, Kadeau was one of the first restaurants to embrace the New Nordic manifesto—an innovative approach to traditional foods

with a focus on health and an

ethical production philoso-



used here are handpicked

from Kadeau's kitchen gar-

den, and then dried, cured, preserved, smoked and pick led to maximum effect. Kadaeu's seemingly simple dishes will blow you away with their bold and subtle flavours and textures. Star of the menu has to be fire-dried vegetables (think soft beef jerky texture, like a sun-dried tomato) in a shellfish bisque. The superstar is the hot-and-cold smoked salmon, served with a sauce of Havgus cheese and buttermilk, and topped with pickled elderflower. Food for the gourmet Viking.

# **Our Pedestrian** Infrastructure Apropos the Edit, 'Missing On

Our Roads: Real Red Lights' (May 22), pointing out 'bad driving' and 'anarchic pedestrian behaviour' as the causes of accidents is spot on. However, the write-up falls short in a few respects in that infrastructural constraints too are many. Look at the encroached footpaths and lack of facilities for pedestrians to cross over, to name just a few. Indeed, a lax society is at the bottom of this but, ironically, it is that very society that can redeem itself. Public participation through the Traffic Sentinel app wherein a photograph of a violation can be sent to traffic police instantly can go a long way in reducing anarchy.

ARUN KAMPANI, IPS (RETD)

Byemail





OUR VIEW



# Sebi's open offer pricing tweak will boost M&As

Market rules that let the open offer of a company acquirer ignore share price moves caused by information leaks should ease acquisitions and favour the economy. But beware complexity

he Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has changed its takeover regulations to shield acquirers from cost spikes in the event information of a merger and acquisition (M&A) plan gets leaked. From 1 June, when its new rumour verification framework comes into effect, the pricing formula for an open offer will be stripped of any spike that arises from the stock market getting whiff of a company's control being in play. At one level, India's top 100 listed entities will be mandated to confirm, deny or clarify market rumours in case of significant movements in their share price. This requirement will be expanded to the next 150 companies from December 2024. At another level, a party seeking to acquire a company will have an easier path. Under Sebi rules, if a quarter of a target firm's equity is acquired (granting a veto on special resolutions), the acquirer needs to make an open offer to shareholders for additional shares that would give it majority control. A 26% stake bought this way can prove expensive. Currently, to even it out for both the buyer and sellers, this offer price goes by the stock's average price over 60 days before the announcement, weighted by volumes traded. In case market participants hear of a control play, we often see them piling into the stock, raising its price beyond a level judged reasonable by the acquirer. Once Sebi's revised rule takes effect, however, 'material' leakdriven upshoots will be clipped out. This, in principle, is fair to retail investors as well, since such gains are not performance led.

A level playing field for M&As would serve us well as it has the potential to make our economy more efficient. In an ideal scenario, the control of companies would be vested in those best

suited to maximize the value they generate for all stakeholders. When this is not the case, the market's self-corrective devices are expected to kick in. Typically, weak performers that are listed see their share value slump. Widely held firms without a single majority owner are thus exposed to takeovers by parties that can integrate them with other operations or appoint their own managers to run them better. This not only keeps incumbents on their toes, it boosts overall value generation by placing assets in more capable hands. Ownership changes can even give dying firms fresh leases of life. Minority shareholders, though, may disapprove of shifts in control and direction, which explains Sebi's mandate of an exit path laid out for them via an open offer to tender their shares. The price must be fair, of course, which is why the weighted-average formula was created. Yet, this protection of minority shareholders should not deter acquisitions, which is what happens when prices shoot up on the buzz of firms being eyed. Lowering the bar could give India's M&A arena some dynamism.

Complexity, however, may hamper the idea's implementation. To clip out a "material share price move," we need it defined clearly. Indian stock exchanges are to issue a framework for it, but market confidence will depend on how convincingly leak-related moves are isolated. Identifying the precise start of a rumour isn't easy; would subjective calls need to be made? How the verification rule impacts a target's share price will also be tested. This part may take time to settle. All said, how smoothly our markets operate under Sebi's new rules will determine the difference they make. The regulator's effort to rebalance the pricing of open offers is laudable. Now let's see some action.

### MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

# Spare a thought for people who live amid our heaps of garbage

A little compassion and care in how we get rid of our waste is the least 'ragpickers' deserve from us



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

eaps of rubbish dot the two acres. Each heap is dense and tightly packed with months of accumulation-remnants of waste collected from the city. Workers, usually called ragpickers, collect the waste and bring it to this site. Then they sift and strip the waste of everything and anything that has the smallest of value. All of which is taken by the thekedaars (contractors) they work for and sold to the recycling chains of different materials-plastics, bottles, metals and more. After the to-the-bone stripping, the worthless remnants form heaps that grow for months and even years

The workers live amid rubbish heaps on the site. In structures made of waste metal and plastic sheets, and makeshift wooden frames. The two acres are divided among 12 thekedaars, all of whose workers live on their portion of the land. These are entire families, not only men. The contractors have brought them here from distant parts of the country, usually from the vicinity of the towns that they themselves hail from. The 500 odd resident families do not pay any rent, but must work for their thekedaars. For many workers, it's a full family enterprise with their children working side-by-side. A family of five may earn up to ₹10,000 in a good month and ₹4,000 in a bad one, depending on how much territory they scrounge. Most cover 30-40 kilometres

on foot every day. If they don't, because of illness, they lose that day's earning. Weather conditions are just another obstacle—a downpour, blazing sun or freezing wind can't stop them, just slow them down. Rain is particularly bad. It makes the waste messier, and its collection and sifting that much harder.

In journeys of dredging the city, dayafter-day, year-after-year, those few who have been able to acquire a decrepit cart are in a different league, and even higher are those two or three who possess broken rickshaws. Both enable coverage of larger territory and collection of greater volumes. But none can escape the basic peril of their trade-putting their hands in the bins, dumps and cesspools that we create across the city, with invisible shards of glass, corrosive chemicals, rotting organic material and worse. Hands with deep and shallow wounds, infected or not, and skin diseases are daily rewards.

The first thekedaar got hold of a piece of the site 15 years ago. Others came in over the next three or four years. The two acres are mired in land-title disputes. The state government and a religious institution are among the many claimants. Titles don't matter on the ground in such disputes; control does. Those who control the land can't sell or build on it without title papers, but they charge rent with impunity. Jockeying for control is continuous. A couple of months ago, in the middle of the night, one of the claimants sent a platoon of thugs to get a portion vacated. Panic gripped the thekedaars of that portion and their workers. Their unlikely saviours turned out to be the local police, who thrashed the thugs and sent them packing. It is not clear why.

There is no water at the site. It is brought by tankers-to drink and wash. About 10-20% of family incomes are spent on water. There are no toilets, other than a few constructed by an NGO after much struggle. Those who rent the land do not want the faintest sign of a permanent settlement-so they do not

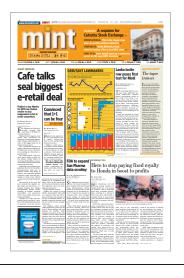
permit construction of any sort. Resident families don't have ration cards, having migrated from afar. Rare are those who get any of the most basic government schemes. Getting children admitted to schools is hard. Even when the family is willing and the schools legally bound to, the latter find excuses not to admit them; they probably find the children dirty, smelly and wayward. There is one tree on the two acres-the only shade on that precipice of survival.

A few hundred metres away on treelined avenues and gleaming plazas are Munich-style bier-gartens and pubs, Japanese and Italian restaurants among scores of others, and four five-star hotels, all buzzing from dawn till late night. Hundreds of families spend ₹10,000 an evening on a single dinner outing, and people like us pay ₹12,000 for a room-night. Remnants of waste from all this revelry add to the heaps close-by. If not those very heaps, then some other somewhere in our urban wasteland. Wherever you live in this country, with no effort beyond opening your gaze, you will find an identical twin of that site with the lone tree and 500 families living amid rubbish heaps.

Excavating our conscience buried at the bottom of those heaps is too much to hope for. We are unlikely to change our society structurally. It demands sustained collective and political action, apart from sacrifices and moral courage of the kind we seem incapable of today. When we regain some of that, we may change. Till then, we will live as we do and they will live as we let them.

Perhaps we can do some small things Don't call them 'ragpickers'-they keep us clean. City and state officials should ensure that they receive the benefits of all government schemes; and others too who live in similar settlements and subsist on other trades. We should tolerate a few smelly children in school, or get them water to wash everyday. And be careful of how we dispose shards of glass and jagged metal, so that a child's

#### 10 PEARS AGO



#### MINT METRIC

by Bibek Debroy

A UP man's only crime, He forgot to buy kurkure sublime. Missing her favourite treat, The wife beat a hasty retreat. Leaving him in his amnesic grime.

**GUEST VIEW** 

# Politically exposed persons ought to keep banks alert

JAIDEEP MEHTA



is an investor and a tech industry watcher.

he general election currently underway is the only thing hotter than the weather in India these days. With talk of tempos full of cash, and the discovery of more than ₹30 crore of unexplained currency in a Jharkhand legislator's home, it is time to shine a light on a somewhat obscure term: Politically exposed persons (PEPs). This term refers to individuals who hold political office or public positions such as judgeships and bureaucracy posts, or have a close association with those who hold such authority.

Data from Rzolut, a risk and compliance technology and data provider, reveals that there are over 2.3 million PEPs around the world, ranging from country presidents to municipality officials. These positions tend to have stronger links than others with cases of corruption, money-laundering and other financial crimes.

For instance, in December 2023, Senator Bob Menandez in the US was found in possession of several gold bars at his home. He

was charged with having accepted bribes from various businesses.

The vast quantities of cash recovered time and again from our own politicians here in India have also often travelled through benami bank accounts and other dubious channels. Note that the currency notes printed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are distributed only through what are described in banking regulations as 'scheduled banks.' There is no other way for them to enter general circulation.

Within the bounds of privacy norms, it would be prudent for banks to keep a watch on the actions of customers who are PEPs. not just to manage their financial risks, but also to satisfy the regulatory requirements of India's central bank and other regulators around the world.

Although there are no credible figures available to quantify political corruption, the scale of money-laundering that takes place globally is estimated to be monumental. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, an estimated 2%-5% of global GDP is laundered. In today's scenario, this would amount to more than \$2 trillion annually. It is safe to assume that a significant proportion of this money is from corruption involving PEPs, though the estimate also includes the proceeds of other crimes, like illegal money made off drug trafficking and gold smuggling.

PEP-related corruption is especially insidious, as it nibbles away at the fabric of the nation and weakens democratic structures in ways that are still being discovered. I involved in terrorist financing. Due dili-

It's prudent for

banks to keep a

vigil on the risk

of their services

being misused

by clients for

financial crimes

From the distortion of elections to the award of contracts for flyovers and highways to contractors that deliver sub-standard quality, the impact covers a vast range of activities.

Connecting the dots between political corruption and India's low-quality infrastructure-roads that barely survive monsoon rains, for exampledoes not require much imagination.

For their own reputation and balance-sheet health, banks should maintain a vigil to prevent their services from being used to facilitate illicit financial activities. Negligence can prove costly. A few years ago, BNP Paribas was fined \$9 billion for letting the governments of Sudan, Cuba and Iran conduct transactions through the bank. These governments are under US government sanctions, and when the regulator found out, it resulted in a court case and massive fine.

In extreme cases, PEPs may also have links with individuals or organizations

gence exercises could ensure that bank services are not surreptitiously used for nefarious ends. As recently as in 2020, it was found that banks in Syria were facilitating the transfer of millions of dollars to the terrorist group ISIS; these lenders paid a heavy price, as they were subsequently cut out of the international payments settlement system, as per

Given the dangers faced by the world, it is no surprise that banks around are being asked by regulators to enhance their due diligence in dealing with PEPs, including obtaining information on

Washington Institute.

their source of funds and nature of business

relationships. Growing online transactions

are also being kept track of.

Banks should invest in systems to identify, monitor and report to regulators their PEP relationships as part of their antimoney laundering and counter-terrorism financing obligations.

 $From\,RBI\,to\,the\,US\,Federal\,Reserve, bank$ regulators around the globe not only have well laid-out policies, procedures and rules, but are also raising the bar on these continually. While this adds to the cost of bank operations, it is seen as necessary to ensure that political corruption is stemmed and terrorist financing stops. Compliance need not be too burdensome, though. Digital technologies are playing a welcome role in ensuring effective compliance and helping banks manage complex processes and reporting cycles.

In election years, the challenge is steeper than usual. Countries with over half the world's population are election-bound in 2024. The list includes robust democracies such as India and the US, but also countries like Russia and North Korea.

It is well understood that the pressures of election-funding needs could combine with the temptations of power to elevate levels of corruption and illicit financial activity. Banks should stay extra vigilant and ensure that their books and business reputations stay spotless.



**THEIR VIEW** 

# What does an emerging Squad in the Indo-Pacific mean for India?

This new mini-lateral grouping of the US and three of its allies could coordinate actions with the Quad for regional stability



HARSH V. PANT & DON MCLAIN GILL

are, respectively, vice president for studies at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, and a Philippines-based geopolitical analyst author and lecturer at De La Salle University.

arlier this month, US Secretary of
Defense Lloyd Austin met his Australian,
Filipino and Japanese counterparts to
institutionalize and launch the 'Squad' as
a new four-way security arrangement in
the Indo-Pacific. The Squad has become
an essential addition to the series of security 'minilateral' groupings in the Indo-Pacific, such as the
Quad, Aukus, the US-Philippines-Japan trilateral
and the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral.

The Philippines, Japan and Australia are not treaty allies; however, each of these countries shares a bilateral treaty alliance with the US. Thus, the idea behind the Squad centres on the desire of all four democracies to deepen their level of integration beyond the hub-and-spokes format at a time when China has been militarizing the South China Sea at the expense of the rules-based order of the Indo-Pacific.

The seeds for the Squad's creation were already planted in 2023 through the efforts of the four countries to enhance their strategic collaboration in the South China Sea. Manila has broadened its alliance with the US and is currently negotiating a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) with Japan to enhance troop deployments between both countries. This also complements the existing Visiting Forces of Agreement (VFA) that the Philippines has with the US and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Manila and Canberra. In June 2023, the defence chiefs of all four countries met for the first time on the sidelines of the Shangri La security dialogue in Singapore. Moreover, in April this year, the US, Japan, the Philippines and Australia conducted their first-ever multilateral maritime exercise in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Though the creation of the Squad may have seemed quite natural, due to the loose and informal nature of mini-laterals, their development relies on the convergence of political will and the intersection of shared interests and threat perceptions among its potential members. Consequently, the degree of collective participation among all four democracies only began to heighten in 2023.

In the past decade, the US, Philippines, Japan, and Australia lacked a collective and homogenous strategic vision *vis-a-vis* the region. While Washington was initially preoccupied with Europe and the Middle East during the latter years of the Obama administration, the Trump presidency sought to reconfigure US commitments towards its alliances based on a greater level of transactionalism. On the other hand, while Japan and Australia recognized the challenges posed by China in the South China Sea, there were still limitations in their abilities to project a more military and defence-driven approach in the geographic space.



Moreover, the absence of a resident Southeast Asian anchor further constrained the ability of the US and its two treaty allies to play a more robust role in securing the South China Sea collectively.

While the Philippines seemed like the most practical Southeast Asian partner then, given its treaty alliance with the US, its close strategic ties with Japan and its defence relations with Australia, the former administration of Rodrigo Duterte significantly reoriented Philippine foreign and security policy. In the hope of gaining economic concessions from Beijing by appeasement, Manila refrained from taking direct action against China through the US alliance network. This policy shift limited the Philippines' participation in security arrangements to secure the South China Sea.

However, this strategic dynamic significantly changed in 2022. While still heavily engaged in Europe and the Middle East, Washington recognized more clearly that China is the only major power with the material capacity and ambition to dismantle the established rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, with China showing no sign of managing its expansionist and belligerent activities in the Western Pacific, Japan has recognized the need to play a more robust defence role in the Indo-Pacific. This reorientation has its roots in Tokyo's National Security Strategy (NSS) released on 16 December 2022, which encompasses several notable objectives, including expediting Japan's military modernization and enhancing its military forces based on the acute traditional security challenges in the region. Importantly, the NSS also highlights the need for Tokyo to enhance

the capabilities of friendly regional countries to attain a genuinely free and open Indo-Pacific. Australia has also been showing greater interest in playing a more prominent role as a security and development partner in Southeast Asia.

**VIEWS** 

Since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office in June 2022, Manila has taken a more proactive role in safeguarding its EEZ against Chinese expansionism by strengthening its partnerships to improve its maritime security capabilities and ability to exercise its sovereignty. This shift opened doors for the Philippines to participate more actively in the emerging network of likeminded democracies of the Indo-Pacific. By playing the anchor's role in Southeast Asia, the country has positioned itself as the Squad's fulcrum.

The proliferation of informal strategic arrangements suggests that Indo-Pacific security will be underpinned by flexible, area-specific and practical elements of cooperation, rather than traditional and rigid alliances. At the heart of these developments lie concerns of a potential challenge posed by China to the stability of the established regional order. All four members of the Squad must consistently engage with one another and explore new means of collective capacity building. Moreover, the Squad needs to coordinate with other existing mini-laterals (like the Quad) to achieve a more robust network-based cooperative framework of like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific.

It is in the very nature of the Indo-Pacific that mini-laterals will proliferate and the nature of security threats in the region demand that they coordinate their actions closely.

#### MINT CURATOR

# It's Bidenomics that has made America's EV tariffs necessary

One bad idea after another: EV subsidies have spelt trade barriers



CLIVE CROOK is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist and member of the editorial board covering

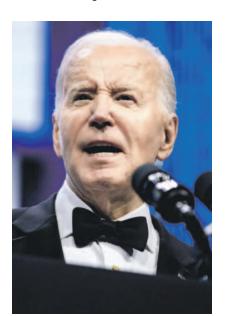
n one sense, US President Joe Biden's punitive new tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) are indeed necessary, just as he argues. What makes them so are the enormous sums that the administration is devoting to expanding US capacity to produce its own EVs. An almost-invariable characteristic of industrial policy is to start with one dumb idea, after which many more then follow—by necessity.

America's local EV makers are struggling despite generous subsidies. Output and sales are growing, but not as quickly as hoped. Early adopters have adopted and the rest are less enthusiastic. That could change, but the charging infrastructure has been slow to roll out and converting American drivers to EVs isn't easy. Even after the subsidies, EVs made in the US aren't cheap. Hence the need for tariffs to make the competition more expensive.

The high cost of producing EVs in the US is partly by design. Bidenomics aims to do two things that are in tension: Suppress carbon emissions by speeding adoption of EVs and create high-wage manufacturing jobs. Well-paid workers making cheap EVs is a tricky combination. "Good-paying union jobs" of the kind Biden advocates are difficult for a high-wage economy like the US to sustain because the resulting production is likely to be globally uncompetitive. A low-wage country can use subsidies to incubate a new industry that might in due course thrive abroad, letting governments withdraw support. In pricey-labour economies, this formula is less successful. As incomes rise, factory employment is apt to decline; work moves to more productive sectors. Just maintaining factory employment requires ongoing government support, wnich, in turn, retards growth by slowing the flow of resources to better uses.

Bidenomics favours sustaining persistently uncompetitive industries. Sometimes that's defensible, provided the costs aren't too high. China's ability to produce vast quantities of usable cheap EVs seems to have surprised the administration. The subsidies and incentives that the US has offered to this point aren't enough. The US faces another "China shock," as National Economic Council Director Lael Brainard puts it. Tariffs of no less than 100% are needed to protect America's nascent EV industry. For the sake of good-paying union jobs, Americans must be prohibited from buying cheap imported EVs.

This won't be the last stupid-but-necessary idea in the sequence. The tariffs will prevent EV prices in the US from falling as quickly as they otherwise would, slowing



Joe Biden's industrial policy has resulted in a trade-distortive follow-up BLOOMBERG

the market uptake of a much-needed technology. If the administration is to keep its promises on climate change, it will need other ways of inducing Americans to use EVs. One such policy is in the works: New EPA rules to control the proportion of EVs and gas-powered vehicles sold in the US. Unless demand patterns shift, producers will be induced to lose money on EVs and recover the losses by selling their reduced output of fossil-fuel vehicles at far higher prices. If this arithmetic doesn't work out, demands for more subsidy may arise.

Support for persistently uncompetitive industries sometimes makes sense. Access to some kinds of goods really is a national-security imperative. Some of the products covered in America's new bundle of tariffs, such as high-end semiconductors, might qualify. EVs plainly don't.

Right now, Biden's officials aren't really pressing the national-security argument. The China threat lurks in the background, of course, but the main case for high tariffs on EVs and other Chinese exports rests on Beijing's market-distorting policies. In this view, US producers can't match their Chinese rivals not because US costs are too high but because China's exports are artificially cheap, driven down by Beijing's pursuit of industrial excess capacity.

A stickler for consistency might pause at this logic. When the US adopts trade-distorting policies, it's presented as an overdue recognition of market failures. When China does it, it's decried as artificial and a threat to global economic stability.

Be that as it may, trade-distorting policies do distort trade. America's industrial polices can make its trading partners worse off. The same goes for China. The question is whether disputes and imbalances can be resolved cooperatively. Pro-trade, positive-sum outcomes are at least imaginable. But governments, led by the US, have chosen to go the other way. Some argue it was a mistake even to hope for cooperation. China, it's argued, is a cheat and should never have been allowed into the World Trade Organization, a defunct institution. I disagree, but let's see how the negativesum alternative of protection, retaliation and counter-retaliation works out.

It's early days for such policies, and the cycle of error piled upon error has plenty of room to run.

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**GUEST VIEW** 

# Electoral bonds case: Do not nullify past transactions

LALIT KUMAR & MUSKAAN GUPTA



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ne of the compelling stories during India's ongoing general elections has concerned electoral bonds. On 15 February 2024, the Supreme Court (SC) struck down the electoral bond scheme for political donations as unconstitutional. This has meant serious ramifications for corporate houses that made contributions to political parties based on this scheme and the three statutes which were amended to facilitate it. If transactions done before the ruling are not preserved by the SC, it is going to cause donor companies a lot of hardship.

First, let's look at what these amendments were and why the scheme was held unconstitutional. A related question also arises: Is the strike-down retrospective or prospective? And, if it is retrospective, what impact will it have on past actions under the scheme

by corporates and political parties?

The verdict scotched the scheme as it violated Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.

Simultaneously, four amendments made in three different laws were also struck down as

unconstitutional. These amendments pertained to exemptions given to political parties from publishing details of electoral bond contributions, maintaining records of the same and from disclosing the names and addresses of donors. Another amendment had removed the upper limit for corporate donations to political parties, earlier fixed at 7.5% of the company's average net profits of the past three years. Perhaps the most telling was an amendment that exempted companies from disclosing the names of political parties favoured by donations in their profit and-loss statements. Of all the strike-downs, this one has hit businesses the hardest.

A well settled position under Article 13(2) of the Constitution is that the state cannot make any law which takes away or abridges rights given by Part III of the Constitution. If any law is made in contravention of these rights, then to the extent of such a contravention, that law will be void. Part III deals with fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. It was violations of Articles 14 and 19 on the rights to equality and information, respectively, that led to the scheme and related amendments being struck down. Article 13(2) makes it clear that once a law is struck down as being unconstitutional, it ceases to have effect.

Thus, the settled position is that judgements declaring any law as unconstitutional are retrospective. This issue was decided by the SC's ruling in *CBI vs. R.R. Kishore*. In this case, an amendment made to the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act of 1946 (DSPE) was held to be unconstitutional from the

very date it was inserted in the DSPE. The SC held that once a law is declared to be unconstitutional, then it is void since its beginning. Such a law would be stillborn, unenforceable and have no legal effect.

In the electoral bond context, the critical question is this: What happens to deeds done in the past when the statutes were still considered relief.

considered valid?
Let's look at the impact that the SC's ruling could

have on the past actions of companies and political parties if it has retrospective effect. The available data shows that companies have already made donations exceeding the earlier cap of 7.5%; companies with zero profits and even losses have made contributions and the names of favoured political

parties were not disclosed in the profit-andloss statements filed by most of these companies. For political parties, it is known they hadn't published any details of electoral bond contributions and haven't maintained records of the donations received.

So, we have a unique set of challenges if

we reverse the actions retrospectively. How will con-**Donors need** tributions beyond the 7.5% limit or those made by lossclarity from the makers be returned to contributors? How will firms SC on whether re-open or amend the duly audited and approved this political financial statements of past funding scheme years, unless they approach the National Company Law has been axed Tribunal? This is a serious challenge for donors. retrospectively

It was to avoid backtracking and incompatible reversals that the doctrine of prospective overruling was introduced in

Indian jurisprudence. Taken originally from American jurisprudence, this doctrine was first applied in India in the 1967 case of *I.C. Golaknath vs State of Punjab*. There, the court held that only the SC can choose to apply this doctrine in matters involving the

Indian Constitution. Recently, this was re-affirmed in its ruling on *State of Manipur vs Surajkumar Okram*. The SC held that it has the power to apply this doctrine to save past transactions under statutes which have been declared unconstitutional, or it can mould the relief provided by exercising its power under Article 142 of the Constitution. Conversely, if the SC chooses not to apply this doctrine, then past transactions executed under the aegis of the struck-down law will be void and null.

Unfortunately, from the language in the electoral bond ruling, it appears that the SC has applied this doctrine only to save electoral bonds that have already been encashed, but not for amendments made to the three statutes. Although unintentional, this has created ambiguity and uncertainty, with divergent views on the subject being taken by different stakeholders.

Given the magnitude of the issue, this needs a quick resolution. So, how can India Inc expect to get legal relief for past actions? For now, the only and best course would be to approach the SC for appropriate directions to be issued so that past transactions are saved. This would set a precedent and reduce *ex-post facto* complications.

These are the authors' personal views.

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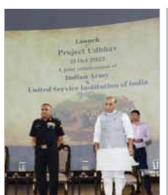
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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

# **Warcraft for all**

Project Udbhav celebrates India's rich heritage in military statecraft and makes it citizen-inclusive

The adage, "If you want peace, be prepared for war," reflects a longstanding philosophy in India. Historically, India has maintained peace while staying strong, refraining from warmongering unless provoked. This approach stems from ancient Indian wisdom, emphasising the importance of advancement in warfare to deter any potential threats. India's rich and ancient heritage in military statecraft, rooted in the Vedas, Puranas and the Mahabharata, forms a significant yet often overlooked aspect of its cultural legacy. The Army's Project Udbhav aims to bring this historical wealth into the public eye, engaging citizens in the defence domain and fostering a deeper understanding of India's strategic and military traditions. The Vedas, among the oldest sacred texts, provide early references to warfare, strategy and the ethical dimensions of combat. The Puranas, a genre of ancient Indian literature, elaborated on the principles of statecraft and warfare. Texts like the Vishnu Purana and Agni Purana offer insights into military



organisation, the roles and responsibilities of warriors and the strategic use of resources. The Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics in world literature, is a treasure trove of military wisdom. The epic not only narrates the Kurukshetra war but also delves into detailed discussions on strategy, the art of war and the moral dilemmas faced by warriors.

Other ancient Indian texts offer timeless wisdom adaptable to modern defence strategies, such as intelligence, psychological warfare and ethical conduct. Launched last year, Project Udbhav delves deep into these ancient texts and aims to promote indigenous discourse in the Army by integrating India's ancient strategic acumen

into contemporary military domain, ensuring that the force remains future-ready. It is also an endeavour to involve our citizens and educate them about warfare for any eventuality. Involving citizens in understanding warfare and being prepared is crucial for several reasons. It fosters national pride and identity by highlighting India's intellectual and strategic achievements, countering one-dimensional portrayals of its history. Under Project Udbhav, workshops, seminars and online courses will educate citizens about ancient Indian military texts and their modern relevance. Collaborations with universities and research institutions will ensure academic rigour and accessibility. Additionally, a series of books, documentaries and articles will highlight various aspects of Indian military statecraft, including translations and commentaries on key texts for a broader audience. Project Udbhav is laudable as it represents an endeavour to weave a strategic vocabulary and conceptual framework deeply embedded in India's philosophical and cultural heritage. This initiative underscores the importance of understanding and valuing the rich military heritage that has shaped India's strategic culture, offering invaluable lessons for contemporary and future defence strategies. It is indeed a praiseworthy effort to revive ancient wisdom lest it is lost.



# Epic election battle enters decisive phase SIDHARTH MISHRA



# The ultimate battleground is UP, where Yogi Adityanath's unwavering leadership is crucial in the BJP's fight to maintain its stronghold

nother 10 days to go and the two-monthelection process would be over. These elections would be remembered for the spearhead of the ruling party, Narendra Modi and of the opposition, Rahul Gandhi battling the heat and dust of the famed Indian summer to spur their cadres to give the best performance.

In the national media, what's being discussed is the punishing schedule of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda trying to match him with almost equal vigour. From the opposition side, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has ensured to create the perspective that the campaign just did not rest on the shoulder's of the Gandhi family.

In any war, there always is a clinching battle that decides who won and who lost. In World War II, the Battle for Berlin proved to be the most crucial. It's the image of the Soviet soldiers putting the flag of the USSR on the Reichstag in Berlin in May 1945 which marked the defeat of Germany under Adolf Hitler.

Similarly, the general elections of 2024 will always be remembered and will be decided on who wins the battle of Uttar Pradesh. With 80 seats, Uttar Pradesh is the citadel of the BJP monolith, which has a dominant presence in the Hindi heartland States of Bihar, UP, Madhya Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Haryana.

Unlike MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Haryana, in Uttar Pradesh the BJP is not in a direct contest with the Congress but a strong regional outfit — Samajwadi Party. UP also cannot be compared to Bihar, where it's fighting another strong regional party - the Rashtriya Janata Dal but in the companionship of another strong regional outfit — the Janata Dal (United).

Thus in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP is completely on its own with paign has been faulted severnowhere else to look forward to but its cadres and leaders. Here concern among his supportthe role of Uttar Pradesh chief ers for allowing the achieve-

minister Yogi Adityanath becomes crucial. The Mahanth of the Goraknath Math has been in campaign mode ever since he retained power with a thumping majority in 2022.

He first delivered the Ram temple at Ayodhya. The consecration of the idol at Ramlalla temple in January this year has been the biggest-ever achievement of the right-wing schema in the country. This would not have been possible but for the determined, firm and passionate execution of the construction plan by the Uttar Pradesh Government of not just the temple complex but the whole of the city of Ayodhya.

The second has been to galvanise the cadres and keep them functioning for a full two months to ensure that the rivals are stopped and checked in their determined assault. He started the polls campaign with the Prabudh Jan Sammelan on March 27 and would continue it till May-end the last phase of polling.

Prime Minister Modi's cam al times and has also caused

ments of the past ten years to be pushed to the background in pursuing a very polarising agenda. The campaign has not aligned with Modi's espousal of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vishwas" (Collective Efforts, Inclusive Growth, Everyone's Trust) slogan, which encapsulates an inclusive approach aimed at fostering economic growth and social cohesion.

Prime Minister's initiatives, such as Make in India, Digital India and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), which underscore his commitment to modernising India's economy and infrastructure, have seldom found space in his speeches. This has somewhere allowed the opposition to attack the Government. On the other hand, Yogi Adityanath, who in the past seven years has combined his vision with a strong emphasis on law and order and cultural nationalism (Hindutva), has continued to keep his campaign on the same track. His leadership in Uttar Pradesh is characterised by a drive to restore cultural heritage and end minority appeasement, as seen in initiatives like the grand celebration of Diwali

ing of places to reflect their historical Hindu signifi-

The lynchpin of his gover-

nance has been the emphasis on strict law enforcement, aiming to improve safety and reduce crime, which resonates even with many of his non-Hindu constituents. His determined perusal of anti-crime drives has found a fan following that goes beyond the traditional Hindutva admirers. Coming back to the battle of Uttar Pradesh, it would take the collective strength of the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Uttar Pradesh chief minister to make the BJP bandwagon have a safe journey to the national Capital. Modi and Yogi are both distinct personalities and both have significantly impacted Indian politics and governance, albeit in different ways. On June 4, in the event of the BJP unfurl-

(The writer is the author and president of The Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views expressed are personal)

ing its flag, the contributions

of the Uttar Pradesh chief

minister would as much be

accounted for as that of the



YOGI ADITYANATH,

WHO IN THE PAST SEVEN YEARS HAS **COMBINED HIS** VISION WITH A STRONG EMPHASIS ON LAW AND ORDER AND CULTURAL **NATIONALISM** (HINDUTVA), HAS CONTINUED TO KEEP HIS CAMPAIGN ON THE SAME TRACK

Prime Minister.

#### THE EDITOR

# Fighting age fraud for Indian football's integrity ARYAN RAJVANSH



From local matches to the big leagues, age falsification distorts fair play and erodes the essence of sportsmanship

**⊣**he issue of age fraud has plagued Indian football for decades. This persistent dishonesty has not only undermined the integrity of the sport but has also stunted the growth of genuine talent, ultimately leading to India's poor performance at the senior team level.

For the last 50 years, age fraud has been an open secret within the football community. Players, coaches and officials are all aware of it, yet the problem persists unchecked. From local tournaments to State, district and national leagues, age fraud is rampant. Shockingly, it even extends to the national team, where overage players take the field under pretences. This systemic dishonesty is a national disgrace. The lack of genuineness and honesty in our footballing ecosystem is a national embarrass-

My personal experience highlights this issue vividly. When I was 14, I shared accommodation with much older players-some even 24-yet they possessed fake birth certificates claiming not only robs honest play-

they were my age. These older players competed alongside me in national leagues, creating an uneven playing

field and undermining the credibility of the competitions. This personal encounter opened my eyes to the widespread nature of

this fraud. The impact of age fraud is profound. Young, talented players who play by the rules find their careers destroyed by those who cheat the system. Genuine athletes are overshadowed by older players who dominate youth categories through sheer physical C cognitive advantage. This

ers of opportunities but also skews the development pathway, leaving India with a senior team that lacks the authentic experience and growth needed to compete

internationally. Cases of age fraud emerge regularly from all corners of the country, yet there is little action from authorities. Until the Government takes decisive measures to eradicate this issue, Indian football will remain stagnant. The current State of affairs ensures that we will never achieve success on the international stage. It is a profound shame and it undermines the spirit of the sport. The rigged system favours deceit over talent and honesty, leaving the sport in shambles. It is time for a rigorous overhaul, strict enforcement of age verification processes and a zero-tolerance policy towards fraud. Only through a genuine commitment to integrity can Indian football hope to reclaim its lost potential and earn respect on the global stage. Until then, we must

acknowledge this harsh reality: as long as we continue to cheat, we will never truly win. The future of Indian football depends on our ability to foster a culture of honesty and fairness, giving every player a fair chance to shine based on merit, not deception. The future of Indian football hinges on our commitment to integrity. We must give every player a fair chance to succeed based on their true abilities. Until we do, our dreams of footballing glory will remain just thatdreams. The time for change is now, for the sake of our sport and the gener-

ations of players to come. (The writer is a football coach; views are personal)

#### **AMOEBA KILLS**

Madam — Strange are the ways of meeting death for a young soul. A five-yearold girl has died of brain-eating amoeba after taking a bath in a pond in Malappuram district of Kerala. She was undergoing treatment at the Kozhikode Medical College of Institute of Maternal and Child Health. She had taken a dip in the pond on May 1 and started showing symptoms of fever, headache and vomiting on May 10. The girl, afflicted by amoebic meningoencephalitis, a rare brain infection caused by a free-living amoeba found in contaminated waters, Still waters are dangerous. Don't let go.

This is not the first case reported. Amebiasis is an intestinal (bowel) illness caused by a microscopic (tiny) parasite called Entamoeba histolytica, which is spread through human feces (poop). Often there are no symptoms, but sometimes it causes diarrhoea (loose stool/poop), nausea (a feeling of sickness in the stomach) and weight loss. The main symptoms of the disease are fever, headache, vomiting and seizures. All infected patients have lost their lives due to the disease so far, as the mortality rate for this rare brain infection is 100 per-

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

**DRONES IN AGRICULTURE** Madam — Apropos the article, "Promise and challenges of drones in agriculture", published on May 20, this is my response. Drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are becoming increasingly popular in India's agricultural sector. Drones offer a range of benefits to farmers, like improved efficiency and enhanced crop yields. However, some challenges may hinder the adoption of drone technology such as fear of job loss, lack of knowledge and training and regulatory barriers. Drones can capture high-resolution images and provide information on crop health, growth and

### **Leadership vacuum in Iran**

in Ayodhya and the renam-



propos to the front page article, "Iran Pres Adies in chopper crash after stinging Israel," published on May 21. The shocking death of the President in a helicopter crash had left Iran in the lurch and uncertainty from

This can help farmers to identify issues early and take corrective measures to optimise their inputs and outputs. But, drones are expensive and many farmers may not have the financial resources to invest in this technology. Hence, there is a need for more subsidies incentives and economical financing options to make drones more affordable and attractive to farmers. It requires a coordinated effort from the Government, the industry, farmers and the civil society to create a conducive and supportive environment for the use of drones in agriculture. There is little doubt that drones can be a powerful tool for transforming Indian agriculture and ensuring the country's food security and prosperity.

#### **MUSEUMS PRESERVE HISTORY**

Madam — Apropos of the article "Museums are pillars of culture and education," published on May 21. Museums

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

all sides. For the last three years; after he took the Presidential position in 2021, Mr Raisi has managed to frame Iran as a Shia Muslim leader block of the world with his conservative cler-

His sudden death had created a leadership vacuum in Iran in the devil's time. The US and Israel are among the direct culprits of Tehran's current situation, despite their denial on personal grounds respectively. Iran needs time to cope with all the big losses it has suffered recently, according to the according to the President, Foreign Minister and other key authorities. The recent death incident had scratched the old scars of Iran when it lost its Revolutionary Gaurd General Qasem Soleimani. Iran has been a victim of targeted killings especially for VVIPs, ever since its bitter relationship with the US over the last two decades. Time will heal everything itself, the domestic and international uncertainty will shed away for Iran with time and normalcy will be restored.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

are an inevitable part of our lives as they depict culture, history and artefacts. They tell us about the evolution of man and let us get familiar with the historical and scientific facts as well. But these days, people, especially children, hardly show interest in visiting museums as

they find it boring. The educational institutions must include visits to museums in the curriculum to enable students to broaden their horizons and get valuable knowledge. Museums are a great source of understanding our civilisation, culture and heritage and help explore various branches of research work. The Government should take the initiative to help the masses visit museums as they are the storehouses for preserving our ancient history and heritage.

Abhilasha Gupta | Mohali

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# **Baramulla wakens**

lections in the Baramulla constituency in Kashmir during the fifth phase on Monday marked a signifi-description a description of the content of t per cent, one and a half times the turnout recorded in Srinagar during the fourth phase on May 13. The increased ~ from 14 per cent in 2019 ~ participation in Srinagar was already seen as a sign of hope in the troubled region, and Baramulla's turnout further underscores this optimistic shift. This remarkable participation is indicative of the evolving political landscape and citizens' desire for change in a region long beset by political and social turmoil. Baramulla's electoral contest has drawn national attention, featuring heavyweight candidates such as former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Peoples' Conference chairman Sajjad Lone, and the incarcerated Sheikh Rashid Ahmad of the Awami Ittehad Party. The increased turnout, despite a sluggish start, reflects a critical shift in the political engagement of Kashmiris, suggesting a renewed faith in the democratic process and an eagerness to influence their future. A significant factor in this election has been the candidacy of Sheikh Rashid Ahmad, whose imprisonment on charges of terror funding has not diminished his appeal. His son, Abrar Rashid, has fervently campaigned on his behalf, appealing to the electorate's emotions and highlighting the plight of families affected by stringent security measures. Sheikh Rashid's popularity among voters who feel disenfranchised by mainstream political parties underscores a broader desire for representation that genuinely addresses local grievances.

The political dynamics in Baramulla have also been reshaped by the 2022 delimitation exercise, which increased the number of assembly segments in the constituency from 15 to 18. This has strategically altered electoral calculations, particularly benefiting candidates like Mr Lone, who is banking on support from newly incorporated areas such as Trehgam in Kupwara. Mr Abdullah's decision to contest from Baramulla, shifting from his father's stronghold in Srinagar, reflects a strategic move to counteract the influence of the BJP and its perceived proxies. Mr Abdullah's campaign has centred on resisting the BJP's policies and protecting Kashmir's unique political identity, a stance that resonates deeply in a region wary of external interference. The enthusiastic voter turnout in traditionally low-participation areas such as Sopore, Palhalan, and parts of Budgam and Magam, traditionally seen as separatist strongholds, signals a critical shift. It suggests that even in regions historically sceptical of Indian electoral politics, there is a growing willingness to engage with the democratic process to seek tangible change. This election's vibrancy is also a testament to the resilience of Kashmir's democratic spirit, even in the face of adversity. The diverse turnout, including a significant number of women voters, highlights the inclusive nature of this political awakening. However, the road ahead is fraught with challenges. The high turnout should not be misinterpreted as a sign of normalcy. Instead, it underscores the population's urgent call for political solutions that address their aspirations and grievances.

# Maharashtra woes

The low voter turnout of 49.01 per cent in Maharashtra, particularly the Mumbai constituencies, during Monday's fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections ~ the final phase in the state ~ has sparked widespread concern and criticism, with various factors contributing to the disenchantment among voters. Long queues, scorching heat, and organisational inefficiencies marred the voting experience for many citizens across the state. At the forefront of these concerns is the issue of poor management at polling stations. Reports of delays, missing voter names, and inadequate facilities have highlighted systemic failures in the electoral process. Voters have voiced frustration over the lack of basic amenities, particularly in hot and humid conditions. Political leaders from opposition parties have seized upon these issues to criticise both the ruling BJP and the Election Commission of India (ECI). Accusations of deliberate voter suppression in certain regions have fuelled tensions and eroded public trust. In light of these challenges, there is an urgent need for the ECI to address the shortcomings and ensure that future elections are conducted with greater efficiency and transparency. This requires a comprehensive review of existing protocols and the implementation of measures to enhance accessibility and convenience for voters. Ultimately, the success of a democratic society hinges on the active participation of its citizens in the electoral process. By addressing the underlying issues that contributed to the low voter turnout in Maharashtra, the ECI can uphold the principles of democracy and safeguard the integrity of our electoral system. The irony of a lower turnout in Maharashtra than in Baramulla cannot escape Nirvachan Sadan. Amid the challenges faced during the election process, it is crucial to recognise the resilience and determination of voters who braved odds to exercise their democratic right. Despite obstacles, many individuals remained committed to casting their ballots, demonstrating their commitment to the democratic process. Their actions serve as a testament to the enduring strength of democracy and the importance of civic engagement in shaping the future of our nation. While there were shortcomings in certain aspects, the ECI plays a crucial role in upholding the democratic principles of fairness and transparency. Encouraging continued dialogue and collaboration between the ECI and various stakeholders can lead to constructive improvements in future electoral processes. Looking ahead, it is imperative for all stakeholders, including political parties, election authorities, and civil society organisations, to work collaboratively towards enhancing the electoral infrastructure and ensuring a smoother voting experience for all citizens. This necessitates not only addressing immediate concerns such as inadequate facilities and logistical challenges but also implementing long-term reforms to strengthen the electoral framework. It must be borne in mind that the ECI does not have full-time staff but only appropriates local officials to oversee the polling process. Thus it is only partly to blame for the shortcomings reported by voters; the state government shares equal responsibility.

# Saha in Politics

Initially, the government failed to evolve policies to establish large-scale industries and neglected the health and education sectors. Multipurpose river valley development schemes had not shown much progress as stipulated initially resulting in cost overruns on most projects. Saha finally decided to contest the general election as an independent candidate supported by communist parties against a powerful candidate of the Congress. He defeated his rival by more than 16 per cent votes epitomizing a historic event in parliamentary democracy

The period between 1850 and 1950 is considered one of the most fertile periods of fundamental science. On the other hand, it was a critical time in the evolution of social consciousness worldwide since it witnessed two World Wars. During this period, undivided India was under colonial rule except the last three years. Therefore, the achievement of any individual in the country during that time should be considered against the strong noncooperation and injustice from the erstwhile administrative authority, and severe economic hardship prevailing in society.

Under such circumstances, it is astonishing to see the journey of Meghnad Saha, a great educationist and an exceptionally brilliant scientist with a committed social vision, who came from a poor family in an obscure village of east Bengal. At the beginning of the 20th century, a group of dedicated youth came to Presidency College and later to Calcutta University with a mission to serve the country with zeal and conviction. Saha was one of them. Meghnad Saha took science as the main subject during intermediate education at Dacca (Dhaka) College where he studied the German language as an additional subject. He entered Presidency College with a scholarship in 1911 and his classmates were Satyendra Nath Bose, Jnan Chandra Ghosh, Jnanendra Nath Mukherjee and Nikhil Ranjan Sen in the B.Sc. class. Meghnad studied mathematics as a B.Sc honours subject with Satyendra Nath and Nikhil Ranjan and later M.Sc. in applied mathematics. Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis and Nil Ratan Dhar were senior to them. Two elder brothers of Subhas Chandra Bose were also their classmates.

Their teachers were Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray (Chemistry), Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose (Physics) and Professors D.N. Mallik and C.E. Cullis (Mathematics). The 1915 M.Sc. batch of Calcutta University produced a galaxy of scholars who brought many laurels to the country. In 1916, University College of Science was established by Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee where Meghnad and Satyendra Nath joined to teach physics in M.Sc classes. Later C V Raman joined as Palit Professor in physics and Prafula Chandra Ray as Palit Professor in chemistry.

Meghnad rose to fame quickly by publishing remarkable papers on the theory of thermal ionization in 1920 and became FRS in 1927 at the age of 34. Saha's theories of thermal ionization of elements, and selective radiation pressure have revolutionized astrophysical thought and research. After a glorious academic career, he entered parliament by winning the general election in 1952 as an independent candidate from Calcutta North-West constituency.

poverty-stricken villages of Bengal and the sufferings of people reconstruction will be possible during natural calamities like floods, and deadly diseases, felt deeply for a permanent solution to these problems. In 1923, a catastrophic flood engulfed some parts of North Bengal and breached the Calcutta-Darjeeling railway lines at different places. A relief committee was formed



**SHYAMAL** 

**BHADRA** 

The writer is Former CSIR

Cultivation of Science (IACS),

under the leadership of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray at the University College of Science. Subhas Chandra Bose was entrusted to fieldwork, Satish Chandra Dasgupta was the member in charge of supplies while Meghnad Saha was given charge of propaganda officer. During this relief operation, Meghnad wrote an article for the Modern Review explaining the possible causes of that devastating flood and suggesting measures for the riverine eastern part of Bengal. He understood that this huge amount of flood water could be utilized for irrigation and generating energy for the benefit of mankind. The enormity of the disastrous flood

made an indelible mark on his young mind. Later, successive floods in the Damodar River in south Bengal, particularly the disastrous flood in 1943, caused a severe war-time crisis. Saha wrote a series of articles in his journal Science and Culture to create awareness amongst the public so that the government could raise a co-

mprehensive multi-purpose plan for Damodar and its tributaries. As a result Damodar Flood Enquiry Committee headed by the Maharajadhiraj Bahadur of Burdwan submitted a report in line with Saha's article with K. Ray ~ The Planning of the Damodar Valley ~ published in Science and Culture in 1944.

However, it had been an uphill struggle to convince the colonial ruler to act fast in planning and implementation. The late 1930s was an interesting phase for Indian politics. Subhas Chandra Bose was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1938. He was invited to speak as chief guest at the 3rd annual meeting of the Indian Science News Association (ISNA), founded by Saha. Bose said on this occasion ~ "Congressmen of today have not only to strive for liberty, but they have also to devote a portion of their thought and Saha who had witnessed the energy to problems of national reconstruction. And national only with the aid of science and our scientists".

> Bose was deeply concerned with the post-independence problems that India would be facing and it was in his mind to make a national economic plan to meet forthcoming challenges. Later Saha took the opportunity

and proposed forming a national planning commission with Subhas Bose. Finally, a national planning committee was formed under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru.

During the Great War arou-British would be forced to give independence to India even if the Allied forces won the war Additionally, the "Quit India" movement by Mahatma Gandhi in August 1942 expedited the process. Interestingly, amidst the great war crisis, the British Government thought that the resources available in Indian science and technology had not been utilized to build certain inland

> viate the poor condition of the masses. Accordingly, on the recommendation of A S Hill, Nobel Laureate in medicine, a team of distinguished scientists from India visited the UK, USA, and Canada in 1944 to assess scientific and industrial development in these countries. Saha was one of the active members of

capabilities to alle-

the delegation along with Jnan Chandra Ghosh, S S Bhatnagar and others. While visiting these countries, Saha delivered lectures on various issues, one of them being on "Science in Social and **International Planning with Spe**cial Reference to India"; later the report was published in *Nature*.

A detailed report of the visit was compiled and prepared by Saha; it was submitted to the government in 1946 for consideration. Therefore, available documents and evidence show that in all these endeavours, Saha took the pivotal role with a mission for the country's fast development once colonial rule ended Immediately after independence, Saha became a member of the University Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan in 1948. The committee members visited different places in the country to get first-hand knowledge about the existing system; they submitted an excellent report describing the plan and pattern of the Indian education system, which is available in the electronic archive. This committee's work enriched Saha to understand the dismal condition of the country's education system.

During the years 1950-52, Saha was disappointed and disillusioned by the activities of the

government particularly with the implementation of the objectives of the National Planning Commission, industrial policies, education, etc. As S N Sen mentioned in the commemorative volume ~ "Entering public life was far from his thoughts, but it was at the request of his friend Sri Sarat Chandra Bose, brother of the Netaji, who was a member of the first constituent assembly. Mr. Bose and other friends argued that as he had given so much thought to national planning, industrialization, and river valley developments, his presence in the legislature might be of great help to the country when decisions are taken by the Government on these points. But this was not liked by other Congressman." Initially, the government failed to evolve policies to establish large-scale industries and neglected the health and education sectors. Multipurpose river valley development schemes had not shown much progress as stipulated initially resulting in cost overruns on most projects. Saha finally decided to contest the general election as an independent candidate supported by communist parties against a powerful candidate of the Congress. He defeated his rival by more than 16 per cent votes epitomizing a historic event in parliamentary democracy.

He actively participated in parliamentary debates suggesting and criticizing different motions put forward by the government. He wrote an article on "Rethinking our Future" in the form of a pamphlet in 1953, which consisted of various speeches in parliament criticizing the report of the Five Year Plan introduced by the Government in November 1952. In that pamphlet Saha had mentioned under a sub-title ~ Why Scientist has taken to Politics? "Scientists are often accused of living in the Ivory Tower and not troubling their minds with realities and apart from my association with political movements in my juvenile years, I had lived in the Ivory Tower up to 1930. But science and technics are very important for administration nowa-days, at least as much as law and order. I have gradually glided into politics because I wanted to be of some use to the country

in my own humble way." Veteran parliamentarian Renu Chakraborty had mentioned in her memoir that Prime Minister Nehru used to listen with attention whenever Saha participated in the debate in the Lok Sabha. On many occasions, they differed but their relationship was never bitter. Another noted parliamentarian, Professor Hiren Mukherjee, once said that we learned a lot through his speeches in the Lok Sabha. All these episodes indicate how rich our parliamentary democracy was. Saha could have contributed much more but with his untimely death in February 1956, all hopes were lost towards a meaningful standard in the opposition in parliament. We lost a towering personality as Satyendra Nath Bose commented while delivering the Meghnad Saha Memorial Lecture on 24 April 1965 at SINP ~ "The pearls were in a sense already there, but it required a Meghnad to recognize them and to string them together into a necklace on unsurpassable beauty."



# **ASIAN VOICES**

# Official affirms pillar position of the economy based on science, technology, and innovation

n recent years, the contributions of science and technology innovation activities have been demonstrated in various aspects, from providing theoretical and practical foundations for the process of building and completing development orientations, policies, and state management tools for each sector and field, to promoting and enhancing domestic production capacity, product competitiveness, and the competitiveness of Vietnamese enterprises by supporting them in researching and applying scientific and technological achievements to practical production and business.

Scientific research, by providing scientific and practical arguments, has played an important role in developing and issuing policies, leading to breakthrough developments across all sectors and fields of industrial production, domestic trade, import-export and international economic integration. Many new issues with far-reaching impacts on sector development have been swiftly incorporated into research content, providing clear arguments for the policies and directions issued by the Ministry and the Government. These have become major policy decisions contributing to the sector's sustainable growth objectives.

By the end of the 2016-2020 period, many studies focused on evaluating and analysing the implementation of sector strategies, planning and dev-

# Việt Nam News.

elopment plans, making significant contributions to setting directions for the period 2021-2030. Key projects include the Industry Restructuring Project, the Export-Import Strategy, and the Domestic Market Development Strategy.

Additionally, research results during this period made substantial contributions to negotiating and participating in multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements, supporting policies for Vietnamese enterprises to open up and engage in the global market.

The Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation to serve the development of the Industry and Trade sector until 2030 was signed by the Minister of Industry and Trade and issued in Decision No. 2795/QD-BCT on 30 October 2023

The strategy clearly prioritises research and development activities, the application of new, modern technologies and digitalisation to create breakthroughs in production capacity and levels in key, priority industries, including high-tech and processingmanufacturing industries.

It particularly emphasises research, application, and technological innovation activities with policies aimed at 'catching up' and then 'leading' in technology for manufacturing enterprises. Attention is also given to STI activities serving state management tasks.

STI is a crucial foundation and breakthrough component in industrial and commercial policy to innovate growth models, enhance productivity, quality, efficiency and competitiveness of the Industry and Trade sector. It ensures technological independence in industries, especially in key technologies, contributing to accelerating the industrialisation and modernisa-

tion of the country. Furthermore, the strategy aims to foster strong relationships between universities, research institutes, and enterprises in STI activities, with enterprises playing a central role, research institutes and universities acting as strong research entities, and state management agencies guiding, coordinating and creating a conducive environment for STI activities. It seeks to mobilise and effectively use resources from state budgets and businesses, encouraging private sector investment in STI activities in the Industry and Trade sector.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

# **Immortal Tagore**

**SIR**, I have read with interest Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta's article "Poetic Odyssey" published in *The Statesman* today. A hundred compliments for her. The creative genius of Rabindranath Tagore, the 14th child of his parents will remain timeless and universal, precisely because that lost flame talked about the human heart. He could do so in Bengali and even in English, the "signature language of British imperialism". There are many volumes of his works in Bengali, a few in the English language. The first Indian and Asiatic to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 went abroad eight years later to receive the same. When abroad he met greats like Bernard Shaw, H G Wells, Bertrand Rus-

sell, John Galsworthy, Rothenstein, Yeats, C F Andrews and others. Rabindranath's greatness lay in the fact that he could both translate and transcreate poetry and other literary components.

Then and that was the age when machines and technology had not dominated the human spirit as today. Every Bengali and culture-conscious others tried to read his works.

Today with momentous changes upon the material plane, the situation has changed; livelihood is the main factor for betterment of human lives coupled with insensitivity in many matters fostered by vested interests.

Only a few cultivate Rabindranath and other cultural colossuses. The very young and the youth all over must be made con-

versant with heritage, humanities along with compassion and kindness. Rabindranath Tagore can never die.

Yours, etc., Parthasarathy Sen, New Delhi, 20 May.

# UNPARDONABLE

**SIR**, Apropos the news report "ECI bans Abhijit Gangopadhyay from campaigning for 24 hours" (May 22), I would like to comment that considering the gravity of offence committed by the former judge of Calcutta High Court, the ban on campaigning for 24 hours may be considered to be too meagre.

Nevertheless, it shall remain on record that a former judge, who is shown himself to be a misogynist has been cautioned by the Election Commission un-

# **PROPERTY GRAB**

**SIR**, This has reference to your report "Miscreants grab RKM property in Siliguri" published today. It is disheartening that a large group of armed miscreants grabbed Ramkrishna Mission property at Siliguri despite their having genuine documents. It is learnt that one Mr Sunil Kumar Roy, who is no more, gifted his property to Ramkrishna Mission at Siliguri. It measured 1.59 acres and included a two-storied building known as "Sewak House" on Sevoke Road. There is no need to say that the aims and ideals of the Mission are purely spiritual and humanitarian, and they have no connection with politics.

The mission strives to practice and preach the principles of the Upanishads and Gita in light of Ramkrishna's life and teachings. No one will tolerate such an attack on RKM. The Hon'ble CM should take appropriate steps immediately so that no such

untoward incident takes place in future. Yours, etc., Deba Prasad Bhattacharya, Kolkata, 21 May.

equivocally. If a former judge violates the Model Code of Conduct, his offence becomes truly

unpardonable.

Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 22 May.





# Bigotry impedes growth and must be shunned

**PATRANGA BASU** 

hen Swami Vivekananda decided to participate in the World's Parliament of Religions neither he nor his followers in Madras, who inspired him, were aware that to appear in the Chicago conclave a formal invitation from the organiser and an introduction from a religious sect or institute was necessary. This is an indication that Hinduism was not an organised religion but a practice by individuals.

Vivekananda once wrote: "Religion is a question of fact, not of talk. We have to analyse our own souls and find what is there. We have to understand it and realize what is understood. That is religion." Religion is therefore realization, a realization of the inner self. External material substances have no relation to religion. Religion cannot be found in books or in temples, mosques and churches. It resides in our minds. It is a perception.

The quest for the unknown, the origins and the future makes man uniquely different from an animal. Man searches for God, prays for His blessings, and desires to get rid of daily distress and misery. He always wants a sense of pleasure. Religion helps to bring an eternal life to man.

On 11 September 1893, Swami Vivekananda's said at Chicago: "Sectarianism, bigotry and its terrible descendant fanaticism, have possessed long this beautiful earth. It has filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations into despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now."

Bigotry and fanaticism, as described by Swamiji, still remains in a faction of our society. We experienced its presence and its fallout



during the last several decades – in 1984, in 1992, in 2002 and also during the last couple of years. There was destruction; there were carnages, violence, hate speeches, assaults on a section of the people. All these were in the name of religion – the works of organised religion.

Swami Vivekananda was critical of organised religion. He wrote: "If you want to be religious, enter not the gate of any organised religion. They do a hundred times more evil than good, because they stop the growth of each one's individual development. ... Religion is only between you and your God, and no third person must come between you."

He said: "If you and I organise, we begin to hate every person. ... If loving your own people means hating everybody else, it is the quintessence of selfishness and brutality, and the effect is that it will make you brutes."

A strong force in society believes today that India is the land of Hindus; all the people of India are united by common blood, tied by the bond of a common motherland and common

culture. It propagates Christians and Muslims as being of foreign origin as their Holy Land is outside our country. When a person or a community is torn between these two loyalties – one to his motherland and the other to his Holy Land – their actions become unpredictable. Therefore, they are to be assimilated in to Hindu culture or be treated as 'infiltrators'.

These believers blur the distinction between history and mythology. Often mythology is placed over history. According to them the day when the 'Horse of Victory' of Ramachandra returned to Ayodhya unchallenged was the real birthday of the Hindu people. It was stated to be truly our national day knitting Aryans and Anaryans into a nation from 'Himalayas to the Sea.' Every Indian must feel that the Ram temple in Avodhya should be built in its original place. If it comes up there the identity of Hinduism will be established in the world. This is the doctrine that these people thrust upon society.

Societal control on individual choices of religion, culture, attire,

food habits – whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian – are getting gradually but prominently visible. According to a strong group, Hindutva is the basis of the Indian nation. 'Ram' and 'Gau Mata' are the basis of Hindu culture. They advise us to eat only vegetarian food. But the fact is that between two-thirds to three-fourths of Indians are said to be non-vegetarian by habit and culture. Not only non-state actors but state actors too are active. Some states have banned cattle slaughter; some have banned eggs in mid-day meals.

It is well known that the British rulers administered the 'divide and rule' policy and often promoted clashes between Hindus and Muslims. The monarchs of older days -rajas, maharajas, nawabs and sultans exploited common people and amassed huge wealth. There was a caste system in society. There was oppression of the high classes on the poor and lower caste people. A heinous system like 'untouchability' persisted.

In the words of Vivekananda: "That (Mohammedan) Rule was, after all, not all bad; nothing is all bad, and nothing is all good. The Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. That is why one fifth of our people have become Mohammedans. It was not the sword that did all. It would be mad to think it was all the work of sword and fire."

We have further observed that "Akbar embraced yogic practices, experimented with vegetarianism, and (was) so keen on understanding the power Hindus experienced in worshipping the sun that he memorized its 1,001 Sanskrit names. ... Stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics were also illustrated in the royal atelier." [Ruby Lal: 'Vagabond Princess']

Diversity is the natural phenom-

enon observed in Indian society. The ethos of Indian society is to embrace one and all - these ideas are embedded in our blood. Hindu ideals teach toleration and acceptance of all religions as true. So an attack on this belief will be a direct assault on the concept of 'secularism' adopted by the people of India. Diversity of thought, opinions and beliefs are the basic tenets of our nation and civilization. Vivekananda said: ".... Any attempt to bring all humanity to one method of thinking in spiritual things has been a failure and always will be a failure. You cannot make all con-

form to the same ideas." It is fortunate and significant that the LOKNITI-CSDS [Centre for the Study of Developing Societies] Prepoll Survey Report 2024 reveals that 79 per cent of Indians believe India belongs to all religions equally and not just to Hindus. Thus there is almost a national consensus and we must not ignore it. Urban areas (85 per cent) and educated individuals (83 per cent) show strong support to religious pluralism. Only 11 per cent believe that India belongs to Hindus while 10 per cent hold no opinion.

India is poised to be a developed nation by 2047. The focussed mind should alleviate lesser issues and focus on the desired growth and its equitable distribution. Religious bigotry and intolerance will damage the social fabric and jeopardise future growth. It is essential to maintain social harmony, peace and freedom of mankind. We may conclude with the words of Vivekananda: "Liberty is the first condition of growth. .. Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress, and marriage, and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others.'

(The writer, a Cost Accountant, worked with a public sector power utility.)

**100 YEARS AGO** 

# **OCCASIONAL NOTE**

So long as the civil strife in China was confined to the better educated classes with a disciplined following, foreigners were reasonably safe, for all parties, whether Monarchist, Republican, or frankly predatory, were anxious to have the good opinion and moral support of Europe, so often reflected in large loans. But loans have become increasingly hard to get, and the discipline, within the various parties has decreased. Many of the leaders have retired disgusted, and their place has been taken by men of ruder calibre. Some of the provincial armies have degenerated into troops of brigands who treat their own homeland no better than enemy country. The foreigner is now suffering equally with the Chinese civilian, and it is no wonder therefore that the remonstrances addressed to the so-called Central Government by the foreign ambassadors at Peking should be increasing in number and volume. But, as it has so often itself declared, that Government is powerless. China already consists of five different republics, and some of these are further divided by inter-provincial factions. None of the parties will take orders from Peking. It remains to be seen whether the death of Sun-yat-Sen will simplify the situation. Wu-pei-Fu, who rules the Yangtse Valley, as Sun-yat-Sen ruled the south, may now renew his attempts to secure Canton. Should he succeed, he will certainly be the most powerful figure in China, and therefore the man best qualified to restore peace to that much-distracted country.

# **NEWS ITEMS**

# **FOOD GRAIN PRICES**

THE average Wholesale prices of cereals and pulses in India, on or about April 15, 1924, were on the same level as a fortnight before. Prices of arhar dal increased by 2 percent, and rice and bajra by 1 per cent, each, while those of barley fell by 1 per cent. Prices of wheat, jawar, maize and gram showed no fluctuation.

There was a decrease of 8 per cent in the prices of salt, but ghi increased by 1 per cent. The price of raw sugar (gur) remained unchanged.

As regards provincial prices the noteworthy fluctuations were as follows:-(1) In Delhi, a fall of 27 per cent, in salt but a rise of 20 per cent. in raw sugar (gur), and 10 per cent, each in gram and arhar dal; (2) in Sind-Baluchistan, an increase of 23 per cent in arhar dal, but a decrease of 10 per cent in salt; (3) in Bengal a decline of 19 per cent, in salt; (4) in the United Provinces, a fall of 13 per cent, in salt; (5) in Bihar and Orissa an advance of 11 per cent, in bajra.

The price of wheat in the Punjab increased by 3 per cent. Rice in Bengal recorded no change.

# MR. HUGHES **DEFENDS EXCLUSION**

THE American Bar Association gave a dinner on May 1, to Mr. Hughes, ex-Prime Minister of Australia, and discussed the "White Australia" policy and the American measure for the exclusion of the Japanese.

Mr. Hughes laid stress upon the point that if an exclusion policy was just for the United States which was rich and powerful, it was much more just for Australia, which was the outpost of Western civilization. Mr. Hughes concluded: "A white Australia is our national creed."

# PRIVILEGE LEAVE **RULES**

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT)

WITH the approval of the Secretary of State for India the Government of India have decided that officers who were unable to avail themselves of full 90 days' privilege leave admissible under provisions of paragraph 801, Army Regulations, India, Volume 2, while serving in Waziristan in 1923 and who have now been transferred to other areas, shall be credited with balance due to them up to a maximum of 30 days. This balance may be combined with any other privilege leave, except in cases where 90 days' accumulated privilege leave has already been earned under the terms of Army instruction (India) No. 157 of 1923 and may be taken at any time up to October 15, 1925. Rules governing grant, of privilege leave must, however, be strictly adhered to.

Officers, concerned will obtain a certificate from the General Officer Commanding under whom they are serving showing amount, of privilege leave taken during 1923 and balance due. This certificate will be authority for balance of privilege leave due.

# **DARJEELING BABY SHOW**

THE postponed Baby Show and Health Exhibition were held to-day at the Town Hall and were opened by Her excellency the Countess of Lytton. The exhibition and show were well attended. Numerous parda ladies were present. The Governor's band was in attendance. Babies of different ages were exhibited. The stall for the local baby clinic, and the stalls containing babies food requisites were opened. Model sanitary and insanitary houses were also exhibited. Demonstrations on health subjects will be given tomorrow by the organizers of the show.

# Role of religion in modern democracies

**TAKENORI INOKI** 

**T**oung Japanese people's interest in thinking and religion is said to have been declining in recent years.

One reason could be the criminal offenses committed by certain religious organizations that have threatened the peace of society. Young people have consequently become aware of the danger described by 18thcentury Scottish philosopher David Hume, who cited the maxim: "the corruption of the best of things produces

Moreover, hectic modern life generally tends to give people no choice but to prioritize the pursuit of convenience resulting from technological progress and economic affluence. People have no time to think about death and the deceased.

Looking at comparable trends overseas regarding people's interest in religion, it becomes clear many industrialized countries have something in common — a change in their populations' interest in traditional religions. One such example may be "religious disaffiliation," a phenomenon that U.S. and European news media report as increasingly conspicuous among Christians.

Statistics exist about the followers of religions and denominations. How should individuals' religious affiliation be verified? It is not an easy process. Religious organizations' selfreports are weak evidence. In one country, for example, the aggregate of people listed by various denominations as their believers surpasses the nation's actual population.

Germany, Austria, Switzerland and some other countries provide reliable statistics based on a so-called church tax — also known as a religious tax — that is traditionally levied on registered members of officially recognized religious communities.

Germany's constitution, the Basic Law, guarantees freedom of religion, and freedom of religious activity and religious association, for individuals and groups. The constitution prohibits the establishment of a state church, and this is believed to guarantee the separation of church and state.

In Germany, recognized religious communities such as the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and the Jewish religious community are legally empowered by the Lander (provinces) to impose a church tax on their members. This tax scheme is a stable source of revenue for clergies' salaries and religious institutions' activities.

People in Germany need to specify a religious affiliation when they register their addresses with a civil registration office. The tax office collects tax from all registered church members' monthly incomes on behalf of their religious community. When a registered member decides to leave a church, they need to notify the relevant district court and/or the civil registration office of the decision.

According to news reports, people in Germany have become increasingly discontent with the church tax. An increasing number of people are said to be leaving churches due to a series

of scandals and the burden of the church tax — which amounts to slightly less than 9 per cent of income tax.

For example, the German Bishops' Conference said an all-time high of more than half a million people left the Catholic Church in Germany in 2022. The Protestant Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) also has seen a decrease in its members.

So, what does "religious disaffiliation" mean for contemporary political and social dynamics? In a liberal democratic society, every person is perceived as an individual who is equal to all other people, free and independent. This inevitably inclines people toward individualism and pursuing their own economic welfare, weakening social ties that would otherwise help people connect to one another.

At the end of the day, people are more likely to lose interest in public affairs and focus particularly on things that could have a direct effect on their economic circumstances.

French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville said democracy would not only weaken the public spirit essential for social order, but also shorten the span of time spent thinking about things. In other words, democracy would tend to produce selfcentered people who would prioritize things that were vital "for me now."

To avert this tendency, he argued, there should be a set of methods in place for cultivating public spirit, such as participation in governance and administration of local communities, voluntary associations of people willing to share interests and concerns and a jury system in which people would participate in determining justice.

Tocqueville also focused on the role of religion. To ensure the healthy functioning of democracy, it would be necessary to expand people's minds, which tended to focus on things that were vital "for me now," to think of "the future and other people." He thus emphasized the power of religion to liberate humans from great selfishness.

But this does not necessarily mean that Tocqueville had in mind any particular organized religion or denomination. He believed religion should be a philosophy that would offer a simple answer to the question of "death and immortality" — an answer human souls seek to know.

Tocqueville thought that expanding thoughts to the future and other people could act like a counterweight, preventing democracy from easily succumbing to mass violence. Tocqueville did not argue that church and state must be separated to prevent a religious group from dominating politics. Rather, he believed people should worry about a religious group becoming interested in politics to the extent that the inherent power of religion would decline.

Religion is only supposed to assert a set of ideals — believers then feel empowered to voluntarily pursue a better life and a better society. This means that religious ideals themselves have no power to directly compel us to engage in specific political and social activities in the real world.

As we look anew at the relationship between religion and the state, the principle of separation does not seem easy to uphold. We witnessed an example of this difficulty after Pope Francis gave an interview to an Italian-language Swiss broadcaster in February this year. The pope urged Ukraine to have "the courage of the white flag" and negotiate an end to the war with Russia. Ukraine's ambassador to the Vatican, Andrii Yurash rejected this call, saying, "During World War II, was anyone serious about peace talks with Hitler?"

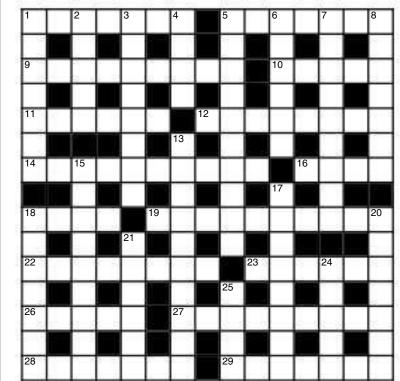
Ukraine's reaction to the pope's remarks illustrates how difficult the choice between religious ideals and the harsh reality of politics can be. Ukraine's criticism indicates that even if church and state remain separate, religion cannot really serve as a mediator for peace when strife among nations

Political and religious groups fought for hegemony throughout much of history. In the modern age, the economic society came into being, in which people were preoccupied with their economic lives. In the preceding age, people's activities were motivated by various factors, including customs, traditions, public obligations, personal promises, religious precepts and political allegiances.

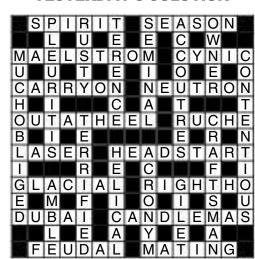
According to Alfred Marshall, whose students included John Maynard Keynes: "Here and there the ardor of the military or the artistic spirit has been for a while predominant, but religious and economic influences have nowhere been displaced from the front rank even for a time."

The Japan News/Yomiuri Shimbun - ANN.

# CROSSWORD



# YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



# **ACROSS**

- Assigned A&E department charge nurses? Quite the
- Make aware of price increase on computer program (7) USA sure to change outfits
- for match (9) 10 Get rid of soap character in sexy clothes (5) 11 Finally The Observer covers men being plagued by
- pessimism (6) 12 Laugh about publicity account problem (8) 14 Runs through steps taken

initially by members (10)

16 I really didn't mean that

sounds like Ravel (4)

- 18 Enthusiastic about books in
- different bits (4) 19 Vandals abruptly abandon saint outside besieged city
- 22 Ethical malware's caught out with reverse engineering
- 23 Journalist lives to circumvent court injunctions (6)
- 26 Contemptible person removing outer layer of clothing (5) 27 What causes pain, besides husband sporting facial hair?
- 28 Radical outed American devoted to his job? (7) 29 Use trade fair to showcase large computer systems
- **DOWN** 
  - How could an empty gallery
- American city encapsulating success and suffering (5) 3 Due diligence's limiting

be unaffected? (7)

- factors were sufficient
- Extracted 400% raise for head of company (4) 5 They distract divorced American men entertained by mate`s dancing
- 6 Take off staff affected by pay squeeze (6) Reporter's intuition seemingly shows inexperience (9)
- Some clientele mentioned
  - what is essential to them 13 Eats tuna salad, drinks lots of
  - tea and gets thinner (10) 15 Break football players with physical training after game

NO-292788

- 17 Broadcast acclaims joint
- position of authority (8) 18 Trendy top worn by Virginia without justification (7)
- 20 Dodgy religious group includes peculiar aspect (7) 21 DJ remixed duet featuring Kiss and Love (6)

24 Substantial growth roughly

doubled with ending of embargo (5) 25 Endured tiresome individual eager to get well? (4)

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

epaper.thestatesman.com



#### Setting the bar

The ECI is too important an institution to be left to its own devices

he Election Commission of India (ECI) asking the BIP and the Congress to desist from raising divisive issues in campaigning in the general election is a case of better late than never. The ECI has, in recent years, disappointed the Indian electorate by its inability to be effective, impartial and prompt in its role as the watchdog of elections. This is partly a function of the emochanism of the approximent of the FCI's the mechanism of the appointment of the ECI's members, which is entirely a partisan decision of the executive. The ECI has now written to BJP President J.P. Nadda to ask "star campaigners" of the party to refrain from making statements which "may divide the society". Its letter follows his response on May 13 to a notice issued to him which may divide us obsery it is expense on May IS to a notice issued to him over a complaint against Prime Minister Naren-far Modi's speech in Banswara, Rajasthan – Mr. Modi had referred to Muslims as "infiltrators" and "people with more children." The letter to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge asks him oe ensure that the party's star campaigners desist from making any statements which may cause tensions between different castes and communities. These rebukes from the ECI to the parties come a day after it censured the former Calcutta High Court judge turned BJP candidate from Tamluk, West Bengal, Abhijit Gangopadhyay, for its remarks against Triannoot chief Mamata Banerjee. He was barred from campaigning for 24 hours.

Earlier, the ECI had acted against YSRCP chief, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, BRS chief K. Chandrash-ekar Rao, Telangana Minister Konda Surekha, BJP leading an informative type of the control sure when the congress leaders Supriya Shrinate and Randeep Surjewala. Complaints against U.P. Chief Minister Homanta Biswa Sarma, last week, for their alleged violation of the model code of conduct (MCC) are pending. Overall, these measures might give an appearance of impartiality but that is not enough. The ECI is assuming a false parity between legitimate debates on policies that impact various social groups differently and an incitement of xenophobia for social polarisation. The MCC cannot be a ruse to muffle political debates and disagreements which are, and should be, at the heart of campaigning. Misuse of power and creation of disharmony fall in a different basket. The integrity and the credibility of the ECI is central to the legitimacy of elections. Reinforcing its independence should be a priority for all stake holders in Indian democracy, particularly politi-cal parties and the judiciary. The ECI is too important to be left to itself.

#### Justified balance

The ICC has done well to move against Israel, Hamas leaders for Gaza crimes

n seeking arrest warrants against the leader-ship of Hamas as well as of Israel, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Crimi-nal Court (ICC) has taken a welcome first step to-wards accountability for the war crimes commit-ted since October 7 last year. It was the day Hamas launched its deadly attacks, killing over 1,500 Israelis and taking at least 245 hostages. Hamas launched its deadly attacks, killing over 1,500 Israelis and taking at least 245 hostages. The Israeli military retaliation on Gaza has been rutal and relentlees, and the death count has crossed 35,000 people, most of them women and children. The application for warrants, which will be decided by a Pre-Frial Chamber of ICC judges, will naturally have a greater impact on Israel than on the non-state group, Israel's immediate concern is the moral equivalence the prosecutor has made in levelling charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity against both the national leadership of a democracy and an armed group that wants to destroy it. Save for Israel's dehard supporters, including the U.S. and some other governments, few would disagree with the balance sought to be struck by ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan. It may not be flattering for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant to be named for war crimes and crimes against humanity alongside Yahya Sinwar, head of the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, Mohammed Disablerahim Al-Masri alias Defi, commander-in-chief of the Al-Dassam Brizades and Ismail Haniseh

alongside Yanya Sinwar, nead of the Isamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri alias Delf, commander-in-chief of the Al-Qassam Brigades, and Ismail Haniyeh, who heads the Hamas Political Bureau.

It would have been impossible, however, for the ICC prosecutor to ignore what the Israel Ilearship has been accused of — starvation as a method of war and intentionally killing and directing attacks against civilians, among others. Hamas has been accused of extermination, murder, rape, torture and taking hostages. Israel has predictably questioned the application, repeating its position that it is engaged in legitimate self-defence. To many, the arrest warrants may appear futile. Those against whom warrants have been issued, but remain unexecuted, include Russian President Vladimir Putin and Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir. However, regardless of the efficacy of such measures in preventing or unishing war crimes, the step does ential diplomatic costs, as member-countries of the ICC are matic costs, as member-countries of the ICC are obliged to arrest and hand over those against obliged to arrest and hand over those against whom warrants are pending under the Rome Statute, the treaty that created the ICC mechanism. It may increase Israel's isolation on the one hand, and harden the U.S.-Israeli position on the Palestinian question on the other. Israel, like the U.S., is not an ICC member-state; but as the Putin percedent shows, this may not be an impediment to the issuance of warrants against its leaders. On the flip side, Mr. Netanyahu will likely use this to shore up his position at home.

### A 'No-Limit' bromance that is not just a bilateral matter

aving met each other over 40 times in aving met each other over 40 times in the past II years, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President other "old friend". Vet, their Summit in Beijing (May 16-17, 2024), ostensibly to mark the 75th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations, stands out, arguably, as among their most consequential meetings. Given their geostrategic and geoeconomic hefts, their "no-limit" bromance is not just a bilateral matter. If concerns the world at large including India, which has a significant yin-yang relationship with both.

#### The phases of Russia-China ties

Over the past two centuries, Russia-China relations have passed through at least five phases. During the 19th century, Czarist Russia took advantage of a weak China to expand to the Pacific, and the Soviet Union continued to hold these territories. A decade of "Comintern

advantage of a weak China to expand to the Pacific, and the Soviet Union continued to hold these territories. A decade of "Comintern brotherhood" followed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, but the bonhomie was upended by ideological and geopolitical differences, triggered, in part, by the Chinese attack on India, in 1962. Russia and China had armed clashes in 1969 over the Ussuri River border dispute.

The fourth phase commenced in 1972, with United States President Richard Nixon's dramatic visit to beijing, aimed at weaning China from the Russia-led Eastern Bloc. In a paradigm shift, China tilted towards the West which supported Deng Xiaoping's "four modernisations", believing that "prosperity would make China a more liberal society". Despite China's violent suppression of the Tianamen Square protests in 1989, the West continued to lavish China with investments, technology transfer, market access and diplomatic support over the next three decades, transforming China into the "World's Factory." Meanwhile, Moscow-Beijing ties withered as the Soviet Union imploded and the Russian Federation, its successor, shed most of its Central Asian Republics which became an arena for geo-pollical competition with China.

The current phase began in 2012, when China's growing assertiveness alarmed the U.S. into launching a "pivot Asia", unwelling hard-lined policies to stem China's sie and gradual economic decoupling. Growing friction with the West led China to return to Russia and the two famously declared after the Beijing Summit in February 2022 that their ites had "No Limits". Within weeks, Mr. Putin launched a "limited military operation" against Ukraine. The West responded angrily with hundreds of sanctions on Moscow to cripple Russia economically. This western blockade impelled Moscow further woords Chiva which was eaconomically. This

western blockade impelled Moscow further towards China which was also under economic towards clinia which was also under economic pressure from the same quarters. Over the past two years, their convergence against the West has triggered a quantitative and qualitative surge in Russia-China ties. Their trade reached \$240



Mahesh Sachdev is a former Indian Ambassador

billion in 2023, having grown 26% over 2022. Russia is now predominantly dependent on China as a market for its energy exports and a source of critical inputs, such as sanctioned items and critical inputs, such as Sanctioned items and those required to pursue its Ukraine war. Russia was the largest crude supplier to China with volume averaging 2.1 million barrels a day in 2023. However, despite decoupling attempts, China traded \$575 billion with the U.S. in 2023, more than twice its trade with Russia. In comparison, India's 2023-24 annual trade with the U.S. and China was \$118 billion each; it traded \$66 billion with Russia.

The message in the joint statement Against this backdrop, the 7,000-word Joint Statement issued after the Putin-Xi Summit was conspicuously silent on bilateral economic, Statement issued after the Putin-Xi Summit was conspicuously silent on bilateral economic, financial and military ties. This taciturnity could have one of two diametrically opposite motives: it was either to avoid invoking western opprobrium and sanctions or to paper over their mutual disagreement. It is relevant to note that during a Beijing visit in April, U.S. Secretary of State Antony, J. Binken met President Xi to reportedly warn against helping Russia militarily. The joint statement also omits any India-specific issues, including the United Nations reforms, and confines treatment of Europe to a santitised version of the Ukraine conflict. In contrast, the text reserves the choicest invectives for the U.S., accusing it of pursuing "dual containment" (of both Russia and China, calling it "unconstructive and hostile") and an "Indo-Pacific Strategy" with "a negative impact on the peace and stability of the region". With its stark polarity, the joint Statement is a clear sign that the two strategic partners have gone on an ant-U.S. offensive.

stars potanty, the joint statement is a cleal sign that the two strategic partners have gone on an ant-U.S. offensive.

The Beijing Summit's likely impact needs analysis in both the short and long terms. In the short run, it may lead to intensified, albeit understated, bilateral cooperation, particularly in the supply of the dual-use materials needed by Russia for its Ukraine campaign. In return, China may seek better terms for Russian raw materials, mining rights in Siberia and access to Russian know-how on a range of critical technologies such as avionics, nuclear power and space. China may also seek greater Russian acquiescence for its dominance over Central Asia.

Beijing may even have cynical motives for quietly supporting Russia: the continuation of the Ukraine war keeps a beleaguered Russia dependent on China and the U.S. preoccupied with eastern Europe, giving China the freedom to bully Asia.

with eastern Europe, giving clinia the needoon to builly asia.

In the longer run, the summit may have an even more profound fallout. While China would want to continue its profitable economic engagements with both Russia and the West, the inherent contradictions may eventually make this pursuit untenable.

On May 17, the U.S. State Department spokesman curtly told China, "You cannot have it

both ways." The continued western pressure may both ways." The continued western pressure may force it to play the Russian card in a high-stakes global poker. This, coupled with the Middle Kingdom's incessant quest for global dominance, could usher in a new Cold War aimed mostly at creating a credible alternative to the U.S.-dominated post-Second World War global eco-political architecture. The early contours of the incipient China-driven global construct, such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the 109-member Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the 147-country, \$1 trillion outlay Belt and Road Initiative are already in place and just need Initiative are already in place and just need ramping up. It could thus presage the opening overture of a new global polarisation.

#### The impact on India

The Beijing Summit would have far-reaching implications for India, presenting it with both challenges and opportunities. To begin with, India needs to carefully and objectively examine Chairlegs and opportunities. To egain wan, india needs to carefully and objectively examine the depth and durability of the current phase of the ties between Russia and China, given their erratic past. Both have strong leaders, even as Russia's COP is currently less than one-seventh of China's. This coupled with the Ukraine war and the sanctions makes Moscow less than an equal partner, perhaps for the first time in their bilateral history. Moscow's potential vulnerability to China's hegemony could concern India given its still overwhelming dependence on Russia for defence supplies particularly as it has border tensions with China. India being Russia's largest defence market, Moscow has an interest in retaining it. However, the reliability of Russian supplies may become subject to Chinese supplies may become subject to Chinese

While India has several reservations about the while india has several reservations about the existing global architecture, it is by no means certain that Beijing's alternative would suit India better. New Delhi's best bet would perhaps be press for a higher profile in the existing global order commensurate with India's size and notential

potential.

In retrospect, during the last Cold War, India largely pursued the high moral ground often eschewing its core national interests. Instead of focusing on its socio-economic development and the realpolitik it required, it adopted a doctrinaire approach to Nora-lignment and Third World solidarity. The rest is history and those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The incoming global polarisation is likely to be differently nuanced with greater flux, driven mostly by the goe-economics and quest for new

mostly by the geo-economics and quest for new technologies. Unlike the first Cold War, India is technologies. Unlike the first Cold war, India is now a major global player with hard-earned "strategic autonomy" providing it with real options. India should leverage its strengths judiciously, and adopt a sharper and nimbler approach. As new opportunities dawn, it needs to be clear-headed about its core long-term national goals, adopt a commensurate strategy and pursue it with single-mindedness.

### A vegetable triumvirate, inflation and the takeaway

nflation is a critical indicator of an economy's health, reflecting the changes in the general price level and the cost of living. In India, the Consumer Price Index (CP) is used to measure price inflation which is largely based to the Laspeve's price index and measures the economy's cost of living. The CPI basket comprises 299 items of which vegetables account for a weight of 6.04% in the total basket.

Within vegetables, the three vegetables account, and potato (TOP) – hold a

tomato, onion, and potato (TOP) – hold a weightage of 2.2% in the overall CPI basket for an average Indian household. The significance of average Indian household. The significance of TOP goes beyond its numerical representation. These three commodities have historically played a pivotal role in influencing both food and beverages inflation as well as headline CPI figures. One notable fact is that the TOP group constitutes 3.6% of the total consumption basket in urban areas while it constitutes 5% of the total consumption basket in urban consumption basket in rural India for the bottom 5% of the consumption classes, respectively, as per the CPI basket classification.



The recent summit in Beijing between Russian President

Vladimir Putin

Jinping has both short and

long-term

implications

and Chinese President Xi

Prachi Bansal

is Assistant Profess Jindal School of Government and Public Policy, O.P. Jindal Global University, Haryana In FY2023-24, vegetable prices in India soared by about 15% (year-on-year). Vegetable prices have exhibited significant volatility, shifting dramatically from a fall of 0.7% in June to a substantial rise of 37.4% in July. Though vegetables have a weight of only 6% in the total CPI basket, their contribution to inflation was as high as about 30% in Bebruary and March 2024. Tomato prices soared by 202% in July 2023 and contributed to 18.1% of the total headline inflation despite the weight of formatoes being only 0.6% in despite the weight of tomatoes being only 0.6% in the CPI basket. During the same month, the contribution of vegetables to headline inflation was a high 31.9%, and of TOP was 17.2%.

Price volatility
One of the striking features of TOP is its price volatility (chart). The coefficient of variation (COV) of inflation is a key measure of volatility. The inflation volatility of TOP has been measured using the coefficient of variation (COV) for the period January 2015 to March 2024, yielding a value of \$2.1 it is significantly higher than the volatility of the vegetables sub-group (COV-3.0), the food group (COV-0.6) as well as the volatility of headline inflation (COV-0.3). This exercise revees that TOP's COV surpasses not only the food group. This heightened volatility underscores the sensitivity of these commodities to market the sensitivity of these commodities to market forces, weather fluctuations, and supply chain

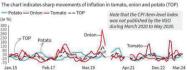
The chart shows the inflation trend for the three commodities, i.e., tomato, onion and potato, as well as for the constructed TOP group. The inflation rate for the TOP sub-group has remained quite volatile ranging from a minimum value of -36.6% in September 2021 to 132.0% in December 2019 (The writer's calculation uses data from the National Statistical Office).

Aiding the farmer
The volatility and importance of TOP in shaping inflation trends highlight the need for effective policy interventions and a nuanced understanding of agricultural supply chains. These are perishable crops and are subject to a number of biotic and abiotic stresses. As these crops do not have Minimum Support Price and are mostly sold to private traders by farmers, this volatility in prices also hurts farmers, the majority of whom are net buyers of these crops. The possible solutions to reduce the volatility of inflation for these crops include an overhauling of agricultural value chains and improvement in the cold storage facilities, better prices for farmers to incentivise the production of the crops, and increased profitability in the cultivation that can be achieved by reducing the exorbitantly high input prices of fertilizers and pesticides used in the production of these crops.

The abrupt changes in lifting the export bans on onion ahead of the Maharashtra elections also show that we are still using short-term measures to deal with the price volatility in these crops as against measures that are demanded by the farmers. The memorable Kisan Long March from Mashik to Mumbai in March 2023 and continuous protests by farmers have time and again raised the demand for Minimum Support Prices for

protests by farmers have time and again raised the demand for Minimum Support Prices for onion. This demand seems to be continually ignored by the government.

#### Year on year inflation for tomato, onion and potato (January 2015 to March 2024)



#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cracking the whip late How interesting it is that the Election Commission of India (ECI) has warned certain campaigners in the Bharatiya Janata Party against making divisive and communal speeches during election rallies. This at the fag end of the election process! Had the ECI brocked the politicians involved for violations of the model code of conduct much earlier, it would not only have restored the

credibility of the ECI but also that of the poll process itself. The failure to act fearlessly and in time has undermined the credibility of the ECI. A partisan commission is just like a non-neutral umpire regulating a cricket match.

M. Jameel Ahmed.

Stranded in a station The article, "Revisiting the railway strike of 1974" (Opinion page, May 21),

brought back memories of my journey during the strike. I was a nine-year-old boy and was travelling with my family on Dadar Express, from Bombay to Madras, for the summer holidays in

1974.
Though it was a significant event for railway employees, the fact was that the entire railway system had been thrown out of gear. We were stationed somewhere in the wilderness at a station

where all the trains had come to a complete halt. Most of the trains in this section were hauled by steam locomotives. The engine drivers detached their locomotives from the rakes and stopped them

travails of passengers, especially children, on that summer day, can hardly be Corrections & Clarifications In an Elections-2024 page special page story titled "Bihar polls enter NDA's 2019 clean-sweep territory" (May 22, 2024) the name of Maharaiganj sit-ting IMP was erroneously given as Janardan Prasad Sigrival instead of Janardan Singh Sigriwal.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.ir :::

father's attempt to coax the

Dadar Express driver to recommence the journey

was unsuccessful. The

imagined. Compartments were like an inferno, with no fans and dead batteries. L. Praveen Dhanaseelan.

#### Pune car crash

this appalling that a minor was able to get alcohol from a bar and allowed to drive a car without a licence. The parents should be blamed and the culprit must face the consequences. Balagopal Gopinath, Keerikkad, Alappuzha, Kerala

M ND-NDE

#### **Opinion**

### When control is disguised as reform

hree recent judicial decisions have led to attacks on the Supreme for the first legitinacy. On February 15, the Court declared electoral bonds unconstitutional, stating that the "right to know supersedes anonymity." On May 10, the Court granted interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal saying, "We.. reject the argument that the reasoning... results in grant of privilege or special status to politicians." On special status to politicians." On May 15, the Court granted bail to Prabir Purkayastha, founder and Editor-in-Chief of NewsClick, holding that "communication of the grounds of arrest in writing was not provided... which vitiates e arrest." These judgments, ised on legal merit, challenge

the arrest." These judgments, based on legal merit, challenge state excesses and also harm the ruling party's interests. The BJP undeniably benefited from electoral bonds, Mr. Kejriwal's arrest, and the suppression of a critical media platform.

These decisions are healthy outcomes for any constitutional democracy where institutions have autonomy and there is a working system of checks and balances. However, they have been preceived by many as breaking a pattern. Legal scholars and even practitioners have been criticising the Court over the last few years for judicial abdication, acquiescence, avoidance, and, in some instances, for working hand-in-glove with the executive. some instances, for working hand-in-glove with the executive. Hence, the recent decisions, especially during an election year, have been seen as an unexpected but welcome display of courage

A sustained campaign In our digital media ecology, each hearing on subjects of public importance, especially those with political implications, receives immediate online commentary. The Supreme Court and High Courts have facilitated this by Courts have facilitated this by enabling live tweeting and streaming of proceedings. Legal reporting platforms have further

ought the court into our social

media streams. However, a



Apar Gupta is an Advocate based in New Delhi

disturbing trend has surfaced: abuse of the judiciary. Many believe that institutions are believe that Institutions are colonial impositions or are rooted in western liberalism and are therefore in conflict with the social norms of 'new India". When this authoritarian world view is challenged, its proponents seek to subvert the legitimacy of the court. Digital campaigns against the court exploit public frustration over the decades it takes for citizens to obtain justice, anger regarding judicial nepotism, and the lack of diversity in the higher the lack of diversity in the higher judiciary, and even conjure up fantasies of a secret society of senior lawyers influencing the court. Such attacks masquerade as

semon lawyes iniliarenting the court. Such attacks masquerade as suggestions for reform. But the proposed "solutions" are not based on evidence. The masked objective seems to be to achieve absolute executive control. This clever subterfuge has been brought forth by Joyojeet Pal and Sheyril Agarwal, who gathered data from X over four months and highlighted spikes in comments on five days when the Chief Justice of India took positions antithetical to the BIP-led government or its supporters. They concluded in their study that the 'Chief Justice's liberal learnings in several judgments rankle many who lear right. But the more significant issue is shat putging the Supreme issue is that purging the Supreme Court of similarly liberal-leaning justices represents an existential thorn in institutional capture by the political establishment." They the political establishment." They also noted that "attacks are more strongly tied to digital influencers who are highly polarised in flavour of the BJP." While the study did not capture this clearly, many online influencers with large followings enjoy official patronage followings enjoy official patronage Nowadays, high-ranking advisers and cabinet ministers devote simificant time to participating in significant time to participating in podcasts and YouTube interviews and often comment on the need for judicial reforms and even a repeal of the Constitution. Critics may dismiss this study as biased and point to instances where

"liberal" and "left leaning" users

have engaged in similar practices. However, the study notes distinctions in how the Opposition

distinctions in how the Opposition and wider civil society organise and conduct campaigns online – by appealing to the Court to follow its constitutional role.

Today, each judgment and slip-up is put up, ridiculed, and delegitimised through coordinated campaigns. For example, the Juvenile Justice Board recently granted bail to the minor son of a builder who was allegedly driving builder who was allegedly driving the car that crashed into two people killing them. Juxtaposed against news reports of the grant of bail are captions such as "the Indian judiciary is a joke". This ignores the role of the police and politicians in the initial procedure. These drip campaigns are part of the long game of organised partisans calling for direct control by the Prime Minister

The way forward
Television and social media play a
crucial role in shaping norms. So,
we must publicly acknowledge the
threats facing the independence of
the judiciary, carefully scrutinise
proposals disguised as judicial
reforms, and take urgent but
careful remedial action on issues
such as the collegium system.
Public trust is the judiciary's Public trust is the judiciary's greatest ally, and it must be restored by improving service delivery, increasing diversity in appointments, and improving the appointments, and improving the Court's counter-majoritarian spine. The judiciary and the wider legal fraternity must counter online threats by dispelling misinformation and exposing bad faith propaganda. This requires reasoned, consistent, and honest public communication about the judicial process. Finally, we the people must recognise the Court as an imperfect ally, sometimes even a negligent guardian, but nonetheless a protector of our constitutional rights. Our civic constitutional rights. Our civic vision has to be broader than the narrow framing of a powerful Prime Minister or a dominant political party, regardless of the election results.

#### It's time to break the stalemate

The Centre could suggest a road map for Telangana and Andhra to resolve issues

M. Rajeev

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yderabad will cease to be the common capital of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh on June 2, it will remain the capital of Telangana alone. Even as there is still no clarity in Andhra Pradesh on the issue of a capital, as an earlier piece ir this column had stated, Telan-gana Chief Minister A. Re-vanth Reddy has directed officials to take over buildings in Hyderabad which have been Hyderabad which have been in Andhra Pradesh's possession since bifurcation. There are more than 50 such properties, including the Lake View Guest House. A majority of these are prime properties located in areas which are under the control of Andhra Pradesh at present.

the control of Andhra Pradesh at present.

As most of the elected re-presentatives of Andhra Pra-desh have permanent houses in Hyderabad, the govern-ment has reportedly sought to keep possession of Hermitage Building Complex, Lake View Guest House, and a building of the CB-CID until the disputes between the two States are between the two States are settled. This would mean that Andhra Pradesh will have to pay Telangana hefty rents if the latter agrees to its

the latter agrees to its requests.

But the question is, when will the two States arrive at a consensus on long-pending issues such as apportionment of assets and liabilities pertaining to Schedule IX and X institutions (public sector corporations and entities owned by the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh governmently? There has been a stalemate because the two States have interpreted the Act States have interpreted the Act to suit their own interests. This has given scope for each



of them to accuse the other of adopting a unilateral stand on

Within two years of the for-mation of Telangana, issues relating to employees were re-solved. But cases on many solved. But Cases on many other issues, including the division of assets of Schedule IX and X institutions, debts, and staff, have been pending in the courts for a long time. With the two States unable to reach a consensus, the intervention of the Union Home Ministry has been sought several times. The Ministry intervened to clarify, for instance, the definition of location-based assets and to give speaking orders on some issues, but did not suggest any measures for the amicable resolution of pending issues. It clarified that the two States should try to resolve the other issues, including the di issues. It clarified that the two States should try to resolve the pending issues themselves, through mutual agreement. This has happened in many cases: the Andhra Pradesh go-vernment handed over of the Secretariat building to Telan-gana and the States reached a consensus over the apportion-ment of assets pertaining to the Andhra Pradesh Bhavan located in New Delhi. But the problem doesn't lie with the two States alone; the Central government too has

Central government too has not fulfilled many of its assurances. These include the creation of new institutions such as the integrated steel factory in Bayyaram in Kham-mam district, an Indian Institute of Management, and an Information Technology Investment Region, as well as financial assistance for Telangana's development as mandated by the Act. After several representations, a Central Tribal University was granted to Andhra Pradesh in 2019 and Telangana last year as part of assurances given in the Reorganisation Act. Section 93 of the Reorganisation Act Clearly mandates that the Union government should take measures enumerated in Schedule XIII for the

erated in Schedule XIII for the progress and sustainable de-velopment of the successor States within 10 years, but the Centre had not fulfilled these.

Centre had not fulfilled these. Senior officials dealing with State Reorganisation affairs say that this reflects the Centre's indifferent attitude. During his visit to New Delin in January, Mr. Reddy requested the Centre to ensure that the Andhra Pradesh government makes payments for Utilising assets belonging to Telangana, along with interest. He also requested the Home Ministry to focus on the institutions which were now mentioned in the Reorganisation Act but which were neverheless claimed by the Andhra theless claimed by the Andhra Pradesh government "in viola-tion of the provisions of the .i. More than 30 meetings of

More than 30 meetings of the dispute resolution committee comprising members from the Home Ministry and representatives from the two States have failed to yield results so far. While the two States reached consensus on some issues, they stuck to their respective stands in several others resulting in a stalemate. A decade has passed since bifurcation. It is time for the Central government to inthe Central government to in-tervene and suggest a road map for resolving the pending issues on which the two States have been at loggerheads.

### The curious case of declining voters in the 2024 elections

In nearly one-third of all constituencies in the 2024 election, the total absolute number of voters declined vis-à-vis the 2019 election

#### DATA POINT

#### Praveen Chakravarthy

t is generally well-accepted that prices of essential goods, population, GDP, agricultural production, professionals' salaries production, professionals salaries and many such parameters only increase every year in a developing and growing country like India unless there is an abnormal, rare event such as Covid-19, which can cause GDP or population or salaries to decline that year. The percentage or rate of increase for each may vary year to year but the absolute number only goes up, barring exceptional conditions.

Similarly, the total number of people who come out to vote in an election is expected to only increase over a five-year election cycle. This is because India's population continues to grow and the

tion continues to grow and the number of people who reach the voting age of 18 increases every year unless there has been a rare demographic disaster resulting in higher numbers of deaths or people fleeing. The total number of people who voted in a constituency in 2024 should then be higher than the number who voted in that constituency in 2019. Just as percentage increase in GDP or salary may vary yearly, voter turnout percentages can go up or down between elections. But the actual number of voters generally only rises between two five-year election cycles in India.

Is it then not intriguing that in nearly one-third of all constituencies in the 2024 election, the total absolute number of voters dedemographic disaster resulting in

absolute number of voters de-clined vis a vis the 2019 election? clined vis-ā-vis the 2019 election?
An analysis of the 42T constituencies until Phase 5 reveals that in 115
(27%) constituencies, fewer number of people came out to vote
than in 2019. It is almost unparaleled in India's electoral history
that in such a large number of constituencies, there is a decline in total voters from the previous election held five years ago.

CM YK

Remember, these are not voter tur-nout percentages but absolute to-tal numbers of people who voted. There is much hullabaloo over

The masked objective of

recent attacks

on the judiciary seems to be to

achieve absolute

executive control of the

voter turnout percentages in the ongoing election. But here is the rub - voter turnout percentage is an insufficient measure to com-pare across elections. It is because turnout percentage depends on the total number of electors on the the total number of electors on the electoral rolls. The total number of electors in a constituency for an election depends on the number of new voters registered as well as the number of dead or emigrated voters deleted. Both these vary widely from election to election depending on the intensity of electoral roll cleaning by the Election Commission. This is why the more meaningful and intuitive measure for comparison is the change in to-tal number of people who came tal number of people who came out to vote across elections.

Until Phase 5, more than 505 million people voted in 2024 versus 485 million in 2019, an in-crease of just 4%. In 2019, there was a 12% increase in total voters was a 12% increase in total voters in these same constituencies visàvis 204. Clearly, there is a significant decline in the total number of ovters in the current election than the norm in previous elections. But the even more baffling finding is that in 115 constituencies, the total number of voters declined from 2019, which is a rarity in a growing country like Inidia. To put if in context, none of these constituencies experienced a decline in total voters in 2014 and only 19 did in 2019. How is it possible that so many How is it possible that so many constituencies had such a dramat-ic drop in total voters? Even if one were to adjust by removing small States and Union Territories that

States and Union Territories that one may argue skews the analysis, the finding is still the same - in one-third of all constituencies, the total voters declined vis-å-vis 2019. Delving further, most of the constituencies where there is a decline in total voters are in six States - Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajas-Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajas-kural Nadu, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. A change in to-

tal voters in a constituency from the previous election is largely a function of three factors - number of new eligible electors, number of electors who have emigrated out, and percentage of electors who ome out to vote. Surely it cannot be the case that there was an inexplicable drop in the number of eligible electors, which normally only follows broad population trends? Neither can it be the case that there was a sudden alarming increase in emigration of people from these IES constituencies due to economic or other compulsions. None of these constituencies saw a decline in total voters in either the 2014 or 2019 election from the previous election. So, the only logical explanation is an extreme decline in turnout to cause a reduction in total absolute voters visă-avis 2019. The natural followup question then is -why is there is a decline in voters in a sigcome out to vote. Surely it cannot

there is a decline in voters in a sig nificant number of constituencies that the Opposition won in 2019 or is expected to get stronger in 2024? Was the reduced turnout vo-2024' Was the reduced turnout vo-luntary or implicitly correct? If voluntary, what demographic or other explanations justify such a large and sudden drop in turnout in so many constituencies in State that are seemingly in play' for 2024'? It is not even the case that voters in the initial phases of the elections were apathetic and the turnout started to pick up as elec-tions progressed. The share of con-stituencies that saw a decline in to-tal voters from 2019 fluctuates up and down across phases.

and down across phases.

It is a rarity in the Indian context for constituencies to see a decline in the absolute number of vo ters between two five-year election cycles. But nearly one-third of all constituencies experienced such a decline in 2024 vis-à-vis 2019. It is best to avoid conjectures and let the Election Commission explain this mysterious trend.

#### Drastic change

The data were sourced from the Election Commission of India

Chart 1: The chart shows the change in voters and electors in % terms between the 2014 and the 2019 elections

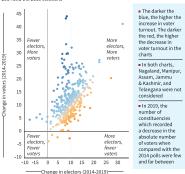
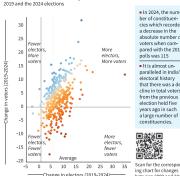


Chart 2: The chart shows the change in voters and electors in % terms between the 2019 and the 2024 elections



■ In 2024, the num-ber of constituen-cies which recorded a decrease in the absolute number of voters when com-pared with the 2019 polls was 115 It is almost un-paralleled in India's electoral history that there was a de-cline in total voters from the previous election held five years ago in such a large number of constituencies.

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES The Ma Diindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 23, 1974

#### Steel mills produce less, yet stocks pile up

New Delhi, May 22: Nearly 3.10 lakh tonnes of finished steel and one lakh tonnes of pig iron have accumulated with the five integrated steel plants since the commencement of the railway

This accumulation has taken place in spite of the steel plants operating at very much less than their normal production levels to conserve coal. The plants are trying very hard to move as much steel as possible particularly to South and West India by sea to meet the needs of the steel-consuming industries. They have already moved about 70,000 tonnes to Madras, Cochin, Mangalore and some quantities in Bombay. The railways, despite their best efforts, could not move more than one lakh tonnes of finished steel and pig from since the commencement of the strike.

Though the steel plants are appreciative of the efforts made by the railways against heavy odds, they are worried over the huge losses they are going to suffer this year due to reduced This accumulation has taken place in spite of

going to suffer this year due to reduced production and accumulation of finished stocks Apart from this, the Steel Ministry is very much concerned about signs of recession in steel demand which seem to be making their demand which seem to be making their appearance even at a time when production is at very low levels. Usually the demand for steel is very aggressives and outruns availability but this aggressiveness has lately disappeared. The Steel Ministry feels that the state of economic stagnation which must have brought this about is more than serious than is believed and the railway strike is going to aggravate it further. The railways claim that they are maintaining a daily movement of about 25,000 tonnes of coal to the steel plants against their normal requirement of 36,000 tonnes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 23, 1924

#### Cavalry war memorial

London, May 22: The cavalry war memorial was London, May 22: The cavalry war memorial war to-day unveiled in Hyde Park by the Earl of Ypres in the presence of the Prince of Wales, units of well-known cavalry regiments and a large crowd. The memorial consists of a bronze presentation of St. George and the Dragon. Bishop Taylor Smith performed the dedication ceremony and the Prince of Wales laid the wreath on the memorial from all cavalry regiments of the Empire.

# Text&Context

#### THE HINDU -

#### **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

China advised to increase the tariffs on large cars

in percent. The advice was given by a government-affiliated auto research body expert. The current import tariff for cars is 15%. The move is expected to support a policy push towards green and low carbon development. and low-carbon development. REUTERS

The onions exported by India since lifting the ban on exports

45,000 in tonnes India, the world's biggest vegetable exporter, banned exports of the bulb last December and extended it in March, after a rise in prices triggered by sluggish production. PTI Amount of student debt cancelled by the U.S. President

in S billion. The number of students to benefit are 1,60,000. They include teachers, nurses, law enforcement officials and public service workers, or borvowers who were approved for relief through other changes. NUTRES

Rise in attacks on medics and health facilities in war zones

in percent. This is the highest level since records began 11 years ago. The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, composed of 40 groups, reported 2,562 incidents of violence and strikes across hospitals in 2023. REUTERS

Pakistani citizens brought back from Kyrgyzstan

Thousands of Pakistanis in Kyrgyzstar are expected to return after recent attacks on foreigners over an unknown dispute

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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### On concerns over voter turnout data

Why are Opposition leaders and civil society members demanding that Form I7C data, which contains the absolute number of votes polled in a booth, be published online? How has the Election Commission of India responded? Why has the Supreme Court's intervention been sought?

#### EXPLAINER

#### Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

he Supreme Court is slated to hear on May 24 a petition filed by the NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of the conclusion of polling for each phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

What happened?

What happened?
ADR has flagged a sizeable difference in the initial turnout figures released by the ECI soon after the conclusion of polling and the final voter percentages published subsequently. Such discrepancies have evoked sharp questions from the Opposition and civil society about the authenticity of the polling data available in the public domain and the possibility of manipulation at the counting stage. On May 20, an intervention application was also moved in the case by advocate Mehmood Pracha who contested polls Mehmood Pracha who contested polls from the Rampur Lok Sabha constituency as an independent candidate. He alleged that the concerned returning officer (RO) had not furnished copies of the Form 17C record of votes polled in his constituency as mandated by the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 (1961 Rules).

Echoing similar concerns, a group of civil society members have written to the apex poll body urging it to "immediately disclose" through its website, the authenticated record of voter turnout of every polling station as contained in Part I

every polling station as contained in Part I of Form I7C (account of votes recorded).

#### What is Form 17C?

What is Form 17C?
As per the 1961 Rules, the ECI has to maintain two forms that have data on the number of electors and the votes polled – Forms 17A and 17C. While the former is used to record the details of every voter who comes into a polling booth and casts his or her vote, the latter is an account of all the votes recorded. Under Rule 495(2), a presiding officer is mandated to furnish a copy of the entries made in Form 17C to the polling agents of the candidates at the close of polling.

Part I of Form I7C contains crucial information – the identification numbers of the EVMs used in the polling station, the total number of electors assigned to the polling station, the total number of voters as entered in the register for voters

voters as entered in the register for voters (Form 17A), the number of voters who decided not to record their votes after signing the register, the number of voters who were not allowed to vote, the total

who were not allowed to vote, the total number of test votes and votes recorded per EVM. Whereas, Part II of the same form contains the results of the counting carried out on the stipulated day.

The data in Form TrC is used by candidates to verify the results on the counting day by matching it with the EVM count. An election petition can be moved in the concerned High Court in case of any discrepancies.

Why is the ECI under the scanner? The ECI has come under scrutiny for not releasing the absolute number of votes polled in any constituency in this general election unlike in 2019. Only voting percentages have been published that too after significant delay – after II days of the first phase of polling held on April 19 and four days after the second phase of polling held on April 26. On May 7, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to leaders of the



Exercising their mandate: Voters stand in queue to cast their votes during the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha polls, at a polling station in Giridih on May 20. AN

NDIA bloc saying that the polling data released by the ECI 'raises serious doubts'. He flagged that apart from the delay, the voter turnout data released by the ECI "does not mention crucial yet related figures, such as the votes polled in each Parliamentary Constituency and in the respective Assembly Constituencies." He alleged that the "credibility of the the respective Assembly Constituences. He alleged that the "credibility of the Election Commission" was at an all-time low. He also expressed concerns that in his 52 years of electoral life, he had never witnessed such a high increment of voting percentages in the final published data. The provisional polling percentages for the first phase released by the ECI at 7 pm on April 19 was about 60% and for the second phase on April 26 was 60.96%. However, the final figures released on April 30 for the first phase stood at 66.14% (an increase of more than 5.5%) and 66.71% for the second phase (an increase of more than 5.74%).

The Congress chief further questioned what was precluding the poll body from publishing the exact voter turnout data of

publishing the exact voter turnout data of each polling station when such each poining station when such information was already available with the polling agents of the candidates through Form 17C. Since no data had been released about the number of eligible voters (electors) in each

eligible voters (electors) in each parliamentary constituency, it was impossible to calculate whether the absolute number of voters had increased or decreased, Mr. Kharge said.

TMC leader and Lok Sabha candidate for Bengal's Krishnamagar constituency, Mahua Moitra also took to the social media platform X to highlight how she was able to compile the number of voters in her constituency within 24 hours of polling. She demanded to know why the ECI had falled to publish this information ECI had failed to publish this information for the previous phases of polling.

How has the ECI responded? In a scathing letter to Mr. Kharge, the ECI maintained that it has no legal obligation to publish online the absolute number of votes polled in every polling station.

Copies of Form 17 C are shared with polling agents present immediately, as the strongest measure of transparency. So, candidates are aware and in possession of exact voter turnout data in absolute numbers even before it is known to the

exact voter turnout data in absolute numbers even before it is known to the ECI", the letter stipulated.

Calling the allegations by Mr. Kharge an attempt to "create confusion, misdirection and impediments in the conduct of free and fair polls", the poll body pointed out how voters continue to vote even after 6:00 pm due to long queues at polling stations resulting in variations in the estimated data on the poll day.

Notably, in an affidavit filed before the apex court, the poll body claimed that disclosure of Form 17C data could cause 'confusion in the minds of voters' since it would also include postal ballot counts. This could be 'used by persons with motivated interests to cast aspersion on the whole electoral process'; it alleged.

Casting aspersions on ADR's motive, the ECI said that the NGO was approaching the top Court with an approaching the top Court with an approaching the top Court with an account of the court of the court with an approaching the top Court with an account of the court with an approaching the top Court with an account of the court of the court with an account of the court of the

approaching the top Court with an agenda "to perpetually keep creating doubt in the mind of voters based on conspiracy theory." It also referred to ADR's unsuccessful challenge in the EVM-VVPAT cross-verification case

What has the Supreme Court said?
The ADR has sought the Supreme Court's intervention to direct the ECI to upload scannel legible copies of Part 1 of Form 17C of all polling stations which contains the authenticated figures for votes polled, within 48 hours of the close of polling. Saying that such information is 'readily available' with the poll body, the NGO has also sought the publication of constituency and polling station-wise constituency and polling station-wise figures of voter turnout in absolute

"The inordinate delay in the release of final voter turnout data, coupled with the unusually high revision (of over 5%) in the EC press note of April 30 and the absence of disaggregated constituency and polling station figures in absolute numbers, has raised concerns and public suspicion regarding the correctness of the data... These apprehensions must be addressed

and put to rest" the petition said. While seeking ECI's response to the While seeking ECI's response to the plea on May 17, Chief Justice of India (GI) D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench asked the poll body's counsel, "Every Polling Officer submits [voting records] by the evening, after 6 or 7 p.m., by which time the polling is completed. The Returning Officer would then have the data of the entire constituency. Why don't you upload it?"

What do experts have to say?
"The ECI always discloses absolute
numbers of voter turnouts. This time they
are only disclosing percentages, usually
the turnouts are out within 24 hours of
the end of polling unlike this time and the
increase in voter turnout in the final
former is unwaught bith." Anieli figures is unusually high", Anjali Bharadwaj, Director of Common Cause earlier told *The Hindu*. She added that the poll body should upload a scanned copy of Form 17C as soon as it is submitted by

of Form 17C as soon as it is submitted by the Presiding Officer to abate transparency concerns.

Addressing the ECT's assertion that access to Form 17C data by polling agents negates the need for such information to be published online, Jagdeep S. Chokkar, the founder of ADR pointed out that political parties do not contest elections in all constituencies. The renowned activist also highlighted how smaller political parties cannot afford to have polling agents in all booths or constituencies due to financial constraints. In fact, The Hindu found that since one constituency has roughly constituency has roughly 2,000-2,200 booths, a candidate needs to have approximately 6,000 polling agents in each constituency to be able to obtain a copy of Form 17 C. "This shows that it is impossible for smaller parties and many independents to have polling agents in all booths," Congress Rajya Sabha MP Shakti Singh Gohil said.

#### THE GIST

ADR has flagged a sizeable difference in the initial turnou figures released by the ECI soon after the conclusion of polling and the final voter percentages published percentages published subsequently.

As per the 1961 Rules, the ECI has to maintain two forms that have data on the number of electors and the votes polled – Forms 17A and 17C. While the former is used to record the details of every voter who comes into a polling booth and casts his or her vote, the latter is an account of all the votes recorded.

The ECI maintained that it has the general public information about the absolute number of votes polled in every polling station.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Begusarai, a metaphor of a secular crisis

In the arena of caste competition, secularism could be an effective tactic; for the minorities it is a survival tool, and for the elite it is an ideology. Reconciling these differing perspectives is essential but difficult

This article, dated May 9, 2019, precedes the author's recent analysis titled 'The pitch for subaltern secularism', published in The Hindu on May 16, 2024.

egusarai, in the Gangetic plains of Bihar, has long been a stronghold of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Kanhaiya Party of India (CPI). Kanhaiya Kumar, the firebrand young leader and former president of Jawaharial Nehru University Students Union, is the CPI candidate from the Begusaria Lok Sabha constituency. Over the past five years, he has become a national icon of resistance against Hindutva. His candidacy has so inspired opponents of Hindutva that they raised all the money that he could legally spend in campaign through crowdfunding — ₹70 lakh. Actors, academics and activists, an array of people from India's secular, liberal universe campaigned for Mr. Kumar. So did enthusiastic youngsters from all over the country. If Prime from all over the country. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi personifies the march of Hindutva in India, Mr. Kumar personifies the resistance to it. And the fight for Begusarai has larger messages

Collapse of binaries
However, this binary world as imagined by the elite was processed differently in Begusarai, which went to the polls on April 29. "We want Narendra Modi as Prime Minister and Kanhaya Kumar as MP," said Binod Singh, a 26-year-old belonging to the same upper called the Singhiar Community as the candidate. This view is broadly representative of a significant section of Mr. Kumar's Bhumilhar supporters, though the BP's Bhumihar supporters, though the BJP's candidate is also a Bhumihar. In the triangular contest of the

than the fortunes of the candidates in the

Bharativa Janata Party (BJP), the CPI and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Begusarai, the latter two are avowedly Begusarai, the latter two are avowedly opposed to the BJP's Hindutra politics. The RJD is in alliance with the Congress and some other small ourfits representing Dalit and backward communities. Its candidate, Tanveer Hasan, is a respectable modernist leader who lost in 2014 but stayed active in the constituency since.

respectable modernist leader who lost in 2014 but stayed active in the constituency since.

How the principles of secularism and social justice, both components of progressive politics, interacted in electoral politics could be understood in terms of the intense competition among caste-based interests groups for political power over the decades. In the era of Congress dominance in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the upper castes that controlled the party roped in Dalits and Muslims with the rhetoric of justice and secularism, but excluded the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from power. The rise of Hindutva changed this dynamic, as the upper castes were the first to abandon the Congress for the BJP. The emergent OBC politics, with Lalu Prasad and Mulayam Singh Yadav at the helm in Bihar and U.P., respectively, offered an alternative to Muslims as the Congress collapsed. With the support of Muslims, the OBCs realised their decades long yearning for political power.

The Muslim-OBC social combination, with the Yadavs at its core, not merely



usarai constituency Giriraj Singh, during a public meeting in Begusarai district, on May 11. PT

ended the upper caste hegemony, but also crushed its vehicle, the Congress party. There is no normative exposition or pursuit of secularism in this context, but social justice parties were against Hinduras for its Manuwad, or upper caste dominance. From the social justice perspective, the opposition to Hindurva can be summarised thus: upper castes allied with Muslims to exclude OBCs initially; when they abandoned Muslims for Hindurva.

they abandoned Muslims for Hindutva, OBCs challenged Hindutva, made a social coalition with Muslims that proved enduring, and won power. Muslims were unwitting participants in this caste competition.

Progressive, oppressive
The elite, vernacular and English,
articulated the standards of secularism,
but remained disconnected from the
dynamics of caste aspirations at play in
the electoral arena. The ideologues and
leaders of this elite, the Nehruvian and
the Marxist streams, have been primarily

upper caste. It would be unfair to question their intentions or commitment but the accident of their birth limited their appeal among the subalterns. The role of Bhumihars in Bihar politics is instructive. Several doyens of the Communist movement were from the community, which also had the progressive poet Dinkar among its ranks. community, which also had the progressive poet Dinkar among its ranks. But the landowning community also mobilised a private army called the mobilised a private army called the Ranweer Sena, which laumched murderous attacks on Daltis in waves of violence in the 1990s, simultaneous with the Muslim-OBC political partnership, and as a reaction to it. If Brahminism denotes hegemony, Blumilharism represents violent oppression. That being said, the CPI's Bhumilhar candidate won nearly two lakh votes in Begusarai in 2014, which evidently included votes of Daltis and OBCs, for the politics it represents. This wider appeal has been significantly strengthened by Kanhaiya Kumar's candidates.

Kanhaiya Kumar's candidacy, notwithstanding the presence of

'Modi-Kanhaiya' voters among his supporters. But the nearly exclusive control of the CPI by a single caste makes it suspect in the eyes of subalterns whose politics it professes to advance. Of the five seats that the CPI wanted to contest as

seats that the CPI wanted to contest as part of the RIP-led alliance, four were for Bhumihars, according to Shivanand Tiwari, RID leader.

The Muslim elites could bargain with the upper caste-controlled Congress and the backward caste RID and Samijavadi Party for favours and representation, but their power to do so is in decline with the rise of Hindutva. In any case, the material condition of average Muslims is the lowest compared to other social groups, though the Hindutva narrative portrays them as the Hindutva narrative portrays them as undeserving recipients of secular appeasement. Even for Muslims who do not subscribe to secularism as a principle not subscribe to secularism as a principle, it is a survival strategy in a Hindu majority country. The rise of Hindutva has correspondingly meant a decline in Muslim representation in politics. Security has increasingly become the sole expectation of Muslims from secularism. But the RID and the SP continue to field Muslim candidates, and in Bihar and U.P., there are constituencies where Muslims candidates, and in Bihar and U.P., there are constituencies where Muslims can win.

there are constituences what communication and the CPI and the RJD put the community in dilemma. An upper caste community in dilemma. An upper caste community were to take on Hindutva is evidently more than a vulnerable Muslim could achieve, and the community supported Mr. Rumar in significant numbers. For security, Muslims are willing to surrender their claim of proposentation—which, ironically, is the municis. For section y, sutainis are willing to surrender their claim of representation — which, ironically, is the implied demand that Hindurts makes to the community in exchange for security. If Muslims abandon a Muslim RID candidate, the OBCs and Dalits would rethink their attitude towards Muslims—and the secularism-social justice axis, which has been a speed-breaker for Hindurva, could collapse. Politically ambitious OBCs and Dalits prefer Hindurva in which they have representation to a secular nationalistic project that is thoughtless of those ambitions at best and exclusive at worst. Lower caste politics is broadly indifferent to the rhetoric of secularism and their opposition to Hindurva is primarily from

opposition to Hindutva is primarily from a social justice perspective. Many champions of lower caste interests would even grudge that Muslims are indifferent to their struggles against Manuwaad. Hindutya 2.0 under Mr. Modi has cleverly used this dynamic for its rise, by offering them representation though no significant political power.

political power.

A progressive politics, of which
secularism is a part, and agnostic of all
considerations of caste and religion, may
be an ideal worth pursuing, but questions
of representation for different social
groups within it is extremely critical.

The road ahead
In the arena of caste competition, secularism could be an effective tactic; for the minorities it is a survival tool, and for the ellie it is an ideology. Reconciling these differing, though not necessarily contesting, perspectives, is essential but difficult as the contest between the RID and the CPI shows. For secular politics to be estatianable as a winnable electoral be sustainable as a winnable electoral platform, it must merge with social justice

politics.

That requires a negotiation between the self-interests of different social groups as they subjectively perceive them with the normative claims of that politics articulated by the elite. Though they have overlapping traits, their accents are different, and there is even a subterranean hostility with one another. Begusarai is a metaphor of that crisis of Indian secularism.

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#### Know your **English**

#### K. Subrahmaniam

"Feminine gender of 'stag' and 'boar' (A. K. Rao, Khammam)"

"Stag-hind; boar-sow. Some others: buck-doe; drake-duck; drone-bee, gander-goose; ram-ewe; colt-filly; horse-mare."

"Education, instruction (Anita Nayak, Mysore)"

"Education' aims at developing the personality of an individual; it is both mental and moral. Education prepares a person to face life. 'Instruction' seeks to give information. It is generally for the development of the mind. Instruction is part of education but not the whole of it."

"We discussed the simple present tense."

"We discussed the simple present tense last week. Let us take up the present continuous tense this week. The present continuous tense is used to describe an action that is going on at the time of

action that is going on at the time of speaking. He is writing a letter. She is feeding the baby. 'He walks in the park in the evening' means that it is his habit to walk in the park in the evening every day. It is not occasional. It is a daily routine. He is walking in the park ears that he is walking in the park means that he is walking in the park at the moment. The action is taking place now and has not been completed. The action 'continues' and hence you call this the present continuous or present progressive tense continuous or present progressive tense. It is 'progressive' as the action is

'progressing.'
The present continuous is also used to

denote a future action.

He is leaving for Madras tomorrow.

Are you attending her wedding next

The use of the present continuous in

The use of the present continuous in these sentences indicates that the future event will definitely take place.

Let us look at the following sentences:
(a) He will leave for Nagpur tomorrow; (b) He is leaving for Nagpur tomorrow; (c) He leaves for Nagpur tomorrow. (c) He leaves for Nagpur tomorrow. (c) He leaves for Nagpur tomorrow. (b) alternative sentences, a future action is mentioned. Sentences (a) asys that the event is likely to take place; (b) says that it is certain to take place; (c) says that it is certain to take place; it stresses the "predetermined nature of the stresses the 'predetermined nature of the happening.'
The following verbs are not generally

happening.' The following verbs are not generally used in the present progressive tense; believe, think, suppose, imagine, know, live, wonder, understand, realise, see, hear, smell, feel, taste, want, wish, prefer.' I understand what you mean' and not '1 am understanding what you mean.' "I love him' and not 'I am loving him.' 'He owns a house in the city' and not 'He is owning a house in the city'. There are exceptions to the general rule. 'We are living here' means that 'we do not reside here permanently.' Permanent residence is implied when we use 'living'. He lives in Mylapore. 'He is living' in Mylapore. 'Seeing' is acceptable when the verb 'see' is used in the sense of 'meet.' I am seeing the minister tomorrow."

I am seeing the minister tomorrow. Published in The Hindu on February 11.

#### THE DAILY QUIZ

#### A quiz on candidates and places that went to polls in Phase 5 of the Lok Sabha elections

#### Srinivasan Ramani

#### OUESTION 1

nce appointed the Sheriff of erstwhile Bombay, this popular acto ected five times from the Mumbai North West constituency. Nam

Which prominent politician (deceased) holds the record for serving mo terms from the Lucknow parliamentary constituency?

The first representative from the Hooghly parliamentary constituency was elected from the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha ticket. His son represented another party and also went on to become the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. Name both these leaders.

#### OUESTION 4

sentative from Madhubani was one of the first two lame him and the ministry he headed.

CM CM

Name this former MP from Bolangir, who recently became the president of the National Rifle Association of India.



Identify this gentleman who is considered to have effected one of the biggest upsets in India's electoral history. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

#### previous day's daily quiz: 1. The first book which featured Sherlock Holmes. Ans: A Study

. The subject Conan Dovle studied before writing mystery novels. Ans: Medicine

3. This man is considered to be the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. Ans: Doyle's former university teacher Joseph

Bell
4. This fictional character appears in a series of fantasy stories by Conan Doyle. Ans:
Professor Challenger

5. Conan Doyle was keenly interested in this field, being a part of many clubs. **Ans: Sports** Visual: Name this 1998 movie. Ans: The Lost World Prashant Nain Rajmohan. V Vasumann Yadavi Sunil Kannada

#### Word of the day

Tawdry: tastelessly showy; made of inferior workmanship and materials

Synonyms: garish, gaudy, tacky, tatty, flashy, loud, cheap, shoddy

Usage: It's a rather tawdry shop selling cheap furniture.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/tawdrypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /tɔ:dui/



# What is the value of attributing extreme events to climate change?

Climate models are bad at capturing normal rainfall and worse at extreme ones. They are better at capturing temperatures, but only at regional scales, not at very local scales. Climate scientists need to address these challenges in the process of assigning probability changes to events in the past

ust a couple of decades ago, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) argued that individual weather events could not be attributed to climate change. The science has since evolved, albeit with all its attendant uncertainties, and now we regularly hear of researchers having been able to attribute some individual extreme events to climate change

seen and to dath out as some monutage extreme events to climate change.

Many scientific and data challenges persist in this exercise even as its outcomes are argued to be usable for estimating richer countries' historic liability for climate-related 'loss and damage" and the legal liability of governments and corporations in precipitating adverse events like floods and droughts. However, researchers have used a variery of methods to evaluate attributability, which raises questions about whether attribution science is mature enough to be used in courts and multilateral fora.

#### Value of extreme-event attribution

Value of extreme-event attribution
While no formal cost-benefit analysis of an attribution severise has been reported, many experts have argued that attributions are critical for the 'loss and damage' (L&D) process. L&D doesn't have a unique definition but its place in climate talks under the U.N. Framework
Convention on Climate Change has come a long way in the last decade.
Economically developing countries, in particular those that are 'particularly vulnerable', have demanded the L&D fund to pay for the havoc climate change wreaks within their borders. Obviously, the criteria by which 'particularly vulnerable' countries are to be identified are crucial. are crucial.

For example, India is a developing country in the tropics and is highly vulnerable to climate change's impacts. But it is unlikely that India will qualify for L&D funding, and herein lies the rub: should climate finance and green funds focus on adaptation and mitigation alone or should they administer L&D funds separately? If the latter, then will

separately? If the latter, then will attribution exercises help? The developed world is opposed to the idea of being held legally accountable in court for any extreme events since that could open a floodgate of lawsit.

Against this background, our understanding of whether attribution reports can actually hold up in court as evidence of culpability is very important. A good case in point is a recently published report on heatwaves in Asia.

#### Attribution of Asian heatwaves

Last week, a team of climate scientists called World Weather Attribution (WWA) reported that heatwaves across Asia, from the west to the southeast, had been rendered nearly 45-times more likely by

rendered nearly 45-times more likely by climate change.

It is worth understanding how these 'rapid extreme event attributions' are performed. The most important concept is the change in probability: in this case, the climate scientists contrasted the conditions in which the heatways cocurred against a counterfactual world in which climate change did not happen. The conditions that prevail in the counterfactual world depend on the availability of data from our world. When there isn't enough data, the researchers



The dried-up catchment area of the Meenkara dam, in Kerala's Palakkad . K.K. MUSTAFAH

run models for the planet's climate without increasing greenhouse gas emissions and other anthropogenic forcings. Where there was sufficient data, they used trends in the data to compare conditions today with a period from the past in which human effects on the plane

past in which manar freets of the pane were relatively minimal. This said, the data are hardly ever sufficient, especially for rainfall, and almost never for extreme rainfall events. Climate models are also notoriously bad Climate models are also notoriously bad at properly capturing normal rainfall and worse at extreme ones. Thus, climate scientists need to address these challenges in the process of assigning probability changes to events in the past. The climate models are better at capturing temperatures and temperature-related events – but again, only at regional scales, not at very local scales.

scales.

If, some day, climate scientists are able to perform reliable hyperlocal attribution exercises, they will still be confronted by a moral question: what actions should follow? Because right now, even though the L&D fund and climate jurisprudence

the L&D fund and climate jurisprudence are becoming more visible, attribution exercises are happening as if disconnected from governmens' adaptation and mitigation strategies. Put another way: will people and businesses move away if a place is seen as being a hotspot of extreme events? This is not just a question of science. Governments need to be able to respond to such decisions, and attribution science should in turn, be sufficiently reliable.

Picking extreme events to attribute Another significant challenge in



While no formal cost-benefit analysis of an attribution exercise has been reported, many experts have argued that attributions are critical for the 'loss and damage'

choose the extreme events for which they will perform attribution exercises. When evaluating the Asian heatwaves, the WWA scientists used regional scales and different definitions for different regions. They also arbitrarily considered daily, three-day, or monthly average temperatures for attributing likelihoods. Heatwaves can be exacerbated by natural factors such as an El Niño event or human factors like urbanisation and deforestation. There is also a debate as to

deforestation. There is also a debate as to whether irrigation affects heatwaves as

Further, no weather event will occur in exactly the same form twice in a place,

exactly the same form twice in a place, which means an extreme event occurring in that place will likely have no precedent. This is why it is easier to reliably attribute heatwaves at the subcontinent scale but not those at the level of particular areas. The kind of questions that climate scientists ask also matter. For example, the same analysis can produce different answers to the questions "was the intensity of a heatwave amplified by climate change?" and "was the frequency or return period of a heatwave altered by climate change?" and the Was report, the scientists used multiple approaches in their attribution exercise to answer the their attribution exercise to answer the

same question, and have added that the differences between them are immaterial. It is not clear whether these differences will be perceived to be material in a court

#### Extreme events and human action

The actual impacts of extreme events depend not only on the hazard or the extreme event but also on the expenul to tonly on the hazard of the extreme event but also on the witherability and the exposure of the population affected. Similarly, the financial consequences are also affected by multiple actors. So, should an attribution exercise only focus on the hazard or should it consider the impacts as well?

This is not a trivial question, especially if L&D negotiations are to be served reliably by attributions.

Considering all these challenges, we must take stock of the international financial aspects of adaptation, mitigation, and L&D. In particular, governments should consider an agreement on historical responsibilities to

mitigation, and L&D. In particular, governments should consider an agreement on historical responsibilities to fund developing countries, close adaptation gaps, build adaptation capacity, and finance mitigation for the global good.

The real world is severely resource-constrained. In a counterfactual world where human, financial, and computational resources are infinite, attribution exercises are a beautiful scientific challenge and could serve as a productive intellectual exercise. But in the real world, we need a cost-benefit analysis based on a clear role for attribution in the overall climate action landscape. (The author is a visiting professor at IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor at the University of Maryland.)



Burning vegetation in a rainforest in Yanomami Indigenous land, Roraima state, Brazil. REUTERS

#### Amazon fires off to record start in 2024

Brazil's Amazon rainforest has experienced its largest blazes on record in the first four months of the year, with the environmental workers union on Monday placing partial blame on lower

government spending on firefighting. Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has staked his international reputation on protecting the Amazon rainforest and restoring Brazil as a leader

rainforest and restoring Brazil as a leader on climate policy. The Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, is vital to curbing catastrophic global warming because of the vast amount of greenhouse gas it absorbs. A record drought in the Amazon rainforest region, driven by the El Nino climate phenomenon and global warming, has helped contribute to dry conditions tuelling fires this year. More than 12,000 square kilometers of the Brazils Amazon rainforest burned between January and April, the most in over two decades of data, according to Brazils Space research agency Inpe. That's

over two decades of data, according to Brazill's space research agency Inpe. That's an area larger than Qatar, or nearly the size of the U.S. state of Connecticut. Fires in the Amazon generally do not occur naturally but are ignited by epople, often seeking to clear land for agriculture. Firefighting budget cuts are also partially to blame, environmental workers union Ascema said in a statement. They complained that this year's budget for umon Ascema sain in a statement. They complained that this year's budget for environmental agency Ibama to fight fires is 24% lower than 2023. In a statement, Brazil's environment ministry said that the Amazon fund,

While the area burned is a record, it pales in comparison to peak dry season from August to November, when an area the same size can burn in a single

which draws on donations from foreign governments, put 405 million reais (\$79.4 million) toward firefighting at the state

governments, put a continuous reast (y-9) a million) toward firefighting at the state level under Lula's current administration, which began in 2023.

The federal government sent about 380 firefighters to Roraima, the northern Amazon state that was hit the hardest by the fires, which were intensified by drought, the ministry said.

It did not respond to questions on cuts to Ibama's firefighting budget. The agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ibama agents have suspended field work since January amid tense negotiations with the federal government for better pay and working conditions.

Ascema has rejected the latest government offer and demanded larger government offer and demanded larger government offer and demanded larger salary rises after more than a decade of

paltry increases and dwindling staff.
While the area burned is a record for
the first four months of the year, it pales in comparison to blazes in the peak dry season from August to November, when an area that size can burn in a single

month.

"The government needs to understand that without total engagement from environmental workers, the situation foreseen for this year is unprecedented catastrophe," said Ascema President Cleberson Zavaski.

"Prevention efforts, such as raising awareness about ignitions, creating firebreaks in strategic areas, and conducting prescribed burns, depend on employing people with stable conditions," said Manoela Machado, a fire researcher at the Woodwell Climate Research Center. at the Woodwell Climate Research Center. "These measures will influence the severity of the fire crisis when the dry conditions allow fires to spread."



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

Visual: Name the yellow pigment derived from trees of the family Guttiferae (shown). This pigment's name comes from an older nar for a country where these trees grow. FOREST & KIM STARR

#### THE SCIENCE QUIZ

#### The stuff that makes things yellow

#### Vasudevan Mukunth

#### QUESTION 1

QUESTION 1

Name the class of pigments that impart a yellow colour to pumpkins, egg yolk, canaries, and daffodils, among other naturally occurring life-forms. Flamingoes also get their characteristic pink hue by consuming food containing pigments of this class. this class

#### QUESTION 2

Two colours are said to be complementary if, when they are mixed, the result is a greyscale colour. In the RGB colour scheme which uses red, green, and blue as the primary colours – what is the complementary colour of yellow?

#### OUESTION 3

uring the Mughal period in India, a CM YK

pigment called Indian yellow was used to render a vivid yellow colour in paintings and frescoes, especially when viewed under sunlight. Name the acid whose salts are the primary components of this pigment.

#### QUESTION 4

for the yellow-red hues of saffron dye. Studies have found this compound has anti-inflammatory properties, as well as a potential ability to disrupt processes involved in the progression of Alzheimer's.

#### OUESTION 5

QUESTION 5
Chrome yellow is a popular yellow pigment, and was particularly so in the 19th century. Its principal component is the compound
A French chemist discovered this fact when he was studying a naturally occurring form of the compound called crocoite. Fill in the blanks.

1. Assistant in Davy's lab who liquefied many gases in 1823

#### Ans: Michael Faraday 2. German physicist who tried to explain ar

electron's path in a solid metal Ans: Paul Drude

#### Effect that Sommerfeld's quantum mechanics models couldn't explain - Ans: Kondo effect

4. Person with whom Dorda and Pepper discovered quantum Hall effect Ans: Klaus von Klitzing

#### 5. Physicists who produced the first Bose-Einstein condensates - Ans: Eric Cornell, Carl Wieman, Wolfgang Ketterle Visual: Philip W. Andersor

First contact: ViswanadhaRao Batchu | K.N. Viswanathan



# A thought for today

Good intentions can lead to government regulations whose benefits are grossly outweighed by their costs

CHARLES WHEELAN

# Poll Do Pyaaza

Onion politics shows how all parties try to balance consumer & farmer interests, and get it wrong

ok Sabha polls on May 20 in Maharashtra's onion belt, Nashik and Dindori, had a unique subplot. Contestants had to deal on the altar of India's consumer-first agricultural policy.

Ban first In Dec, GOI banned onion exports. It was in response to initial signs that the rabi crop output would likely disappoint. That's been the case with the first advance estimate putting onion output at 25.4 million tonnes, 19.4% lower than the previous year. Maharashtra is expected to account for the bulk of decline in production.

The policy put the interests of domestic consumers over farmers. A consequence of export bans is that producer earnings are capped to help the consumer. The ban was conditionally lifted in early May, ahead of polling in the onion belt.

Old template | Export bans have been part of GOI's playbook, regardless of the party in govt. For example, in

2007-08, India banned wheat and rice exports in response to a global food price surge. Domestic consumers were insulated by preventing farmers from seeking markets with the best returns.

And its cost | OECD and Icrier looked at data over 17 years (2000-17) to gauge the cost of India's trade and marketing policies. Input subsidies, classified as producer support estimates (PSE), were matched with consumer

support estimates (CSE) such as export bans and marketing restrictions. The result showed that PSE was -14%, a measure of the extent of the consumer bias in policy.

**Subsequent distortions** | Beyond immediate costs, policies such as export bans also extract a price in terms of compensations and lost opportunities.

Consumers at the national level have the numbers to influence the policy direction. But at the state level, political parties can't ignore farmers. This duality leads to incoherent policy. For example, both BJP and Congress promised to top-up GOI's MSP for wheat and rice in the four assembly elections held in Nov. It will have distortionary effects on not just agriculture but also in areas such as power tariffs.

Interventions are not costless | Cross-subsidisation of some economic activities is common to all countries. But in India, there's an overdose that makes overall economic reform harder. Export bans, in general, are a bad idea. Consumers can be insulated from global shocks through temporary income transfers, and not by curtailing potential returns to farmers.

# A Scarlett Voice

Johansson makes OpenAI back down, but most artistes are less effective against Big Tech

t was the voice interface of GPT-40 that was the real wow factor at its demo last week. This AI assistant sees you, hears you, talks to Lyou. The latency is down, the humour is up. Flirtatiousness is fab. But one of the five voices being debuted sounded familiar to many. OpenAI chief posting "her" on his X account only made sure that even those who weren't thinking about Her, would now do. Last year too Altman had tipped his hat to the 2013 movie, saying the things it got right-"like the whole interaction models of how people

use AI" - was incredibly prophetic.

And then came the bombshell. Scarlett Johansson told the world that Altman had pursued a voice that sounded "eerily similar" in clear defiance of her wishes. She is a superstar. A big Hollywood brand. She is even above the Selena Gomez vs Hailey Bieber type of split vibes. Her fandom is global and consolidated. And still, OpenAI denied having used an imitation of her voice, before withdrawing it.

Ordinary artistes, whose work and identities are also being hoovered up to raise AI, will meet very different fates. They will be out-litigated by Big Tech. Their only hope lies in collective bargaining. Here in India too, the Johansson fight should mean preparation for many more to come.

Johansson, of course, doesn't appear in a single frame of Her. All the power of her performance is from her voice. Why do humans want an AI companion who trains on countless human voices, instead of an actual human companion? Answers run into tomes. But the fact is, more and more of us do. Even if this is a risky relationship. The more Big Tech personalises its companion products, the more they seduce - and more the problems.

# Poll-ka dots

Random musings of a marked woman

# **Bachi Karkaria**



claims.

On Monday I voted for only one of the two candidates I was legally entitled to choose. The Efficient Commission of India had accepted my 'change of address' application and sent me a voter slip for Sewri along with a shiny, new voter ID. But my old one wasn't duly invalidated: a voter slip was also sent to my former Five Gardens flat. Bad enough having to choose among

the uniformly bad lot, now I even had a booth dilemma. Convenience outvoted resolve. Fractured foot was swing factor. Still wheelchair bound, my new Sewri centre would be as inaccessible as a Shivaji fort; the one at Five Gardens was, well, a walk in the park. With free manicure thrown in. The booth lady applied the ink along my entire nail with the dexterity of a parlour didi. Actually, I deserve extra marks for not

voting twice by 'rubbing out the first dot on well-oiled hair' - like the woman on the 'picnic' bus ferrying 'doublers', who too had slips for both home gaanv and work city. Or eight times, like the UP teen not yet eligible to vote at all. Returning home, I wondered:

 Democracy visibly left its mark on me last Monday, but did I leave any mark on it?

erratica MVPL, all-time ink-supplier, was established in 1937 by Mysore Maharaja Krishna Raja Wadiyar. Strange, no, that symbol of people power flows from former symbol of feudal power?

The purplish ink reminded me of old-fashioned stamp pads. Means EC is rubber stamp only? The 2.7m-vial order was shipped in the usual orange containers. Why no

cry over saffronish hue?

Is poll-ka dot like 'Mark of Vishnu'? In this short story about a devout snakeworshipper who nevertheless dies of snake bite, agnostic Khushwant Singh warns us that blind faith can lead to doom. I'm not sure if we should keep faith in elections, and be blind to blatant abuses. But, Shiva! Shiva! seeing how star campaigners are tandav-ing on democracy, my vote is for any Preserver of it.

Alec Smart said: "If no 'wave' then everyone waves goodbye to tall

# VIB: Very Ineligible Bachelors

Untold election story: young, jobless men from land-owning families who can't get married, in Maharashtra & elsewhere. How they're voting is interesting, what they mean for India is troubling

# Jaideep Hardikar



In a small cotton-growing village of Yavatmal in western Vidarbha, a young man with a Masters in his mid-30s cracked a joke on himself before breaking into a hearty laugh. My question to him was: "What do you do?"

"I am sushikshit, berozgaar and avivahit (educated, jobless and unmarried)," he quipped, as half-a-dozen friends at his *paan* kiosk chortled, knowing the joke was also on them. They were all in their 30s; graduates or postgraduates; jobless, and unmarried.

Why should any woman marry them? they asked. Even if they get a bride, two of them reasoned, they won't marry, because they won't be able to raise families on atrociously puny incomes. And neither will they marry their sisters to men who rely only on farm incomes. Finally, they were almost certain that their financial situation won't dramatically improve in their lifetime.

These days, the first preference of potential brides is for men with govt jobs that don't exist, followed by private jobs that are shrinking, and then self-employed youth, backed by farmland; the foremost question being, what's the groom's annual income? Finding a good match is thus an equally daunting task for

prospective brides in villages.

About two dozen men well past

**Special Series on Elections** their marriageable age showed up at the shop when I asked how many youths of that age were unmarried in the village. There were more, they said. For at least half of them, past age 35, marriage was out of question. They'd stopped going to family weddings out of shame.

"Everyone asks, when is your number?" one of them said. That's embarrassing.

And with laughs that mask simmering anxiety bordering on anger, they poked fun at each other about their forced bachelorhood. In villages here, men or women are usually married by mid-20s.

Unemployment is not a new story. Nor lack of skills or quality education. Or unemployability. But in village unto village across Maharashtra's countryside, a supposedly prosperous state, unemployment and agrarian crisis are spurring a ravaging, if unacknowledged and far-reaching, social consequence. Educated and jobless men with family farms their only source of income are unable to find suitable brides for themselves. Jobs are a mirage. Farming is nonprofitable.

Why is this disconcerting and what are the factors driving this trend? It's a no-brainer. One, rural

economy has been under duress for far too long. Two, there's been a decline in social status among landowning castes and classes. Three, a new generation of rural youths is better educated and better informed. It is aspirational like its urban peers, albeit with fewer social, communication and other skills.

Delayed marriages are also not new to the countryside. Droughts or bad crop seasons have always pushed marriage plans. But not on the scale seen today. It's particularly stark among land-owning OBCs. Good and higher education was considered a ticket to good jobs. Now, good jobs are a ticket to getting brides

or grooms, both ways around. Remember Toilet: Ek Prem Katha? No toilets, no marriage. Add to it, Job: Ek Prem Katha. You need a job if you plan to marry. Farmer-parents don't want their daughters to work in fields and do the drudgery they've suffered all their lives. Marriageable

previous generations and with aspirations, justifiably want to marry men with steady jobs in cities and some farmland back home. Districts with a low malefemale ratio, like Beed in Marathwada, are worse off. The prosperous sugar belt is no exception.

young women, bet-

ter educated than

This is in reality a pan-India problem. In a 2022 study, sociologist Alaka Malwade Basu and demographer Sneha Kumar analysed NFHS data to find that economic changes including unemployment are forcing adaptations in traditional marriage practices across the country, making men wait longer and longer to tie the knot.

Such worry can be seen even across Hindi heartland's once feudal regions. Indeed, mixed with stagnant farming incomes, rising indebtedness and expensive higher education, the social fallout of economic pain in villages could be triggering a political churn that may shatter caste-andclass calculations for Lok Sabha polls.

like a volcano about to erupt.

As one man explained: "I was 24 in 2014. I am 34 in 2024. Nothing's changed for me." Outcome of the 2024 elections apart, this experience of rejection and disillusionment among working men and women is

From its poorest eastern tip to the more prosperous

western sugar belt, swathes of Maharashtra's country-

side are teeming with such young and educated men,

now reluctant farmers, well past marriageable age. You meet graduates and postgraduates of all hues; they've tried their luck - futilely in the industrial belt of Mumbai-Pune-Nashik; worked in contractual employment for paltry wages; lived in crowded shared chawls or rooms; tried-or are still trying-their luck

at competitive exams to land a job, and failed. Intra-state regional imbalances are adding to the fury.

Vidarbha and Marathwada have

been in the midst of a raging

agrarian crisis for a very long time. Both are rain-dependent regions and haven't seen a new industry or sector absorb educated rural youth in close to two decades. Marathwada has also been in the throes of a water crisis that's throwing up successive droughts. No one wants to marry their daughter into a village with water scarcity, unless the groom is working in

> a distant city. None of this is sudden. Nor is it limited to rural Maharashtra.

> > writer is with People's Archive of Rural India

# In The Hot Seat, Under Beijing's Glare

Taiwan's new president has China to deal with & a deeply divided parliament. At stake is the island nation's near future

# Anushka Saxena



In what can be considered a tragic incident in the history of Taiwanese democracy, on May 17, members of the island nation's parliament engaged in an intense brawl, leading to the hospitalisation of five lawmakers.

This was just a couple of days before Lai Ching-te, the new Taiwanese President, assumed office on May 20.

Why are Taiwanese politicians resorting to fisticuffs? During the elections in Jan, in a break from the past two elections, the Kuomintang (KMT) won a slim majority in parliament even though Lai from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) - party of outgoing president Tsai Ing-wen - secured the presidency. KMT secured 52 seats to DPP's 51, while Taiwan People's Party (TPP) – which has aligned with KMT – secured 8. Thus, the non-DPP camp has come to enjoy a healthy parliamentary majority.

How deep is the ideological rift? | But with these results it was only a matter of time before the ideological rift between the parties came to the fore. The May 17 scuffles were provoked by the alleged circumvention of mandated processes by KMT lawmakers in introducing legislative reform bills. DPP lawmakers say KMT introduced amendments to laws on the legislature's powers without undertaking the mandatory process of first hashing them out at a procedural committee meeting, and then forwarding them for a first and second reading to the legislative floor, before eventually being voted upon.

opposed this stance, arguing that the amendment bills have already gone through the procedural committee, cross-caucus negotiations, and even public hearings.

What are the legislative amendments? | The nature of the amendments proposed is serious. For example, one of the bills put forth jointly by KMT and TPP makes the case that it should be compulsory for the president-elect to make remarks to the parliament post-inauguration, and hold an on-the-spot Q&A session with

legislators. While this has previously been an optional procedure for the president, and one that sitting Taiwanese presidents have never taken up, KMT and TPP lawmakers propose that it be made mandatory for Lai.

Another amendment bill put forth revolves around granting parliament suprajudicial investigative powers. Such powers would grant it the ability to set up investigative committees on any matter of choosing, and make both govt and private

persons liable to answer to such a committee. If such a call is not met by the persons placed under investigation, the bill proposes that it can be defined as "contempt of legislature" - a concept that hasn't previously existed in

> Taiwanese legislative law. As the amendment bills were pushed for a reading between Thursday and Friday last week, DPP lawmakers took matters into their own hands and attempted to occupy the dais of the legislative speaker, KMT's Han Kuo-yu, leading to KMT responding

with force. The bills were reintroduced on May 21 and some of the amendments passed.

Is Lai up for a challenge? In addition to the prevalent partisanship in parliament, the constant threat and pressure from China puts President Lai in a tough spot. Lack of a majority in the legislature makes DPP susceptible to frequent deadlocks vis-a-vis policy priorities, most emphatically on foreign policy.

Both DPP and KMT's China policies have perhaps been the biggest differentiator between the two. On the one hand, Lai has demonstrated willingness to walk the same path as his predecessor, Tsai, in managing the relationship with China with confidence, while continuing to invest in Taiwan's indigenous capabilities and international diplomatic cache. This especially involves enabling a closer relationship with Taiwan's most crucial military and tech partner, US. But Lai's relatively "deep-green" mentality can be a challenge, as it makes him lean more towards independence and exercise of sovereignty than Tsai, who walked a more moderate path.

Why are the young protesting? KMT, on the other hand, has explicitly focused on managing the relationship with China through dialogue and deterrence, not necessarily defence and diplomacy. Despite its parliamentary victory, KMT's China policy is unpopular among young voters, owing to the generational development of a distinct 'Taiwanese' identity as separate from a 'Chinese' one. Which is why KMT's controversial bills have also been met by protesters gathered outside the legislature chanting "no discussion, no democracy". The fact, however, remains that for the next four years, KMT and TPP form a significant majority in the legislature, leading to a parliamentary deadlock.

Tough decisions lie ahead for Taiwan with continued Chinese belligerence beyond the median line of the Taiwan Strait, as well as internal discord on matters both legislative and foreign.

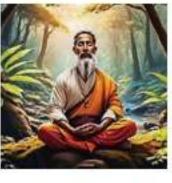
The writer is with Takshashila Institution

# **Calvin & Hobbes**

KMT lawmakers have



# **Sacred**space



Fools pursue desires outside themselves, Fall into the snares of widespread death:

But wise men, discerning immortality, Seek not the stable here among unstable things.

**Katha Upanishad** 

# Buddha Was A Social Philosopher

# Ashok Vohra

ax Weber has been responsible for spreading the misconception that Buddha was concerned with individual nirvana and had nothing to do with the welfare of society. In his book Religions of India, Weber says, "Salvation is an absolutely personal performance of the self-reliant individual. No one and particularly no social community can help him. The specific asocial character of genuine mysticism is here carried to its maximum."

However, nothing can be more confusing and misleading than this. Unlike other religions, Buddha does not believe either in a revealed text or a creator god or the one whose grace leads to salvation. So, nirvana or salvation or perfection can be attained by man solely through his efforts by understanding the four noble truths and practising the

eightfold path. Buddha, emphatically says that 'Buddha' is not a person but a state and that 'Buddhahood is an achievement.'

In Dhammapada (1-4) Buddha says, 'One should first establish oneself in what is proper; then instruct others. Such a wise one will not become stained.' In other words, if the personal life of a person is immoral and questionable,

he is not fit to serve society.

As long as a person is practising the eightfold path and seeking nirvanaperfection, he has to be engaged in individual, personal, and private effort. However, once he achieves Buddhahood, he voluntarily participates in the worldly activities with detachment. He becomes the one who according to Gita is a jivanmukta.

Buddha himself can be cited as a

paradigm. When Buddha was doing penance to achieve nirvana, he did so all by himself, remaining aloof and completely cut off from society. But once he attained Buddhahood, he rushed to Sarnath to share his newly acquired knowledge and technique of

the 'middle path' with his four friends in particular and with society in general.

According to Buddha, nirvana can be attained by practising four brahmaviharas, cardinal virtues namely, maitri, universal THE SPEAKING TREE friendship; karuna,

universal pity; mudita, happiness in the prosperity and wellbeing of all, and upeksha, indifference to any kind of preferential treatment for oneself, one's family and friends, one's enemy or a third party.

The purpose of meditation on these virtues is to overcome the difference

between the happiness or safety of himself and that of others. The 'other' so to say is extinguished. The duality vanishes. The effect of brahmavihara, therefore, is to purge all egoism.

Buddha emphasised using pleasant words in communication with others, piya vacana, resorting to beneficent actions, atthacariya, and equality, samanata. An analysis of the above shows the extent to which Buddha was keen to bring about harmony, brotherhood, and peace among society's members.

How to help humanity to get rid of the 'tyranny of suffering' was Buddha's only concern. In achieving this goal he was guided by the maxim, 'For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many'.

Swami Vivekananda was the first Indian to recognise that 'the unique element' in Buddhism is its 'social

element'. Today is Buddha Purnima

# The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

# Mind your tongue

ECI tells politicians not to cross the red line

"N a commendable step, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has pulled up former Calcutta High Court judge and BJP candidate Abhijit Gangopadhyay for his derogatory remarks against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and debarred him from campaigning for 24 hours. Rather than confining its order to just one contestant, the poll panel has asked the BJP to issue an advisory to all party candidates and campaigners to ensure that such lapses do not recur during the campaign period. Describing Gangopadhyay's comments as a 'low-level personal attack', the ECI said he had violated the Model Code of Conduct. The ECI's exemplary reprimand will help in blunting the Opposition's charge that the poll panel invariably favours the ruling party at the Centre.

Gangopadhyay, who joined the BJP in March after resigning as a judge, has not exactly covered himself in glory by basely targeting the CM. It does not behove someone of his professional background to stoop so low. The ECI has rightly reminded political leaders that their criticism of other parties should avoid 'all aspects of private life not connected with the public activities of the leaders or workers'.

Another judge of the Calcutta High Court, Justice Chitta Ranjan Dash, has caused controversy by thanking the RSS in his farewell speech. He stated that he owed a lot to the organisation and was ready to go back to it. Later, Justice Dash argued that it would have been hypocritical of him not to have mentioned his long association with the right-wing body. Both ex-judges deserve flak for having dented the reputation of the judiciary, whose independence is central to the rule of law and constitutional norms. No less significant is the autonomy of the ECI, which has done well to warn both the BJP and the Congress to desist from campaigning along religious, communal, linguistic and caste lines.

# Deadly turbulence

A wake-up call for the aviation industry

HE 1,800-metre descent of a Singapore Airlines airplane amid severe turbulence, which left a 73-year-old British man dead and 71 injured, is shocking. Marking the airline's first fatality in 24 years, it underscores the growing threat of disturbance in modern air travel. Turbulence, particularly the clear-air variety that is suspected in this incident, is a formidable threat despite advances in meteorological technology. Experts say that it is most hazardous as it often strikes without warning or visibility to pilots near jet streams and other atmospheric boundaries. The unpredictability makes it vital for passengers to heed the seatbelt sign at all times, as unbuckled individuals are at a higher risk of suffering injuries during such sudden episodes, even as turbulence fatalities are very rare.

The emergency landing in Bangkok and the treatment of injured passengers, including six in a critical condition, illustrate the severity of the incident as also the potential for harm by bumpy rides. A thorough investigation, as promised by Singapore's Prime Minister, should unravel the causes of and circumstances around the deadly drop, thereby helping understand and mitigate such risks. It is believed that climate change is exacerbating turbulence. Scientists at Reading University have noted a significant increase in severe turbulence over the past four decades, attributing the rise to changing wind patterns driven by global warming.

As air travel soars, so does the likelihood of encountering turbulent zones, complicating flight planning and passenger safety. The aviation industry must adapt to these new realities. Enhanced forecasting tools, rigorous training for crew and stricter adherence to safety protocols are essential. Airlines must also prioritise passenger education, ensuring the importance of staying buckled up throughout the flight. As the skies get rougher, concerted efforts are needed to navigate these challenges and ensure safer journeys for all.

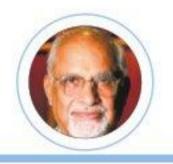
ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

LAHORE, FRIDAY, MAY 23, 1924

Is Empire goods' boycott indefensible? IN the last issue of Young India, Mahatma Gandhi has definitely stated that the boycott of Empire goods is indefensible. He says it is curious how this question has engaged public attention from time to time. The reason is very simple, though the Mahatma does not see it. In their daily intercourse with one another, people, when insulted and put to great annoyance, refuse to have any dealings with the offender. The other alternative, generally avoided, is to challenge the aggressor to an open fight. This is the experience of the people in everyday life. Similarly, when the Indians feel themselves insulted and cruelly wronged by the Empire, they resort to the only course left to them for showing their resentment by resolving to boycott the Empire goods as far as possible. They know that they have no power to demonstrate their resentment in any other practicable way. It may be 'impotent rage', but if the nation resolves to carry out the boycott by a united effort, it can certainly make its action felt. But the resolve has not proved successful for several reasons. Mahatmaji says that from the standpoint of non-violent non-cooperation, Empire goods' boycott is indefensible because it is "retaliation pure and simple and as such punitive". It may be doubted if the term 'retaliation' can be appropriately used to express the state of mind in which the injured Indian finds himself when he is ill-treated and wronged by one who is very powerful. In ordinary social intercourse, when a big man insults a small man, the latter does not 'retaliate'. For he knows he is too weak to do that. He declines to have any social or business dealings with the former.

# East wind prevails over the West wind

Why it's too late for the West to shut the technology door on China



TN NINAN SENIOR JOURNALIST

N the escalating contest between the West and the Rest, it is now clear that the former, while still packing the more powerful punch, is weakening. In the Asia-Pacific, the US Navy's stance has shifted from dominance to deterrence. In the economic sphere, too, Washington has switched from being on the offensive (technology bans, trade restrictions and financial sanctions) to playing defensive (putting up a tariff wall around the US market). And Western support for Ukraine has not stopped Russia. Mao Zedong had declared somewhat ahead of time that the East wind prevails over the West wind. That may now be beginning to happen.

For years, Western analysts and journalists misread both China and Russia. The latter was portrayed as economically vulnerable and Vladimir Putin as politically challengeable, perhaps even terminally ill. China's collapse has been forecast for decades; more recently it has been seen as beleaguered. Yet Russia has withstood Western sanctions unexpectedly well; it has gained the upper hand in Ukraine, and Putin has been elected to a fresh term in office. China, meanwhile, remains the fastest-growing among economies with comparable income levels.

The steep tariffs that the US has announced recently on some Chinese products do not signal a full-scale trade war since they target items that China does not sell much in the US. So, the signalling may be primarily to President Biden's domestic political base. Regardless, China remains the dominant producer of many of the targeted products, and can find other markets. It is US importers who may have no



alternative sources of supply for some items. China could also route supplies through factories in third countries. Meanwhile, American consumers will pay through inflation.

Such defensive ploys (the flip side of a subsidy-laden policy to revive American manufacturing) contrast with the offensive thrust of earlier moves. The hope was that those aggressive moves would box in America's enemies. Without question, the sanctions have hurt, but (as almost always with sanctions) the impact has been partial. Russia has found new customers for its oil and gas, while Europe has lost a vital source of cheap energy, thereby hobbling economies like Germany's. Meanwhile, the Russian economy has continued to grow.

Both Russia and China have

developed payment systems that bypass the dollar (95 per cent of the Russia-China trade is now in local currencies) and even banking communication systems like SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications). Russia now holds more renminbis in its reserve armoury than it does dollars. And China has been switching to gold, of which it has bought vast quantities over the past 18 months. The People's Bank of China's 2,250-tonne gold hoard still accounts for less than 5 per cent of the total

Russia and China have developed payment systems that bypass the dollar and even banking communication systems like SWIFT.

reserves, but is the highest ever. As fortechnology, Chinamoved earlier and faster than anyone else and occupies pole position in the clean-energy fields of electric mobility, solar power and lithium batteries. China also moved ahead of the pack to secure supplies of the special materials needed for these industries, and may have a lock on some of those markets. It may now be ready to break through tech barriers in electronics, life sciences and defence manufacture.

Huawei, for instance, recently surprised the West by showcasing smartphones loaded with 7-nm (nanometre) chips, and is getting prepared to turn out 5-nm chips. China has set itself the target of 70 per cent self-sufficiency in chipmaking by next year. Meanwhile, Western pharmaceutical firms have acknowledged China's emerging leadership in biopharma and life sciences in places like BioBay, a mega-hub for innovation at Suzhou, near Shanghai. In defence, China is building a fourth aircraft carrier, which may be nuclear-powered, signalling the crossing of another technology threshold. The bald fact is that it is too late to shut the technology door on China.

On the security front, Western commentators worry about possible convulsions if Russia gets its way in Ukraine, and further carves up that half-destroyed country. Matters could get worse if Donald Trump returns as US President and carries out his threat to hobble the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Given the extreme limitations of European defence forces in terms of manpower, equipment, fighting capabilities and defence production capacities, all of Europe would suddenly feel more vulnerable than at any time since the start of the Cold War. European defence budgets have belatedly gone up to the targeted 2 per cent of the GDP, but it will be at least a decade before Europe can hope to be viable in its defence without the assurance of US support-not to mention the US nuclear umbrella.

In comparison, Moscow and Beijing have moved closer, while scoring diplomatic gains elsewhere in the world. Russia played a successful card in Syria and now gets drones from Iran. Last year, China brokered the normalisation of ties between Iran and

Saudi Arabia, In Africa, China is outspending the US on a continent that needs lots of money, while one country after another is booting out French and American soldiers and inviting in Russian soldiers for security support. Even in South-East Asia, countries whose economies are closely interlinked with China's, and getting even more so, do not wish to choose between the US and China. It doesn't help that the US frequently shows itself as an unreliable support pillar, as seen on arms supplies to Ukraine. Nor does it help Western credibility with the Global South when it adopts hypocritically contradictory stances on Ukraine and Gaza.

with reason, that China has for long been single-mindedly pursuing a mercantilist course, promoting industries with massive government support and running huge trade surpluses without allowing its currency to appreciate; and that China is provoking the West into applying (belated) counter-measures. Fair enough. But what they don't add is that China has intensely competitive home markets. No fewer than 139 companies turn out electric vehicles, for example. Only the fittest will survive, and companies like BYD therefore emerge as potential world-beaters.

Western commentators argue,

Still, it would be a challenge for China's manufacturing capabilities if major export markets were denied to it. But as India's experience shows, tariff walls do not necessarily keep out Chinese products. Indeed, China could soon be in a position to play tit-for-tat on both technology and market access. That seems a more likely response to Western pressure than Japan's in the mid-1980s, when Tokyo reined in its exports and got the yen to appreciate. In today's world, whether it is on security matters, technological development, manufacturing and trade prowess or diplomatic heft - in short, the global power balance — the East wind is blowing harder than before.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

You can't have successful education reform or any other reform if you don't have a strong economy. -David Cameron

"

# An unsunghero of Malayan campaign

NJ RAVI CHANDER

URING World War II, Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners rushed more units to Malaya in 1941 to check the advancing Japanese forces. Answering the call of duty, Marimuthu of Kokkalai (Tamil Nadu) bid farewell to his wife Mariammal and four children to join the Malayan campaign, little realising that he would never return. Marimuthu was the grandfather of my colleague, Kayalkanni.

Astonishingly, Marimuthu's family remained clueless about his whereabouts for many years. The absence of records or photographs posed a challenge to the family in reconstructing his journey. The discovery of an old picture and a Google search led his kin to the Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore.

Led by Marimuthu's granddaughters, 16 family members flew to Singapore. Their excitement grew when they found his name inscribed on the memorial stone at the war cemetery. Unfortunately, they couldn't find his grave — scores of them bore the legend 'tomb of the unknown soldier'. The war cemetery houses over 4,400 graves. The family took pictures, perused war records and paid respects at the soldiers' graves.

The Sappers are combatants who perform military engineering duties such as breaching, demolitions, bridge-building, laying or clearing minefields, field defences and airfield construction and repair. A fellow prisoner of war (POW) recounts that Marimuthu took a bullet in his skull, and it remained there for six months. Finally, when he went under the knife while still in captivity, he didn't survive the surgery and died on August 10, 1942. Japanese cruelty towards prisoners is well-documented. They regarded the Allied troops as unworthy of honourable treatment because the latter had chosen surrender over death. Marimuthu may have suffered horrible torture.

After WWII, the military authorities returned the iron trunk containing his military uniform and medals to his family. Muthukrishnan, the eldest son, proudly donned the uniform and flaunted it before the villagers.

According to historical accounts, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) arrived in northern Malaya on December 8, 1941. Singapore fell to the Japanese just 69 days later. The Japanese air and naval supremacy made the Allied forces steadily lose ground, pushing them southward.

By the end of January 1942, all Allied troops had retreated to Singapore, and the battle for the city was quick and decisive. The IJA launched its attack on Singapore's northwest coast at Kranji and seized strategic positions across the island. With resources dwindling, Lt Gen Arthur E Percival (GOC, Malaya) and his advisers surrendered. For the British, Indian, Australian and Malayan forces defending the colony, the campaign was a disaster.

Marimuthu, identified as Sapper 14391 from the 13 Field Company, Column 160, is one of the countless unsung war heroes who made the supreme sacrifice.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't put teens behind the wheel Refer to 'Fatal Porsche crash'; the tragic incident underscores the urgent need for spreading awareness and educating children and teenagers about traffic rules and the importance of ensuring adherence to the minimum age limit for driving. The accident, which claimed the lives of two engineers, serves as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of traffic norm violations. While the allure of driving a fancy vehicle may be too strong for young individuals to ignore, it is imperative that they understand the responsibilities and risks associated with driving. Allowing underage individuals to take the wheel not only puts their own lives at risk, but it also endangers the lives of oth-

er motorists and pedestrians. JAGDEEP SHARMA, BY MAIL

### Driver shouldn't get off scot-free

Apropos of 'Fatal Porsche crash'; the story of a drunken teenager ramming his car into a bike and killing two young engineers in Pune is heartbreaking. He must not get away with the crime just because he is a minor or because he belongs to a well-off family. It is unfortunate that he was granted bail by the Juvenile Justice Board in no time. Though the police have arrested the father of the spoilt brat and the bar owner and staffers who served him liquor, it is not enough. The boy, whose reckless act snuffed out two lives, must be tried as an adult. All those responsible for the ghastly episode must receive stringent punishment.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWANA

### Don't treat teen with kid gloves

With reference to the editorial 'Fatal Porsche crash'; the incident is extremely tragic. The recklessness of the teenager who was driving the car at a break-neck speed in an inebriated state, the sheer negligence on the part of his parents and the pub owner and staffers are to blame for the mishap that claimed two lives. It is an irreparable loss for the kin of the deceased; they would never get their precious family members back even if the culprits are brought to justice. The boy did not even deserve bail. An example should be made of the boy and his parents to prevent a repeat of the incident.

SUNIL CHOPRA, LUDHIANA

### Sects' hold on public troubling

Apropos of 'The dera factor'; the influence of religious sects or deras on politics in Punjab and Haryana is troubling, Politicians' relentless pursuit of these vote banks undermines democratic integrity. Despite the Supreme Court's ruling against the use of religion for electoral gains, the covert courting of deras continues unabated. This practice erodes public trust. The 2017 conviction of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh highlights the peril of such alliances. Political parties must choose transparent, policy-based campaigning over the use of sects' influence. Our democracy deserves leaders who earn votes through merit and vision, not through sects' endorsements. Only then can we restore faith in our electoral system and ensure true

representation for all citizens. SARGUNPREET KAUR, MOHALI

### Deras' sway undeniable

Refer to the editorial 'The dera factor'; it is common for political leaders in states like Punjab and Haryana, where such sects command a mammoth following, to call on religious leaders or dera heads amid an election season under the pretext of seeking their blessings. It is true that a party that receives the endorsement of a dera can get the upper hand in a contest. Derus are meant to promote peace and harmony in society and help people transform their lives. But the role such bodies or other religious organisations play in influencing the result of a poll cannot be discounted. The dera factor is definitely going to be crucial in this Lok Sabha election too.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

### Enough of self-styled godmen

The phenomenon of self-styled godmen some genuine while others fake - having sway over the masses in India is not something new. Matters of religion must be detached from politics. Politicians supporting deras must not be allowed to make a mockery of the electoral process. It is detestable how even disgraced godmen convicted of serious crimes still manage to pull the strings and how politicians approach them for electoral gains. Since political leaders need public support to gain or remain in power, they end up seeking help from dera heads.

NISHANT PRASHAR, NURPUR

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

# Political parties pay lip service to women's safety



PREM CHOWDHRY AUTHOR AND FORMER ACADEMIC, DELHIUNIVERSITY

HE Swati Maliwal case underlines a horrifying reality political parties are reluctant to walk the talk on women's issues. They may pledge their commitment to empowering women, but when it comes to taking action, they are nowhere to be seen. It is not just the Aam Aadmi Party that is at fault. The BJP has been largely evasive about the sexual harassment case against its MP, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. The saffron party has not only ignored his condemnable acts, but it has also given the ticket to his son to fight the Lok Sabha election from the Kaiserganj constituency in Uttar Pradesh. The oft-repeated shibboleths of Nari Shakti and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao remain empty political slogans.

In the Maliwal case, Arvind Kejriwal's former personal secretary Bibhav Kumar is accused of assaulting her at the Delhi Chief Minister's residence. Violence took place during a heated exchange between Kumar and Maliwal, a Rajva Sabha MP. She was allegedly slapped and kicked in the chest and stomach. Did it have something to do with her superior position - as an MP - to that of the man (the CM's aide)? What we do know is that violence was the result.

The case of Brij Bhushan - a former chief of the Wrestling Federation of India and a six-time MP pertains to the sexual harassment of female wrestlers. He was charged by the court for sexual harassment, stalking, outraging the modesty of women and criminal intimidation. The matter brings to the fore the menace of sexual exploitation of women by powerful individuals.

Prajwal Revanna, a

young MP from Karnataka,

has been accused of sexual-

ly abusing several women. He belongs to an influential political family — he is the grandson of former Prime Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) chief Deve Gowda. The Karnataka State Commission for Women has stated that the parliamentarian abused women and made objectionable videos of them without their consent. When the videos went

viral and the truth could



ORDEAL: Swati Maliwal's case adds another dimension to the violence women face, which extends from domestic abuse to sexual crimes and acid attacks, PIL

not be denied any longer, Prajwal fled to Germany. Even as he continues to evade the authorities, he has been suspended by the party. Interpol has been contacted to locate him, but there has been no success so far. Incidentally, the JD(S) is an ally of the BJP in Karnataka in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

These cases underscore the double standards that political leaders adopt towards women and highlight the difference in what they say and what actions they take. Maliwal's case adds yet another

women face, which extends from domestic abuse to murder (dowry deaths and honour killings), sexual crimes (rape, human trafficking and prostitution) and acid attacks. The Swati Maliwal, Brij Bhushan and

The unpalatable truth about women in India, both historically and socially, is that they are struggling for their own identity, shouting to have their voices heard and fighting for their esteem and respect. Despite the constitutional guarantee of gender equality, rampant discrimination and exploitation of women

dimension to the violence

continue in India. Incidents of sexual harassment, molestation and ill-treatment of women are on the rise. It is high time that women got a respectable and dignified position in Indian society to fearlessly voice their opinions. Awareness should be spread among women and in society, and their rights should be protected. All crimes against women should be made punishable.

In this era of globalisation and revolution in the means of communication and information technology, the role of the media has become all the more crucial for women's empowerment in India. There has been much societal progress all over the world. And a number of organisations have been striving to protect the honour and freedom of women. But in our country, a deep-rooted patriarchal attitude persists. That is the reason why it is the male child that gets more attention in a family and enjoys more freedom than a girl.

It is necessary to have women in India educated so that they can live with dignity and help solve their issues. Education alone would give them confidence. Every woman has a fundamental right to be safe. If she is able to protect herself and stand up against injustice, her protest becomes meaningful. Socio-economic empowerment of women can help improve their status in society.

Unfortunately, the Maliw-

al, Brij Bhushan and Prajwal cases have sown fear in the minds of women. Inaction or delayed action by law enforcement authorities only adds to their plight. Notably, the police initially dragged their feet on registering an FIR against Brij Bhushan; they did it only after the intervention of the Supreme Court. It is imperative that courts take these things into consideration and order a speedy trial to ensure the harshest punishment possible for the culprits. Such promptness will at least deter people from committing crimes against women. It is the perpetrators who should be afraid, not the victims. Hopefully, the judiciary will understand the gravity of the situation and ensure the swift delivery of justice in such cases.

A change in mindset can make women's lives more safe and secure. The need of the hour is to create awareness about their rights to save them from exploitation. Inculcating strong social, moral and cultural values among citizens through education and making strong laws to punish perpetrators can bring about a positive change.

# Xi keen on consolidating bilateral ties to divide EU

Prajwal cases

highlight the double

standards of

politicians on

women's issues.



JAYADEVA RANADE PRESIDENT, CENTRE FOR CHINA ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

HINESE President Xi Jinping's recent visit to France, Serbia and Hungary came amid rising concern in Europe about the war in Ukraine and China's growing assistance to Russia. Commenting on Xi's tour, the official Zhongguo Qingnian Bao (China Youth Daily, May 6) candidly observed that the visit was "vitally important for China's relations with France, Serbia, Hungary and the European Union (EU) at large".

High on Xi's agenda were the economy, concern about the possibility of the West imposing sanctions on China, and the issue of 'overcapacity' flagged by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and the EU. Xi's tour was carefully crafted to first try and 'soften' France, which has a powerful voice in the EU and considerable investments in China, and then to end with a successful flourish in Serbia and Hungary - both countries

with whom China has excellent commercial and diplomatic ties. Signed articles by Xi were published in major newspapers of the three countries, coinciding with his arrival.

France was the most difficult to deal with as President Macron has changed his views over the past year and now sees the war in Ukraine as an existential threat to Europe. This has increased worries about the supply by China of dual-use goods and military material to Russia. To demonstrate - especially after German Chancellor Olaf Scholz bent his knee to Beijing - that France and the EU were equally concerned about Ukraine, Macron invited EU President Ursula von der Leyen to join the talks with Xi in Paris. Contentious issues were raised, such as the French-backed anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles from China; Chinese overcapacity; Beijing's indirect support to Russia's war in Ukraine; and the explosion of the

Nordic pipeline. In their 80-minute bilateral talks, Macron reportedly raised concerns about China supplying dual-use items to Russia and under-



ALARM: French President Emmanuel Macron (left) has reportedly raised concerns about China supplying dual-use goods to Russia. REUTERS

China has been

trying to widen

differences between

the US and the EU

to loosen American

restrictions on the

sale of technology

and weaponry to it.

uphold independence and jointly prevent a new Cold War or bloc confrontation" and "stay committed to the spirit that guided the establishment of their diplomatic ties, namely independmutual

understanding, long-term vision and mutual benefit, and enrich it with new features of the new era". He said they should take "a long view and work together for an equal and orderly multipolar world" and "and jointly oppose decoupling and cutting off of supply chains." He offered to "deepen cooperation" in aerospace and aviation, nuclear energy, innovation and finance, and "expand cooperation in emerging areas such as green energy, smart manufacturing, biomedicine and artificial intelligence (AI)" as well as a reform of the international financial system.

Macron emphasised that France would not adopt discriminatory policies and did not want to keep China out of the French market. He said France hoped to export more agricultural products to China and was ready to enhance cooperation in areas such as aerospace and aviation, nuclear energy for civilian use, biodiversity protection and AI, and jointly uphold multilateralism, the UN Charter and international law.

After their 100-minute trilateral meeting, Von der

Leven said she had pressed Xi on all contentious points and urged him to rein in Chinese subsidies and manufacturing overcapacity and give European companies more access to the Chinese market. She said she was counting "on China to use all its influence on Russia to end its war of aggression against Ukraine", and urged Beijing to stem the supply of dual-use goods helping Russia's military. She pointed out that "given the existential nature of the threats stemming from this war for both Ukraine and Europe, this does affect the EU-China relations."

Xi seemed to brush off these concerns and stressed that "China is not at the origin of this crisis, nor is it a participant". He said the crisis should not be used to tarnish China's image or start a new Cold War. Interestingly, throughout the meetings, Xi referred to the war in Ukraine as a 'crisis'.

After a quick visit to the home of Macron's grandmother in the Hautes-Pyrénées, Xi arrived in Serbia on the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade on May 7 to a red-carpet welcome. Xi received a similar reception in Hungary. China signed 28 and 18 agreements, respectively, in Belgrade and Budapest. In Serbia, which is not a

member of the EU. Xi made it clear that the country

stood to gain far more from close ties with China than the EU. The trans-Serbia Railway was highlighted as an example of the Belt and Road cooperation and they agreed to build a "China-Serbia community with a shared future in the new era". Three more Confucius Centres and a Chinese Cultural Centre were opened. In Hungary, agreements were signed for two new electric vehicle-manufacturing factories.

At the joint press conference on May 9, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban announced that "China is one of the pillars of the new world order" and that Hungary would support China's peace plan for Ukraine. Xi said: "China supports Hungary in playing a bigger role in the EU and promoting greater progress in China-EU relations."

Beijing has for decades been trying to widen differences between the US and the EU to loosen American restrictions on the sale of technology and weaponry to China. Xi is consolidating relations with Serbia and Hungary to build them into potential wedges to divide the EU. Following Scholz's visit in April, Beijing could see Germany as a potential weak link. The apparent change in French President Macron's views on Russia could, however, impact China-France ties.

### scored that the war in Ukraine posed a direct threat to Europe. Xi said that in this phase of transformation and turbulence, "China and France should **QUICK CROSSWORD**

- ACROSS
- 1 Likely (2,8) 8 Ridicule by imitation (5)
- 9 Wariness (7) 10 Dog of no definable
- breed (7)
- 11 A lightweight wood (5) 12 Of rectangular shape (6)
- 14 Considered (6)
- 17 Absolute (5) 19 Model of excellence (7)
- 21 Concentrated artillery fire (7) 15 A mauvish-crimson (7)
- 22 To give and take (5) 23 Scene of exciting activity

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

- 2 Existing in name only (7)
- 3 Come round again (5) 4 Tool, emblem of
- Communism (6) 5 Not easily angered (7)
- 6 Woven fabric with diagonal
- lines (5)
- 7 Unique (3,3,4) 8 Meaningless ritual (5-5)
- 13 Give spoken commentary
- for (7)

18 Lose (contest) deliberately (5)

16 Globe (6)

(5,3,2)20 Disprove (5)

Across: 1 Debase, 4 Drivel, 9 Let slip, 10 Delft, 11 Green, 12 Nirvana, 13 Case in point, 18 Impetus, 20 Poker, 22 Deign, 23 Umpteen, 24 Entice, 25 Grudge.

Down: 1 Deluge, 2 Bathe, 3 Silence, 5 Rider, 6 Villain, 7 Lethal, 8 Open-and-shut, 14 Appoint, 15 On paper, 16 Kindle, 17 Fringe, 19 Tonic, 21 Knead.

# SU DO KU 2 9 4 8 9 6 5 3 9 5 6 9 V HARD

#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 1 9 8 2 6 5 2 9 6 5 4 7 8 1 3 8 5 1 2 6 3 9 7 4 5 6 3 1 4 9 8 1 6 3 9 8 4 7 5 2 9 8 4 7 5 2 6 3 1 4 3 9 8 1 6 5 2 7 6 7 8 3 2 5 1 4 9 5 1 2 4 7 9 3 8 6 CALENDAR MAY 23RD 2024, THURSDAY Shaka Samvat 1946 Jyeshtha Shaka 2 Jyeshtha Parvishte 10 1445

Shukla Paksha Tithi 15, up to 7.23 pm

Vishakha Nakshatra up to 9.15 am

■ Parigh a Yoga up to 12.12 pm

Moon in Scorpio sign

Vaishakh Purnima

SUNSET: THUR SUNRISE: FRID		19:14 HR: 05:24 HR
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	39	30
New Delhi	44	32
Amritsar	45	27
Bathinda	47	29
Jalandhar	45	28
Ludhiana	44	29
Bhiwani	45	31
Hisar	46	30
Sirsa	47	31
Dharamsala	38	23
Manali	29	12
Shimla	30	18
Srinagar	30	13
Jammu	43	27
Kargil	29	10
Leh	23	08
Dehradun	39	23
Mussoorie	27	16

EODECAST

NEW DELHI | THURSDAY, 23 MAY 2024

### Another milestone

Stock valuations have increased substantially

he market capitalisation of companies listed on BSE crossed the threshold of \$5 trillion for the first time on Tuesday. This has made India the fifth member of the \$5 trillion market-cap "club" after the US, China, Japan, and Hong Kong. At around \$3.9 trillion, India has a lower gross domestic product (GDP) than the US (\$25.5 trillion), China (\$18 trillion) and Japan (\$4.2 trillion), while Hong Kong is famously a free-market economy with a convertible currency and listings of many corporate entities based in Mainland China. Importantly, from an investor's perspective, India's market cap substantially exceeds its GDP. While this is not an exception — the US, for instance, has a market cap that is roughly twice its GDP — it is unusual in the Indian context. It has occurred before only at close to bull-market peaks and is usually a sign of a market being close to topping out.

It's also notable that the recent surge in market cap has been driven by small and midcap stocks. The market cap crossed \$4 trillion in November 2023 and rose another 25 per cent in the next six months. However, the benchmark largecap indices like the National Stock Exchange Nifty and the BSE Sensex are trading below their respective record highs. On average, largecap valuations in terms of fundamental ratios like price-to-earnings (PE) are lower than smallcap and midcap, even though the entire market is trading on the higher side in historical terms. The Sensex, which tracks 30 large companies with high market cap, is trading at an average PE of 22, but the Midcap 150 index is trading at an average PE of 37 and the Smallcap index at an average PE of 28. Again, these valuations are not at historical peaks, but they are on the high side. One reason why largecaps are available at lower valuations is institutional caution. Most large institutions are waiting for the result of the general elections, as well as watching for geopolitical cues arising from West Asia, and monetary policy

Foreign portfolio investors sold a net ₹28,000 crore worth of Indian equity in May, following up on ₹8,600 crore of net sales in April. The smallcap support comes largely from retail investors, who appear to be more sanguine about high valuations and more prepared to live with high risks. Much of the midcap support comes from mutual funds, which must invest if they have large inflows. Equity mutual funds received ₹18,917 crore of net inflows in April, again mostly from retail investors. The averaged index valuations obscure the fact that many individual companies are extremely overvalued. Several fund managers have issued cautious advisories. A domestic brokerage has pointed out that there are 104 companies trading at over 50 times their PE, while nine companies are trading above 100 times their PE. This is unusual.

In terms of fundamentals, it is hard to justify such high valuations across sectors, unless there is an extraordinarily sharp acceleration in revenue growth and profitability. While guidance by managements is optimistic, there is no hint of such acceleration. It behoves investors, especially those dabbling in smaller stocks, to be cautious. The smallcap and midcap segments would be most vulnerable if there is a selloff, and that might be triggered if investors are spooked by electoral results.

# Women employment

Indian economy poses structural constraints

he quarterly bulletin of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for January to March 2024 (Q4FY24), released recently, had interesting findings regarding women and their state in India's labour market. In terms of involvement in the workforce, the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in urban areas increased from 22.7 per cent in Q42022-23 to 25.6 per cent in Q42023-24. Since 2022, a steady uptick in the female LFPR is visible. It is now at an all-time high since the PLFS was launched in 2017-18. Besides, the female unemployment rate in urban areas has been declining since 2022. It decreased from 9.2 per cent in Q4FY23 to 8.5 per cent in Q4FY24. However, female representation continues to remain low in the labour force. The female LFPR hovers around one-third of the male LFPR, which stood at 74.4 per cent in Q4FY24. While equal participation does not automatically guarantee gender equality, India is still far from achieving equal labour market outcomes for both genders.

Further, between Q42022-23 and Q42023-24, the share of women employed in regular salaried jobs in urban India declined from 54.2 per cent to 52.3 per cent. In fact, this is the lowest in any quarter over the past six years. During the same period, the share of women engaged in self-employment went up from 38.5 per cent in Q42022-23 to 41.3 per cent in Q42023-24. This includes working as an unpaid helper in household enterprises. Both developments point to a deterioration in the quality of work being generated. It has been observed that a rise in education levels among women in urban areas leads to their staying at home to take care of household responsibilities. Female labour force participation often tends to drop among women in their early to mid-twenties, suggesting that marriage- and family-related responsibilities specifically limit women's labour force participation. For those who do find productive employment, it is more difficult to get adequate remuneration compared to their male counterparts.

The increase in self-employment and unpaid work in family enterprises, which was also witnessed in the annual PLFS report, highlights the lack of remunerative employment opportunities in the country. In the case of urban employment, the trend among firms to bring their employees back to office after the pandemic has also resulted in high attrition rates among women — many are unable to return to work owing to the restructuring of household responsibilities during the pandemic. Despite a significant increase in the LFPR and workforce participation rates among women, inadequate job creation in urban areas meant that a significant proportion of women remained unabsorbed in productive work opportunities despite migrating to cities in search of improved livelihood. The gender gap in India's labour market does not always arise out of differences in educational attainment and occupational skills. More often than not, labour markets penalise the work-time flexibility that women demand. Things would perhaps change with a significant increase in job creation, which will push up demand for both skilled and unskilled labour. While the government has taken several steps to support women in the labour force, the nature of the Indian economy with a large number of small enterprises also poses structural constraints that may be difficult to address in the short run.

# The East wind blows harder

The global power balance is shifting as China and Russia assert dominance in technology and diplomacy

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



T N NINAN

n the escalating contest between the West and the Rest, it is now clear that the West, while still packing the more powerful punch, is weakening. In the Asia-Pacific, the US Navy's stance has shifted from dominance to deterrence. In the economic sphere too, Washington has switched from being on the offensive (technology bans, trade restrictions and financial sanctions) to playing defence (putting up a tariff wall around the US market). And Western support for Ukraine has not stopped Russia. Mao had declared somewhat ahead of time that the East wind prevails over the West wind. That may now be beginning to happen.

For years, Western analysts and journalists misread both China and Russia. The latter was portraved as economically vulnerable and Vladimir Putin as politically challengeable, perhaps even terminally ill. China's collapse has been forecast for decades; more recently, it has been seen as beleaguered. Yet Russia has withstood Western sanctions unexpectedly well, it has gained the upper hand in Ukraine. and Mr Putin has been elected to a fresh term in office. China, meanwhile, remains the fastest-growing among economies with comparable income levels

The steep tariffs that the US has announced recently on some Chinese products do not signal a full-scale trade war since they target items that China does not sell much in the US. So the signalling may be primarily to President Joe Biden's domestic political base. Regardless, China remains the dominant producer of many of the targeted products, and can find other markets. It is US importers who may have no alternative sources of supply for some items. China could also route supplies through factories in third countries. Meanwhile, American consumers will pay through inflation.

Such defensive ploys (the flip side of a subsidyladen policy to revive American manufacturing)

contrast with the offensive thrust of earlier moves. The hope was that those aggressive moves would box in America's enemies. Without question. the sanctions have hurt, but (as almost always with sanctions) the impact has been partial. Russia has found new customers for its oil and gas, while Europe has lost a vital source of cheap energy, thereby hobbling economies like Germany's. Meanwhile, the Russian economy has continued to grow.

Both Russia and China have developed payment systems that bypass the dollar (95 per cent of Russia China trade is now in local currencies) and even banking communication systems like SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication). Russia now holds more renminbis in its reserve armoury than it does dollars. And China has been switching to gold, buying vast quantities for the past 18 months. The People's Bank of China's 2.250-tonne gold hoard still accounts for less than 5 per cent of total reserves, but is the highest ever.

As for technology, China moved earlier and faster than anyone else and occupies pole position in the clean-energy fields of electric mobility, solar power, and lithium batteries. China also moved ahead of the pack to secure supplies of the special materials needed for these industries, and may have a lock on some of those markets. It may now be ready to break through tech barriers in electronics, life sciences, and defence manufacture.

Huawei, for instance, recently surprised the West by showcasing smartphones loaded with 7 nm (nanometer) chips, and is getting prepared to turn out 5 nm chips. The country has set itself the target of 70 per cent self-sufficiency in chipmaking by next year. Meanwhile, Western pharmaceutical firms have acknowledged China's emerging leadership in biopharma and life sciences in places like BioBay, a mega-hub for innovation at Suzhou, near Shanghai. In defence, China is building a fourth aircraft carrier which may be nuclear-powered, signalling the crossing of another technology threshold. The bald fact is

that it is too late to shut the technology door on China. On the security front, Western commentators wor-

ry about possible convulsions if Russia gets its way in Ukraine, and further carves up that half-destroyed country. Matters could get worse if Donald Trump returns as US President and carries out his threat to hobble the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato). Given the extreme limitations of European defence forces in terms of manpower, equipment, fighting capabilities and defence production capacities, all of Europe would suddenly feel more vulnerable than at any time since the start of the Cold War. European defence budgets have belatedly gone up to the targeted 2 per cent of gross domestic product, but it will be at least a decade before Europe can hope to be viable in its defence without the assurance of US support—not to mention the US nuclear umbrella.

In comparison, Moscow and Beijing have moved closer together, while scoring diplomatic gains elsewhere in the world. Russia played a successful card in Syria and now gets drones from Iran. China last year brokered the normalisation of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In Africa, China is outspending the US on a continent that needs lots of money, while one country after another is booting out French and American soldiers and inviting in Russian soldiers for security support. Even in Southeast Asia, countries whose economies are closely inter-linked with China's, and getting even more so, do not wish to choose between the US and China. It doesn't help that the US frequently shows itself as an unreliable support pillar, as seen on arms supplies to Ukraine. Nor does it help Western credibility with the Global South when it adopts hypocritically contradictory stances on Ukraine and Gaza.

Western commentators argue, with reason, that China has for long been single-mindedly pursuing a mercantilist course, promoting industries with massive government support, and running huge trade surpluses without allowing its currency to appreciate; and therefore that China has asked for the West's belated counter measures. Fair enough But what they don't add is that China has intensely competitive home markets. No fewer than 139 companies turn out electric vehicles, for example. Only the fittest will survive, and companies like BYD therefore emerge as potential world-beaters.

Still, it would be a challenge for China's manufacturing capabilities if major export markets were denied to it. But as India's experience shows, tariff walls do not necessarily keep out Chinese products. Indeed, China could soon be in a position to play titfor-tat on both technology and market access. That seems a more likely response to Western pressure than Japan's in the mid-1980s when Tokyo reined in its exports and got the yen to appreciate. In today's world, whether it is on security matters, technological development, manufacturing and trade prowess or diplomatic heft — in short the global power balance the East wind is blowing harder than before.

The writer is a former editor and chairman of

# Tackling congestion for growing population

any a time we wonder: "Are our cities truly prepared?" This question weighs heavily on us as our population grows and our resources dwindle, leaving our cities ill-prepared for what lies ahead. We discuss the importance of sustainability, energy efficiency, and resource management to improve urban living, and yet we overlook a crucial challenge that has persisted throughout history. Since ancient times, transportation has served as the lifeblood of our cities. With the population constantly increasing, so does our reliance on accessible transportation. In fact, growth in population and the surge in vehicle numbers go hand in hand, leading to

more traffic congestion and longer

hours spent on roads. According to recent reports from the United Nations, our global population is projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, with a significant majority — about 68.4 per cent living in urban areas. In the case of India, the population, currently at 1.4 billion, is expected to surpass 1.5 billion by 2030. By 2047, nearly 51 per cent of the population would live in cities. These numbers are staggering and give us pause to consider the implications for our everyday lives.

Since 1950, India has seen its population increase by a billion. At the same time, the number of registered motor vehicles has also skyrocketed from a mere 300,000 in 1951 to over 326 million in 2020, as noted in the Road Transport Year Book 2019-20. This explosion in vehicle ownership has compounded the ageold problem of traffic congestion, turning our daily iournevs into tests of patience and endurance.

Today, our major cities — Bengaluru, Pune, Mumbai, and Delhi — suffer from extreme traffic congestion, causing people to lose productive hours of the day. In a study carried out by an Amsterdambased research group, it was reported that people lost as many as five days in a year (during peak rush hours) stuck in traffic in Pune. In the same study, Bengaluru and Pune were reported to be the sixth and seventh cities among the world's 10 worst traffic-hit cities in 2023. Bengaluru was also identified as the world's second-most congested city. The toll of this congestion goes beyond the inconvenience of being stuck in traffic. It chips away at the quality of life we aspire to, leaving us frazzled and weary after long commutes. The stress and fatigue of navigating congested streets take a toll on individuals and our communities as a whole. Moreover, the environmental impact cannot be ignored. With vehicles

idling in traffic the air we breathe becomes polluted, posing risks to our health and well-being. As we grapple with these challenges, it's clear that we need to find sustainable solutions. Investing in efficient public transportation, promoting alternative modes of transport like cycling and walking, and implementing smart urban planning strategies are essential steps in alleviating congestion and creating more livable cities.

Addressing the intertwined challenges of population growth, urbanisation and transportation

demands a concerted effort on multiple fronts. It requires bold policy interventions and innovative solutions that reimagine the way we move within and between cities. By leveraging real-time data and analytics, smart transportation systems can dynamically adjust traffic signals, manage congestion, and provide commuters with up-to-date information on travel conditions. This not only improves the efficiency of transportation networks but also enhances the overall experience for commuters. In addition to investing in public transit, promoting activities like walking and cycling is essential for creating healthier, more livable cities. By designing pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, including dedicated bike lanes and safe sidewalks, we can encourage residents to embrace these sustainable modes of travel. Not only are these activities environmentfriendly, as they reduce congestion and emission, but they also promote physical activity and improve public health

Furthermore, the adoption of smart transportation systems powered by cutting-edge technology holds immense promise for optimising traffic flow and enhancing mobility. Congestion-pricing schemes represent another innovative approach to managing traffic congestion and reducing emission. These schemes can incentivise the use of alternative modes of transport and discourage unnecessary car trips. Revenue generated from congestion pricing can be reinvested in transportation infrastructure improvements and sustainable mobility initiatives. Urban planning also plays an important role in influencing the future of transportation. By prioritising mixed-use developments and transit-oriented design, cities can create vibrant, walkable communities where residents can live and work within close proximity to public transit options. This not only reduces reliance on cars but also fosters more sustainable, resilient urban environments.

As we prepare ourselves for more innovative and equitable work, with more and more people benefiting from the advantages and opportunities that cities offer, we must ensure that our cities are equipped to be homes for millions of people. While one of the most important factors to ascertain is optimal usage of transportation infrastructure, it also means that our approaches need to be rooted in principles of sustainability and are climate-friendly.

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# Seismic matters



CHITTAJIT MITRA

ast year, Dutch researcher Frank Hoogerbeets, who had accurately predicted the twin earthquakes in Turkey and Syria of February 2023, predicted a massive earthquake in Pakistan. In December, Pakistan was indeed jolted by an earthquake with a magnitude of 4, fortunately without loss of life. But Mr Hoogerbeets findings, which are controversially based on the alignment of celestial bodies, are intriguing because

earthquakes cannot really be predicted. In fact, just a month after his widely reported prediction, it was Nepal that was unprepared for the 6.4 magnitude

earthquake on November 3, which killed more than 153 people, underlining the  $constant\, anxiety\, for those\, who\, live\, in$ quake-prone zones and raising questions for the curious. What causes earthquakes and why are they so difficult to predict? In tracing the science, history and impact of earthquakes in India, renowned seismologists CPRajendran and Kusala Rajendran offer a useful perspective on this phenomenon in *The Rumbling* Earth: The Story of Indian Earthquakes. The authors begin the conversation

by highlighting the importance of earth sciences and how it is ignored on a wider level in the education system that also diverts prospective scientists away from a field that deals with issues directly impacting nations and people. For earth scientists, public outreach is another complication because they cannot predict a calamity such as this. When six Italian scientists were asked whether a series of tremors that the people at a town called L'Aquila were experiencing is of any concern, they expressed a balanced

viewpoint based on the available data. Then they experienced an earthquake of 6.3 magnitude that killed 309 people on April 6, 2009. They were subsequently convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to a six-vear prison term for supposedly downplaying the calamity. Later, the conviction was reversed. This shows the contradictions that exist within the science of earthquakes as the data is still unclear whether a culmination of tremors can lead to a massive earthquake or not.

The following chapters go on to talk about how stress accumulates at the Himalayan range and then leads to several earthquakes such as those in Garhwal (1803), Kangra (1905), Bihar-Nepal (1934), Assam (1950), Kashmir (2005) and Nepal (2015). To understand why and how it happens one needs to go back into prehistory. About 225 million years ago, India was an island near Australia and Antarctica. Eventually 40-50 million years ago, this plate collided with Eurasia, forming the initial peaks of the Himalayas. This movement between the two plates, which continues today. causes stress that leads to earthquakes in that specific region.

For instance, along the eastern and north-eastern part of the country, active tectonic movements led to the formation of scenic mountain ranges and river systems of which the Brahmaputra is a major one. But it has a long history of disturbances as well. On August 15, 1950, the largest documented continental

**CONURBATION** 

AMIT KAPOOR & BIBEK DEBROY

inter-plate earthquake shook the Northeast with a magnitude of 8.7. Before that, in 1897, another great earthquake with a magnitude of 8.2 shook that region with its epicentre in Shillong. The effects were so

RUMBLING THE STORY OF INDIAN EARTHQUAKES widespread that the

aftershocks were felt in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bhagalpur. This historic event was also mentioned in a Ruskin Bond story as well as in letters British colonialists wrote home to their families. But this disaster opened new avenues in observational seismology as well as modern seismological research.

Yet, the authors point out, it cannot

be concluded that earthquakes can occur only at the plate boundaries; in fact, they often also occur at places least expected. Regions away from plate boundaries with fewer deformations are known as stable continental regions (SCRs) and because the chances of stress accumulating in such regions have been low, one might

THE RUMBLING EARTH: The Story of Indian Earthquakes Author: CP Rajendran & Kusala

Raiendran **Publisher:** Penguin **Pages:** 256

**Price:** ₹699

earthquakes at all. But this false sense of security can lead to cataclysmic disasters. Near Killari, a moderate

assume that they

won't experience

Maharashtra, on September 30, 1993, earthquake of 6.3

magnitude hit at 3:56 am, killing more than 10,000 across 67 villages that were reduced to rubble. The damage was worsened by the fact that homes here were built using wooden beams and light frames for the roof and covered by several layers of black soil. Since the villagers never suspected the possibility of such a disaster, they had no concerns

for their safety on that particular aspect. This incident, though unexpected, opened another arena for seismologists to examine diverse possibilities around earthquakes in India.

Time and again, history has pointed to the lessons that we need to learn from earthquakes. Whether we are paying heed to them is a different conversation altogether. In the race to "development", we seem to have ignored the long-term implications, especially in seismically fragile areas. The steady sinking of the Himalayan town of Joshimath stands as one cautionary event. Yet, the government seems oblivious to the risks as the Himalayan hydropower projects and the perilous over-tourism during the Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand demonstrate. In demystifying the science behind earthquakes in the form of a compelling story, the authors allow the reader to grasp this phenomenon in all its variety. Most critically, the book also points to a potentially disastrous future if we continue to ignore the messages from the rumbling earth.

The reviewer is an Allahabad-based writer and translator