Reign of fire

New Delhi's experience of high heat cannot be pinned on climate change

n May 29, the Mungeshpur automatic weather station north of New Delhi recorded a maximum of 52.9° C. While the India Meteorological Department has since suggested that the station's thermistor may be faulty, the country's north has clearly been suffering scorching weather. After the recording was reported, New Delhi's Water Minister imposed a fine of ₹2,000 on those washing vehicles with hoses and allowing water tanks to overflow, and said 200 teams would monitor for wastage. The temperatures people experience in a place are produced by a combination of factors, including public ventilation, density of built-up structures, and the availability of shade. How a person's body responds to such heat is also mediated by several forces. But it has become the norm to blame climate change as the all-encompassing cause of the consequences of extreme heat, and thus argue that the governments' only option is to react. The fact is that though New Delhi is large, it is smaller than the scale at which climate models reliably predict anomalous heat. Even if an attribution exercise concludes Mungeshpur's temperature was related to climate change, no interstate cooperation or heat response mechanism exists to act meaningfully on the finding.

According to New Delhi's new orders, the monitoring teams have been empowered to sever illegal supply lines, placing those in informal settlements at risk. For this to be fair, the city must already have ensured all its residents are sufficiently supplied with legal connections. Equally, 200 teams are too few for a city of its size. Together with there being no effective way to scrutinise water use in private properties, their mandate amounts to little. The city's peak power demand also crossed 8.3 gigawatt on May 29; high heat increases water consumption at power generation facilities. New Delhi has a heat action plan but the city's present response suggests it does not accommodate externalities such as the availability of water from neighbouring Haryana and illegal supply connections. Such plans should also include passive, long-term measures that ensure life can go on irrespective of the ambient temperature. With respect to water, for example, cities could maintain a reservoir for emergencies, a distribution system that resists tampering, and municipal body teams that conduct surprise wastage checks year-round rather than intermittently. Similarly, instead of shutting schools and offices to avoid peak heat, as many action plans stipulate, governments should facilitate cooling by (traditional) architectural methods, set up shaded pedestrian corridors, and incentivise the use of air-conditioned public transport. Governments are answerable to the terms on which they expect people to cope with the heat.

Demonising protests

Jmar Khalid's right to protest should not be seen as incitement of riots

perverse combination of statutory restrictions and judicial deference has kept former university scholar Umar Khalid in prison for over three years. In yet another order denying him bail, a Sessions Court in Delhi declined to change its mind on earlier findings that the charge that he was part of a "larger conspiracy" behind the north-east Delhi riots of 2020 was prima facie true. It declined to countenance the argument that the trial proceedings were being delayed far too long and that a July 2023 judgment on grant of bail in cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) could support his petition for bail. The court, instead, banked on earlier orders denying him bail, especially the Delhi High Court's 2022 verdict that agreed with the Delhi Police claim that the riots were "orchestrated at conspiratorial meetings", even though there is nothing more than WhatsApp chats on organising road blockades to substantiate it. Bail hearings have been interminably long in Mr. Khalid's case, and inevitably end in rejections. In fact, before the Supreme Court, his bail application was listed over a dozen times, and repeatedly adjourned. He chose to withdraw the application in February 2024 and try his luck before the lower courts again. However, the Sessions Court did not see any reason to change its view.

The outcome is quite unfortunate, as while granting bail in 2021 to three other activists implicated in the Delhi riots case, the Delhi High Court had looked at the available evidence and ruled that none of them had been specifically accused of any 'terrorist' act or plot or act preparatory to it. It had remarked that the state, in its anxiety to suppress dissent, had blurred the line between the constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity. The attempt to conflate the organisation of the protests against the amendment to the citizenship law with the riots resulted in the police invoking UAPA without justification. The UAPA bars the grant of bail if the court is of the view that the allegations against a suspect are prima facie true. To compound the difficulty, judicial decisions prohibit any detailed scrutiny of the evidence at the bail stage, and mandate accepting the prosecution case based on its "broad probabilities". This low standard enables the police to repeatedly achieve success in opposing bail to dissenters and the disfavoured. Umar Khalid's continued and unjust incarceration represents a trend as well as an aberration in the criminal justice system. A system that sometimes bats for personal liberty also demonises protesters, allows unwanted arrests and routinely denies bail or indefinitely postpones bail hearings.

India's middle class and the 'Modi factor'

arendra Modi's appeal to the middle class is a case study in political communication, as his style of populism does not neatly fit any typical framework long studied by academics.

In liberal democracies the world over, the middle class is known to be an anchor of stability and a defender of the status quo. Like elsewhere, members of India's middle class are no revolutionaries. They support communal peace and social stability, they seek improvement through incremental change, not uprisings, and, above all, are keen to eschew politics altogether.

In a study of Indian middle-class voters during the 2019 election campaign, I found that most of them supported the status quo – a secular, multicultural India that emerged after Independence. These voters acknowledged the centripetal potential of religion in the Indian polity and assessed it negatively. This was true even among many supporters of Mr. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Why then does this stability-loving middle class vote for a party whose policies are aimed at changing the secular status quo? Does its shift towards a national-populist party such as the BJP represent a rebellion, a rejection of the present order, or is it the result of other dynamics, including the perception that the party is not extremist any more?

Could double messaging be the answer? The answer, my research found, lies partly in a

double messaging by Mr. Modi and the BJP. Of the voters I interviewed, only a tiny minority – less than a tenth of the sample – supported unconditionally the BJP's agenda items in their original, extreme, uncompromising form. A large majority of the participants, including BJP supporters, for instance, did not support the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, because they were afraid it would spark violence. They supported a compromise, and did not fully believe that the party would go ahead with the creation of the temple. In short, the BJP's promise of building the temple had low credibility.

Low credibility is usually a downside for a party because it undermines voter trust in its commitment. However, low credibility helped the BJP develop a double level of communication with its audience. The assumption that the party would not act on its most extreme, Hindutvaconnotated proposals made it sound more innocuous to moderate middle-class voters.

This does not necessarily mean that there was discrepancy between the BJP's message and the middle class's understanding of it. Rather, the audience decoded the message in accordance with its own social and cultural context, even though it did not necessarily accept the



Gabriele Parussini

As Prime

Narendra Modi

looked set to

win a second

term in 2019,

delved into the

psychology of

the country's

middle-class

voters who

were the main

engine behind

revisiting today

his previous

victory. His

analysis is

worth

Minister

Gabriele

Parussini

underlying ideology. In other words, India's middle class did not engage with the BJP's entire message, ignoring the parts it found unacceptable.

The encoder of the political message – in this case Mr. Modi and the BJP – took advantage of the middle class's willingness to ignore the obvious consequences of its choices by offering a pretence of moderation, which I call 'implicit moderation'.

Ultimately, however, this 'implicit moderation' only held true during the election campaign, fostering an impression that let voters believe that they were not choosing something revolutionary. Once it came to power, the BJP swayed to its more extreme instincts, taking peace-threatening measures such as construction of the Ram temple.

Alternate narratives

Another question this study set out to answer is to what extent the middle class is aware of the BJP's attempts to create alternative narratives aimed at changing the public perception of the

I found that participants could separate the effective change that has been delivered and the impression of change that the BJP was eager to

For instance, many of the participants noted that the BJP had tinkered with the names of welfare schemes since it got into power, such as by adding 'PM' to the names. One participant said that attention to public perception and promotion of government action were the main differences between the BJP government and its predecessor. "Maybe [the same] was happening with Congress. But [now] the media is promoting so much, [that] we know this is happening," he

Respondents singled out the aim of the BJP's communication: to bypass the voters' rational side and play on their emotions.

Despite understanding that the BJP constructs alternative narratives when it suits, middle-class voters support it again partly because of Mr. Modi's communication.

Consider how voters perceive the government's economic measures.

When asked what the main measures adopted by the BJP-led government until 2019 are, two-thirds of the respondents mentioned either demonetisation or the introduction of the goods and services tax, or GST.

The overwhelming majority of participants thought both of these measures caused large disruption, or their implementation was botched up. Still, many of them held a positive image of the party's record in power, thanks to the

In demonetisation, for instance, the BJP built an alternative narrative, one in which Mr. Modi's populist tactics are on full display.

The process set up was highly dramatic. Mr. Modi described himself as the hero who was leading a fight against an evil conspiracy. Demonetisation became a moral tale where regular people are associated to the hero in a fight against the money hoarder, and, essentially,

The revenge narrative had a wide appeal, irrespective of participants' political allegiance. "The big people, the businessmen had the most problems...which was a good thing. Poor people did not have any problem," said one participant.

Rather than focusing on the negative consequences of these measures, participants were swayed by Mr. Modi's decisiveness. One BJP opponent said that "demonetisation was very drastic", but called it "a very good step" because Mr. Modi "didn't think twice" about it. Mr. Modi's decisiveness showed that he takes responsibility for his own actions, radical as they may be.

This research found that the middle class wants to see an affirmative, purposeful government that does not refrain from action, even if the rights and the freedom of some sections of society are curtailed.

An original style

In the last 10 years of his leadership, it is debatable whether Mr. Modi has been the 'Vikas Purush' or development man that he promised to be in 2014. But there is no debate that his development credentials with the middle class have been barely dented. That is thanks to his effective advertisement and the adoption of populist tactics to communicate with the audience. Populism thrives around a communication process that creates a direct connection between the leader and his audience, and Mr. Modi has created an original style of populism that academics are still studying.

The middle class can see through the BJP's promotional effort, but tolerates the party's aggressive communication style because it considers it to be fair game in politics. How this electorate votes in the ongoing elections will warrant further study not only to better understand the communication tools that work for populist leaders but also to get clues on the future of the world's largest democracy.

Gabriele Parussini, who was the India correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, decided in the late 2010s to pursue a PhD under the $supervision\ of\ Christophe\ Jaffrelot\ and\ Rafal$ Zaborowski at King's College, but died of blood cancer soon after submitting his thesis. He has just been awarded the title of doctor, posthumously

India and the 'managed care' promise

ealth insurance as the main modality of universal health coverage (UHC) now looks to be indisputably confirmed to be ingrained in Indian health policy thinking. Aided by the digital revolution, it is opening doors to potential reforms that are redolent of the United States, albeit with local adaptations that avoid its profligate spending on health. Recently, a notable health-care chain in South India announced its foray into comprehensive health insurance by combining insurance and health-care provision functions under one roof – what can be called the Indian iteration of a managed care organisation (MCO). It is timely to reflect on whether MCOs hold promise for the bigger Indian health-care landscape, particularly when it comes to extending universal health care.

The background

Having its precursors in some rudimentary prepaid health-care practices in the United States of the 20th century, the strongest impetus for mainstreaming MCOs in U.S. health care came in the 1970s, when cost containment concerns in health care loomed large. Hitherto dominated by generously reimbursed providers in cahoots with insurers, high premiums became increasingly unattractive for health insurance purchasers following the economic slowdown after the 1970s. This prompted the fusion of insurance and provisioning functions under one roof, a focus on prevention and early management, and a strict emphasis on cost control – all this was against a fixed premium paid by the enrollee.

Ever since then, MCOs have evolved into multiple generations and forms, and have penetrated deep and wide into the health insurance space. Although robust evidence on their contribution to improving health outcomes and prioritising preventive care has been lacking, evidence indicates that they did help in reducing costly hospitalisations and associated costs.

In India, ever since the first public commercial



Dr. Soham **Bhaduri**

is a physician and an independent researcher who specialises in health policy and leadership

Universal Health

complex maze,

but managed

organisations

could be a part

of the answer

Indian health

care seeks

care is a

health insurance was promulgated in the 1980s, the focus has been on indemnity insurance and covering hospitalisation costs, despite a near \$26 billion market for outpatient consultations in the country. As Thomas (2011) has discussed, health insurance, playing second fiddle to life and general insurance, has seen scant innovation and high, often unsustainable, costs of operation.

A contrast

In an early analysis of how the HMO - or health maintenance organisation, a type of MCO) experience panned out for developing nations, Tollman *et al.* identified some important characteristics: MCOs tended to be urban-predominant, attracted the high-income cohort, and caught on in contexts where the public sector was failing or lacked strong socialist moorings. In addition, it required that players brought in enough financial clout, managerial capabilities, and manpower, and found well-off and well-defined beneficiary bases to serve.

Much in contrast to the U.S., the evolutionary trajectory of Indian health insurance has offered few natural incentives for consumer-driven cost control. Insurance has targeted the thin, urban well-off segment, informality has been rife among outpatient practices, and widely accepted clinical protocols have been lacking. And, while unprofitable operations coupled with unaffordable premiums can serve as incentives in theory, they are a far cry from engendering a strong systemic push towards managed care.

A few successful initiatives are likely to stem from big health-care brands having a loyal urban patient-base, and pockets deep enough to forge networks and invest in administrative capacities and infrastructure. However, prospects of them transmuting into a consequential contributor to UHC purely based on private initiative are far-fetched. That said, there could be promise in exploring the managed care route with cautious and incremental public patronage. With an

average of three consultations per year per person and the negligibly small share of insurance in outpatient care spend, there lies significant scope in reducing health-car through early interventions afforded by comprehensive outpatient care coverage. The health insurer today has little control over the patient's journey before they reach the hospital.

NITI Aayog report

In 2021, NITI Aayog released a report endorsing an outpatient care insurance scheme based on a subscription model, which would generate savings through better integration of care. The gains from a well-functioning managed care system can easily be many times over. And its positive spillovers in terms of consolidation of dispersed practices, streamlining of management protocols, and embedding a much-needed preventive care focus in the private sector can imply a sustainable solution to the problem of outpatient care coverage over the longer term.

Under the Ayushman Bharat Mission, incentives were announced for promoting the opening of hospitals in underserved areas which would preferentially cater to beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). Similar incentives could be conceived for MCOs, which would insure and cater to PMJAY patients apart from a private, self-paying clientele on a limited scale initially and on a pilot basis. The same applies to other public sector social health insurance schemes. This would also contribute to increasing awareness and expanding the reach of MCOs over time, as the self-paying pool expands and grows the demand base.

UHC is a complex maze, and as in all complex systems, there is never a solitary answer to a complex question. Neither is there a solution that does not beget a problem in turn. While MCOs cannot be expected to be the perfect solution, they can be part of the bigger answer that Indian health care seeks today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kanniyakumari visit As we approach the conclusion of the election campaign in India, we have observed the culmination of a particularly contentious period. The Bharatiya Janata Party has, regrettably, engaged in disseminating hate speech and disparaging opponents in its efforts to garner votes. Such tactics have tarnished the democratic process with unnecessary hostility and

discord. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has opted to spend the final moments of the campaign in meditation. Perhaps, this appears to be a calculated attempt to alter the narrative and appeal to the electorate's sense of spirituality and contemplation. Let us seize this moment to celebrate the end of such divisive tactics and look forward to a future where our political discourse is

characterised by unity, respect, and constructive dialogue. May we all endeavour to cultivate a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Puttur Galimugham, Karnataka

While the Prime Minister is entitled to pursue his religious belief or spirituality, it should not become a heady cocktail of spirituality and politics.

Further, such visits by a Prime Minister can also, by no stretch of the imagination, be treated as being "in public interest" to justify incurring huge expenses at the cost of the taxpayer. Constitutional and political morality and propriety would demand that the Prime Minister must personally bear these

expenses for such private

visits. Will the 'hand-picked

Election Commission' and

the CAG look into the matter and lay down certain guidelines? S.K. Choudhury, Bengaluru

Heat management

While global warming-induced climate change contributes to an rise in temperatures and humidity, factors such as the trapping of heat due to a dense concentration of buildings, paved roads, and

other surfaces made of certain materials have been exacerbating urban heat stress. City-specific plans that take into account local factors, prioritise green spaces and water bodies, and target all heat generators, including vehicles, industries, and concrete surfaces, hold the key to keeping cities from heating up in excess. M. Jeyaram,

Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

THE HINDU

Does the Model Code of Conduct need legal teeth?



is former Chief



Achary is former

Secretary

Lok Sabha

General of the



n May 22, the Election Commission of India (ECI) asked the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress to desist from raising divisive issues in the campaign. In recent years, and particularly during the campaign to the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, critics of the ECI have accused the body of being late or ineffective or partial in responding to alleged violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Does the MCC need legal teeth for better implementation? T.S. Krishnamurthy and P.D.T. Achary discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Sreeparna Chakrabarty. Edited excerpts:

PARLEY

Mr. Krishnamurthy, a lot of people have said that the ECI has not properly enforced the MCC during this election and that some violations have been overlooked. What is your opinion on these allegations?

T.S. Krishnamurthy: The media and political parties make vague allegations against the ECI, and this is common during every election. As far as political parties go, one set of parties or the other will always have a complaint. This is very common in every election. Parties have their own political reasons for making complaints. What is necessary is to know how genuine these complaints are and what action has been taken. It is for the people to decide whether the action taken has been free and fair.

Mr. Achary, do you think the MCC needs legal teeth for better implementation?

P.D.T. Achary: I don't look at this from the point of view of political parties but from the point of view of law and the Constitution. Legal enforceability is out of the question because it (the MCC) doesn't have legal teeth. But the point is that the ECI has been given a lot of powers. In fact, Justice Justice Krishna Iyer had said in one of his judgments that it (the ECI) is a reservoir of powers. That means the ECI has a lot of powers to act to ensure that elections are free and fair. So, it is not necessary to give legal teeth to the

The argument against giving it legal teeth is that once it (the ECI) goes to the courts, it will take a lot of time. The electoral process, once it starts, should be completed expeditiously. So, legal teeth should not be made a part of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951. In the absence of this legal provision, the MCC can be enforced and that is for the ECI to deal with because Article 324 of the Constitution gives it enormous powers wherever there is no legal provision. Whether the ECI is actually using all its powers under Article 324 is the question.



A shop sells banners, flags and other election advertisement materials in Bengaluru. THE HINDU

People who do not favour statutory measures to implement the MCC also argue that when a strict measure is taken, it disrupts the political process. Mr. Krishnamurthy, what do you think?

TSK: While I agree that the Supreme Court in one of its judgments observed that the ECI has a reservoir of powers under Article 324, it is only in respect of areas where there is a legislative vacuum. This is not an all-comprehensive power. The ECI is entitled to exercise this power without appealing to any other outside body, but even here, the restriction is that it has to be within the framework of the Constitution and the RPA. It is not as if the ECI has got extraordinary powers to go beyond the provisions of law. The ECI is accountable for its decisions in exercise of such power.

The main purpose of the MCC is to ensure a level playing field and ensure that elections take place in a free and fair manner. But the problem is that the MCC is only a code. Once it finds a violation, if the ECI can book them under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or under the RPA, or file an FIR, that will take months and years to be decided by the courts. Moreover, the police which functions under the State government will be taking action against such complaints depending upon which party comes to power.

And if there are other violations not covered by the IPC or the RPA, all that the ECI can do is, say, ban a candidate from campaigning. But it has no wide-ranging powers as people assume, and that is where the problem lies. That is why I believe that some limited power should be given to the ECI to impose a monetary penalty or a temporary disqualification or something like that. There are some areas where I believe that it (the MCC) should be brought within the framework of law. I know there are differences of opinion among political parties and analysts.



Judicial proceedings are out of question. An election has to be completed expeditiously within a given time frame.

P.D.T. ACHARY

Some parties may not agree to such a change. But if you want to instill some fear in candidates and the political parties, at least some minimal power of imposing a monetary penalty [should be given]. Or disqualification for a short period would be ideal.

In recent times, has there been any discussion with parties on widening the ambit of the MCC or making it more efficient?

TSK: As far as I know, I don't think so.

Mr. Achary, what is the harm in including certain statutory provisions like penalties for violating the MCC within the RPA Act?

PDTA: See, once it becomes a part of the RPA Act, suppose the ECI moves in and uses that particular provision against any person who violates the MCC, that person will certainly go to court and challenge it. If there is a stay, then the matter will end there. So, quick executive action is what is required. Judicial proceedings are out of question. An election has to be completed expeditiously within a given time frame.

I agree with Mr. Krishnamurthy that the reservoir of powers doesn't mean that the ECI is omnipotent and it can operate outside the Constitution and law. The Supreme Court has made it clear that if there is a statutory law, then the ECI will have to go by that. But if there is no statutory law to deal with the particular situation, the ECI can draw this power from Article 324. Let's suppose a very important person violates the MCC. In such cases, the ECI has, even during this election, taken a leader off campaigning for 24 hours or 48 hours. If the ECI can use this power and take a person off the campaign for 24 hours or 48 hours, it can take that person off the campaign for the duration of the election if it is a very serious offence or violation. That call has to be taken by the ECI.

I would also like to draw your attention to Paragraph 16A of the Election Symbols Order, 1968. It says if there is a violation of the MCC, the ECI can even derecognise or temporarily suspend the recognition given to a party. So, it is not that the that the ECI does not have or cannot exercise its authority.

TSK: Yes, the ECI has the power under the Election Symbols Order to withdraw (recognition). But if the ECI starts withdrawing the symbol for various violations that political parties are indulging in these days, I think most of the parties are likely to lose their symbol at one stroke. It cannot be invoked in all cases; it can only be invoked in very serious cases. Among the candidates and political parties, mere fear of withdrawal of the symbol or filing an FIR doesn't work. Thousands of cases of FIRS are filed and you know how the FIRs are treated.

Over the past few years, there has been a debate on whether the ECI has been able to ensure a level playing field. What do you

PDTA: Here, the point is whether the ECI is using all its powers to deal with situations where senior political leaders while campaigning seem to be violating the MCC. Whether the ECI (in such situations) is acting effectively and applying the MCC and its regulatory aspect uniformly to all the people, whatever position they may hold politically or otherwise, is the question that needs to be debated. It is a serious situation. And all of us know what has been happening during this election.

Social media has become a huge influence as far as campaigning goes. Do you think it needs regulation?

TSK: This is a complex issue. There is need for regulation. How that can be done needs to be discussed with all stakeholders. I'm not saying everything is hunky dory. We have to bring about some changes. The MCC was started with a good intention. It had a lot of positive effect initially, but parties are now becoming more and more aggressive. I think it is time for us to review the contents of the MCC and also to find out methods to improve the regulation of social media, hate speeches, and fake news. But let us clearly understand that the ECI does not have that kind of a power during the election process to swiftly deal with the violations.

PDTA: Social media is unregulated, so some muck also moves through it. But the point is that when there is a some kind of a control over the rest of the media – sections of electronic media and print media - people get a lot of information through social media. Therefore, yes, there should be some healthy regulation, but otherwise social platforms are certainly serving a very important purpose, particularly in a situation like this.



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link

NOTEBOOK

During election time, expect the unexpected

Covering the Lok Sabha elections for the first time can be equally thrilling and daunting

Satvika Mahajan

or a cub reporter who is just finding her feet in the industry, covering any election can be intimidating, and a Lok Sabha one even more so. During election season, there is a constant influx of information and misinformation. There are dozens of speeches to cover, interviews to conduct, and places to be at. Some of these assignments can throw up surprises and involve quick turnarounds. All reporters prepare meticulously before elections, but regardless of the effort, something or the other tends to happen which changes the course of our coverage. In short, we always have to be prepared for the unexpected too.

For instance, just ahead of the polls, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested. This was an unprecedented event that none of us foresaw. On the day of the arrest, I was having a slow news day. But as updates of the Enforcement Directorate reaching the Chief Minister's residence came in, I rushed to the site with my colleagues and saw him being taken away. The arrest landed the Aam Aadmi Party in a crisis and changed its campaign, likely made a difference to public opinion, and affected our coverage of

the elections in the capital too. There were also days when I found myself unprepared to deal with the contradictions in narratives or unable to trace the source of a narrative or belief. In northeast Delhi, for instance, where riots broke out in early 2020 over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, several people I spoke to recounted a particular narrative against the Congress's candidate, Kanhaiya Kumar. People dismissed him as the leader of the "tukde tukde gang" – a pejorative catchphrase used to refer to groups allegedly supporting sedition and secessionism - but when asked where they had heard this, many of them

did not have a proper answer. Similarly, while researching and writing about the candidates in the fray, I

realised that it was difficult to take a call on which aspects about them were important, which ones were unimportant and avoidable, and which ones were perhaps unimportant but still interesting.

Additionally, we reporters must also deal with the fact that there are certain aspects or events in a person's life that cannot be written about due to several factors. For instance, the candidate may have faced a case years ago. But if that case was withdrawn later, do you include it? Similarly, it can be tricky to write about personal details that shaped the candidate's motivations.

One day, despite doing my research and discovering crucial details about the candidates buried in larger stories, I was still caught off guard. During an interview, I asked the candidate many personal questions, including what he does when he takes breaks from campaigning. When I asked him about his children, he paused, unable to speak. I did not realise that he had lost his child. A member of his team answered instead. I quickly changed the subject and we moved back to talking about politics.

Most importantly, I was unaware of the impact of some of these stories on readers. Journalists spend their lives chasing stories, with little time to really look back at the previous day or report. We file so many stories that we even forget about them sometimes. But readers don't forget. Stories, I have come to know, can even change their mind about a particular issue or person. I learned this one day when a reader called me and said, "The profiles you are writing for the candidates in my constituency will decide who I vote for."

To hear that was thrilling, albeit daunting. Since that phone call, while interviewing candidates, I have tried even harder to put myself in the shoes of the people of the constituency and ask questions that the voters may want answered.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Waiting for water



A shepherd pours water for a herd of goats in Malleswaram in Nagarkurnool district of Telangana. India has been in the grip of a severe heatwave. NAGARA GOPAL

FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 31, 1974

Indians for South African Army

Cape Town, May 30: Representatives of the 700,00 South African Indian community have welcomed the announcement that Indians may become part of the South African defence force. A statement has been issued by the Prime Minister, Mr. B.K. Vorster, saying: "The

Government has decided to establish a social service battalion for Indians on similar lines to that of the coloureds."

The Indian service battalion will provisionally be established on Salisbury island as a unit of the Navy. Training of the first Indians will begin in January next year.

Mr. J.N. Reddy, Chairman of the South African Indian Council, said: "We welcome with high praise the decision taken by the Government. This is a step in the right direction. We (Indians) feel part of South Africa."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 31, 1924

Strike at Tinnevely

Trichinopoly, May 31: The South Indian Railway firemen and cleaners have struck work at Trichinopoly on Friday noon. Similar strikes are also reported from Tanjore where it began at 4 p.m. yesterday. The Reserve Police are guarding the junction platform and railway sheds. The ex firemen are being called in of whom about half a dozen have already been registered. The duplicate Trivandrum Express left Trichinopoly with Mr. Vierra, Assistant Traffic Superintendent acting as firemen.



Heat is a Real Damp **Squib for Productivity**

Adaptive strategies to mitigate economic losses

India is particularly vulnerable to losing labour productivity due to heatwaves. A large section of its workforce is engaged in outdoor work, such as agriculture, construction and mining. Spread of irrigation increases humidity levels that add to heat stress. Air pollution reflects some heat and keeps temperatures in check. But as the country cleans up, its workers will be exposed to rising temperatures. By one estimate, every degree rise in temperature above 27° C lowers labour productivity in factories by 2-4%. These effects are more pronounced in northern Indian plains than in the coastal peninsula. The impact on a workforce predominantly engaged in outdoor activity should be more severe.

Roughly, India loses around a quarter of its physical labour supply on very hot days. Added to effects of heatwaves on agricultural output, the impact spills over into in-



flation. Both income growth and price stability in India are at risk from global warming. Even investment is affected by construction and logistics. Size of the informal economy contributes to the problem of keeping the workforce cool enough to be productive. Besides, mitigation through coo-

ling solutions is a partial exercise because it doesn't apply to well over half the country's workers. The other option, changing seasonal migration, could make some parts of the country more productive than others.

While solutions such as cooling and evacuation come with negative externalities, they are necessary steps in addressing the impact of heatwaves. Geographically, the country's population is concentrated in the expanding northern 'heat belt'. Disguised unemployment in agriculture restricts labour mobility, except to urban areas, which, in turn, have a higher carbon footprint. An accelerated switch to RE could cut through most of the issues that contribute to heatwaves pulling down India's labour supply. It's crucial that adaptive strategies emerge before the loss of potential economic output becomes non-linear to rising temperatures.

With Friends of America Like This...

... who needs enemies? Benjamin Netanyahu is making life increasingly hard for the 'leader of the free world'. When in early May, Joe Biden said that Washington would not provide bombs and artillery shells for the Israeli army to invade Rafah in southern Gaza, where some 1.3 mn Palestinians were taking shelter, he didn't reckon that a NYT visual analysis of land fragments of the US-made precision bomb GBU-39 found near the site of an Israeli strike would land at his Pennsylvania Avenue door. Biden's credibility - and the US' as keeper of global stability — is now at stake thanks to ally Israel's belligerent PM who has conflated the sovereign right to defend itself with brutal excessive force against the Palestinian people.



The White House continues to believe that Israel's 'actions' in Rafah haven't crossed 'red lines'. The evidence on display suggests otherwise, unless Washington believes in different coloured lines for different powers. The US, in its continued support to Tel Aviv, looks morally compromised. The other Israeli conflation the US is 'not un-

happy enough' about is Netanyahu equating Palestinians with Hamas, a conflation, ironically, Hamas created and nurtures. The US still has time to dehyphenate 'Netanyahu-Israel' and

realise that withholding military support to Tel Aviv won't weaken US-Israel ties — and its own standing. On its part, Israel must agree with the US-Saudi Arabia proposal for a credible and irreversible path to a Palestinian state in return for normalising Saudi-Israel relations, which were strained after the October 7 Hamas attacks. Such a stand can only benefit Israel. DC doesn't have to switch its friendship with Israel off. It has to get Tel Aviv to dial things down considerably — as a friend.



Without Movies, We'd Be So Ignorant

Cinema — or moving pictures in its many formats — is a wondrously powerful medium. Before the advent of the internet and the likes of YouTube and streaming shows, it was the cinematic experience that gave us an idea of things existing beyond our nose and navel. Take the Empire State Building. Before the 1933 film, King Kong, for instance, people outside New York, and certainly outside the US, didn't know the existence of the then-tallest building in the world. Or of a gigantic ape that had once stood atop it.

The same holds for historical figures. Before the 1979 film, Life of Brian, no one outside a tiny group had heard of the 'other' messiah who was born a stable down and on the same night as Christ. Similarly, without the 1982 film, Gandhi, most of us also wouldn't have known about Richard Attenborough, the film's director, who remarkably didn't misspell his movie title-protagonist's name as 'Ghandi' or 'Gandi' that many non-Indians prior to the film's release and even after it were/have been wont to when spelling it in English. Nor would the world have known about Nathuram Godse, even as the world, including India, still knows very little about Harsh Nayyar who played the ex-RSS member. Hype, in its positive sense of amplification, is a key tool in advocacy. Especially for those who can't have enough of it. Thank god for mass media.

Our cities need granular heat-risk data, hyperlocal heat action plans down to the ward level

Coolness Lies in the Details



The Edit Page

KumKum Dasgupta

n Wednesday, Mungeshpur, 50 km north of New Delhi, became the top trending news on social media for a while when the Indian Meteorological Department's weather station reported a maximum temperature of 52.9°C, a record for any location in India. IMD later said that the reading may have been due to sensor error or local factors, as it was significantly higher than readings in the nearest station.

But regardless of whether the Mungeshpur result holds up or not, it's pretty obvious to anyone facing the heat in these parts of the country now that India's megacities are facing increased heat stress due to urbanisation and humidity, with slower cooling at night compared to a decade ago. At New Delhi's Safdarjung station, the city's base station, temperatures hit 46.8° C, the highest in 80 years and the second highest since 1901, 6° C above normal. These are certainly not achhe din on the weather front.

Two new reports corroborate the role of our 'glass and cement' cities in pushing up the mercury:

► Centre for Science and Environment's study, 'Decoding the Urban Heat Stress Among Indian Cities', released on May 23, analysed 23 years of data (Jan 2001-Apr 2024) from six major cities. It attributes the heat crisis to rising humidity and increased built-up areas.

Mumbai's air temperature and humidity have increased, the report says, worsening heat stress. Summers have registered a 0.6° C increase in decadal

It's time the

16th Finance

Commission

states to beef

up their heat

earmarks

funds for

resilience

average ambient air temperature, and relative humidity has gone up by 7% between 2001-10 and 2014-23. Cooling down of land surface temperature between day and night is down by 24%.



Hot couture

Mumbai's built-up area has increased from 38.4% in 2003 to 52.1% in 2023. Green cover has decreased from 35.8% in 2003 to 30.2% in 2023.

► An IIT-Bhubaneswar School of Earth, Ocean and Climate Sciences study. 'Urbanisation and Regional Climate Change-Linked Warming of Indian Cities', published in Nature Cities on May 15, found that urbanisation alone is responsible for 60% of the warming trend in Indian cities.

Almost 100 Indian cities have Heat veloped India's first Action Plans (HAPs). But scientists are now advocating 'hyperlocal assessments' down to the ward level, and customised solutions for each segment of the population to tackle heat. While present HAPs have been effective in reducing mortalities following their implementation from 2016, they have their shortcomings.

"They lack granular-level heat-risk data, and they also don't account for humidity and the impact of warm nights, 'says Vishwas Chitale, senior pro-



partment. Its objectives include:

ping vulnerable populations. to ensure zero human mortalities. ce and innovative cooling solutions.

ge of variations in vulnerabilities, and risks within the city to prioritise their

actions. A comprehensive HAP requi-

risk populations, a factor missing in al-

res understanding sub-city-level at-

most 95% of Indian HAPs, 'he adds. But some cities are doing/planning exactly that. In Maharashtra's Thane, CEEW, in collaboration with the city administration, has deward-level HAP. It provides detailed heat-risk mapping down to the level of 'prabhag samitis' and outlines specific mitigation, preparedness and response strategies for each stakeholder and de-

to prioritise their actions Granular mapping of heat hazards under various climate change scenarios, establishing local heat-health thresholds for early warnings, and map-

Most warnings are issued

at broad regional scales,

while decision-makers

require detailed knowledge

of variations in

vulnerabilities within the city

Designing effective preparedness and response strategies, with a focus on health and disaster management, Reducing heat-health risks, heat stress and heat-related illnesses by implementing robust tracking, surveillan-

Long-term reduction of economic

losses through region-specific heat riskmitigation strategies.

▶ Building capacity of stakeholders to prepare for, respond to, and review the implementation of HAP.

Establishing city-specific heat thresholds based on biometeorological

 Recalibrating alert systems based on established thresholds to provide colour-coded, impact-based early war-

 Developing a ward-level heat-risk index based on the risk assessment framework of the Fifth Assessment Report of UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR5) to map at-risk wards.

 Combining climate, socioeconomic and geospatial indicators to map factors leading to high risk in each ward. Creating a responsibility matrix for each line department for mitigation, preparedness and response actions.

Developing effective communication strategies for each ward.

Chitale, however, emphasises that, along with sub-city-level HAPs, cities will need much more to tackle the heat crisis. They will need:

More data on heat's impact on health.

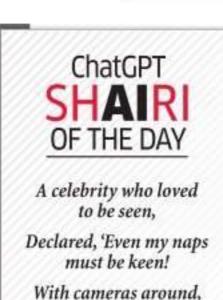
Additional human resources and financial capacity to design and implement HAPs. Policy push from the highest levels. "The 15th Finance Commission earmarked funds for tackling air pollution. It is time to discuss whether the 16th Finance Commission should earmark funds for states to beef up their heat resilience, says Chitale.

Strengthening health infrastructure, en-

suring all hospitals have cold rooms and dedicated staff to treat patients suffering from heat-related issues. Several hospitals in cities in south India, and Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in Delhi, have set up dedicated wards to treat heat stroke patients.

With different parts of a city warming at varying levels due to local factors, it's imperative that HAPs also go local to mitigate the effects of heat stress and safeguard vulnerable populations.

kumkum.dasgupta@timesgroup.com



I'll be snoozing renowned,

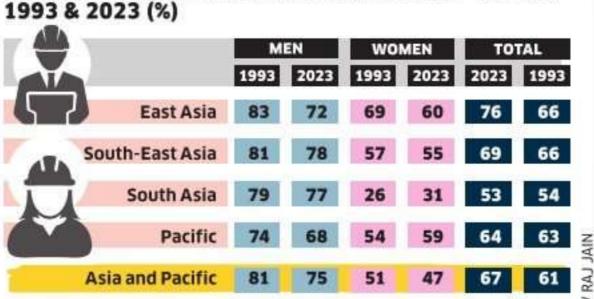
For my dreams are the best

ever screened!'

Despite raising retirement ages, total labour force participation in the Asia-Pacific region fell from 67% in 1991 to about 61% in 2023, according to a report by ILO. It's projected to fall to 55% by 2050. A snapshot...

Asia's Labour Force Participation

Asia-Pacific labour force participation rate* by sex,



*A measure of the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work Source: Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2024

Bell Curves R Prasad



Our guns are strictly for human use; the monkey is for representational purposes only.

Tackling FTA Attractions & BLISSTECH



Vivek Johri

Since India withdrew from Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations in 2019, it took New Delhi almost two years to restart free trade negotiations with trading partners. The process resumed with the signing of India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) in March 2021, followed by India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreemen (ECTA) in 2022, and India-European Free Trade Association (EFTA) pact in February this year. Negotiations on trade pacts are on with Britain, the EU, Oman and Peru.

Instead of entering into agreements with large trading blocs like RCEP where the level of ambition may be too high, and finding a common denominator with several partners challenging-India's plan seems to focus on bilateral arrangements where reciprocity may be easier. Although such a diversification strategy can't be faulted in a multipolar world where WTO negotiations are almost at a standstill, we must contend with challenges if these future arrangements are to yield robust and

meaningful gains. Diverse basket Most trade negotiations have graduated from trade in goods (such as customs tariffs and rules of origin) to comprehensive agreements for economic cooperation, straddling market access for services, investment, safeguard measures, trade facilitation, and technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures. This means that instead of reckoning

pluses and minuses in one negotiating track—namely, market access for goods an evaluation is necessary across

tracks to assess the overall balance. Multiple stakeholders Number of domestic constituencies that are impacted and need to be consulted has multiplied. This calls for more agile institutional mechanisms. Further, new concepts and standards are constantly emerging in each track, and ambition is growing. For instance, with their greater integration into global value chains, many trading partners expect that rules of origin need to loosen up both for naturally produced goods and those

manufactured by industry. While each bilateral negotiation is unique, it is natural for a trading partner to demand what has been conceded to another recently. For example, any new concessions to Australia, the UAE or EFTA will likely have a precedent value for other ongoing or future negotiations.

▶ Tariff asymmetry Indian tariff levels for industrial goods are higher than those of trading partners with whom negotiations are being made. Given the WTO compulsions law — which recognises an FTA only if it has substantial trade coverage and predominantly envisages tariff elimination, and not just reduction — it is evident that we need to concede greater ground compared to our negotiating partners.



Prima facie, this appears to be a challenge as we have historically engendered a diverse industrial basket, a large segment comprising MSMEs. But with a clever negotiating strategy, this could be converted into a strength where we can leverage concessions made in this to extract

gains in other areas of our interest. An example is the case of ECTA, where India negotiated a definitive investment commitment from Switzerland in exchange for tariff concessions. This is an untested idea. Creating inverted duty rates vis-à-vis general or MFN tariffs is another challenge, given our tariff structure.

These challenges are manageable. We need a coherent strategy to convert them into opportunities.

▶ Be proactive Identify, articulate and become demandeurs of offensive trade interests, rather than merely being reactive and defensive in containing the perceived damage from concessions. This presupposes broad-based and meaningful consultations with trade, industry and other stakeholders, so that it's possible to come to a shared understanding about real and significant threats, and delineate the most promising opportunities around which a well-thought-out negotiating strategy can be crafted.

Onboard domain experts A permanent, right-sized institutional mechanism in GoI that brings together domain expertise and diverse skill sets, such as trade data analytics with varying granularity, mapping of export capacity with demand in other markets and domestic supply gaps where it would be prudent to ease market access; likely impact assessment of tariff and nontariff measures; negotiating strategy; legal drafting, etc, is imperative.

GoI is reportedly preparing a detailed operating procedure defining the roles and responsibilities of different agencies. This is a right and timely step.

The writer is former chairman, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs

Carried Off By a Table Fan

In this sweltering heat, we know how much the air conditioner is non-negotiable. But there's a joy we may have forgotten about — facing the wind made by a whirling table fan. This pleasure holds the magic of a natural phenomenon inside the protective, charmed circle of your home. The fan's breeze is you sitting in a sofa and, yet, if you close your eyes, soaking in the cool windy breeze of a choppy sea coast.

With its rhythmic oscillations, the table fan feeds you all the cool air you crave. And, unlike the AC, it does it with



display. If you wear your hair long, you could well be having your head outside a speeding car window, letting the strands fly like a fluttering flag in the wind

The wind the fan generates isn't just about cooling you - that the AC does more effectively. It's about making you feel movement, liberated as the wind tousles your hair, and washes over your face.

So, turn on that fan even as your AC does the needful. Tilt towards this windmill next to you.



THE SPEAKING TREE Pleasure

SWAMI SIVANANDA

And Pain

What is pleasure for you is pain for another. What is pleasure for you now is pain after some time. The first two cups of milk give you pleasure. The third cup induces disgust, nausea and retching. Milk does not give pleasure during fever. Therefore, pleasure is not in the objects but in the imagination or inclination of the mind.

Pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, are false imaginations of the mind. Mind is a false, illusory product. Conceptions of the mind also must, therefore, be false. Pleasure and pain are in the mind only. It is subjective. Things when longed for, are pleasant, but

are bitter if not longed for Desi-

res are the cause of pleasures.... Ignorant persons attribute their pleasure to external objects. That is a serious blunder, indeed. Really, there is no pleasure in objects. There is neither pleasure nor pain in objects. It is all mental creation, mental perception, mental jugglery. It is only the mental attitude or a certain kind of mental behaviour towards objects that brings joy or grief, pleasure or pain. Maya has her powerful seat

in the imagination of the mind. When you are in acute agony, a cup of coffee, milk or tea does not give you any pleasure. When you are in acute agony, the whole world that appeared to you to be full of bliss while in good health, appears quite dreary.... A real thing must give pleasure to everybody at all times. Does it not?

> June 1, 2024, marks the centenary of Swami Sivananda's sannyasa diksha

Chat Room

When Copyright Is Right to Copy

Apropos Innovate, Not Copy-Paste' by TK Arun (May 29), right from the school days, children are not encouraged to come up with innovation or original ideas. A departure from the tried and tested is looked upon as trying to act smart by authoritative figures, including teachers. So, by the time they reach maturity, all the appetite for innovation is lost. Research and pure academics are generally regarded as a waste even by the family since there are no immediate gains or returns. Neither do most Indian companies focus on research, considering it a useless expense. With Indians excelling at copying products and processes, how can we aspire to be vishwaguru?

ANTHONY HENRIQUES Mumbai

In reference to Sankaracharya being called 'Sarvgnya', the Upanishads reveal the open nature of discussions that happened between guru and shishya, between the knowledge-seekers and -givers. That Sankaracharya was a towering religious apostle is not diminished by certain incidents in his life that point to his own learning from unconven-



tional sources. Hinduism has schools of thought that are united in the spirit of devotion and certain practices, but differ in other aspects.

stirring intellectual and informed debates among themselves, all the time. Perhaps that intellectual vigour is not prominent today even in religious circles. Innovative instincts being comparatively less today has to be attributed to the current academics and the supporting systems that revel in conformity, not questioning and reasoning.

V GOPINATH Chennai

Brands Ad to **Free Content**

Apropos the news report, 'Is

There A Future for Ad-Free TV?" (Brand Equity, May 29-Jun 4), one isn't sure about ad-free TV but, indeed, ads have made TV free. Recently, Jio Cinema streamed IPL for free — to 59 crore viewers live—but still made big bucks by banking on ads. However, despite cricket being a religion in India, its OTT viewers don't appre ciate ads. Revenue models will evolve over time but one must remember, 'If something is free, you are the product.' So, paying for content will keep you safe.

SHRUTI SHARMA

Uijain Letters to the editor may be addressed to

editet@timesgroup.com



FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2024



A WELCOME DEVELOPMENT

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman

S&P Global Ratings' revision of its outlook on India from 'stable' to 'positive' is a welcome development. This reflects India's solid growth performance and a promising economic outlook for the coming years

Local stimulus

Domestic liquidity is fuelling the rally in the markets, the trend is likely to sustain

NDIA'S MARKET CAPITALISATION recently crossed the \$5-trillion mark, putting it on a par with the Hong Kong market. Becoming the world's fourth biggest market is no mean achievement. Importantly, the rally from \$4 trillion to \$5 trillion came about in less than six months and was driven overwhelmingly by domestic liquidity. While domestic institutional investors (DIIs) invested a shade over ₹2 trillion, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) put in just over a fifth of that at close to ₹45,000 crore. FPIs have been playing a smaller role in India's stock market. In fact, at 16.6%, the share of FPIs in India's companies now stands at a 12-year low having fallen steadily since 19.9% in FY21; it was lower at 15.6% in FY12. The dramatic increase in domestic investments into the stock markets, in the past couple of years, is reflected in the growing contributions by retail investors into equity schemes of mutual funds. Data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India shows that inflows to systematic investment plans (SIPs) have averaged ₹18,500 crore in the last 12 months or so, going on to hit a high of ₹20,371 crore in April. Between FY17 and FY24, money flow into SIPs has risen nearly five-fold to nearly ₹2 trillion with the number of investors at 87 million.

This is the result of a sharp shift in savings by households to financial $savings-from\ physical\ savings-and\ in\ particular\ to\ equities. As\ Gold$ man Sachs has pointed out, there is an ongoing trend of financialisation of household savings, where within financial savings, allocations shifted from banks towards non-banks, especially into retirement savings. The overall AUM or assets under management of retirement savings, insurance, and mutual funds rose at a compound annual growth rate of 15% over the last 10 years, outpacing the CAGR for bank deposits of 9%.

FPIs, for their part, have pared exposure to India in the last few years. They sold stocks worth over \$17 billion and \$6 billion in FY22 and FY23 respectively, but subsequently bought shares worth \$25 billion in FY24. In 2024 so far, FPIs have sold a net \$3.07 billion in India whereas the local institutions have risked some \$25 billion. The reason for this, as veteran fund managers point out, is the general disenchantment with emerging markets (EMs) as an asset class. This has been largely on account of the weaknesses in markets like China, Brazil, and South Africa rather than any specific dislike for the Indian market. Money has moved into the US where the S&P and Nasdaq have done well. Moreover, they believe Indian stocks are hugely overvalued and are also possibly staying light ahead of the results of the general elections. However, it is unlikely they will not increase exposure to India in the future given the sound macro-fundamentals and large universe of stocks.

At the same time, given how the allocation of savings by Indian households to non-bank assets is well below the levels seen in the developed markets and even EMs like Korea and Taiwan, increasingly more money is expected to flow into retirement savings over the next decade. The share of domestic liquidity being channelled into equities, therefore, could well trump FPI inflows into stocks. This will cushion the Indian market against sudden outflows of money, leaving it more stable.

DANGEROUSLY INCOHERENT

THE US NARROW VIEW ON TRADE POLICY AND STANCE AGAINST CHINA GOES AGAINST GLOBALISATION

US' politics-trade masquerade

HE UNITED STATES does not have a coherent trade policy. It has a political strategy masquerading as trade policy that has taken dead aim at China. Unsurprisingly, China has responded in kind. With the two superpowers drawing on their allies for support — the US leaning on the G7 and China turning to the Global South — economic decoupling is the least of our problems.

It is easy to blame US Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden for this unfortunate turn of events — Trump for firing the first shot in the Sino-American trade war, and Biden for doubling down on protectionism. Yet the problems predate both presidents they stem largely from a decades-long misunderstanding of the role foreign trade plays in open economies.

Politicians tend to see trade balances in black and white: surpluses are good, deficits are bad. For the US, where the merchandise trade balance has been in deficit for all but two years since 1970, trade is viewed as bad — a source of leakage in an otherwise strong economy that puts pressure on jobs, companies, communities, and incomes.

From this perspective, America sees itself as the hapless victim of others' transgressions. Japan was the culprit in the 1980s. Now it's China. The US also blames the World Trade Organization, which it has effectively neutered by blocking appointments to the WTO Appellate Body for the past five years.

Blame is about politics, not economics. Students of economics are taught almost immediately to respect a basic premise of national income accounting: that a country's trade balance is equal to the difference between investment and saving. It follows that any savings-short economy wanting to invest and grow must borrow surplus savings from abroad, which requires balance-of-payments and trade

STEPHEN S ROACH Faculty member, Yale University and former chairman,

Morgan Stanley Asia

deficits with the rest of the world. This conceptual framework fits the

US economy to a tee. In 2023, America's net domestic savings rate — the combined depreciation-adjusted savings of individuals, businesses, and the government sector — was negative, at -0.3% of national income, compared to a post-World War II average of 6.4%. This has happened only once before: during and immediately after the global financial crisis of 2008-09.

This leads to a politi-**Notwithstanding US** cally uncomfortable verdict on trade: in keeping leaders' efforts to with national income convince voters that identities, savings-short they are fixing the America runs massive country's trade external deficits. In 2023, problems, the very current-account deficit was equivalent to notion of a "China 3% of GDP, and the merfix" rings hollow chandise trade deficit was 3.9% of GDP — more than double the postwar averages of 1.3% and 1.7%, respectively.

Blaming others for this problem is a cop-out. Without a shortfall of domestic savings, there would be no trade deficit. And that shortfall is largely made at home — the result of outsize federal budget deficits that are counted as negative savings in the national income accounts. After ballooning during the Covid-19 recession to 13.3% of GDP in 2020-21, the budget deficit remained stuck at 5.8% of GDP in 2022-23, nearly double the 3.2% average from 1962 to 2019. Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office's baseline

projections suggest that the deficit share will remain around its current level for the next decade.

This outcome is not China's fault. It is a result of conscious decisions by US politicians. Yet Trump pinned the blame for America's widening merchandise trade deficit squarely on China during the 2016 presidential campaign, seizing on the point that China's share of the deficit had soared

from 20% to nearly 50% between 1999 and 2015. Tariffs quickly followed Trump's victory.

On one level, this strategy appeared to work. The tariffs shrunk China's share of the US merchandise trade deficit by \$138.8 billion from 2018 to 2023. However, over the same period, the overall deficit grew by \$181 billion —

precisely what one would expect from a country with a falling savings rate. Excluding China, America's merchandise trade deficit widened by \$319 billion from 2018 to 2023, as net imports from Mexico, Vietnam, Canada, South Korea, Taiwan, India, Ireland, and Germany surged.

In other words, notwithstanding US leaders' efforts to convince voters that they are fixing the country's trade problems, the very notion of a "China fix" rings hollow. By targeting China, all the US is doing is diverting trade away from a low-cost producer to

higher-cost countries — the equivalent of a tax hike on American consumers that exacerbates the added costs of Chinese tariffs. At the same time, Washington is perfectly content to run massive budget deficits that will depress domestic savings even further, leading to increased trade diversion.

If only the story stopped there. The trade conflict has allowed Washington to launch a full-throttle political assault on China. Not only have national-security concerns given rise to a tech war, but the excesses of Sinophobia have increased the risks of a cyber war.

Moreover, the US has just announced another round of so-called Section 301 tariffs on Chinese goods, targeting electric vehicles, solar panels, and batteries, all sectors where America has little, if any, comparative advantage. This will compromise America's green-energy objectives at a time when the effects of climate change are increasingly apparent. It also reeks of hypocrisy. After all, US complaints about China's unfair subsidisation of its alternative energy initiatives conveniently overlook the generous US subsidies that have long benefitted companies such as Tesla.

Free trade and globalisation have made the world a better place. That conclusion, which became accepted wisdom in the postwar period, is now considered heresy. The resulting incoherence of US trade policy — flailing at savings-driven trade deficits, steeped in national-security paranoia, and fearful of relying on China's so-called excess capacity to combat climate change - risks making the world a worse place. Global stewardship is in tatters, and the dangers of superpower conflict are now painfully reminiscent of the 1930s.

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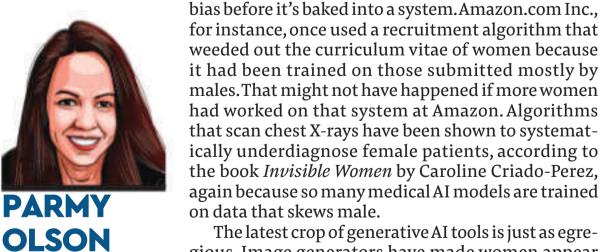
Flirty ChatGPT shows ugly truth about women in tech

IT WAS HARD not to cringe at the demo of ChatGPT's latest upgrade. Instead of showcasing a chatbot that sounded more reliable, OpenAI gave the world one that hit all the notes of an obsequious female, giggling at the antics of its male researchers and praising their outfits. The resulting outrage over the voice's similarity to Scarlett Johansson missed a deeper point. The world's leading AI builders are creating software that reinforces stereotypes about women. And there's a big reason why: There are simply too few of them involved. At OpenAI, just 18% of staff working on the development of its technology

are women, according to data collected for Bloomberg Opinion by business intelligence firm Glass.ai, which used machine-learning technology to scrutinise tech-company websites and thousands of LinkedIn profiles of AI-focused employees. (To identify and gather details about AI employees, Glass.ai's software crawled the websites of tech companies and scanned the LinkedIn profiles of their hundreds of thousands of employees.) The creator of ChatGPT was the worst among other leading firms in the survey, conducted in May 2024. Although OpenAI's chief technology officer, Mira Murati, is a woman (and

briefly was chief executive officer during last year's drama when Sam Altman was fired), just 122 of the company's 686 staff whose job involves building AI systems are female. The discrepancy was even worse a year ago, when Glass.ai did a similar survey of LinkedIn profiles, finding that women made up just 12% of OpenAI's research staff.

When women and ethnic minorities don't play a role in building critical technology like AI, there's far less chance that someone will call out potential



Bloomberg

The latest crop of generative AI tools is just as egregious. Image generators have made women appear more sexualised than men, while an investigative report by *Bloomberg News* found that Stable Diffu-

sion, the open-source AI image maker, tended to forget women existed altogether. It produced three times more images of men than women. Men dominated pictures of high-paying occupations, like engineers, CEOs or doctors, while women were depicted in low-paying jobs like housekeepers and cashiers.

None of this will surprise female AI researchers familiar with the field's legacy of objectifying women. Even before the recent generative AI boom, academics were known to test the performance of their models by using them to put make-up on images of women's faces, or by swapping out their jeans for miniskirts, according to a recent blog post by Sasha Luccioni, a researcher at open-source AI firm Hugging Face.

Whenever she spoke up about these methods, Luccioni says she faced pushback. "It was just a benchmark after all," she writes, pointing out that in academia, women are just as woefully underrepresented, making up 12% of machine-learning researchers.

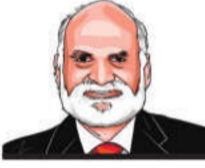
This is the kind of complex problem that takes years to solve thanks to its roots in the educational system and systemic cultural norms. But OpenAI and its peers could hinder many modern-day efforts to level the playing field, like bringing more girls and women into STEM industries, if their systems continue to perpetuate stereotypes. Rooting out the bias in the data they use to train their algorithms is one step toward fixing the problem. Another is to simply hire more female researchers to resolve the chronic imbalance. Expect their future prod-

ucts to be more cringeworthy — and even harmful — if they don't.

Road map for a healthier India

afflict a large portion

of our population



ANIL RAJPUT

Chairperson, Assocham National CSR Council and resident, corporate affairs, ITC Ltd. Views are personal

INDIA IS TODAY on the cusp of tremendous all-round development. While its stellar economic performance is clearly visible, it is very encouraging to note that the trends in the area of health also look quite promising. The government's people-centric policies such as Ayushman Bharat Yojana and Fit India are giving a tremendous thrust to its overall vision of a healthier country. Over the last 10 years, we have been witnessing a robust all-round implementation of unique and far-reaching ideas enviincidence of this sioned by the government, which has deadly disease among also scaled up its efforts to deliver women. health services in a nation that is home to over 1.4 billion people.

Various reports on India's efforts to address and mitigate health issues have been released, and have provided valuable insights and flagged concerns about certain aspects of this subject. One such report, titled "Health of the Nation 2024", an initiative of the Apollo Group, has made some interesting and significant observations. This report sensitises people about the need for preemptive health check-ups to ensure early detection of diseases.

As much as we may want diseases to go away, the fact is that there are some serious problems: there are health trends and certain malaises that afflict a large portion of our population and require our unfailing attention. If we look at the incidence of lung cancer in

India, the decade between 1982 and 1992 witnessed its sharpest rise. Over the years, its prevalence has been 20 times higher among women than in men with their exposure to cooking fumes in rural areas being a leading contributor and hazard. Realising this, the government has consistently intensified its efforts to provide cooking gas to all. I believe that in the years ahead, such well-thought-out steps will doubt lower the

Another potentially lethal threat to the young and old, male

and female alike that is present in varying degrees and cannot be avoided in our busy lives, is stress. It leads to a number of spiralling problems and creates or aggravates many ail-

ments. The best example is its impact on the two most common and dangerous non-communicable diseases (NCDs) hypertension and diabetes. The report says that chronic stress alone increases the incidence of hypertension and diabetes by 1.3 to 2 times, with women again being more susceptible. Therefore, for a nation that has the highest number of diabetics and cardiac cases,

the role of stress and its reduction requires our unflinching attention. All this becomes critical as stress is impacting people at a younger age at a time India is the youngest nation by demography in the world. In my view, the role of stress busters cannot be overemphasised. One powerful stress buster is yoga, which is irrefutably backed by science. Over the past 10 years, it has been propagated like never before with

increasing emphasis on its relevance in today's As much as we may world. In the words of Prime Minister Narenwant diseases to go dra Modi, who is credited away, the fact is that with mainstreaming this there are some serious ancient practice, "Yoga problems. There are creates a healthy and health trends and powerful society where the collective energy is certain malaises that much more."

> India has around 101 million diabetics. Also, one in three have prediabetes, with the pro-

gression from pre-diabetes to uncontrolled diabetes being around 15 years. Having said that, the situation would have become nearly unmanageable had it not been for the comprehensive health policies of the government over the past 10 years. The data in the report from 2016-2023 clearly indicates that India has been able to keep the percentage of diabetic population over 45 years of age

at around 36%, and at the same time the population under 45 has been constant at 12%. Considering that a huge segment of our population is under 45 years of age, I'm sure this percentage will come down further owing to the wellplanned policies of the government.

Raising awareness about testing and monitoring can

contribute greatly in supplementing government

efforts to control non-communicable diseases

One area that can contribute significantly in supplementing the government's efforts to control several NCDs is raising awareness about the critical need for testing and monitoring. Assocham's CSR Council, through its Illness to Wellness initiative, has been doing this for over a decade. It has organised more than 475 camps, 125 interactive sessions, and eight conferences featuring over 450 health experts engaging on a plethora of topics, besides emphasising dissemination of information, focussed and expert views, opinions and recommendations. The campaign continued its uninterrupted run, and despite limitations organised over 95 webinars during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also scaled up activities and organised two back-to-back awareness summits in which top medical professionals from varied fields took part. Mass access to affordable testing

holds the key, as it will lessen the health burden faced by policymakers as well as ensure much greater contribution from the citizens towards nation-building in the years to come. And a healthier India will be a stronger India.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A welcome upgrade?

Apropos of "Small consolation", while the upward revision of India's outlook by S&P Global is welcome, it may not do much to halt the current trend of foreign direct investments in India tapering off. It is strange that whenever there is a downgrade we usually term the ratings as inconsequential, but as soon as there is an upgrade, the government of the day takes it as a thumbs-up to its

policies. Rating agencies, though not infallible, are the yardstick by which many foreign institutional investors base their investment decisions. It remains to be seen if this upgrade will give a fillip to foreign capital in investments and not just in the stock markets.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra Doubts and debates

Debates and discussions are necessary to ensure a level playing

field in elections. They help opposition parties to make inroads and prevent the ruling parties from using their dominance over the government. Though digital media debates take place daily, because they are partisan these discussions do not contribute much. There may be some doubts in the minds of citizens. If they are given a chance to question the candidates, it may clarify positions. An entire new generation of electors, who are dependent on technology and

needs a full debate over various issues. Dynamic urbanisation is rapidly changing India's politics forever — roti-kapda-makaan is no longer what voters want, neither do they want empty promises from politicians. We have moved to sadak, bijli, sehat, and padhai. Thus, debates are very much necessary. —SK Khosla, Chandigarh

globalisation, has come of age and

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{ OUR TAKE }

Getting ready for heatwaves

India must look at both short- and mediumterm measures to mitigate the toll heat takes

crushing heatwave that began more than a week ago has become unbearable since Monday. In the national Capital, the maximum broke an 80-year record with readings between 45.2°C and 49.1°C. India Meteorological Department (IMD) data showed that much of north India was in the grip of heatwave or severe heatwave conditions. In Delhi, power consumption surpassed records and desperate families mobbed water tankers after their taps ran dry. A 40-year-old labourer who lived in a room with no air cooling died at a hospital during the week and the administration imposed fines on wasteful use of water and said construction workers must be given paid time off during the peak daytime hours.

The scorching end to May comes after the eighth hottest April recorded in India since 1901. Scientists said an unusual, rapid switch from El Nino to La Nina conditions is likely to blame, but its effects have certainly been exacerbated by the climate crisis. In April, IMD predicted the country could record more than double the number of heatwaves than in a usual year, before a more bountiful than average monsoon takes hold. Study after study has warned that such summers will become more common. In one of the latest studies, from the Imperial College London's Grantham Institute, experts estimated human-caused climate crisis had made heatwaves 30 times more likely and 2°C hotter.

The implications of such a future span not just human health, but the economy and society at large. Millions of people will be left to the mercy of the elements, unable to afford ambient cooling equipment or the power required to run them. Many will be forced to work through gruelling days, as those in unorganised labour-intensive sectors typically are made to. Vulnerable people — children, the elderly and those with existing health conditions or are pregnant — will be at risk even when they are not exerting themselves. Farm yields will drop and water and power scarcities will worsen, inevitably leading to public anger. This summer has demonstrated that these are not mere hypotheticals. India must now look at both short-term and medium-term measures to mitigate the toll heat takes, exploring ideas such as community cooling centres and legally enforceable restrictions on heatrelated activities. India cannot afford the same approach it has had till now to fighting another environmental crisis — air pollution — which has till now been a losing battle.

A de jure upgrade for Indian economy

¬ lobal rating agency S&P updated India's sovereign outlook to "positive" after almost a decade. The upgrade has been done in the wake of robust growth prospects, improvement in the quality of government expenditure and expectations of broad continuity in policies.

While rating agencies play a big role in sovereign debt markets and driving overall investor sentiment about countries, the latest decision is more a de jure recognition of the fact that India has emerged as a bright spot in an otherwise turbulent and uncertain economic global environment. India being the fastest growing major economy in the world, occupying a strong position in the growing China+1 readjustment in global value chains, having seen as enjoying a large demographic dividend, and pulling large investments in infrastructure development are some of the factors which have been driving up India's stock among global investors. While the government has welcomed the upgrade, it needs to be underlined that our economic policy establishment has also been critical of the approach of these rating agencies in the past. Such scepticism vis-à-vis sovereign ratings is desirable as long as deviations from prescribed economic orthodoxy are driven by political economy considerations which prioritise long-term gains for the economy from shortterm palliatives. RBI's decision to keep interest rates low during the pandemic when inflation was running above its target range and the decision to significantly breach FRBM norms to provide relief to the poorest people are some such examples.

To be sure, there is no denying the fact that the rating upgrade can bring tangible gains to India in terms of lower borrowing costs. It is all the more significant given the fact that India is going to be included in international bond indices from this year onwards.

BEYOND THE BYTE } Rajdeep Sardesai



Ten key takeaways from the elections

The campaign suggests that electoral democracy is alive in India even if constitutional democracy appears weakened

fter crisscrossing the

country for the last eight

weeks, here are 10 key

takeaways from an elec-

tion that reveal the strengths and weaknesses of Indian electoral democracy. One, if there is one common pan-India strand that stands out in this election, it remains the Modi factor. The Prime Minister (PM) looms large as both a uniquely polarising and stabilising figure. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s "Modi ki guarantee" slogan is designed to make this election de facto presidential, where the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)'s 543 candidates are dwarfed by the larger-thanlife presence of just one man. Every roadside conversation eventually turns to whether Modi has done enough in the last 10 years to deserve another five. If mandate 2014 was driven by a desire for change and 2019 by an overarching sense of muscular nationalism, this election is primarily about a personality cult that towers above all

Two, if the BJP has made this elec-

tion about a One Leader, One Nation narrative, the Opposition has tried to make this as local as possible and, to some extent, succeeded in their effort. paper leaks in Uttar Pradesh (UP) or onion farmers in Nashik protesting export controls or micro enterprises in Coimbatore raising Goods and Services Tax concerns, this election has shown the limits to seeking uniformity in a diverse country. The final vote may be less fragmented, but at least the street conversations reflect a

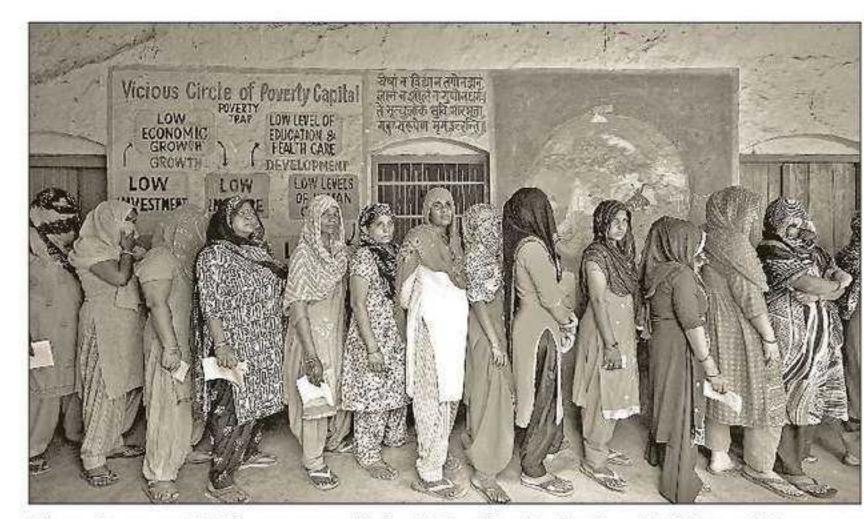
healthy plurality of opinion. Three, the politics of fear has replaced the politics of hope as a recurrent theme. The PM initiated this lurch into darkness by likening the Congress manifesto to that of the Muslim League. Then be it mangalsutra or mujra, the coarse language is meant to stoke prejudice amongst the majority community towards Muslims, a familiar trope for a party whose core base is galvanised by Muslim-bashing. The Congress warning that "samvidhan khatre mein hai" (Constitution is in danger) and the BJP might take away reservations is also driven by a fear factor. Just how the caste-communal matrix eventually plays out is uncertain but, more reassuringly, divisive emotional appeals have less impact on the ground than in TV studios.

Four, the battle for guarantees reveals the increasingly transactional

nature of electoral politics. Economists may warn against freebies, but for a vast majority of Indians living on the margins, free ration, an extra ₹500 in Then be it students complaining of the bank account, or a free bus ride are seen as genuine benefits. Not surprisingly, Rahul Gandhi's khatakhat (staccato) slew of promises gets him instant applause rather than a *mohabbat-ki*dukan monologue. This election is witnessing uncontrolled competitive populism: A mai-baap sarkar is still expected to be the ultimate provider.

> Five, vikas or development is seen through a prism of class and geography. The gleaming highways are picture-perfect for the urban middle class but village roads remain less motorable. There is visible start-up energy across urban sprawls, less so in rural India. The super-rich are eyeing a golden visa in Dubai while the farmer in eastern UP wants a solution to awaara pashu (stray cattle). The aspirational lifestyle of the affluent versus basic livelihood anxieties for the poor, the contrast in a grossly unequal society could not be starker. The inequality doesn't just extend to the rural-urban divide, but North vs South and East vs West too. Even an average school or primary health centre in a south Indian state appears better equipped than those across the Hindi heartland.

> Six, the disconnect between the leaders and citizens has only widened. The lal batti Ambassador has been



There is a new MY in town and it isn't Muslim-Yadav but Mahila and Yuva AFP

replaced by a fuel-guzzling convoy of photo op there, the average neta is a distant, inaccessible figure for increasingly disenchanted voters. The assets of many rent-seeking *netas* seem to multiply exponentially every five years while their constituents struggle to make ends meet.

Seven, politics no longer seems to attract the best and brightest. Creeping cynicism over *netagiri* being driven by naked self-aggrandisement has meant fewer mass leaders who can actually make a difference on the ground. Not surprisingly, it's the regional leaders who stand out, far more confident in their sense of rooted identity than those who flash their ministerial privileges in the national Capital.

Eight, there is a new MY in town and it isn't Muslim-Yadav but Mahila and Yuva. These are the two key demographics that could prove decisive in 2024. Women voters have a greater agency now than ever before in making independent choices: The she voter is the core labharthi (beneficiary) constituency for all parties. The younger voter is restless, unwilling to take electoral promises at face value. Not surprisingly, the loudest street voices of dissent in this election are heard

amongst the young. Nine, social media is now an active

player in the political contest. If 2019 SUVs. A cursory wave here, a quick was India's first WhatsApp election, in 2024 it is YouTube videos and Instagram reels that have taken centre stage. Young adults in every mohalla across the country are devouring content on their mobile phones, their opinions being shaped by short viral videos. In an age of disinformation and hyper-partisanship, social media is the

great disruptor. Ten, electoral democracy is not dead even if constitutional democracy appears weakened. This election has seen fiercer competition than anticipated, the Opposition finding a voice and even a narrative that has forced a domineering government to respond. There may be no level-playing field in terms of access to institutional power and monetary resources, but at least voters still have a mind of their own with a boundless capacity to surprise and confound. It is the more silent voter who may have the last laugh on

judgment day. Post-script: I have stayed away from predicting the final electoral outcome, leaving the number-crunching to the exit pollsters. But here is a hint: Amidst heightened state-level competition, expect a clear-cut national verdict.

Rajdeep Sardesai is a senior journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

Legal deterrence must to ensure public safety

Neelam

Krishnamoorthy

his past week, India witnessed two major man-made tragedies, one in the TRP Gaming Zone, Rajkot, where 33 people, including young children, lost their lives, and the other at Baby Care Hospital, New Delhi, where seven infants died.

Tragedy struck at the TRP Gaming Zone when the venue was bustling with visitors. The fire that swept through the gaming arcade reportedly could have been caused by sparks from a welding machine that inadvertently landed on highly flammable materials stockpiled within the premises. As it turned out, fire safety norms had been violated and the staff abandoned the visitors when the fire broke out. It emerged that the management had stored combustible material indoors and, in addition, there were no emergency exits

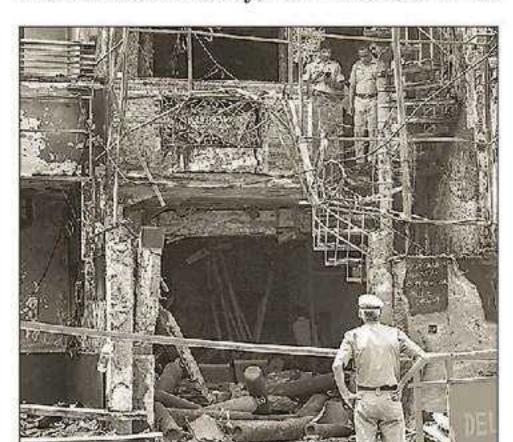
from the building. The cause of the fire at the Baby Care Hospital in Delhi could have been an electrical short circuit. Again, the list of violations was long and callous: The hospital had permission for five beds but at the time of the incident there were 12 infants admitted. It was operating without a valid licence; there were no emergency

exits from the building, fire extinguishers were not installed on the hospital premises, and it did not possess a no-objection certificate (NOC) issued by the fire department.

I cannot help but say with the utmost regret, disappointment and anger that no lessons have been learnt from the Uphaar cinema tragedy that took place 27 years ago on June 13, 1997. I call these tragedies man-made because they are caused by gross negligence and a complete disregard for human lives. These tragedies are nothing but murder by wilful negligence.

The cause of fire in such incidents is usually an electrical short circuit and the cause of death is generally asphyxia. Owners need to be held responsible for the incidents because, in many cases, they do not comply with fire safety measures including providing a required number of exits from the premises. Often, the owners and occupiers connive with government agencies to violate fire safety measures, inevitably endangering human lives. Officials from these very government agencies are known to tell the owners of public spaces about how to subvert rules and by-laws in exchange for money.

The Uphaar fire tragedy case was exceptional in the sense the owners were convicted under section 304(A) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) (Rash & Negligent Act) by the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, the convicted Ansal



Cause of the fire at the Baby Care Hospital could have been a short circuit

brothers were allowed to walk free by paying a fine of ₹60 crore to the Delhi government to build a trauma centre. The fine amount was deposited with the Delhi government in November 2015 but the centre is yet to come up. A fire official convicted for issuing NOCs for Uphaar cinema while on casual leave was allowed to walk free by paying a sum ₹10 lakh to the Delhi government.

Those involved in such serious and fatal incidents of negligence are often booked under IPC section 304 (A), a bailable provision that deals with rash and negligent acts. Only in some cases, and because of public outrage, investigating agencies book those responsible under section 304 (II) IPC (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) being fully aware that it will not pass muster in the court.

Incidents such as the Uphaar tragedy and the two recent fires in Rajkot and Delhi are bound to recur since there is no legal deterrence that can instil fear in the minds of those who could potentially violate or bend the rules. I am unable to comprehend how man-made disasters could be treated merely as a rash and negligent act. Hence, the Association

of the Victims of Uphaar Tragedy (AVUT) made a representation to the Indian government to bring about a new law to deal with accidents that are likely to have been triggered by human negligence. In 2009, the Union law ministry forwarded our petition to the Law Commission. AVUT had several meetings with the chairman of the Law Commission and gave him many inputs, illustrating how such cases were dealt with in other countries. In 2012, the Law Commission published a consultation paper, which I am sure is lying in

some obscure corner of the ministry. I began my journey to get justice for my teenage children whose lives were cruelly cut short in the Uphaar fire tragedy. I was devastated by the loss of my children but was firm in my belief that I would get justice and ensure that such tragedies could be averted in the future. Unfortunately, I have failed in my endeavour. As many as 27 years later, no lesson has been learnt from the Uphaar fire tragedy. After each incident, the blame game starts. Hence the need of the hour is to have a single point nodal agency or licensing authority consisting of experts in structural engineering, fire prevention and electrical systems. This nodal agency should be held

responsible and accountable for mishaps. Another key requirement is to have appropriate legislation to tackle such incidents and put in place an appropriate investigative and judicial mechanism that compels potential offenders to be on alert against acts of omission or commission that can endanger human life. The legislation must prescribe the mandatory stipulations that need to be met by owners, occupiers and builders of places inhabited and visited by the public at large. Strict adherence to public safety norms, rules and regulations can be ensured through this legislation. Not only should adequate punishment be prescribed for the offenders but care must also be taken that the punishment is of such a nature and degree that it has the necessary preventive effect.

> Neelam Krishnamoorthy is president, Association of the Victims of Uphaar Tragedy. The views expressed are personal

ABDEL FATTAH AL-SISI } EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT

call on all active actors of the international community to assume their moral and legal responsibilities to stop the outrageous Israeli war

India needs to be ready for hotter and longer summers

Suruchi

Bhadwal

emperatures nudged 50 degree Celsius in the national Capital recently, and 47 degrees and above have become a norm during summers. Situated in the tropics, India experiences high temperatures during this time of the year. However, with the climate crisis, several years over the last decade-and-a-half have broken national heat records. Temperatures remaining consistently high over a period of time creates heatwave conditions. Data shows heatwave conditions are now created almost every year in many parts of India.

Thanks to rising greenhouse gas emissions trapping outgoing solar radiation, the 10 warmest years in the 174-year planetary temperature record were all in the last decade, from 2014 to 2023. Unfortunately, it seems that this trend

will continue, and we can expect similar or higher temperatures this

Several studies conducted in India have underscored the climate crisis's significant impact on the country. These have highlighted the increase in frequency and intensity of climate extremes over the past few decades. There are various ways in which the data are interpreted and understood from scientific and societal perspectives. The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) conducted a study investigating climate patterns over the past 50 years, and it shows a rising trend for maximum and minimum temperatures regardless of location. Maximum temperatures are observed to be ris-

ing more rapidly across India, except for a few locations. The increase varies from 0.1 degree Celsius to 0.4 degree Celsius per decade, and the trends are statistically significant at 90% confidence levels. The northwestern regions of India show the highest rise, at 0.3 degree Celsius per decade. The northeastern regions show an increase in the number of hot days, with 10-15 more hot days per year. The west coast shows a rise in hot days too, with 5-10

more hot days. With the climate crisis worsening, a rise in maximum temperature and the number of hot days is predicted for the coming decades. The west side of Rajasthan and Ladakh are expected to experience a sharp rise in maximum temperatures, with an expected increase of around 1.8 degree Celsius by 2055. In terms of hot days, both the annual and seasonal (summer) estimations show more hot days in the coming years, with the summer months expected to record an increase of 4-40 more hot days. This includes the western part of Rajasthan, west of Gujarat,

and the west coast, all experiencing increases in the range of 20-35 hot days.

Temperatures consistently remaining above the climatological normal result in heatwave conditions that carry outsized health-harm potential. Many times, people are taken by surprise when they get affected as they do not realise the extent of exposure during the flow of activities during the day. The health impact includes heat strokes, dehydration and, in extreme cases, even death. Besides, the discomfort from extreme heat leads to loss of productivity. These conditions are likely to increase with

time and, therefore, need particular attention. As the climate crisis makes extreme heat stretches more common, longer, and more

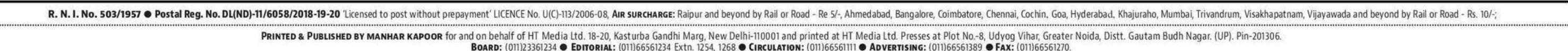
severe, scientists warn of impacts that could put more than a billion lives at risk. Heatwaves with mass impacts can precipitate health emergencies.

Thus, there is a strong need to discuss how heat stress can be tackled. There is also a particular need to widely disseminate the warnings issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) in a format that is well understood and easy to act upon by the masses. It is important to convey what actions should be taken, some being as simple as staying indoors if you can afford to, avoiding peak hours for outdoor activities, avoiding over-crowded spaces, staying hydrated and under shade, cooling internal spaces, as



India needs to be sensitive to rising temperatures and heatwave conditions. The country is now locked into this due to the climate crisis. Such action is essential to reduce the overall disruption that it is likely to experience. A basket of targeted solutions, varying across social strata, needs to be implemented. At the same time, people need to be made aware so that they can avoid getting exposed and affected.

Suruchi Bhadwal is programme director, and K Venkatramana is associate fellow, Earth Science and Climate Change Division, TERI. The views expressed are personal





THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

STOLEN KISSES ARE ALWAYS SWEETEST.

— LEIGH HUNT

The Indian EXPRESS

∞ Founded By ∞

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A STEP UP

S&P Global revises India outlook. Policy must focus on keeping inflation low and bringing down government deficit

N WEDNESDAY, RATINGS agency S&P Global changed its outlook on India from stable to positive. The revised outlook reflects its assessment that "policy stability, deepening economic reforms and high infrastructure investment" will help sustain the Indian economy's long-term growth prospects. The change in outlook comes only a few days before the results of the ongoing national elections are declared. While there are differences in the manifestos and public rhetoric of the two broad political formations contesting this election, which may well translate into differences in policies, the ratings agency says that "regardless of the election outcome", "broad continuity in economic reforms and fiscal policies" can be expected.

The change in outlook now raises the possibility of a ratings upgrade over the next two years. The current rating of BBB — is the lowest investment grade rating. As per S&P, an upgrade hinges on two metrics: Bringing down general government debt, of Centre and states, to below 7 per cent of GDP and ensuring that inflation remains low. On both fronts, there has been improvement in recent years. The general government deficit, which had risen sharply during the pandemic year of 2020, has since declined. The Centre's fiscal deficit has fallen from 9.2 per cent of GDP in 2020-21 to 5.8 per cent in 2023-24, and over the same period, the states' deficit has fallen from 4.1 per cent to 3.1 per cent (budget estimate). As per the agency's projections, the combined deficit is expected to fall from 7.9 per cent of GDP in fiscal 2025 to 6.8 per cent by fiscal 2028. Alongside, the general government debt is expected to fall to 81 per cent of GDP by fiscal 2028. (The ratings agency puts recapitalisation bonds on the general government balance sheet and includes liabilities of Indian Railway Finance Corp as government debt). Inflation, too, has been on a downward trajectory. As per the National Statistical Office's most recent estimate, retail inflation had fallen to 4.83 per cent in April. A study from economists at RBI expects inflation to see a "durable alignment with the target" in the second half of the year.

However, there are downside risks. The ratings agency says that the outlook could be revised back to stable if there is an "erosion of political commitment" in ensuring that public finances remain sustainable. The next government must therefore continue on the path of fiscal consolidation, commit to bringing down the deficit below 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26. It must also provide a fresh roadmap to lower the deficit further to 3 per cent. Alongside, it must ensure that the thrust on capital spending is sustained. As S&P notes, it is "public investment and consumer momentum" that will help sustain growth in the near term.

HEALTH OF A LEADER

More transparency on the health of those who hold or aspire to public office is needed. But this is a discussion for calmer times

HE QUESTION IS... whether there is a conspiracy behind the deteriorating health condition of Naveen Babu." Speaking at an election rally in Mayurbhanj in Odisha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concern about Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's health, and suggested a possible conspiracy by the "lobby that has been enjoying power from behind the scenes". He promised a special committee to look into the matter if the BJP is elected to power in the state. The PM's pitch lends his weight to a controversy that has till now remained mostly below the surface. It seems to be crossing a red line in a country where, by and large, the personal lives of political leaders, including their health issues, have been kept out of the political and electoral conversation and gaze. Of course, in times when the citizen's right to know has acquired greater salience, a case can be made for greater openness and transparency on the health of those who hold public office, or aspire to it.

In the US, the private lives of politicians are prime fodder for political opponents and the media. The broad justification for this is that the physical and mental health of those who acquire power and compete for it, and their "character", is relevant to voters making an informed choice. President Joe Biden's age and health, for example, have dominated headlines for well over a year now. Special Counsel Robert Hur called him a "well-meaning elderly man with a poor memory" in February. Hur's report exonerated Biden of charges of mishandling documents, but his assessment of Biden's mental health has arguably had a political cost. Similarly, former President Donald Trump's mental health and his fitness to be commander-in-chief, to "have a finger on the nuclear button", has been brought up by the media and his opponents. The book *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump* (2017) compiled assessments of his mental state by 27 psychiatrists and psychologists. In the UK, the tabloid culture is rampant and often toxic. Rupert Murdoch's News International illegally tapped phones, including of politicians, for salacious stories.

India's public discourse has, by and large, been more reticent and circumspect. But the lines and boundaries that have been drawn and observed can be revisited and revised in keeping with the changing temper of the times and the reworked balance between the politicians' right to privacy and the public's right to know. This, however, is a discussion for calmer times. It cannot be had amid the electoral battle's heated to-and-fro, the floating of conspiracy theories and spectre-mongering. A careful balance needs to be struck, and care must be taken to ensure that rumour, gossip and innuendo are not given a free pass in the name of informing the public.

SEALED WITH A KISS

A marriage ceremony, a moral outrage and a heartening change in script

LOVER'S KISS is usually the denouement that most romances await. Boy meets girl. Love blooms. Then comes the lovers' trial, at the end of which the path to happily-ever-after emerges. In western UP's Hapur, though, the kiss turned out to be the beginning of what could well be a Hrisihikesh Mukherjee movie script. The band, *baaja* and *baraat* were in attendance, so were the guests. On the *mandap*, the garland exchange between the bride and the groom had just happened. And then came the plot twist: A kiss on the forehead of his childhood-sweetheart-now-almost-wife set the sanskari tempers rising at the so-called transgression. The wedding was called off, a brawl ensued. But wait, that's not where the story ended.

That night, the young woman eloped to her beau's place, where the wedding was solemnised, the ceremony overseen, among others, by the groom's mother. The fracas of the previous day, she said later, amounted to naught: After all, "If a husband doesn't kiss his wife, who else will?" In a country where public displays of affection have been battlegrounds for the young trying to assert their freedoms and where the line between affection and obscenity blurs at the discretion of a conservative moral police, could there be a more refreshing narrative frame than the nonchalance of the mother of the groom?

In 2014, the vandalisation of a cafe in Kozhikode for allowing young couples to hold hands or kiss had led to the Kiss of Love protests across the country. Since then, Indian cities have see-sawed between greater accommodation of public displays of intimacy and patriarchal outrage over "immoral activities". One thing stands out though: Like the groom's mother, or his sister who stood with the couple. It seems that it is the women who find it easier to read the changing script. The men in the family? They were the ones outraging and brawling.

Heat wave & the worker



There must be long-term measures to protect informal workers' health and livelihoods

SHALINI SINHA AND ARAVIND UNNI

AS NORTHERN INDIA reels under a brutal heat wave, it is workers who are facing the brunt of it. Delhi has reportedly breached the 50-degree Celsius mark, halfway to the boiling point of water. Following the death of a 40-year-old labourer due to extreme heat, the office of the Lieutenant Governor has intervened by issuing instructions for water provision, sprinkling water on roads and change in timings for construction workers considering the "unprecedented heat wave".

For many who do hard physical labour in this heat, this is an emergency, not only on the immediate health front but also for their work and incomes. Our cities exacerbate the situation, due to high density and built environment, resulting in the "heat island effect". In India, four out of five urban workers are informal, with minimal job security, irregular incomes, no social protection, unsafe worksites and vulnerability to economic fluctuations. This precarity, along with pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, makes the majority of workers more susceptible to heat waves.

Heat Action Plans (HAPs) list preparatory, adaptive, and responsive measures for government departments to tackle the heat and its impacts. They are mandated to be drafted — not in an ad hoc manner — at the city, district, and state levels for effective implementation and as per the guidelines of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

It is undeniable that HAPs have aided in reducing the casualties due to heatwaves, and this relatively new policy instrument has been increasingly recognised for its importance, but it misses the varied nature of impacts on different vulnerable groups, like workers in the informal economy in cities. As of now, a vast majority of the cities in India do not have HAPs. Most of the existing HAPs barely mention the workers. If they do, they refer only to "outdoor workers", with no mention of related interventions specific to their nature of work. With their "disaster-emergency" perspective, the HAPs leave little room for medium to longterm actions. They are usually biased towards rural realities, without any links to urban planning and design of cities.

Working in extreme heat conditions im-

workers in indoor and outdoor activities. Domestic workers are confronted with constant exposure to hot stoves and excessive heat. Home-based workers continue to work and live in a "pressure cooker" environment in small and congested houses in urban slums. Construction workers encounter the relentless challenges of working in the blazing sun, compounded by unbearably hot makeshift shelters near the worksite. Street vendors face income loss as the perishable goods they sell spoil rapidly, combined with a decline in customer traffic and additional expenses on water and shade. Women workers, constituting a substantial number of informal workers, find an increase in their care activity, particularly because of food spoilage, which leads to frequent cooking and cleaning, as well as taking care of the young, sick, and vulnerable in the family. Narratives of workers often also point to

pacts productivity and income for informal

Narratives of workers often also point to frequent heat-related illnesses — greater fatigue, dehydration, increased anxiety and higher chances of heat stroke. The lack of "basic infrastructure", such as drinking water and a sunshade at working sites, worsens the risk of these ailments. Most informal workers are not protected under any health insurance and incur out-of-pocket expenses for medical treatment, which adds to their already shrinking income during the hot months. The cost of business goes up even as the income comes down — they are compelled to purchase protective gear, such as umbrellas and shade, and water, invest more in transport and absorb the costs of spoilage of goods.

There must be policy measures to mitigate the impact of heat waves on workers. First, it is essential to reimagine heat waves as not conventional disaster events, but as prolonged disasters, thereby moving from ad hoc, instruction-based response to linking HAPs with other long-term measures of urban planning and climate action plans (CAPs). This should then also translate into the NDMA working with other stakeholders in urban areas, like the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE).

Second, there must be mandatory inclusion of wide categories of informal workers in urban areas and clearer guidelines at the national level, that can help states broaden them and innovate as per their contexts.

Third, the general divisions of indoor-out-door work and the nature of impacts need to be investigated further to frame holistic guidelines and interventions as, in many cases, indoor workers also face extreme heat.

Fourth, there is a clear need for the inclusion of worker communities and voices in the preparation of action plans. Representations from worker welfare boards and bodies similar to the Town Vending Committees (TVC) for street vendors need to be roped in for the drafting and execution of HAPs in cities.

Fifth, the impact of heat is not gender-neutral and has a harsher bearing on women workers' lives — heat stress plans need to factor in these realities.

Sixth, recognise that heat waves mean losses — of income, health, and livelihoods — and welfare measures must compensate for these. Workers need system-wide protections, with state interventions and employers' contributions, which include climate-resilient social protection systems and income protection, including compensation for loss of income.

Seventh, as we think about the reforms in labour laws and the Labour Codes that await implementation, it will be critical to rethink many of them from the perspective of informal workers and the impact of climate change on work.

Lastly, our cities, and society in general,

have always been designed to invisiblise workers and their work — especially the ones in the informal economy. Our urban imagination needs to be reconfigured, not only to ensure water, shade, and rest–eat–leisure spaces to mitigate heat wave impacts, but also to find more ways of advancing workers' rights in cities.

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WIDENING THE FRAME

Payal Kapadia's Cannes win will push filmmakers to be more inventive

Alaka Sahani

THE BIGGEST "HURRAH" moment for India at the 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival was when Japanese master Hirokazu Koreeda announced Payal Kapadia's debut feature, All We Imagine As Light, as the winner of the Grand Prix. As a beaming Kapadia moved towards the stage to receive the award, she grabbed Divya Prabha's hand and pulled the actor to walk with her, as the other two actors with prominent roles in the film — Kani Kusruti and Chhaya Kadam — followed them. The writer-director received the award from producer-actor Viola Davis, while jury president Greta Gerwig looked on and applauded.

Moments like this are what cinematic dreams are made of. The presence of Davis, Gerwig and Kore-eda — who are known for their pioneering work — as Kapadia accepted her award, underline the importance of celebrating new cinematic voices.

Let's rewind to the moments before Kapadia's big win. When Davis came on stage, she said, "Art doesn't come from a safe place". She praised the festival for being "daring" and encouraging "inventiveness", apart from supporting "voices of change". That's the kind of support and space that a writer-director, who has been researching and revising her script for over seven years, requires as the newest Grand Prix winner. Visually rich and with a poetic style, Kapadia's films are a showcase for her inventive storytelling.

The chorus that Kapadia has created "history" started when the festival announced the selection of *All We Imagine as Light* for its "competition section". For 30 years before that, it

Kapadia's win makes it possible for Indian cinema to think beyond masculinity and violence as safe bets to grab audience attention in the post-pandemic scenario. Although the Oscar for Original Song won by RRR's 'Naatu Naatu' in 2023 was another major cinematic milestone for India, the fact remains that S S Rajamouli's film was powered by popular stars, and a massive scale and budget.

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had passed over Indian filmmakers. Prior to the announcement, few would have fancied the chances of *All We Imagine As Light*, which is being described as a "gentle, meditative" movie about female friendship. The award proves the ability of Kapadia, a Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) alumna, to create a moving narrative without banking on star power or calculating commercial gains.

As we celebrate Kapadia's cinematic excellence, this is also a moment to reflect on India's cinema-making culture. Kapadia was one of the students who paid a price for protesting against the appointment of Gajendra Chauhan as FTII's chairperson when her scholarship grant was cut. True to Davis's words about "creation of art", Kapadia's 2021 documentary *A Night of Knowing Nothing* came out of the "chaos" that prevailed on Indian campuses as students protested.

Kapadia's win makes it possible for Indian cinema to think beyond masculinity and violence as safe bets to grab audience attention in the post-pandemic scenario. Although the Oscar for Original Song won by RRR's 'Naatu Naatu' in 2023 was another major cinematic milestone for India, the fact remains that S S Rajamouli's film was powered by popular stars, and a massive scale and budget. All We Imagine As Light, instead, goes for an idea that Kapadia described as "weird" during the Cannes closing ceremony, before expressing her gratitude to her producers.

Cutting the clutter of glamourous and promotional red carpet appearances, this Mumbai-based filmmaker has shown us how

in 2017, when her short film Afternoon Clouds was the lone Indian representative at Cannes, Kapadia was not alone this time. There were seven other films which were either made by Indians or have a strong India connection. Adding to the "big India moment" at Cannes this year, art director-turned-actor Anasuya Sengupta created history by becoming the first Indian to win Best Actress at Cannes (Un Certain Regard) for her role in the Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's The Shameless. Also, bringing home the first and third prizes in the La Cinef category are Chidananda S Naik's Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know and Mansi Maheshwari's animated movie Bunnyhood. Both British-Indian filmmaker Sandhya Suri's Santosh, featuring Shahana Goswami, and Karan Kandhari-directed Sister Midnight, featuring Radhika Apte, have drawn rave reviews. There was In Retreat, directed by FTII alumnus Syed Maisam Ali Shah, in ACID, Cannes' sidebar. Not to forget Santosh Sivan, who received the prestigious Pierre Angénieux Tribute award and Manthan,

to go for the thing that really matters. Unlike

screened under Cannes Classics section.

It is not a coincidence that India's representation at Cannes this year captured its strong art-house cinema, past and present, as well as the creative spirit of indie filmmaking. Instead of obsessing over box office figures, let this magnificent Indian run at Cannes nudge filmmakers to be more "inventive" and follow their "weird" ideas.

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MAY 31, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO SIKKIM CM DEFECTS Chief Bal Thackeray's controversial specified by the second second



THE FIRST CHIEF Minister of Sikkim, Kazi Ihendup Dorji, and his followers are likely to be admitted en bloc to the Congress (I) and the Kazi is to be given a prominent party post in the state. Kazi is president of the Sikkim United Council. Kazi said that the resignation of Nar Bahadur Bhandari from the party had created an urgent need to strengthen the hands of national and democratic forces.

THACKERAY IN DOCK

BOMBAY POLICE COMMISSIONER J F Ribeiro has clarified that the transcript of Shiv Sena

Chief Bal Thackeray's controversial speech in Bombay produced by a police reporter did not contain derogatory references to the prophet. He offered to show the transcript to some members of the peace committee. But they pointed out that some persons who attended the meeting had claimed to have heard the remarks. The police chief said Thackeray would be prosecuted for his other remarks.

MINISTER RESIGNS

B M SINGLA, Haryana Excise and Taxation Minister, whose election to the state assembly was set aside by the Punjab and Haryana High Court has resigned. Singla submitted his resignation to Chief Minister Bhajan Lal. Singla was elected in 1982 from the Jind assembly constituency on the Lok Dal ticket but had later defected to the Congress (I).

DEATHS IN PUNJAB

TENSIONS MOUNTED IN the Golden Temple complex area following an exchange of fire between persons near the complex and the CRPF as six more persons were killed in continuing violence in Punjab during the last 24 hours. One person travelling on the roof of a bus without ticket was killed when the paramilitary force personnel tried to apprehend him and he tried to evade.

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15 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As critical voices are the backbone of a strong democracy, their absence in public spaces threatens to turn our society spineless. Civil society members cannot be complicit in democratic backsliding in Nepal, for they have a history of standing up for justice and freedom under authoritarian regimes." —THE KATHMANDU POST

After June 4, nationising India

Sense of uncertainty about the ultimate built into Indic religions, flexibility of asymmetric federalism offer necessary space to accommodate regional diversity and build an inclusive nation



Subrata Mitra

ONCE THE SOUND and fury of the campaign has died down, votes are cast and counted, the electoral dénouement will converge on two critical questions: "Who won?" and "what won?" The first is answered simply in most democracies. Counting agencies do their job, and the loser's consent seals the result as legitimate and final. That said, the process, as the fiasco that followed the last presidential election in the United States, is not necessarily seamless. However, in India, the issues that could complicate the final tally are filtered out beforehand by an alert judiciary and hyperactive Election Commission. Going by past precedents, the losers in India's electoral game have usually conceded defeat quickly and gracefully. So, on June 4, one can expect a smooth and unproblematic regime continuity, or for that matter, a radical transition.

The answer to the other question — "what won?" — is much more complicated. Exactly what does a mandate consist of? Parties issue manifestos and in the heat of the battle, candidates make tall promises. None of this is binding on the winners. However, political parties do not want simply an episodic win. They want long-term success at the hustings and therefore, to hold on to their clientele. One clue to prognosticate the winner's potential policy choice is to watch the subliminal message that underpins campaigns, and tease out of this triggers that have shaped the voters' choice. What the country is in for would become clearer once detailed data from exit polls are available. However, at this point of time, the highly acrimonious and polarising campaign that we have seen, points in the direction of one vital issue. What kind of "nation" will the winners have as the domain of their authority, and how they might try to take ownership of it to assure their long-term prospects.

The media, both domestic and foreign, have been rife with speculation on this very issue. One such report from the press in Pakistan — always deeply concerned about the status of secularism in India — will suffice to gauge the mood that prevails. *Daily Times* (May 23) believes that a third term for Modi means that "the real winner in the so-called secular state would be bigotry... Indian voters would scream out their preference for vigilante identity over the ideals of modern India." Prime Minister Modi has vehemently denied the allegation of discrimination against Muslims, pointing to the fact that social and economic vulnerability and not religion has been the basis of the allocation of welfare. He has said categorically "the day I do Hindu-Muslim, I will be unworthy of public life" (IE, May 15) But, in life as in politics, perception is all. The argument that the Bharatiya Janata Party stands for the whole of Bharat and not any specific caste or religionbased vote bank does not appear to have reached its mark. That makes "nationising" India – pulling together the diverse fragments of the huge population into one nation — the most salient issue for the winners on June 4. The is a much bigger challenge than security, welfare or the economy — all of which have acquired a sense of bipartisan



C R Sasikumar

consensus and as such, autonomy from the regime in power.

A nation is a moral community, based on a shared sense of good and evil. Nationising is the process of crafting a nation out of a loosely affiliated people, drawing on their norms, values, collective memories and deeply held beliefs, linked to religion. One thinks of the early years of Gandhi — not yet a Mahatma — freshly back in India from South Africa, trying to discover the commonality that described the essence of the Indian nation. Nationising was for him a heuristic process, seeking to build an authentic normative core, linked to religion. The idea that religion was to be treated as personal faith and as such a private matter, came from societies like Great Britain or the United States where the church is "established", and forms the ontological foundation of the modern state. This fact does not appear to have registered on the minds of the first generation of Indian leaders, traumatised by the partition of the country on the ground of religion.

Leaders of India today face a cruel dilemma. Too close an identification with the culture and norms of any specific community can alienate the rest of the population. On the other hand, ignoring the religiosity of the majority, or for that matter, minorities for whom religion is essential to their identity, can lead Nationising is the process of crafting a nation out of a loosely affiliated people, drawing on their norms, values, collective memories and deeply held beliefs, linked to religion. One thinks of the early years of Gandhi — not yet a Mahatma — freshly back in India from South Africa, trying to discover the commonality that described the essence of the Indian

to a legitimacy deficit or worse, causing their thwarted agency to find expression in ways not exactly desirable. This fact that the country is up against this dilemma is missed both by Hindu nationalists and their critics in the liberal media, for entirely different reasons. The former see nationising as unproblematic, and the latter consider the fuss over the "nation" detrimental to the vaunted secularism of the country.

Has nationising of India still got a chance to succeed? The vigorous culture of contestation ingrained in the collective mindset of India, general constituencies as opposed to proportional representation that make shortterm coalitions and intense bargaining imperative, smooth running of general elections, and the admirable dexterity of the Indian judiciary which excels at the art of balancing the letter of the law and collective belief, are assets that an imaginative leadership can draw on. Significantly, the RSS appears to be signalling the need for inclusion and moderation. Most of all, the sense of uncertainty about the ultimate built into Indic religions, and the flexibility of India's asymmetric federalism offer the necessary space to accommodate regional diversity and thus build an inclusive nation. There is no other way around it.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STATE AND THE COURT

THIS REFERS TO the article. The vacation red herring' (IE, May 30). The writer's analysis of the reasons behind the backlog of court cases has exposed the hollowness of the remark by a member of the PMEAC that attributed the vacation of judges with the pendency of cases. It cannot have been a casual remark given that a similar comment has been made by ex-law minister Kiren Rijiju, who attributed the mode of judges appointments and courts' vacation for the five crore backlog of cases. This is a case of wrong diagnosis and an inappropriate treatment plan. It obfuscates the governments' deficiencies in terms of shortage of judges, persistent vacancies, inadequate funding etc. All of these have a bearing on increase in backlog of cases. LR Murmu, New Delhi

LESSONS FROM REMAL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Before the next storm' (IE, May 30). At least four to five of the northeast states suffered heavily from the rain that the season's first tropical storm Remal triggered in the region. As tropical storms rage in India in and out of the monsoon season, there are lessons to take from each experience. The example of Odisha is often quoted in having put together model plans for evacuation and safety of people ahead of each storm, minimising loss of life and damage to dwellings and infrastructure. The need of the hour is to prepare by moving lakhs of the most vulnerable people from the path of the storm.

SS Paul, Nadia

Her stake in Bengal

Voter turnout in the state shows women outdoing men. Question is: What are they voting for?



ISHITA MUKHOPADHYAY AND TINKU KHANNA

THE WAY THE 2024 general elections are playing out in West Bengal reveals a new narrative in the discourse on democracy in India, one focussed squarely on gender. Compared to many other states, the number of women voters here is higher. Women are also a visible and strong presence in political debates. The election picture coming out of the state has women firmly at the centre, though this is not unlike many other states, at least in the initial phases of the poll.

West Bengal provides one of the highest numbers of male migrant labourers in the country. Many villages, therefore, have a higher concentration of only women, children and the elderly. It is easy to infer why women are seen as vote banks and not as participants in the process of democracy by the ruling political parties in the state and at the Centre.

The ruling government in West Bengal is responding with a scheme called Lakshmir Bhandar — a state allowance for women. Pre-poll promises of a quantitative increase in the amount have also been made. The Centre is also responding to the question of the woman voter with the Lakhpati Didi scheme.

With all these schemes, are poll promises making a U-turn to return to and address the demands of the democratic women's movement in the country? Affirmative action addressing gender discrimination was the mandate of the National Policy for The Empowerment of Women (2001) and the Gender Budget of 2005. These have been converted to poll promises in 2024. Has the history of the women's movement demanding affirmative action been forgotten or the achievements lost in oblivion? How are the women of West Bengal responding?

The number of female voters in the 2024 polls is 968 per 1,000 males. This is higher than the national ratio which is 948 per 1,000 males. EC data shows that the turnout of female voters in the state in Phase I was 82.59 per cent, in Phase II was 77.99 per cent, in Phase III was 83.01 per cent, in Phase IV was 81.49 per cent.

Except in Phase II, the female turnout in West Bengal was the highest among all the states of the country in the initial phases of the polls. In Phase II, West Bengal and Assam were tied, where the percentage of female voters' turnout was highest in the country. In all the phases, the percentage of female turnout was higher than male turnout. Female voters in percentage turnouts outnumbered male voters in the constituencies of Alipurduar, Coochbehar,

Balurghat, Raiganj, Jangipur, Malda Dakshin, Malda Uttar, Murshidabad, Baharampur, Baharampur Purba, Birbhum, Bolpur, Krishnanagar and Ranaghat. These comprise mostly rural populations and are the source districts of migrant labour. The numbers of female voter turnout in these constituencies stand out clearly among all the parliamentary constituencies in the country.

Is this huge turnout of women a response to affirmative action schemes? Women are also seen to be vocal about problems like inflation, unemployment, lack of industries, and agrarian distress. Most rural families are indebted and women have to bear the brunt of this often. Their reality has pushed them and made them eager to participate in the political process. West Bengal along with Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra accounted for more than half of the headcount of child marriages of girls in the country in 2021 according to a Lancet study. This is despite the many schemes targeted at the girl child. West Bengal accounted for 15.2 per cent of these illegal marriages. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Statistics showed that 49.9 per cent of girls in West Bengal between the ages of 15 to 24 stay in their homes and do not attend school as opposed to the 43.8 per cent in the rest of the country. The Kanyashree scheme, aimed at encouraging the schooling of young girls is a one-time grant and is failing to keep these girls in school as the burden at home doubles.

The precarity rural families live with is also visible in the data on the trafficking of women and girls from the state. According to the National Crime Research Bureau report 2022, on average, every day more than 172 girls went missing, another 170 girls were kidnapped, and almost three girls were trafficked. While more trafficked girls were rescued than reported in 2022, a large number of missing and/or abducted girls remained untraced and unrecovered. Across India that year, a total of 2,250 cases of human trafficking were registered and 6,036 victims were identified, of which 2,878 were children, including 1,059 girls. In West Bengal, 40,725 women and 10,571 girls went missing, the highest numbers among the states in the country.

There is a rise in violence and atrocities against women in the state with recent reports from Sandeshkhali surpassing many previous instances of violence against women. It is clear that women in the state are more than mere silent "beneficiaries" they are part of the political conversation. The vulnerability of their living conditions has driven them to assemble, speak up, and express their opinions. It is a new gender narrative of reclaiming the political space and reinstating the democratic women's movement, which is yet to be recognised by the mainstream social and political narrative in the country.

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When a Holkar queen ruled

nation. Nationising was

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Ahilya Bai's reign is a blueprint for a modern Ram Rajya

Aditi Narayani Paswan

TODAY, WE CELEBRATE the 300th birth anniversary of the Maratha queen Ahilya Bai Holkar — a great administrator and visionary with a spiritual inclination. When we talk about women's empowerment, we often overlook figures from our own history, the brave daughters who contributed towards building the India we see today. The historical glorification of men and their deeds hides the stories of countless women who served their nation.

Perhaps this is why Ahilya Bai used to find little mention in national rhetoric. Born in 1725 to a shepherd (Dhangar/Gadariya) family in what is today Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district, Ahilya Bai strove to be recognised not just as the wife of Khande Rao Holkar but also as a leader in her own capacity, who helped preserve and encourage India's spiritual integrity and displayed administrative ingenuity and political impartiality. Breaking the shackles of patriarchy, she took over the role of monarch after her husband's death. Her exceptional leadership skills were evident in the 30 years of peace and financial stability that her kingdom experienced under her reign.

Ahilya Bai was not unaware of the fact that her identity as a woman — and a widow — deemed her unfit for certain administrative and political tasks, given the time's social and cultural context. For the sake of her state and subjects' welfare, she appointed Tukoji Holkar — a trusted soldier who had served under her father-in-law Malhar Rao Holkar — as the commander of her army. In all her dealings with her subjects, Ahilya Bai was guided by her innate generosity and principles. Even though historians write of her "tolerance" of people of different faiths and beliefs, in my opinion, Ahilya Bai truly celebrated all her subjects.

Ahilya Bai is believed to be the great ruler that she was due to her undying faith in Hinduism. She regularly attended Purana recitals and yagnas, believing that the spiritually charged environment would help her stand firm on her principles. It was her immersion in the philosophy of Hinduism that eventually led to a monumental change in the architectural expression of the faith. Ahilya Bai resurrected the jyotirlingas across the country as a tribute to Lord Shiva. Renovations in Somnath, Varanasi, Trambak, Gaya, Pushkar, Vrindavan, Nathdwara, Haridwar, Badrinath, Kedarnath and many other sacred sites were undertaken during her reign. To defend against attacks and iconoclasm, she came up with the idea of installing the idols in secret shrines under the

temples, providing an additional layer of security. Ahilya Bai's tireless attempts to resurrect these temples were, on the one hand, an act of defiance against Mughal autocracy and, on the other, bound her subjects together with the thread of civilisational ethos, irrespective of their social-religious identity.

The beautiful Maheshwari saris that we wear today are also part of the queen's legacy. She not only promoted the traditional weave but also paved the way for skilling women, thus empowering them. The production of these saris was not only a way to increase the revenue collection of the state, but provided a steady source of income to the weavers. Under her encouragement, the production of Maheswari saris gained momentum and popularity. Today, their production remains alive as a traditional craft of Maharashtra. Ahilya Bai also made efforts to develop the city of Indore, conserve forests and animals, and was responsible for the flourishing trade and commerce in her kingdom.

If true Ram Rajya was attained by any ruler, it was under Ahilya Bai's graceful reign where farmers flourished, faiths were restored, and inclusivity found its rightful place. Her efforts in mainstreaming the Bhil and Gond castes are less talked about but

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remain an important achievement. She commanded respect not just from her contemporaries but from later historians and intellectuals too, such as Jadunath Sarkar, Annie Besant and John Keay. It is a travesty that Ahilya Bai Holkar is not nearly as celebrated nationally as she is regionally. Her localisation reveals how the rest of the nation conveniently forgets a woman of her stature due to an inbuilt gender bias.

Ahilya Bai's rule serves as an example of inclusive policymaking. She worked to develop her state and uplift her subjects on various levels. Her legacy is not only remembered for her administrative acumen but also for paving the way for future generations of the Holkar dynasty towards effective governance that transcends gender norms. To bind her legacy only to her contribution to temple renovation would also be unjust. In assessing her impact, it is impossible to overlook her overall governance, which helped bring samajik samrasta (social harmony) in the truest sense and provided a blueprint for what Ram Rajya in today's era would look like.

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Delhi University

REFINE NUKE POLICY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'An outdated nuclear debate' (IE, May 29). Given Pakistan's tendency to indulge in nuclear blackmail, India must review and restructure its no first use (NFU) policy. While the NFU can remain in place with respect to China, India should focus on improving the delivery system. Submarine-launched nuclear capabilities must be the centre of gravity of our nuclear arsenal. Since both of our adversaries are authoritarian states. India also needs to refine its command and control hierarchy to expose its civilian authorities to the nuances involved in handling this dangerous arsenal.

Shubhada H, via email

Present & working

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Criminal abdication' (IE, May 27). The loss of life due to fire incidents continues despite investigations and suggested actions to curb tragedies. Taking suo motu cognisance, the Gujarat High Court has asked the state government and municipal corporations to submit a report regarding the functioning of gaming centres. This right should be voluntarily exercised in the country by authorities to check the fire control apparatus availability at all vulnerable buildings. The soaring temperatures are worsening this situation. Some institutions have drills for regular inspections of fire equipment intermittently and by an expert annually. The preventive equipment should not only be in place but should also be functional. Subhash Vaid, New Delhi



OUR VIEW



Wet-bulb heat: A rising threat we cannot ignore

As temperature readings smash records and leave us agape, humidity is worsening too. It's climate change. Wet-bulb heat could spell a massive crisis in India as the planet warms up

n Wednesday, a weather station in Delhi reported a maximum temperature of 52.9° Celsius. This is the highest ever—not just for the capital, but for all of India. As anything above 50° is rare even during intense heat waves, the reading left observers agape. And since it was an outlier among other mercury readings across Delhi, a central minister said that the weather department has been asked to check if the thermometer was okay. Whether or not it has its notches correct, the scorching heat this year makes anything around the 50° mark seem believable. The oven-like conditions that have gripped large parts of our landmass are all too real, with people groaning that this summer is the hottest they have ever experienced. The tragic irony of such groans is that unlike a 'once in a century' event like the covid pandemic, it's likely that the same attestation of misery will be made year after year as we go along. After all, the blazing sun is only the most visible cause. Air pollution that traps heat on the planet has put us on a path whose perils are only just starting to show.

An analysis of data from India Meteorological Department by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) reveals that it's not just regular heat, the hot season has gradually become more muggy too. In Delhi, the average relative humidity in summer months was 52.5% in the first decade of the millennium, but recent years have seen it go above 60%, pushing us into a sweltering zone. Perspiration cools our bodies down as sweat evaporates, but if the ambient air is too humid—with high moisture, i.e.—then we take longer to dry and this cooling effect weakens. Exposure for

hours on end to extreme humid heat can thus induce stress and even prove fatal. While heatstroke deaths are few and far between right now, what we need to recognize is how soon global warming and rising humidity could combine to make the fatality count shoot up. Global human tolerance studies suggest that five hours or more spent outdoors in 'wet-bulb heat' of above 35° Celsius could kill people (with variation on account of other factors, of course). With such a risk staring at millions of workers without air-conditioned work spaces, we need to wrap our heads around wet-bulb heat as a concept. It refers to readings of a thermometer whose bulb is covered with a cloth soaked in water. As it's wet, its reading will be much lower than a dry bulb's, but the gap can start closing rapidly if high humidity does not let the wet bulb cool. In other words, while the usual dry heat readings have begun reaching scary levels, with rising moisture in the air, we may see much worse to come.

Several issues demand attention. For one, we must not fall for the myth of hardy Indian toilers, ready to work under harsh conditions. On current trends, the bulk of our population may be vulnerable to wet-bulb heat by mid-century. For another, the energy needed to keep Indians safe—let alone cool—would be enormous, which could push us into a vicious cycle if we don't plan properly. Even as we adopt cleantech options for electricity, carbon neutrality by 2070 will not be easy to achieve. As with all climate science, nothing can be said with certainty. But still, the risks we face are too severe to kick this can further down the road. As lives are involved, we must prepare for a worst-case scenario. We shouldn't face a fatality curve someday that's too late to flatten.

MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS

India's employment challenge: Think beyond basic livelihoods

Improve the quality of employment broadly to assure employees better earnings and social security



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 $fthere \, is \, a \, single \, is sue \, that \, has \, domi$ nated the election discourse over the past two months, it has been India's crisis of jobs. But what exactly is this so-called employment challenge? While one hears anecdotal stories of educated youth not finding employment, jobs mean different things to different people. If it means any engagement in gainful productive activity, then the growth of employment since 2017-18 has been the highest in recent years, with the total number of workers in the economy increasing from 458 million in 2017-18 to 563 million in 2022-23, as reported by Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS).

Last week, the National Statistical Office (NSO) released estimates from quarterly surveys for urban areas for January-March 2024; these confirm the trends reported earlier. Urban males aged above 15 years have seen their workforce participation increase from 67.7% in January-March 2022 to 69.8% in January-March 2024. The increase is greater for urban females, whose workforce participation rate rose from 18.3% to 23.4% over the same period.

But then, why is employment an issue? Primarily because in an economy like ours, with significant economic distress, getting jobs is almost a necessity. Most people in the working age-group need some means of earning a livelihood, with only a few able to survive on

accumulated wealth. For India's vast majority, joblessness is an unaffordable luxury. Which also implies that unemployment statistics are not the only way to understand the challenge. While useful, this data represents only one aspect of the problem. A nuanced look would show that rising employment data may mask increasing distress in the economy. Most employment gains have been in agriculture and among women workers; this suggests distress-induced job seeking over the last five years. Also consider that rising economic growth is usually associated with a declining share of workers in agriculture, but this trend held firm only till 2017-18 and saw a reversal after that, raising questions about non-farm job creation.

Anxiety over jobs extends to those who want superior employment, a significantly large group. Among those who are employed, the last decade has seen a deterioration in job quality and also a decline in earnings from such work. While casual wage labourers in rural areas continue to suffer declining real wages for farm and non-farm work, the decline has been sharper for regular employees. PLFS data suggests a decline in rural regular wages by 1.3% per annum in the last five years, with urban regular wages declining at 2.7% per annum. In fact, regular worker

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Economic growth is usually associated with a declining share of workers in agriculture, but this trend saw a reversal after 2017-18, raising questions about non-farm job creation in the country.

People need better jobs but official Indian survey findings suggest that the last decade has seen a broad deterioration in job quality and also a decline in earnings from such work.

wages have been declining since 2011-12, with real wages in rural areas declining at 0.6% per annum since 2011-12 while urban wages declined at 1.2% per annum since 2011-12.

Quality of employment has been a bigger challenge. The only thing that distinguishes a regular worker from a casual wage worker is the regularity of employment. But this scenario is bleak. Almost two-thirds of India's regular workers do not have a written contract, while only one-fourth have one that is longer than 3 years. Both these indicators have worsened since 2011-12.

The decline in real earnings from regular employment has led to a situation where the earnings of the bottom quintile of regular workers is no different from the bottom quintile of casual workers. In 2022, both received average monthly earning of about ₹3,000 per month or ₹100 per day.

Earlier this year, while releasing the India Employment Report 2024 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Institute for Human Development, the chief economic advisor (CEA) was criticised for saying that the government cannot create jobs for everyone. The CEA may be right in a general sense, given the limitations of the government in creating public-sector jobs, but the administration's responsibility is not just to create government jobs, but also to create enabling conditions for the private sector to employ people in good jobs. It is also the duty of the government to provide an enabling framework of regulations for decent work, including provisions of social security to those who are either employed as regular workers or are selfemployed. Instead of political promises of creating millions of jobs, a better way to deal with the employment challenge is to initiate structural reforms that can encourage labour-intensive sectors as well as small and medium enterprises. India must improve the quality of employment to assure people social security as well as better earnings.

10 PCARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Nothing is sudden in nature: whereas the slightest storms are forecast several days in advance, the destruction of the world must have been announced several years beforehand by heatwaves, by winds, by meteorites, in short, by an infinity of phenomena.

NICOLAS ANTOINE BOULANGER

GUEST VIEW

Commercial leases in the retail sector are evolving fast

ANIMESH TIWARY



has worked as an in-house legal counsel at a major manufacturing company.

he retail sector in India has grown hugely. It is now placed at \$1.2 trillion, fuelled by rising consumer spending. swift urbanization and a burgeoning middle class that's youthful by world comparison. In an effort to meet growing demand, home grown as well as foreign brands are scaling up their operations and physical presence. With prominent single and multi-brand retailers such as Apple, Reliance Retail, Tata's Trent, Shoppers' Stop, etc, all vying to fulfil fast-growing urban demand, India saw record-high leasing of space by retailers in 2023. While the phenomenon of 'ghost malls' does exist, we also saw renovations of shopping malls and hypermarkets that were struggling to retain footfalls, especially after the covid pandemic. In recent years, real estate developers have been launching better designed and located retail spaces to attract large tenants whose requirement

runs into several thousand square feet.
Historically, in India, landlords have driven lease negotiations with tenants,

drawing up terms based on their own standard template. This has been changing. In today's times, organized retail players with a major national presence seem just as capable of tilting the scales in their favour as high-profile international tenants.

In April 2023, iPhone-maker Apple struck lease agreements for its first Apple retail stores in Delhi and Mumbai, thereby officially marking its physical presence in the country. The lease agreement for Apple's 20,000-sq-ft space in Reliance Jio World Drive mall, located in Mumbai's posh BKC area, features an 'exclusive zone' clause that restricts the landlord from leasing space to 22 competing technology brands near the store, as specified by the tenant. This is one of the first such instances in the Indian retail sector of an 'anchor' tenant leveraging its dominance to obtain such favourable terms.

An 'exclusive zone' is a tenant-requested clause designed to ensure that two similar tenants do not end up in such close retail proximity that they interfere with each other's customer traffic. In such cases, landlords are wary of the restriction being too wide, effectively acting as a restraint on their space-rental business. Fortunately for Apple, past rulings of law courts in India suggest that such a restrictive clause does not

violate any Indian law, considering that its objective is not restrictive of trade but to facilitate the retailing of a company's products in a specified geographical location (and also that the restriction ends with the expiry of the lease tenure).

Across the world, big shopping malls rely on an anchor retailer to attract footfalls. This is also evident in India, where some shopping centres have turned into loss-making 'ghost malls' after their anchor tenants shut shop. Anchor retailers are in a position to use this dependence to their advantage by negotiating the lease rent and

QUICK READ

that protect either party from

being let down by the other.

corresponding terms in anticipation of market downturns.

period of time. As tenant

departures could also

Dominant retailers have begun There also exists a 'co-tenancy' clause that to exercise their clout as tenants. enables an anchor tenant Apple's rental deal in Mumbai, for example, reportedly has an to exercise the right to pay reduced rent if the 'exclusive zone' clause designed shopping centre fails to to keep rival brands at a distance. achieve a pre-negotiated An anchor tenant at a mall may occupancy level of nationally recognized have a symbiotic relationship with the landlord and their lease tenants "open and operating" within a specified agreement can include clauses

reduce the whole shopping centre's traffic, specific conditions could be stipulated as the trigger for rent reduction. If occupancy falls below a certain threshold along a timeline, for example, this clause could be invoked.

There can be complexities. An anchor

tenant with market clout, for example, may want to reduce the rent payable to, say, a fixed percentage of its gross sales till the time the co-tenancy occupancy threshold is attained. This may invite its own disputes. To begin with, the landlord and tenant may have different interpretations of who quali-

fies as a "nationally recognized tenant" or what an "open and operating" store means. Further, the legality of an anchor tenant using a unilateral formula to determine rent in response to a breach of the co-tenancy clause has been contested in US courts, where it has been held that "co-tenancy provisions will be generally enforceable, unless they are substantively unreasonable."

While lease rent in India is governed by the rent control legislation of respective states and is a result of the sum agreed upon by both parties, India's apex court has made it clear that "both the landlord and tenant are empowered under the law to approach the rent controller for fixing 'fair rent' during the subsistence of the lease."

Apart from choosing what concessions to extend to an anchor tenant, there are certain terms under a lease that landlords can negotiate to protect their interests. For any big retail centre, store occupancy drives traffic and a shuttered anchor will inevitably hurt smaller tenants. Dark storefronts and corridors put customers off. To combat this, landlords can introduce the right to 're-capture space in lease agreements. This would empower them to take back rented space from an anchor tenant in the event the latter is not open for business for a defined period of time during the week. Landlords could also demand monetary compensation from such a tenant. In general, though, with organized retail expected to expand further and Indian spending on the rise, we can expect to see retailers with significant clout and market presence driving a hard bargain with landlords for retail spaces

These are the author's personal views.





THEIR VIEW

Set priorities to prepare for the global economy that's emerging

How well we leverage and ride ongoing transformations of energy and digital technology will determine India's success



is chairman, Centre for Development Studies.

new government will soon take charge at the centre. Hopefully, India's new government will have a long-term vision and the courage to think outside the box. Nothing less will do to prepare India for the emerging new global economy, driven by fundamental, disruptive technological changes that are gathering momentum.

There have been periods in history when such fundamental technological change has had a profound, pervasive impact on the way we live and work. The first industrial revolution triggered by the coal-powered steam engine, electricity, the oilpowered transport revolution and the computer and communication revolutions are illustrations of such disruptive technological change in modern history. Today, two such transformations are simultaneously underway: the energy transition and the digital transformation.

The fossil-fuel-based industrial economy had more or less run its course by the end of the 20th century, as it became evident that burning fossil fuels was leading to climate change, which could eventually make the earth uninhabitable. It took another quarter century for national governments to agree on targets to limit greenhouse gas emissions and switch to alternative technologies to arrest global warming. But action by governments to achieve those targets has proceeded at a snail's pace, while we are already experiencing the impact of global warming in our daily lives.

Fortunately, the market and private capital have come to the rescue. As the profitability of renewables became evident, massive private investment flowed in to fast-track the transition to solar power, wind power and green hydrogen across a wide range of industries. Costs plummeted as renewable energy capacity and products were rolled out at scale to reap economies of scale. Reports suggest that the costs of solar power, off-shore and on-shore wind power and electric vehicle batteries have dropped by 80%, 60-70% and 80% respectively. The binding constraint now is not technology, but inadequate availability of financing in developing countries where much of the transition to renewables must be done (Sudipto Mundle, Mint, 28 April and 25 May 2023). However, the market is likely to devise instruments like guarantees and insurance to find its way around this constraint.

Though markets and private capital are leading the energy transformation, national governments are also playing a key role in supporting and subsiding private companies. Chinese companies now control more than three-fourths of the global photovoltaic cells market and well over half the global market for wind turbines, electric vehicles and e-vehicle batteries, thanks to large scale government support. There has been pushback from



QUICK READ

Perhaps for the first time in

history, two fundamental tech

transformations are taking place

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this sets the stage for a boom.

global economic transformation

that a new government will take

charge to lead India for the next

five years. Its policy agenda must

focus on new opportunities.

It is at this critical juncture of a

the US and EU. But US companies are also receiving billions of dollars in subsidies under the Inflation Reduction Act and the EU is contemplating its own counter-measures. Green industries are growing rapidly, thanks to intense global competition among leading companies, supported by their respective governments.

Most of the examples of disruptive technical change cited at the outset were embodied in machines designed to replicate and multiply hugely the physical capacity of human beings. But the computer revolution pioneered by Alan Turing and others led to machines that would replicate and massively multiply the mental capacity of human beings. Semi-conductor chips multiplied the capacity of these machines manifold while miniaturizing them. Computers com $bined\,with\,the\,communication$ revolution gave us the internet, then smartphones and finally artificial intelligence (AI): large learning models that don't just follow human commands, but

autonomously replicate and hugely multiply, with Generative AI (GenAI), their capacity for some forms of human-like thinking. The advent of AI

will further change the way we live and work. Deep thinkers like Geoffrey Hinton, recognized as the 'father of AI,' and Israeli philosopher Yuval Harari fear that AI poses an existential threat to humankind. Others like Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, argue AI can be deployed to immensely

enhance human knowledge and creativity across

In India, the AI experience has been quite positive so far. The Microsoft LinkedIn Work Trend Index indicates that 92% of knowledge workers in India use AI, as compared to a global average of 75%. However, much of this has to do with the application of AI and GenAI algorithms, rather

than creating them. There is now intense global competition, especially between the US and China, in leading this digital transformation, since its enormous strategic and economic potential is clear.

> Perhaps for the first time in history, two fundamental tech nological transformations are taking place together, their pace intensified by global rivalry. Barring catastrophic shocks, this will usher in a massive investment boom and decades of high growth as new technological and economic processes change the world in which we live.

> It is at this critical juncture of a global economic transformation

that a new government will take charge to lead India for the next five years. How well we prepare to leverage both technological transformations and ride them successfully will determine whether India becomes the third largest economy by the end of this decade, as has been projected, and a developed country by the middle of the century. Hopefully, this will be the strategic agenda of India's new government.

MINT CURATOR

Transparency holds the key to a carbon market that delivers

Resolving this market failure will help us against climate change



is the founder and majority owner of Bloomberg LP and UN Special Envoy on Climate Ambition and Solutions

he problem of climate change cannot be solved without capitalism. Governments have tried for more than three decades with little to show for it. And while more of them are now engaging partners in the private sector, the world is still lagging in deploying the full power of the market. An announcement by the Joe Biden administration in the US could help change that by beginning a much-needed overhaul of the market for carbon credits.

Global investment in clean energy has accelerated but is far below what's required to restrain rising temperatures. Governments will not make up that difference on their own. Private capital will be needed, and while businesses and investors are eager to provide it, a market failure in one crucial area-carbon credits-is keeping them on the sidelines.

Carbon credits, which are bought and sold in a voluntary carbon market, offer companies and investors many ways to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. In addition to helping finance new clean-energy installations, these credits can drive capital to projects with high upfront costs and high potential rewards, such as scaling up green hydrogen technology. They can also play a role in funding reforestation and ecological preservation, as well as financing the early retirement of coal plants.

There is enormous potential demand for carbon credits. Many business leaders $recognize\,that\,tackling\,climate\,change\,is\,in$ their companies' self-interest and are setting ambitious decarbonization goals. That is not altruism. It's capitalism.

Companies have far less control, however, of their 'Scope 3' emissions, those generated by suppliers and customers. Letting firms buys credits against these emis sions-but only after they disclose and begin implementing robust plans aligned with the Paris Agreement—could dramatically increase demand for them. For the demand side of the market to function, however, supply side problems must be fixed. Right now, the market for credits is opaque and riddled with inefficiency. Buyers can't be sure which credits are credible, projects often don't deliver what they promise and sellers can't be held accountable. Lack of transparency also opens the door for greenwashing, where companies claim to be making a much bigger difference than they are, which fuels public scepticism about [private efforts].

As a result, the market for carbon credits is much smaller and far less useful than it should be. Many of us have long been sceptical of it, and for good reason. As with any



The US is trying to fix its faulty market for carbon credits

market, opacity breeds not only inefficacy but also corruption.

This is a market failure we can fix, and we should treat it like any other market failure. For instance, when banks collapsed and the stock market melted down in 2007, the world didn't walk away from markets and banking. Governments worked to address some of the causes of the crisis, including requiring more transparency of opaque securities like credit default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. A similar remedy is needed for carbon credits.

Transparency works. Bloomberg's story is a testament to that. When we created Bloomberg in 1981, there was virtually no way for firms (especially smaller ones) to negotiate bond prices with sellers, because sellers had all the information. Prices were inflated, commissions were enormous and the market was inefficient. By creating real-time bond pricing and making it available to buyers and sellers, we helped level the playing field and allowed more capital to flow to productive assets, benefiting investors and driving economic growth.

For markets to work well, they must be transparent, trusted and standardized three qualities that have largely eluded the market for carbon credits. But change is coming. The US has released a policy statement and set of principles for building more transparent, responsible and effective voluntary carbon markets. It's an important step that builds on work led by the Integrity Council for the Voluntar Carbon Market and the Voluntary Carbon

Markets Integrity Initiative. Together, these efforts can do for the carbon market what the Bloomberg Terminal helped do for the bond market in the 1980s. Through transparency and standardization, we can generate more trust that these investments are sound, turning a relatively small market into an enormous one, and a relatively inefficient one into a powerhouse. This way, we can unleash the market power that we desperately need on our side in this fight. Encouraging other nations to join should be a priority for the Biden administration, including at November's G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Fixing the carbon-credit market won't solve the climate crisis on its own, but it will go a long way towards enlisting the market in the fight. **©BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

Inclusivity crisis: Transgender students need support

SUHANI GARG & YASHVI BANSAL



Institute of International Business (FIIB).

ndia's democracy is famed globally not just for its size, but for its diversity. There are sections of people, however, who suffer the effects of centuries-old practices that deny them their right to equality. One such community at the receiving end comprises individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+.

While doing our internship at Basera Samajik Sansthan and living with transgender people for 15 days, we observed much variation in how they chose to describe themselves. A transgender woman, some one assigned the gender 'male' at birth who identifies as female, might describe herself as a "transwoman", "male-to-female" or simply "female," and vice versa. Some do not identify as either male or female, opting to go beyond the gender binary.

In India, transgenderism is well known as a sub-culture. Yet, mainstream awareness about the community is very low, which worsens their social oppression. A transwoman working for a global lifestyle brand recounts how co-workers would often ridiculed her appearance. Customers would also pass snide remarks and avoid her billing counter. She was deeply disheartened, she says. In another instance, a transgender individual secured a job at a renowned pathology lab. On her first day, the organization invited the media to celebrate its recruit and showcase its commitment to diversity and inclusion. It was good news for all transgenders in need of regular jobs. However, after seven months, the company asked her to leave, citing an alleged contractual term that was never documented. Unlike the fanfare on her first day, her dismissal got no media attention. Diversity for the lab was only performative, she says, aimed at brownie points instead of genuine inclusion. This incident highlights the reluctance of employers to accept transgender individuals. Similar cases of discrimination are found in educational settings.

Data suggests that the literacy rate among India's transgender population is significantly lower than the national average. This disparity extends to education, with transgender students dropping out of school. Many of them face a hostile environment within institutions. Bullying, harassment and the targeted use of derogatory language create a climate of humiliation and anxiety. These experiences take a toll on their wellbeing, contributing to depression, a major factor leading young people to leave school prematurely. Despite their strong desire for education, they find their academic goals thwarted. This highlights the need for rapid progress in creating safe and welcoming learning environments for all.

There are an estimated 25 million transgender people globally, and they are nearly

four times more likely to suffer from conditions like depression, anxiety and the ills of substance misuse than cisgender individuals. The former often encounter barriers to enrolling in higher education due to discrepancies between their birth certificate's assigned sex and their gender identity. As a result, many are unable to pursue university education. In India, low

educational qualifica-

QUICK READ equality demands that we act. Those who identify as LGBTQI+

Whether it's as students or job seekers, transgender folks still have to bear discrimination and hostility. Their upliftment will be a long haul but the principle of

deserve better. We must respect chosen names and pronouns, provide gender-neutral facilities, strengthen legal protections and establish feedback mechanisms.

tions and job discrimination have led some to turn to prostitution for income, with increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases. Government policy interventions for transgenders include the National Youth Policy, which recognizes transgender youth as marginalized and calls for support for the LGBTQ+ community. Then, there are Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules and Ayushmaan Bharat TG Plus Scheme, among several other welfare schemes. The way forward would be to

establish specialized schools for vocational training and guidance. promote transgender culture, integrate transgender-related topics into academic curricula and explore new modes of engagement that can dismantle barriers and foster inclusive classrooms. We must also respect people's chosen names and pronouns, provide gender-neutral facilities, ensure confidentiality, offer financial assistance, strengthen legal protections and establish feedback mechanisms. Support for transgenders in pursuit of education and employment, of course, must be a priority.

Vision statements and guidelines apart, very few educational institutions in India have established inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ students. Gender-inclusive policies are imperative for a substantive change to be achieved. To this end, it is crucial for everyone to acknowledge the right of transgender students to determine their own gender identity. The transition processes of officialdom that involve gender and name changes should be smooth.

It is time to set up committees dedicated to addressing gender minority concerns. From privacy issues to protocols, there is much ground to cover. Further, state governments should implement appropriate laws to regulate institutions and ensure compliance with inclusion guidelines. For truly effective law-making, opinions need to be sought from within the transgender community and taken into consideration.

Community participation is a very important factor for overall progress on gender inclusion-so that everyone in the country can live a life of dignity.

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PAPER WITH PASSION-

Appeals no more

The last phase of Lok Sabha polls gets over on June 1 after weeks-long campaign and slogans

The biggest electoral contest in the world will conclude with the seventh phase of voting on June 1. It has been a dynamic election season; the battleground vibrant with slogans, promises and appeals. The major coalitions, the NDA and INDIA, have each deployed strategic messaging to galvanise voter support. When it comes to sloganeering, the BJP-led NDA has been a hands-down winner, coming up with not one but several catchy phrases to woo the electorate. 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' (Together with all, Development for all, Trust of all) has been a cornerstone of its campaign. 'Naya Bharat' (New India), aimed at portraying the vision for a progressive and self-reliant nation, was another NDA slogan. Along the same lines was 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-reliant India) which reflected the NDA's focus on boosting local industries and reducing dependency on foreign goods. But more interesting were its jumlas (catchy phrases) that were floated intermittently to give the NDA 'top recall



value': 'Abki baar 400 paar' (this time, we will cross 400) and 'Modi ki guarantee'. The major takeaways from the NDA's election pitch were of course its 'Sankalp Patra', heavily focused on economic progress, showcasing initiatives like Make in India, Digital India and the push towards a \$5 trillion economy. The NDA alliance also highlighted its efforts in strengthening national security. The message is clear a strong leadership to safeguard the nation.

Not to be outdone, the INDIA bloc also used several slogans to reach voters' hearts. Prominence was given to slogans critical of the Modi Government's unpopular policies and its actions to subvert democracy by

sending Opposition leaders to jail. 'Jai jawan, Jai kisan, Jai samvidhan' (Hail the soldier, the farmer, the Constitution) drew heavily on this sentiment. 'Bharat Jodo' (Unite India), a call for unity across the nation's diverse fabric to counter divisive politics, was inspired by Rahul Gandhi's pan-India foot march. Yet another slogan from the INDIA stable was 'Nyay' (Justice), a promise to address disparities and ensure equitable growth. The INDIA alliance has positioned itself as the protector of social justice, focusing on uplifting marginalised communities, ensuring minority rights and addressing caste-based and religious discrimination. The INDIA bloc has promised to tackle issues like farmer suicides, inadequate MSP (Minimum Support Price) and the need for comprehensive agrarian reforms. Of course, 'Save democracy' has been its main theme. The NDA's pitch was more country-centric security, \$5 trillion economy and so forth but INDIA's pitch was more about people, their sufferings and plight due to economic hardships. INDIA's focus on social justice and inclusivity is designed to attract voters who feel marginalised. Their promises to address agrarian distress and safeguard democratic values are aimed at rural voters, farmers and the educated urban electorate. Who really touched people's hearts, we shall get to know on June 4.



Children playing in water to beat the heat during a hot summer day, in Ranch

Unveiling the enigma of an unusual election



In this election, accusations of tampering with constitutional values take centre stage, punctuated by issues such as the annulment of OBC certificates by the Calcutta HC

t is one of the strangest elections. Nobody speaks out. Visibly there is no wave. Election commission warnings to defaulting speakers are in nuances. More than the prices and unemployment, saving the Constitution has become the prime concern. This is an onslaught on their rights, asserting the Dalits, OBCs, Scheduled tribes and other marginalised classes. An issue raised by the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi seems to reverberate. Swelling crowds at Phulpur and Lalganj in the suburbs and Allahabad city at Congress and Samajwadi Party speak a lot.

Another key aspect is the campaigning gusto with the nominations by Rahul Gandhi at Rae Bareli and family friend Kishori Lal Sharma at Amethi. It is being called Rae Bareli syndrome. It has infused life to Indian alliance workers — AAP, Samajwadi Party and Congress almost everywhere. It has enthused the opposition parties, who now want to clinch the battle.

This is in sharp contrast to BJP leaders' meetings, which are marked by empty chairs as also apologetic clarifications that they are not for changing the statute. But the '400 paar' slogan of the BJP is being equated with a design to change the sacred Constitution of BR Ambedkar. The opposition, INDIA, seemingly has become a trailblazer and the ruling NDA is busy clarifying its

charges.
Rally after rally of the NDA is countering the accusations of toying with the statute and trying to alter its basic principles. Selling of public sector assets to preferred private groups comes next. The rulers are saying that major PSUs like ISRO and HAL remain intact. They are, however, quiet on Indian Oil and Railways.

There are emerging issues like the sudden nullification of OBC certificates issued till 2010 by the Calcutta High Court. It is a double-edged sword that targets the Trinamool Congress Government in West Bengal and the Central iovernment alike. Prices make the highest noise, followed by religion and Agniveer part-time soldiers supposedly compromising with the country's security.



Five kg of free ration is no longer an issue. People have taken it for granted that they would have free ration anyway whosoever is in power. But jobs have become a major issue. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's assurance of one lakh rupee a year for apprenticeship per unemployed is being lapped up so as Rs 1 lakh for every woman. "This money is for the family", Gandhi

many of the days of post-emer-

gency rallies and apologetic

clarifications by the then prime

minister Indira Gandhi. She was also called the Janata

Party, a khichri or motley

The top BJP leaders' assertion that "abhi to yah trailor hai" may be counter-productive considering the Supreme Court Stated Newsclick journalist Prabir Purakayastha's detention was illegal and released him. Gradually most news systems seem to be changing its delivery, a bid to snare space with the surging opposition.

Job reservation, though scoffed at by the BJP, has got a new lease of life with the Bihar caste

RESTORING PURI'S ANCIENT TEMPLE



THERE ARE EMERGING ISSUES. LIKE THE SUDDEN **NULLIFICATION OF OBC CERTIFICATES ISSUED UNTIL 2010** BY THE CALCUTTA HIGH COURT. IT IS A DOUBLE-EDGED **SWORD THAT** TARGETS THE TMC **GOVERNMENT IN** WEST BENGAL AND

THE CENTRAL

GOVERNMENT ALIKE

census and the slogan "jiski jitni sankhya bhari, uski utni hissedari". Yes, reservation is to stav and Indians have to grapple with it. The BJP has been painted not in a bright colour on this score by the opposition. Despite the Calcutta High Court cancellation of all OBC certificates and a tough stance against TMC leader Mamata Banerjee, it will not be easy to nullify the reservation in an aspirational jobless country.

Another peculiar aspect is the regional variations of the poll. Congress or its alliance partners are the principal opposition in UP, MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Himachal, Maharashtra, Punjab and has even come out with some determination in Gujarat. Most southern States have secured tie-ups with the Congress. BJP is fighting a straight bat-

tle in all those States as also in Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and many other smaller States. The poll is being keenly contested and results are difficult to guess, particularly with the EC revising the total extra votes polled by over 1.7 crore. The jerky expressions of BJP leaders, achievements of the party have put it on the back foot with each day partly leaders dishing

out new figures on the lower side. This gives jitters to the party cadre. It is another story that the cadre is mostly missing. They are not seen moving robustly in constituencies and managing the booths. It is being said that the cadre has been told by the organisation to stay put and not seek to vote for anyone.

The cadre apathy is said to be reflected in its performance. More so the voters are getting alerted by its slogan "abhi to yah trailor hai", spoken by top BJP leaders often, may not suit the BJP. Quite a few YouTube news channels and skits like "Dadi Poti ke Khat" have viewership in lakhs. These are setting the basics for election narratives across the country in different languages.

How these are influencing the

voters would be known as boxes open on June 4. BJP leaders' shrill deliveries and the brash expressions from public platforms are not taken kindly. Still predicting the elections is not easy. The Election Commission adding to 1.7 crore votes to the numbers cast after a few days may do wonders. The election this time with regional flavours of all kinds and quiet voters may even fox the exit poll stalwarts if it is free and fair. Nobody should wonder if the post-June stressing on mangal sutra to l exit polls reflect a frend that Muslims instead of the could be different from the actual.

> (The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Believe in yourself, not in superstitions



Discovering happiness hinges on passion and diligence, not reliance on external predictors. Be your own lucky charm through hard work

n Sundays, I usually find myself glancing through the weekly forecasts in the newspapers. A favourable week ahead is enough to bring a smile to my lips. It is good fun for the moment. But it was not always so. A few decades ago, I was heading a major department in a Government production unit. Yet I was restless, not satisfied with the way my life was moving. Repeated visits astrologers and their forecasts became the opium to soothe my frayed nerves. So much so that when I actually got another posting, I visited an astrologer for reassurance that the movement would be auspicious. As I moved into an entirely different role, I found that I loved the new job with the same zeal that I had displayed in my earlier workspaces. I realised a few years later that the key to my happiness was within me-a passion to immerse myself in the moment. I have not gone

back to an astrologer since

ling with my colleagues one

had something important night to catch a flight to Europe for a study tour. The driver braked the vehicle to an abrupt halt as a cat crossed the road. The driver was in a dilemma. It was not a good sign. He resolved the issue by reversing the car a few metres before continuing to ward off the ill effect. I was to remember the incident when I had to cut short my stay by a couple of days having caught stomach flu, probably consuming beer and other savouries during the Oktoberfest festivities in

Germany. The feline in Delhi had no inkling of its role in my misfortune. I am often surprised at the

to communicate. This fear of the unknown is not limited to us only. Such superstitions abound even in the so called modern western world. We all have heard the myths of break a mirror and bad luck follows for 7 years, the curse of Friday the 13th, sneezes and blessings, fingers crossed, purse on the floor, money out of the door and countless others.

invoke the blessings, or even to ward off the evil, for

an unknown future. Many

of us have gone through the

process of our mothers

feeding us curd and sugar

when leaving home for the

examinations. The ritual

did not help me with papers

that I had not prepared

well. I also remember my

elders telling me not to call

out a person leaving home

to avoid ill luck, even if I

Cricket has been a craze in our country ever since I can remember. IPL is a relatively recent phenomenon that has fueled the frenzy to unimaginable heights. Fans root for players, who are not even remotely connected Years earlier, I was travel- measures taken by us, to with the State or city after

which the team is named. The tournament has also sprouted several homegrown charms to ensure victory. I am surprised to see people continuing to remain standing or sitting for the duration of the match, controlling the uncomfortable urge to empty bursting bladders, or staying at home even at the cost of cancelling urgent engagements, among many other quirky behaviours.

A lucky charm would also work only if one acts, that too based on sound reasoning and an understanding of the risks involved. Even if one fails, it might not feel like the end of the world. Do it the other way round and it is a heady cocktail for disappointment.

American actress and comedian Lucille Ball's words inspire me to set myself free and be my own lucky charm: "Luck to me is something else: Hard work and realising what is opportunity and what isn't." The author is an electrical

engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

Madam — Apropos the news article, "ASI moves to restore 1400-year-old Shiva temple in Puri," published on May 29, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, the story of the Swapneswar Mahadev temple in Ódisha's Puri district resonates deeply. The recent discovery and imminent restoration of this 1300-1400-yearold marvel is both exciting and a reminder of the rich historical tapestry of our

The temple, showcasing the unique Kalingan architectural style, had been neglected for years, buried under vegetation and obscurity. The Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) efforts to designate it as a "monument of national importance" will ensure that it receives the attention and resources needed for preservation. This initiative, supported by various ministers and INTACH, reflects a commendable commitment to preserving our cultural heritage. The intricate stonework and historical significance of the temple are a testament to the craftsmanship of the post-Gupta era. Protecting such monuments is crucial, not just for their architectural beauty but for the cultural and historical legacy they represent.

Roshan Nayak | Puri

INDIA NEEDS MORE DEFENCE FUNDS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "India needs substantial defence investment", published on May 29, this is my response. Reading the daily headlines reveals a complex landscape for India's defence strategy. The BJP's manifesto, promising a "Surakshit Bharat," emphasises achievements like the revocation of Article 370 and reductions in terrorism, yet recent attacks in J&K challenge these claims. Historical incidents, from the 2001 Parliament attack to the Pulwama tragedy, illustrate the persistent threat of

The BJP touts surgical strikes as deterrents, but critics point to ongoing violence and the situation in Manipur as evidence of unmet challenges. The omission of China

Ensure fire safety, prevent tragedies



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ments to ensure firefighting equipment functional and there are no obstacles on staircases," published on May 29, this is my response. The loss of newly born lives in the heart-wrenching fire incident in a neonatal hos-

and Pakistan from the manifesto is concerning, especially given the unresolved tensions in Ladakh. Moreover, defence spending remains insufficient. Despite rising GDP, the allocation has dropped to under 2 per cent, far below what's needed to match China's military capability. With global trends showing increased defence investments, India must re-evaluate its priorities to effectively address its twin threats

and ensure robust national security. **Pratiksha Sharma** | *Ujjain*

END CASTE HATRED IN INDIA Madam — Apropos the article "Nurture dreams with open eyes and determination," published on May 29, this is my response. Sanjay Chandra rightly highlighted the importance of supporting others in their journey towards realising their aspirations. But to achieve fraternity among Indians, caste hatred is a major obstacle. The latest National Crime Records Bureau data show the crimes against Dalits increased from 50,744 in 2021 to 57,428 in 2022. The graph has been going up since 2013. There were 15,368 crimes against Scheduled

pital in East Delhi is a huge, irreparable loss for the bereaved families. The round of allegations and counter-allegations has started on the fire incidents.

The administration and Delhi Government should examine every technical and legal aspect to determine accountability. The explosion of an oxygen cylinder and fire due to a short circuit in a Delhi hospital is a serious case of negligence in safety parameters. The Central or State Government will have to make concrete arrangements to ensure that incidents of arson are not repeated anywhere. Fire safety-related infrastructure facilities should occasionally be audited and inspected without favour and waiver. Right now, the wellknown phrase befits on Delhi Government that the decadent and unpopular Nero "fiddled while Rome burned.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

Caste persons in 2022 in Uttar Pradesh, while MP ranked first in crimes against Scheduled Tribes from 2020 to 2022 However, the ugly apathy towards Dalits by the upper-caste members of the same religion is not just confined to these two States but all over India. In some schools in Tamil Nadu, students wear colour-coded wristbands to show their caste identity! This is a threat to the ideals of equality and fraternity. Even a machine cannot work if there is a conflict among its parts, let alone a State or a society. In his famous poem Apamanita (Insulted), Tagore said, "Whom you push down will pull you down." We cannot turn a blind eye to hatred, abuse, torture and exploitation towards our Dalit brothers and sisters. Political will and stringent punishment must be in place to prevent atrocities against Dalits. Also, Dalits should get proportional representation in every sector to counter caste-based nepo-

Sujit De | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Economic boost

S&P rating upgrade gives govt a leg-up

decade after upping India's economic outlook from 'negative' to 'stable', S&P Global Ratings has raised it to 'positive' on the back of 'robust economic growth, pronounced improvement in the quality of government spending and political commitment to fiscal consolidation'. This implies that India's creditworthiness — a key factor for investors — has improved. The rating upgrade has come on the eve of the final phase of the Lok Sabha polls. No wonder the Union Government has welcomed the revision in outlook, saying that it reflects a solid growth performance and good prospects for the coming years, even as S&P expects continuity in economic reforms and fiscal policies - irrespective of the outcome of the General Election.

The S&P has put its stamp on the remarkable recovery made by the Indian economy after the mayhem caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It has forecast India's GDP growth at 6.8 per cent this fiscal. This is an encouraging sign amid a global slowdown. Going a step ahead, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has estimated that the GDP growth is likely to touch 7 per cent in 2024-25. It was only last week that the RBI transferred a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government. The funds might be used to reduce the fiscal deficit, which the government hopes to bring down significantly over the next two years.

The stock market, however, was not impressed by the latest S&P rating, with Nifty and the BSE Sensex falling appreciably on Thursday. This downturn is being attributed to growing nervousness among investors ahead of the election verdict. Indian stock indices had a superb bull run last week, defying the slump in global markets. But the reversal suggests that a churn in the market sentiment is manifesting as the counting day nears. Could it be that a thumping victory for the BJP-led alliance is no longer a foregone conclusion?

Heatwave havoc

Urbanisation under fire as region sizzles

HE tragic death of a 40-year-old man due to heatstroke in Delhi underscores the lethal consequences of the ongoing heatwave. With temperatures reaching unprecedented levels, including a questionable 52.9°C in Delhi, the NCR is grappling with an environmental crisis with far-reaching impacts. The previous record was 51°C, clocked by Rajasthan's Phalodi in 2016. The scorching reality extends to Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, where the mercury has soared alarmingly in the past week. Rohtak recording 48.8°C and Chandigarh experiencing its hottest day at 46°C are some telling examples.

These extreme conditions are part of a broader pattern affecting North India. The brutal weather has forced schools in the region to shut a few days ahead of the scheduled vacation and raised the risk of heatstroke for people working outdoors. This is compounded by a severe water crisis. As temperatures soar, the demand for water has escalated, but supply remains critically inadequate. Residents in some affected towns and cities are receiving it through tankers, leading to scenes of desperate residents jostling for water. This dire situation poses significant public health risks.

The struggle is symptomatic of climatic shifts affecting urban India. Record-breaking temperatures, exacerbated by urban heat islands, highlight the urgent need for adaptive measures. This phenomenon, in which urban areas experience significantly higher temperatures than their rural surroundings, is driven by factors such as rampant concrete expansion and dwindling green spaces. Climate change is intensifying heatwaves across the globe. Urbanisation, without adequate planning for climate resilience, has turned cities into furnaces. The frequency and severity of heatwaves will increase, unless comprehensive mitigation and adaptation strategies are implemented. The tragic death in Delhi should serve as a wake-up call for sustained action to protect vulnerable populations from global warming.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

Tribune.

LAHORE, SATURDAY, MAY 31, 1924

Sir Edward MacLagan's tenure TODAY at Bombay, Sir Edward MacLagan hands over the charge of the administration, of which he has been the head during the last five years. The period has been one of great storm and stress, and no one who has been in touch with the province during this period will claim for His departing Excellency that nature had endowed him with the gifts necessary for piloting the ship of the State at such a time. He was an essentially good-natured but weak man, and like so many other weak men, he had the habit, while depending upon and probably following the lead of others, to cling to the line of policy chalked out for him with an obstinacy which could not have been greater if the policy had been his own. In reality, the last five years, when, if ever, Punjab needed a strong man of the right stamp, she had the misfortune to be ruled by one who had no mind and no will except the mind and will of those around him, of the permanent Civil Service on the one hand and on the other an ambitious Minister whose one dominating purpose was to make his own position secure. Between the one and the other, Sir Edward has committed blunder after blunder, all the time imagining, as we firmly believe, that he was acting in the best interests of the province committed to his care. Here is a real tragedy, but it is a tragedy which is inseparable from the experiment of putting a round peg in a square hole. There were plenty of offices even in India in which Sir Edward could probably have acquitted himself with both credit and distinction. The Governorship of Punjab was clearly not one of them.

The Bhima Koregaon saga of injustice

Charges yet to be framed against the accused, even though the first arrests were made in 2018



TRYSTS AND TURNS **JULIO RIBEIRO**

LPA Shah, whose family hailed from Gujarat, was raised in Nairobi, where my deceased wife, Melba, was born and lived till the age of 10. The Mau Mau movement in Kenya forced many families of Indian origin to leave that country. The Menezes of Goa to which my wife belonged was among the few families that returned to India. They sailed back to Goa, while Alpa emigrated to England.

She studied at Cambridge University and the London School of Economics, where she is presently a professor of anthropology. She is the author of Nightmarch and In the Shadows of the State. But it is her recent book, The Incarcerations: Bhima Koregaon and the Search for Democracy in India, that got me acquainted with this intrepid warrior for human rights.

Incarcerations was published in March. Alpa has delved into the personal history of each of the 16 men and women accused of being members of a banned Maoist organisation that was allegedly plotting to kill Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The accusation of plotting to kill Modi appears to have been added for effect. It was not repeated during the investigations.

Those arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case were a motley crowd of lawyers, academics, writers, poets and even balladeers, some not even known to the others, like Kabir Kala Manch poet Sudhir Dhawale, singers Ramesh Gaichor, Sagar Gorkhe and Jvoti Jagtap.

Each of them spent many years in jail without being con-

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DRACONIAN: Bail is almost impossible to obtain in cases under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. PTI

victed, without even being tried! Since they were arrested under the draconian UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), the process was phased to become the sentence. Bail is almost impossible to obtain in UAPA cases. The charges against the Bhima Koregaon accused have not yet been framed, though the first arrests were made in 2018. A few of them are on bail. Some are still in prison. Their trial is not likely to start anytime in the near future.

'Bail, not jail' was the principle laid down by Justice VR Krishna Iyer, one of the most respected jurists to have graced the Supreme Court. His elder brother, VR Laxminarayanan, an IPS colleague of mine, served in the CBI. The UAPA was meant to neutralise the 'mischief' of that legal principle in cases where the security of the nation was said to be threatened. But in actual practice, it has been turned into an instrument of injustice, confining citizens arrested under that Act to incarceration without trial for years together.

The 16 incarcerated activists belong to different communities. There are four Christians — Fr Stan Swamy (now deceased), a Jesuit priest born in an affluent landholding family of Tamil Nadu, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira of Mumbai and

'Bail, not jail' was the principle laid down by Justice VR Krishna Iyer, one of the most respected jurists to have graced the Supreme Court.

Rona Wilson of Kerala. There is one Muslim, Hany Babu, also from Kerala, and seven Dalit rights activists - Anand Teltumbde, married to Rama, granddaughter of Dalit icon BR Ambedkar, Jyoti Jagtap, Sagar Gorkhe, Ramesh Gaichor, Sudhir Dhawale, Surendra Gadling and Shoma Sen.

The rest were upper-caste Hindus — Bharadwaj, Mahesh Raut (a forest rights activist from Gadchiroli), Gautam Navlakha, a human rights activist whose partner Sabha Husain was a women's rights activist, and Varavara Rao, a left-oriented poet from Hyderabad who had been in prison earlier for his poems and activities.

Bharadwaj and Fr Swamy were fighting for tribal rights. Bharadwaj was born in the US to Indian parents who were academics. She had a US passport, which she surrendered when she decided to spend her life with the tribals fighting for their due by law. She studied at ITT-Kanpur. Bharadwaj spent three years in jail before being released by the Bombay High Court. Her only 'crime' was taking up the cause of tribals who were being dispossessed of their

Under Fr Swamy's leadership, tribals were made aware of their rights in accordance with the laws in force. These laws militated against the mining of iron ore and coal in tribal lands. Many corporate groups were hit by the objections raised by the Ho tribals of Jharkhand, prompted by Fr Swamy. He spent a year in jail and died in judicial custody.

land in Chhattisgarh.

Teltumbde was an engineer who worked for two decades at Bharat Petroleum before he was appointed CEO and Managing Director of Petronet India, an oil and gas production company in the public sector. Before he retired, he got a PhD in management from the University of Mumbai. He joined as a professor at the Vinod Gupta School of Manage-

ment at IIT-Kharagpur; later, he was picked up in Goa by the Pune Police for a crime he said he did not commit.

The only evidence produced by the police and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) against Teltumbde was correspondence extracted from his computer and those of some of the others suspected of Maoist links, which they all have disowned. Teltumbde's main interest was to analyse nationwide data to show that Dalits and Adivasis were the poorest of all groups in India and had not benefited from neo-liberalisation and globalisation. This stand was contrary to the efforts being made by the Sangh Parivar to include Dalits and Adivasis in the greater Hindu fold, whereas the efforts of activists like Bharadwaj, Fr Swamy, Teltumbde and Sen tended to prove that stigmas of caste and tribe had survived in contemporary India and discrimination against them was the rule.

Alpa's book is a must-read for all students of contemporary Indian politics. The finding of US-based experts on the hacking of computers suggested the presence of a "hacker for hire", an expert in the use of malware to insert evidence in victims' computers. The NIA and the Pune Police refuse to accept the findings of Arsenal Consulting and Sentinel Labs, two globally recognised digital forensics and cybersecurity companies based in the US. The defence will try to submit the findings of these experts during the trial.

But when will the trial commence? There are no signs of even the charges being framed! Is there any democratic country in the world that keeps citizens in jail for years together without hope of a trial, especially when they claim they are not guilty of the offences for which they have been charged? I would like to be enlightened. So would Alpa. And so should all of you who read her meticulously researched book.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

If you tremble with indignation at every injustice, then you are a comrade of mine. - Che Guevara

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Real issues remain unaddressed

The last phase of the Lok Sabha elections is around the corner. Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, among other states, and Chandigarh are set to vote on June 1. It is a good time to reflect on the current state of politics in India, where dialogue has been replaced by noise and distractions. Voters have started to feel disillusioned with politicians, who are seen as shrewd, selfserving opportunists. They make tall promises ahead of an election to garner votes but fail to deliver on them. What happened to PM Narendra Modi's poll promise of better days (achhe din)? Besides, many politicians often try to take advantage of the religious sentiments of the masses or seek the blessings of self-styled godmen to gain votes. Meanwhile, real issues like unemployment, unprecedented inflation and the drug menace remain unaddressed.

JASBIR SINGH CHAWLA, BY MAIL

CBI must pull up its socks

Refer to the editorial 'Dera chief's acquittal'; the court's observation that the investigating officers carried out a 'tainted and sketchy' investigation delivers a severe blow to the credibility and reputation of the probe agency. The case suffered from a number of legal infirmities. The car allegedly used in the crime could not be recovered. Despite the prosecution witnesses' claim about the assailants being armed, no weapon could be found. Though Ram Rahim - who has been convicted in two rape cases and another murder case — will remain in jail, his acquittal in the Ranjit Singh case has cast aspersions on the functioning of the CBI. While it was considered an open-and-shut case, it could not withstand legal scrutiny and fell flat in court. This must prompt the CBI to get its act together.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

Don't allow miscarriage of justice

The acquittal of dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim in the Ranjit Singh murder case underscores a glaring failure on the part of the CBI. It is telling that the Punjab and Haryana High Court found the probe carried out by the investigating officers 'tainted and sketchy'. The fact that the probe agency could not even recover the weapons or the vehicle used in the crime undermines its credibility. Besides, it highlights the detrimental impact of the media's influence on the objectivity of a probe. The CBI must hold those responsible for the lapses accountable in order to restore public faith in the system. Such miscarriage of justice must not be allowed.

CHANCHALS MANN, UNA

"

India, Pak must give peace a shot

With reference to the editorial 'Sharif's admission'; the former Pakistan Prime Minister's acknowledgement that his country violated the 1999 Lahore Declaration is a watershed moment in the history of India-Pakistan relations. This is a rare opportunity for reconciliation. Sharif's admission about Pakistan's breach of the declaration — specifically the Kargil debacle — is a bold step towards peace. It must prompt both nations to end the hostilities and rekindle dialogue. This momentous occasion demands that New Delhi and Islamabad forge a path towards amity and cooperation. The two countries must not continue to be prisoners of the past but architects of a harmonious future.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

Step up security measures

With reference to the editorial 'Bomb threats'; the recent spate of threatening emails sent to schools and airports across the country are a matter of concern. Whether real or fake, any such threat must be taken seriously by the authorities concerned. Even a bit of complacency can result in a loss of life. The possibility of a common thread running through the threats sent to schools in Delhi-NCR, Kanpur, Lucknow, Jaipur, Kolkata and other cities cannot be ruled out. It is time for law enforcement agencies to step up security measures across the country and establish a mechanism to identify any suspicious activity at sensitive locations like educational institutions and airports.

PARISHA KHATRI, CHANDIGARH

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

Big Brother is watchingyou

SHASHI UBAN TRIPATHI

IPLOMATS posted abroad, whether in friendly countries or inimical ones, know that they are being watched — at home, at work, on tour. In many countries, surveillance was not so much in your face. In Karachi, the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) maintained a list of targets and Indians were right at the top.

When we moved into 63 Clifton, the Indian Consul General's (CG) designated house, an ISI tent quickly made its appearance opposite the main gate. We were told that it was for our protection, but we knew better. After a few days, it moved closer to the gate next to the boundary wall. All pretences were over. A ledger in the tent kept a record of cars entering our house or leaving it. The minute Mani Tripathi (the CG) or I (Deputy CG) ventured out, the motorcycle parked outside the ISI tent whired into motion.

Slowly, the men in the tent became acquaintances. Then, they became friends. Each time we had a reception, a big plate of snacks would go out to the tent.

When bilateral relations took a downtum, however, the surveillance intensified. There would be crank calls at the dead of night, just to provoke and annoy us. Usually, we ignored such calls. On one occasion, after an insistent ringing, Mani picked up the phone and the voice at the other end shouted: 'Kashmir banega Pakistan.' Mani said: 'Dekho bhai, raat ke barah baje to Kashmir Pakistan ban-ne se raha. Kyun apni neend kharab karte ho, aur hamari bhi? So jao. Subah dekhi jayegi (Look, brother. There is no chance of Kashmir becoming Pakistan at midnight. Why spoil your sleep and ours? Go to bed. We shall see in the morning).' There was a guffaw at the other end and the phone fell silent.

On my visit to Peshawar, I knew we were being tailed. In the course of the day, as we shared refreshments with the occupants of the car behind, the ice was broken and soon they were guiding us through crowded streets and narrow lanes. As we decided to make our way home, we found the main operative in the ISI car asking us frantically to stop. For a moment, my heart missed a beat. He came up to my car, and as I rolled down the window, he said: 'Janab, aap ja rahe hain? (Ma'am, are you leaving?)'

'Yes,' I said, 'But you have not done any shopping, Peshawar has the biggest cloth market, where you get fabric from all over,' he said. So, off we went to the cloth market (once again piloted by the ISI car), where I bought a bale of Do ghode ki Boski. Boski was a cream-coloured silk cotton material ideal for men's shirts and women's salwars. The most popular brand had a logo of two horses printed on it.

We turned homeward with an exchange of goodbyes. Elsewhere on the border between our two countries, a different kind of exchange was taking place — an exchange of crossfire accompanied by the relentless infiltration of terrorists. Thus, the paradox of frenemies (enemies who could be friends) continues to play itself out, time and time again.

Political wisdom a must to solve Punjab's problems



KC SINGH FORMER AMBASSADOR AND EX-SECRETARY, MEA

UNJAB goes to the polls tomorrow, with four major parties in the fray. The BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party(AAP) are in power at the Centre and in the state, respectively. In the past three decades or so, the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)-BJP alliance have ruled the state for 15 years each.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, interviewed by this newspaper, is promoting the BJP's vision and record of good governance. Farmers sitting in the searing heat at the Shambhu border would disagree. He has argued that the SAD-BJP alliance ended due to a "series of electoral routs" and the ally's inability to 'reform' and move "with the times". He has concluded that Punjab is 'disgusted' with AAP, 'disillusioned' with the Congress and 'disappointed with the SAD.

He is partly right on all counts. The SAD was founded in 1920 after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre to wrest control of Darbar Sahib and other gurdwaras from the British or Thereafter, the Akali leadership and the Congress were mostly in alignment during the freedom struggle. However, before attending the 1929 Lahore Congress session, the Akalis sought a commitment that no constitutional arrangement would be concluded without Sikh concurrence. This was reiterated before Independence. Although upset over the Partition on communal lines, the Sikh leadership rejected negotiations with Muhammad Ali Jinnah for an autonomous Sikh province within Pakistan.

But neither the Congress in the past nor the BJP now has understood the Sikhs' fears over the perceived threat to their language, religion and identity. This has surfaced periodically and been mishandled each time. The States' Reorganisation Act, 1956, reformed the boundaries of states on a linguistic basis, except those of Punjab. The Akali Dal's Punjabi Suba agitation persisted till the demand was conceded a decade later, albeit with many issues left unsettled or conditionally resolved.

The decade-long militancy, Operation Blue Star and the PM's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards shaped the Sikh angst. The 1984 mass killings of Sikhs, especially in Delhi, scarred the Sikh psyche. The SAD, under Parkash Singh Badal, by aligning with the BJP, managed to bridge the commu-



SHORTCOMING: Neither the Congress in the past nor the BJP now has understood the Sikhs' fears over the perceived threat to their language, religion and identity. TRIBUNE PHOTO

The perils of

dependence on

individual

businessmen or

a single export

destination are

demonstrated by

the fate of HP's

apple growers.

in 2023, the SAD has been reduced to a family enterprise with a Panthic veneer. The wooing of Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh by getting the Sikh clergy to pardon his blasphemous conduct was the last straw. The BJP, too, is pampering him in Haryana, with parole being granted leniently. Electoral benefit, not Sikh sentiments, takes precedence.

The SAD-BJP romance ended mainly over differences regarding the handling of the farmers' agitation in protest against the three Central farm laws. The BJP, instead of addressing the rural distress and the farming crisis in Punjab and Haryana, is adopting a divide-and-win policy.

It began with former CM Capt Amarinder Singh and the Dhindsa family being nal divide. After his demise lured by the BJP. While the

Congress leaders like Manpreet Singh Badal and Sunil Jakhar joined the BJP. Their collective influence, the BJP's urban Hindu support and the dera-guided Dalit vote were expected to enhance the BJP's political prospects in Punjab. The latest entrant is former

Dhindsas reversed course.

diplomat Taranjit Singh Sandhu as the BJP's Amritsar candidate. The BJP hopes to capitalise on the legacy of his grandfather Teja Singh Samundri, who died in custody in 1926, resisting British interference in Sikh gurdwara management. Historically, Punjab has memorialised martyrs Samundri, but punished those collaborating with perceived oppressors.

Amritpal Singh's sudden ascendance, followed by his arrest and now his candidature from Khadoor Sahib seat India amended the Essential

lead to the question: Is he the inheritor of the Samundri legacy or is it the grandson?

Punjab's problems are selfevident, but no party is comprehensively discussing solutions. They range from debt-caused rural distress, unsustainable farming, fragmented landholdings, joblessness, massive youth migration, lack of inbound investment in sustainable manufacturing, environmental stress and drug addiction. The export of agricultural or horticultural produce is a recurrent proposal. However, no system exists to facilitate it. The talk of reviving trade routes to Central Asia ignores the BJP's aggressive policy on Pakistan.

Simply bringing private entrepreneurs to lift the produce will create imbalanced profiteering by some in select districts. I have known MA Yusuff Ali of the LuLu Group since his pre-billionaire days in the late 1990s. He is a shrewd trader, now aiding the BJP electorally by promising procurement from Punjab.

Punjab needs a cooperative network for food procurement and export, like the Anand dairy cooperative which procures, processes and markets produce. They introduce modem techniques and deliver services that individual members can neither afford nor manage. The Abu Dhabi proposal for the India-UAE Food Sector Corridor announced in February 2022, with an outlay of \$7 billion.

Commodities Act to allow 'contract farming' and supply chains for export. The UAE budgeted \$2 billion for a food park to supply onions, rice and bananas. But the first big investment is going to Gujarat, with Madhya Pradesh also a beneficiary. Why have the northern states been ignored?

This proposal assumes the collaboration of the US and Israel under the four-nation I2U2 format. But Israel's Gaza misadventure degrades its viability as a partner. The same factors also threaten India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

The perils of dependence on individual businessmen or a single export destination are demonstrated by the fate of Himachal Pradesh's apple growers. 'Contract farming' needs guidelines and oversight to protect farmers. Punjab requires the political wisdom of Partap Singh Kairon. During his eight-year tenure, he established Punjab Agricultural University ahead of the Green Revolution, anticipating a demand for trained agricultural scientists.

Punjabis must introspect before voting. Outside the Hindi-belt states, regional parties have flourished. The SAD once performed that role. Historically, Punjabis resist autocracy and reject communalism. Let their instincts again guide them. This election is to save India, as envisaged by its founding fathers. Saving Punjab is a project for after June 4.

Juvenile justice must balance punishment with rehabilitation



SHARAD S CHAUHAN DGP & MD, PUNJAB POLICE HOUSING CORPORATION

N the aftermath of the May 19 Pune accident, in which two young bikeborne engineers were fatally hit by a Porsche car driven by a 17-year-old boy, a web of cover-ups and misuse of power has emerged, involving politicians, doctors and law enforcement officials.

The minor had reportedly been drinking at pubs before the accident. A local MLA is accused of influencing the investigation and is linked to doctors who allegedly tampered with the teenager's blood sample to conceal alcohol consumption. The Juvenile Justice Board, particuits non-judicial member, has faced flak for initially granting bail to the boy on lenient conditions like writing an essay. The minor's father and grandfather have been accused of wilful neglect and manipulating evidence and witnesses, including an alleged attempt to coerce their driver into taking the blame for the mishap. Police officials have been suspended for mishandling the case. The lapses on

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their part include a delayed collection of the teen's blood sample and initially pressing less serious charges.

The case underscores the complex interplay of influence and accountability, highlighting significant lapses and raising questions about the integrity of not only the juvenile justice system but the criminal justice system in general, which can be manipulated by the rich and powerful. Besides, such cases demonstrate that some minors display adult-level criminal behaviour.

Heinous crimes, such as rapes, violent assaults and fatal accidents, being committed by juveniles across the world highlight this trend. In England and Wales, stop and searches involving children rose by 13 per cent in one year, and arrests increased by 9 per cent, pointing to a rise in youth involvement in serious offences. The reoffending rate among juveniles in the UK has increased to 32.2 per cent, suggesting that the current system may not be addressing the root

causes of juvenile delinquency. In India, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there was a significant increase in juvenile crimes, rising by 30 per cent in 2020 compared to the year before. Most of these offenders were in the 16-18 age group. Rape and murder were among the offences committed by them, underlining a worrying trend that has seen minors commit seri-



PORSCHE CASE: The boy involved in the fatal crash should have faced more stringent action. PTI

The legal

framework offers

various options for

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offenders, including

the application of

the strictest

measures.

HARD

ous sexual crimes The NCRB data from 2002 to 2012 shows an increase of 143 per cent in the number of rapes by juveniles, an 87 per cent rise in murders and an alarming increase of 500 per cent in kidnappings of women and girls by minors.

High-profile cases of heinous crimes committed by underage persons draw media attention and public scrutiny, shapperceptions and influencing the debate on juvenile justice. These cases amplify the public sentiment and lead to calls for harsher penalties for the minors behind such serious crimes. The Nirbhaya case prompted amendments in criminal laws to enhance penalties for sexual offences. But the changes have not addressed the root

1 Temporary infatuation (5)

2 Small measure of liquor (3)

4 Dissertation based on

3 A muddle (4)

research (6)

6 Without needing

to hurry (2,7)

13 Fluctuating (8)

16 To arrest (6)

20 Eschew (4)

11 One's utmost (5,4)

14 A sweet sauce (7)

19 Arousing suspicion (5)

23 Jaws of voracious animal (3)

7 Outlay (7)

5 Out of the blue (8)

causes of juvenile delinquency or the developmental and psychological aspects of juveniles. Research indicates that public confidence in the justice

system is affected by the perceived leniency in such cases. A Pew Research Centre study found that 58 per cent of the Americans believe that the justice system was too lenient when it came to juvenile offenders, a concern applicable to other countries, including India. Although substanevidence tial supports rehabilitation over punishment for juveniles, the US juvenile justice system often leans towards stricter penalties in view of public and political pressure. However, recent reforms and shifts towards rehabilitation indicate recognition of the need for a bal-

SU DO KU

anced approach that prioritises the wellbeing of young offenders and takes into consideration their prospects, according to the Harvard Undergraduate Law Review.

A balanced approach to punishment and rehabilitation is essential for maintaining public trust in the juvenile justice system. Transparent and fair handling of cases involving juveniles is the key. The Juvenile Justice Act permits the trial of juveniles aged 16-18 as adults for heinous crimes, provided that their mental capacity to understand the crime is proven. To ensure swift action and mitigate public outcry, initial psychological evaluations could be expedited. This demonstrates the system's responsiveness in addressing severe offences.

The legal framework offers various options for dealing with offenders, including the application of the strictest measures. For instance, the boy involved in the fatal car accident should have faced more stringent consequences, such as extended detention, mandatory community service or strict probation. A recent study published in Frontiers in Psychology supports this approach, revealing that despite ongoing brain development, juveniles, particularly those aged 16-18, often have the cognitive and moral maturity to grasp the severity

of their actions. This ensures that the punishment is proportionate to the severity of the crime and addresses public concerns about leniency.

Rehabilitation grammes for juveniles who commit serious offences should include structured activities like regimented training, cadet programmes, firefighting, civic service corps, agricultural initiatives, sports, and skill development in construction and trades. These programmes, encompassing law enforcement training, emergency skills, community projects and hands-on public service, not only address behavioural issues but also prepare the underage offenders for societal reintegration, ultimately reducing recidivism and fostering long-term success. By putting in place a stringent legal framework that ensures swift and transparent trials and balances justice with rehabilitation, the system can address both punitive and reformative needs while reinforcing societal values that discourage violent behaviour.

As Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defence Fund, stated, "Justice is not cheap. Justice is not quick. It is not ever finally achieved. It is hard, continuous work to bring about change." social approach avoids the pitfalls of short-term penal solutions driven by public pressure.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

Be in trouble (5,2)

- 5 Quick-witted (5)
- 8 Operating at full potential (2,2,5)
- 9 Put down (3) 10 Heavy clumsy ship (4)
- 12 Similarly (8)
- 14 Speleology (6) 15 Display ostentatiously (6)
- 17 Answer to problem (8) 18 Medieval bondsman (4)
- 21 Monkey (3) 22 Clumsy with one's
- hands (3,6) 24 Simple song (5)

25 Fugitive (7)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION Across: 1 Escapade, 5 Wolf, 9 Peril, 10 Shelter, 11 Masterstroke, 13 Eulogy, 14 Recoil, 17 Take to pieces, 20 Conceit, 21 Loose, 22 Lead, 23 Hypnosis.

Down: 1 Espy, 2 Cure-all, 3 Pull together, 4 Desert, 6 Outdo, 7 Formerly, 8 Set the seal on, 12 Vertical, 15 Onerous, 16 Apathy, 18 Kenya, 19 Less.

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

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 5 6 1 9 3 8 3 6 7 4 9 5 2 1 9 1 8 3 2 6 4 7 3 8 9 2 1 7 4 6 5 2 1 7 4 5 6 8 9 3 6 4 5 9 8 3 1 7 2 7 6 4 1 2 8 3 5 9 1 2 3 6 9 5 7 8 4 9 5 8 3 7 4 2 1 6 CALENDAR



Purvabhadrpad Nakshatra up to 4.48 am

■ Moon enters Pisces sign 11.10 pm.

	R IDAY ATURDAY	19:18 HRS 05:22 HRS
CITY	MAX	
Chandigarl	h 45	30
New Delhi	44	28
Amritsar	45	26
Bathinda	45	26
Jalandhar	44	31
Ludhiana	45	28
Bhiwani	45	33
Hisar	45	28
Sirsa	45	32
Dharamsa	la 36	23
Manali	28	17
Shimla	29	17
Srinagar	30	16
Jammu	44	25
Kargil	29	11
Leh	22	06
Dehradun	39	25
Mussoorie	29	11

FORECAST