



## OPINION

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[ OUR TAKE ]

## Lessons from Paralympics

India's record medal haul underlines the human potential that must be facilitated by inclusion of the differently abled in sports, and other spheres

It is hard not to be awed by the performance of athletes at the Paralympics. Beyond the podium finishes, this is a moment when all athletes who participated deserve to be celebrated because each one's is a story of incredible resilience and sportsmanship. They have surmounted serious challenges to push the boundaries set by a society that continues to be largely ableist by default, if not design. For Indian para-athletes, such hurdles have historically been worse — which is why the record haul of 29 medals (seven gold, nine silver, and 13 bronze) needs to be cheered fervently. India's 18th-place finish on the medals tally is a testament to the government's investment in training and facilitating differently abled sportspeople. This Paralympics saw a much higher number of Indian coaches and support staff, and was also the first time that a dedicated recovery centre to deal with injuries developed during the sporting event was set up for the contingent. The country's participation in the Paralympics has seen a quantum jump in just 16 years. From five athletes at the Beijing Paralympics in 2008, the Indian contingent has now grown to 84.

The medals are a direct consequence of this increased participation and should push many more persons with disabilities towards sport. This underlines the case for stepping up investment further, perhaps venturing into sports where there is room to grow Indian participation. The corporate world must also pitch in, to create a robust culture of sports and activity for the differently abled.

This is also a moment for mainstreaming this aspect of diversity and disability inclusion outside sports, in schools, offices, and public spaces — in terms of nurturing the potential of persons with disabilities and facilitating them in living a life of dignity. The human spirit knows no boundaries, but the Paralympics serve as a timely reminder that the right to play and enjoy sports is directly linked to other human rights, such as the right to personal mobility and to participate in cultural life. India can do a lot more on that front. The medals are only the start and provide but a glimpse of what the differently abled can do for themselves and the country.

## Uttarakhand must fight intolerance

Boards announcing a ban on entry of "non-Hindus, Rohingya Muslims, and hawkers" into villages in Uttarakhand are not just a trampling of constitutional values, but also a brazen attempt to further communal divides in the state that has seen such tensions rise over the past few years. Stray incidents, which should have been resolved as the law-and-order issues they were, have been given a communal colour and used to stoke divides. The latest flare-up occurred last week in Chamoli when an incident involving a Muslim miscreant led to a mob targeting the community by ransacking Muslim-owned shops and attacking their property. Last year, such unrest was reported in Uttarkashi over an alleged abduction involving two accused, a Hindu and a Muslim — both were later acquitted by the court — with posters threatening Muslim establishments and giving the community a "deadline" to leave for good.

The state police is now removing the boards and investigating who these put up, but the matter is not merely an administrative one. Underpinning such instances is an interest in normalising interfaith polarisation and making it part of the mainstream. This, in turn, lends itself to a politics of playing on divides in a state where a clutch of districts have significant minority populations.

Preventing an escalation will need the state's political class and its administration to resist the easy gains of communal strife. Instead of allowing tensions to fester, reconciliatory measures need to be mounted at the earliest, beyond the removal of the offending boards. Several instances, including pronouncements by top state leaders to demonise interfaith relationships and push for demolition of structures associated with minority faiths, inspire little confidence. But the imperative to contain internal disharmony in a border state quickly and comprehensively should be clear to all.

## Narratives on the wolf vs its life on the margins

The attacks on humans in Uttar Pradesh are not common behaviour and do not represent the Indian wolf's actual nature. Authorities must act swiftly to eliminate this threat, before public perception turns against all wolves

The "big, bad wolf" — or at least a spectre of it — is back. Bahraich, a district in Uttar Pradesh, has witnessed a spate of attacks, purportedly by a pack of wolves, with at least ten persons (mostly children) killed and more than 25 injured. Violent human-animal conflict in which wildlife and humans are injured or killed, either deliberately or accidentally, is a common occurrence across India. Usually, large carnivores such as leopards, tigers, and bears, or other wildlife such as elephants are implicated. Only rarely do wolves and jackals (often mistakenly referred to as foxes) make the news for attacking people, that too, mostly when they contract rabies and go on a biting spree before being killed by trite humans. Wolves hunting children is rarer still. The last time such incidents were reported in UP was more than 30 years ago. The headlines were similar back then. Only when forest officials succeeded in eliminating the wolves did

the tragic loss of human lives stop and the sensationalism die down.

For those of us studying wolves and interested in their conservation, this human-killing is aberrant. The Indian grey wolf is a unique subspecies of the ubiquitous found wolf. This subspecies, along with the Tibetan wolf of the Trans-Himalayan region, is an ancient lineage of wolves. Unfortunately, in a country that has so many glamorous conservation icons, the Indian grey wolf finds little space in the spotlight. There is no Project Wolf even though its numbers may be lower than the tiger's. Indeed, its favoured habitat, the savanna grasslands of India, are not even considered conservation-worthy — ignominiously labeled as wastelands.

The only saving grace is that the wolf's life is lived in the shadows of pastures, shaking behind their herds of sheep and goats. The Indian wolf long gave up hopes of living up to a romanticised version of its story, of chasing antelopes among the tall grass. The herds of blackback and chauri are no more there, driven out by our pursuit of food and habitat. The herdman and the wolf are thus old acquaintances. The 50-odd nomadic pastoralist tribes in India have a carefully balanced relationship with the wolf. Many of them will not graze the wolf's pasture. After all, it needs to feed. But mounting losses can lead to wolf retaliation — dens are blocked, cubs are killed, and poisoned carcasses of livestock are laid out. So, why have wolves taken suddenly

to hunting humans? Speculation is rife, and information is scarce. Some believe that this could be the handiwork of dog-wolf hybrids, with the dog side being more used to dwelling among humans. After all, dogs also kill tens of children and adults across the country every year. There is scientific evidence that the ancient wolf lineage in India is in danger due to hybridisation with dogs. But, without conducting DNA tests on the animals suspected in the recent killings, we will not know for sure.

Another hypothesis is that the wolves did not have enough to eat and are therefore turning to prey. There is little evidence of that. Wolves have high adaptability. In times of scarcity, they will survive on rodents and fruit. Our countryside is filled with carcasses of livestock and goats and sheep are abundant. A reasonable wolf would certainly not have to take such great risks to attack children.

Whatever the reason, this behaviour is not common and does not represent the Indian wolf's actual nature. It is, therefore, imperative that authorities act to eliminate this threat. Else, public perception will turn negative towards all wolves, and indiscriminate killing will start even where there is no conflict. Indeed, reports already suggest that jackals and foxes are being targeted as well. Ensuring that such conflict does not recur requires dedicated and systematic efforts to conserve landscape species such as the Indian wolf. If wolf populations are secure across the broader subconti-



Animals do not recognise the difference between "our" habitat and "theirs", nor the artificial lines designating where they "belong" WIMEDIA

ment, then authorities will not hesitate to take the necessary steps on the rare occasion that violent conflict occurs. And only if people feel safe around the wolf, it can have a chance to cling on despite our expanding footprint.

Conserving Indian wolves is relatively easy. They do not require dedicated wildlife sanctuaries or national parks. They do not need vast herds of dedicated prey. They do not need the exposure of all eyes as flagships of their beloved habitat. They are happy to simply exist in the background. They will continue to depend on the largesse of marginalised pastoralist communities or scavenge in stealth at carcass dumps or outside poultry farms. All they need are secure places to raise their pups, their habitat not relentlessly converted to other uses, and greater awareness of their precarious presence. They are also more pernicious threat — from their domestic cousins, the dog. Entire packs of wolves have been wiped out due to pathogens such as canine distemper virus contracted from dogs. Controlling the ever-burgeoning populations of free-ranging dogs in the countryside will allow the wolves some respite. Utt-

mately, the conservation of wolves, the lives and livelihoods of pastoralists, and the future of grasslands are intricately intertwined.

Let the "bhedayas of Bahraich" and their innocent victims serve the needed warning: If people are not kept at the centre of conservation, then our living landscapes will turn into battlefields. And there will only be losers on both sides. The future of wildlife conservation in India stretches beyond forests and our small protected areas. Animals do not recognise the difference between "our" habitat and "theirs", nor the artificial lines that designate where they are supposed to "belong". They do not "stray" outside forests. They have adapted to live among us. We need to change our conservation models so that people who live cheek-by-jowl with wildlife are made partners and beneficiaries in the conservation philosophy the rest espouse.

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Abi Tamim Vanak

## [ GRAND STRATEGY ]

Happymon Jacob

## Why Seoul, Delhi need more ambitious ties

For most Indians, South Korea is synonymous with major brands like LG, Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia, among others, or the K-pop and K-drama. For Koreans, India is where they export these to. If you take them out of the equation, the bilateral relationship isn't very exciting, may be even a tad boring.

For Delhi-Seoul relations to go beyond this, the two sides have to hold hands. What struck me during my recent visit to South Korea to attend the Seoul Diplomacy Forum was a poverty of such ideas to forge a bilateral strategic partnership, despite a keen desire to do so. The strategic circumstances that can foster these ideas exist. What is missing could be political will. While New Delhi is too preoccupied, Seoul may be moving a bit too slowly.

Let's first understand Seoul's new strategic context that could potentially change its slow-paced relationship with India. North Korea getting away with its nuclear weapons programme — by wooing Donald Trump, partnering with Vladimir Putin's Russia, and manipulating Beijing — along with Kim Jong Un's garbage balloons has sent alarm bells ringing in Seoul. North Korea nuclear adventurism and the international community's inability to check this has convinced many Korean strategic thinkers that should Kim unleash an attack on South Korea, the United States (US) might not come to its aid. The recent North Korea-Russia defence agreement has sharply heightened Seoul's concerns. Then, there is China's ever-increasing assertiveness in the region. For Seoul, this presents a four-stroke security puzzle.

This has forced an otherwise strategically cautious South Korea to look for new partners, solutions, and strategies. It seems to have come up with a multi-pronged approach — some official, some gaining momentum within the Korean strategic community, and others still taking shape. First of all, there is a fast-growing nuke-for-peace narrative among Seoul's strategic elite. The more Kim's nuclear arsenal matures, the less the international community seems to be able to keep him in check. And the more uncertain the American security guarantees become, the sharper the Korean nuclear argument gets, even though South Korea's official position continues to be anti-nuclear. The second piece of the Korean response to its security dilemma has been to reconcile with its former coloniser, Japan. Kim's threats, China's aggression, and America's ambivalence — many of Seoul's challenges are Japan's as well. For Seoul today, contemporary security challenges are far more

consequential than memories of historical subjugation. Last year's Camp David summit between Japan, the US, and South Korea was just the beginning.

South Korea is also slowly shedding its strategic ambivalence, not just regarding China. Having abandoned its initial hesitation regarding Indo-Pacific and Quad (for fear of getting caught in a geopolitical competition between the US and China in the region), Seoul today has an Indo-Pacific strategy and might even be open to working with Indo-Pacific mini-laterals such as Quad. It also launched a New Southern Policy aiming to broaden its strategic periphery, emerge from China's sphere of influence, and engage with new actors in the wider Indo-Pacific region. As it seeks to be a "global pivot state", this is where India comes in.

The rising geopolitical tensions in the Korean peninsula, South Korea's determination to come out of Beijing's strategic orbit, and India's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific provide an opportunity for Seoul and Delhi to discover each other's strategic direction and infuse new energy and direction into their strategic partnership. The two have a lot more in common than is generally understood. The two sides have hardly any disagreements, have lots of positive sentiments regarding each other, and there are many areas for potential cooperation. Both view China as a challenge but are careful about how to address the challenge given the physical proximity and strong economic relationship. More so, the fact that both Delhi and Seoul today are less concerned about what Beijing will think of their respective strategic postures further creates possibilities for the two to work together.

China is indeed the biggest military and economic power in the region, but a coming together of like-minded countries in the region has enough ballast to deal with it, or at least make Beijing think twice before it gets too aggressive. Consider this: With or without the US, if regional states in the Indo-Pacific, such as Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea, engage in strategic consultations, work together on regional security issues, and collectively send out the right messages, it would work as a formidable force of dissuasion towards Chinese aggression.

Coming back to Delhi-Seoul relations, the resetting of the Seoul-Delhi relationship must have at least four parts: A deeper and structured political engagement, upgrading the relationship from the current joint commission level to a 2+2 format, defence co-production including for third-country markets, and most importantly, a joint India-South Korea initiative on strategic and emerging technologies (ISET) like the one between New Delhi and Washington. As the two strategic communities deepen their engagement, a touch of pop culture can further enhance mutual understanding. So, when South Korean diplomats in India recite Nagma Nastra, it's only fitting that Indians give Gangnam Style a shot.

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RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER OF INDIA



...you can change a friend but not your neighbour. We want improved relations with Pakistan but first of all they should stop terrorism

## [ STRAIGHTFORWARD ]

Shashi Shekhar

## Hurdles in India's efforts to drive world diplomacy

Russian president Vladimir Putin has made an important statement, "We respect our friends and partners, who, I believe, sincerely seek to resolve all issues surrounding this conflict, primarily China, Brazil and India," he said. Russian spokesman Dimitri Peskov went a step further and claimed that Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi can play a pivotal role in facilitating talks between the two sides.

It isn't an ordinary achievement. This is the same Moscow that in 1971 had welcomed Indira Gandhi, the then PM of India, when she went seeking Russia's help after being humiliated by US president Richard Nixon. Leonid Brezhnev was then the head of Soviet Union. The friendship forged then has survived the test of time.

From the time Modi rose to power in 2014, he has made extensive efforts to define India's role in the emerging global order. From August 2 to September 5, the PM travelled to Poland, Ukraine, Brunei and Singapore. During this period, foreign minister S Jaishankar visited the Maldives and Kuwait. The South Block is now busy preparing for Modi's upcoming visit to Russia and the US over the next few weeks.

Modi's visits are shaping India's place in the shifting geopolitical landscape. The PM's latest Brunei and Singapore visits exemplify this. Brunei has immense oil reserves and part of its shores lie in the South China Sea, where China has aggressive ambitions. China wants to straggle Brunei and get concessions on oil from the small nation. This is unacceptable to the Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah. Seen from this perspective, Modi's presence in Brunei assumes tremendous significance. Like China, India needs oil. It has been facing problems from China for decades. Singapore, in its turn, has been our old ally and its spectacular progress attracts our young enterprising Indians. The island nation plays a key role in ASEAN and in the changing global scenario. India-Singapore relations needed steady strengthening. With Singapore's help we can fulfil our dream of turning India into a semiconductor hub. The current scenario requires nimble diplomacy.

Why? A new global challenge has emerged over the past two and a-half years with Russia

and Ukraine bleeding each other. Experts had felt that the conflict would spread to neighbouring areas and they have been proven right. Now Israel and its neighbours are locked in a deadly war, leading to another geopolitical crisis. The US, her allies and all their might haven't been able to stop the war.

We are in the age of declining US power. In this chaotic world, China wants to increase its influence. Its leader Xi Jinping wants to make China the global leader replacing the US. His ambitious project him to fuel global fire-ups instead of bringing them to an end.

India's role in brokering peace has thus become significant. Singapore's seasoned diplomat, expert in geopolitics and economics, writer and speaker Kishore Mahbubani says the world is spiralling out of control and it needs a country such as India and a leader like Modi to re-establish order. Mahbubani rates Modi as the third most influential leader after the presidents of the US and China and even suggests that Britain should relinquish its seat at the UN Security Council for India.

But Modi is facing headwinds within the country. The PM's grand welcome in Brunei and the killing of a young man in Faridabad bogged media headlines in equal measure. Cow vigilantes had shot the young man dead suspecting him to be a cattle smuggler. Who are these cow vigilantes? Who has given them the right to kill in the name of protecting cows? Who will rein them in? Tragically, those leaders who should have shouldered the responsibility of tackling the menace are aggravating it. Those who took oath on the Constitution are inciting people using Bangladesh as a scapegoat. It's not a surprise that many thoughtful Bangladeshis are unhappy that their country's image is being tarnished to further internal political gains. Such needless statements have made our diplomats' work even harder as they were tirelessly to build a positive image for India with sincerity and integrity.

Are those indulging in the business of hate listening? The country, which has big dreams, expects them to behave responsibly.

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# Mahmudabad & Musharraf's family land: 'enemy property' in India

**AJOY SINHA KARPURAM**  
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 8

A PARCEL of land in western UP that belonged to the family of former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf is up for sale under The Enemy Property Act, 1968. In a notice erected at the plot, the Union Home Ministry has said that the "enemy property" of around 13 bighas of land in Kotana Bangar village in Baghat district is open for e-auction until September 12 midnight.

**What is enemy property?**  
 The Defence of India Act, 1962 defines an enemy as "any person or country committing external aggression against India... any country that is "assisting the country committing such aggression", as well as any person who belongs to either country.  
 Under Section 29 of the act, the Centre or states can "requisition" any immovable property for the purpose of "securing the defence of India, civil defence, public safety, maintenance of public order or efficient conduct of military operations, or for maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community".  
 The requisitioning can be done only for the period required for any of these purposes, unless the government legally acquires the property in return for compensation (Sections 36 and 37).  
 At the time of the 1965 and 1971 wars, as some people moved to Pakistan from India. Under the Defence of India Act, 1962, the Government of India took over the properties and companies of those who took Pakistani nationality, and vested them with the Custodian of Enemy Property for India. The same was done for property left behind by those who went to China after the 1962 Sino-Indian War.  
 The Tashkent Declaration of 1966, said India and Pakistan had "agreed to discuss the return of the property and assets taken over by either side in connection with the conflict". But the Pakistani government disposed of all such properties in that country in 1971.

**How did India deal with enemy property?**  
 The Enemy Property Act, enacted in 1968,

provided for the continuous vesting of enemy property in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India, a department under the Ministry of Home Affairs.  
 This property attains a unique status, as it cannot be transferred by the original owners who have been deemed an "enemy", "enemy subject" or "enemy firm" under the Defence of India Act. The Custodian has the power to transfer the property, enter into contracts over its use, and collect rent from any person occupying it.  
 In response to the sale of properties by Pakistan in 1971, India took control of all enemy property under the Enemy Property Act and the 1971 Rules. In 2017, Parliament passed The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2016, which amended the 1968 Act and The Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971.  
 The new law expanded the definitions of "enemy subject" and "enemy firm" to include the legal heir and successor of the "enemy" even if they were citizens of India or any coun-

try that is not an enemy (legal heirs who were citizens of India were initially excluded from the definition); and the succeeding firm of an enemy firm, irrespective of the nationality of its members or partners.  
 The amended law provided that enemy property would continue to vest in the Custodian even if the enemy, enemy subject or enemy firm ceased to be an enemy due to death, extinction, winding up of business or change of nationality; or if the legal heir was a citizen of India or a citizen of a country which was not an enemy.  
 The Custodian can, with the Centre's approval, dispose of enemy properties, and the government may issue directions to the Custodian for this purpose.  
**Why were these amendments brought?**  
 The Statement of Objects and Reasons in the Bill said: "Of late, there have been various judgments by various courts that have adversely affected the powers of the Custodian and the Government of India as provided under the Enemy Property Act, 1968. In view of

such interpretation by various courts, the Custodian is finding it difficult to sustain his actions under the Enemy Property Act, 1968."  
 One major judgment that the amendment sought to negate was passed in the case of the estate of the erstwhile Raja of Mahmudabad in UP, who owned several large properties in Harzarganj (Lucknow), Sitapur, and Nainital.  
**What was the Mahmudabad case?**  
 The Raja left India in 1957 and took Pakistani citizenship; his wife and son Mohammed Amir Mohammed Khan, however, stayed on as Indian citizens. Under the 1968 Act, the Raja's estate was declared enemy property. After the Raja died, his son staked claim to these properties.  
 On October 21, 2005, after a long legal battle, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Mahmudabad heir. The court held that ownership of the property does not vest with the Custodian, who only takes it over for the purposes of possession, control, and management. It held that the Raja's son, as an Indian citizen, was entitled to the entire property, which would then cease to be enemy property.

The verdict opened the floodgates for other pleas in which genuine or purported relatives of persons who had migrated to Pakistan produced deeds of gift claiming they were the rightful owners of enemy properties.  
 On July 2, 2010, the UP government promulgated an Ordinance that restrained courts from ordering the government to divest enemy properties from the Custodian. The 2005 SC order was thus rendered ineffective, and the Custodian again took over the Raja's properties. A Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 22, 2010, but it could not be passed during the term of the 15th Lok Sabha, and lapsed.  
 On January 7, 2016, The Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Ordinance, 2016 was promulgated, which was then replaced by the Bill that became law in 2017. In February 2017, the Supreme Court refused to interfere with the Ordinance.  
 On February 22, 2024, a Bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan allowed the Lucknow Municipal Corporation to collect property tax on properties owned by the Raja of Mahmudabad, which were vested with the Custodian under the Enemy Property Act.

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**EXPLAINED LAW**

**EXPLAINED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

# Use of AI in warfare

A global summit on the responsible use of AI in the military domain begins in Seoul today, with focus on shaping global norms. India has so far been in 'watch-and-wait' mode in this critical global debate

# PRESVU: EYE DROPS WHICH 'REDUCE DEPENDENCY ON READING GLASSES'

**ANONNA DUTT**  
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 8

MUMBAI-BASED Entod Pharmaceuticals has announced that the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) — the country's apex drug regulator — has approved its new eye drop, which has been "specifically developed to reduce dependency on reading glasses for individuals affected by presbyopia."

According to the company, the eye drop PresVu is the first of its kind in India, and that Entod has "applied for a patent for this invention in terms of its formulation and the process".

**What is presbyopia?**  
 Presbyopia is an age-related condition in which the eyes gradually lose the ability to focus on nearby objects. People usually start to develop presbyopia at around the age of 40. According to doctors, presbyopia are one of the most effective ways to manage the condition.

**How does PresVu work?**  
 The active ingredient — chemical compounds in medicines that have an effect on the body — in PresVu is pilocarpine. The compound contracts the iris muscles, which control the size of the pupil and help humans see things clearly, thereby enabling one's eyes to focus better on nearby objects, according to Entod Pharmaceuticals.  
 The company also said that PresVu uses "advanced dynamic buffer technology" — essentially, a base solution — to adapt to the pH level (a scale used to measure how acidic or basic a substance is) of tears. This ensures that the eye drop has "consistent efficacy and safety for extended use, keeping in mind that such drops will be used for years at a stretch".  
 PresVu is a prescription-only medicine and, according to doctors, its impact is unlikely to last beyond four to six hours. It should not be used by people



PresVu is a pharmaceutical intervention for presbyopia, also corrected using glasses or LASIK surgery. X.com/EntodPharma

who have inflammation of the iris. Regular use of PresVu may lead to itching and redness, eyebrow pain, and muscle spasms in the eyes.

**Is this a novel therapy?**  
 Although Entod's claims make it seem that PresVu is a new therapy, pilocarpine, the main compound used in the eye drop, has been available in India for decades now.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Dr Mahipal Sachdeva, chairman of Centre for Sight, a chain of eye hospitals and clinics in India, said, "While pilocarpine has been in use as the first line therapy for cataract, its property of temporarily improving the depth of focus is something that has been known for quite some time. The drug has been tried for presbyopia in other countries as well".  
 The United States Food and Drug Administration approved a pilocarpine eye drop for presbyopia in 2021.

In India, the government decided on the ceiling price of pilocarpine in 4% and 2% concentrations. PresVu has pilocarpine in 1.25% concentration.

**IN FACT**

**EXPERT EXPLAINS**  
**C RAJA MOHAN**

AS THE USE of artificial intelligence (AI) by the world's militaries grows, the political effort to regulate the way the revolutionary technology is used in warfare is growing too. If the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza are emerging as "AI labs" for warfare, there is also a diplomatic push to establish at least some general norms on how to limit the dangers of its military use.  
 India, which has been actively engaged with the issues of development and safe use of AI in the civilian domain, has stood apart from the emerging global debate on AI in military use. But as new global frameworks for 'AI arms control' begin to emerge, Delhi must shape the process rather than stay away from it.

**REAIM, beyond LAWS**

The summit on Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (REAIM), beginning in Seoul South Korea, on Monday is part of the new global diplomacy to shape global norms on the military applications of AI. The summit is being co-hosted by Kenya, the Netherlands, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. Various governments, international organisations, tech companies, and civil society members will participate.

This is the second iteration of the summit; the first took place in February 2023 in The Hague. Until recently, the debate on military AI had been focused on autonomous weapons, the so-called 'killer robots'. The fear that the conduct of warfare would be taken up by computers and algorithms had generated calls for control. Keeping humans in the decision-making loop on the use of force has been a major objective of this discourse.

The issues relating to lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) have been discussed within a group of governmental experts since 2019 at the United Nations in Geneva. Last December, the United Nations General Assembly took up for the first time the question of LAWS, and called on the Secretary General to gather the views of member states on addressing the ethical, legal, and operational challenges. The report is expected to be presented at the UNGA session later this month.

**AI in wars, from detection to strikes**

**GAZA**  
 A damaged building after an Israeli airstrike on Khan Younis in Gaza on Dec. 1, 2023. *The New York Times*



A damaged building after an Israeli airstrike on Khan Younis in Gaza on Dec. 1, 2023. *The New York Times*

**UKRAINE**  
 Members of Ukraine's Army test a Vampire drone in Donetsk on May 5, 2024. *The New York Times*



Members of Ukraine's Army test a Vampire drone in Donetsk on May 5, 2024. *The New York Times*

**The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) allegedly used AI-based programmes "Lavender" and "The Gospel" to detect and strike suspected operatives of the militant group Hamas. A report from Israel-based +972 Magazine and news website Local Call said that IDF officers often acted as "rubber stamps" in greenlighting strikes. The IDF denied such capabilities, saying the system was "simply a database... to cross-reference intelligence sources".**

**From The Hague to Seoul**

The REAIM process widened the debate beyond 'killer robots' to a broader range of issues by recognising that AI systems are finding ever greater application in warfare. While AI has long been used by leading militaries for inventory management and logistical planning, its use in intelligence, surveillance, and battlefield reconnaissance has significantly expanded of late.  
 Major militaries see the capacity of AI to transform the collection, synthesis, and analysis of vast amounts of data from the battlefield as useful in raising situational awareness, increasing the time available for decision-making on use of force, enhancing precision targeting, limiting civilian casualties, and increasing the tempo of warfare. Many critics have warned that these presumed attractions might be illusory and dangerous.  
 The proliferation of the so-called AI decision-making support systems (AI-DSS) and

and formalised it in November 2023. In 2020, Washington issued national guidelines for responsible military use of AI by its armed forces.  
 The US also encouraged its NATO allies to adopt similar norms. NATO's 2021 strategy identified six principles for the responsible military use of AI: unveiled a set of guidelines for its forces in July. The objective is to "accelerate" the use of AI systems for military gains in a "safe and responsible" manner.  
 Simply put, we are going to see more AI in warfare than less; that comports with the historic trend that all new technologies will eventually find military applications. AI is no exception. The US is also conducting a bilateral dialogue with China on the subject, especially on limiting its possible implications for nuclear deterrence.

**The world, India, and China**  
 The US introduced a resolution on the responsible use of AI at the UNGA earlier this year, co-sponsored by 123 countries and adopted by consensus. The REAIM process is aimed at a more granular discussion and building an international coalition in developing global norms. The US is also reaching out to countries in the Global South to win their support for the new AI initiative.

On its part, India has been in a "watch-and-wait" mode. It is examining issues of substance and their long-term significance as it observes but holds back from full involvement. India had not endorsed the "call to action" issued by the Hague summit and it remains to be seen if it supports a blueprint for global AI action, expected to be unveiled in Korea. Delhi, however, can't afford to remain a passive by-stander in this profoundly consequential global debate.

Beijing, in contrast, has been at the forefront of the strategic as well as regulatory discourse. Its military analysts talk about the role of AI in "intelligised warfare". In 2021, China issued a White Paper outlining its approach on regulating AI in military. It also supported the "call to action" at the Hague.  
 India's bitter experience with nuclear arms control, where political indecisiveness and ideological hesitations cost the nation dearly, is a reminder that it is easier to shape the global normative architecture in the design phase than change it after the new rules are established.

**Focus on responsible use**  
 Notably, the REAIM process has moved away from the idea that the AI revolution in military affairs can be reversed and abolished. Instead, it is calling for "responsible use". The REAIM process is one of the many initiatives on promoting responsible AI — national, bilateral, plurilateral, and multilateral.  
 On the last day of The Hague summit, the United States issued a unilateral draft political declaration on the responsible use of AI

their implications are among the issues now being debated under the REAIM process. The Hague summit called for continuing dialogue, and the second summit hopes to codify a consensus measure. The summit's three-fold objective is to understand and the implications of military AI on global peace and security, implement new norms on its use, and develop ideas on long-term global governance of AI in the military domain.

**Notably, the REAIM process has moved away from the idea that the AI revolution in military affairs can be reversed and abolished. Instead, it is calling for "responsible use".**

On the one hand are fossil-fuel producing countries and industry groups, who view plastics pollution as a "waste management problem", and want to focus on that instead of curbing production. On the other hand are countries in the European Union and Africa, who want to phase out single-use plastics and introduce production curbs.  
 This "High Ambition Coalition" says that simply "managing" plastic waste to the point where there is no pollution at all is impossible, given the scale of plastic waste generation, and the economics and complexity of recycling. A study published in April in the journal *Science Advances* found

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# India generates highest plastic pollution in world: what a new study found

**ARJUN SENGUPTA**  
 NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 8

INDIA CONTRIBUTES to a fifth of global plastic pollution, a study published in the journal *Nature* last week found.  
 India burns roughly 5.8 million tonnes (mt) of plastic each year, and releases another 3.5 mt of plastics into the environment (land, air, water) as debris. Cumulatively, India contributes to 9.3 mt of plastic pollution in the world annually, significantly more than the countries next in this list — Nigeria (3.5 mt), Indonesia (3.4 mt) and China (2.8 mt) — and exceeding previous estimates.  
**Problem of 'unmanaged' waste**  
 The study, carried out by University of Leeds researchers Joshua W Cottom, Ed Cook, and Costas A Velis, estimated that around 251 mt of plastic waste is produced every year, enough to fill up roughly 200,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Roughly a

fifth of this waste — 52.1 mt — is "emitted" into the environment, unmanaged.  
 The authors define "managed" waste as what is collected by municipal bodies, and either recycled or sent to a landfill. Most plastic waste meets the latter fate.  
 "Unmanaged" waste is what ends up in the environment either as debris — polluting every conceivable place on Earth from the heights of Mount Everest to the bottom of the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean — as a result of plastic burning in open, uncontrolled fires. The latter generates fine particulates and toxic gases like carbon monoxide which have been linked to heart disease, respiratory disorders, cancer, and neurological problems.  
 Of the unmanaged waste, roughly 43% or 22.2 mt is the form of unburned debris and the rest, some 29.9 mt, is burnt either in dumps or locally.

**North-South divide**

A trend that the study identified was that there is a notable Global North and Global

South divide when it comes to plastic pollution. "On an absolute basis, we find that plastic waste emissions are highest across countries in Southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and South-eastern Asia," the study said.  
 In fact, approximately 60% (or 35.7 mt per year) of the world's plastic pollution comes from 20 nations, none of which are High Income Countries (those with a gross national income per capita of \$13,846 or more, according to the World Bank). This is despite these HICs — which are all in the so-called Global North — having higher plastic-waste generation rates than countries in the South. Not a single HIC is "ranked in the top 90 polluters, because most have 100% collection coverage and controlled disposal," the study said.

Open burning is the predominant form of plastic pollution in the Global South (with

the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa, where uncontrolled debris comprised a larger share of the pollution pie) unlike in the Global North, where plastic pollution predominantly comprised uncontrolled debris.  
 This, the researchers say, is simply a symptom of inadequate or completely absent waste management systems, and a lack of public infrastructure for the same.  
 However, "we shouldn't put the blame, any blame, on the Global South... [or] praise ourselves about what we do in the Global North in any way," researcher Costas Velis told *The Associated Press*, adding that

**Criticism of the research**

people's ability to dispose of waste depends largely on their government's power to provide the necessary services.  
 The study comes at treaty negotiations

for the very first legally binding international treaty on plastics pollution are ongoing. In 2022, the UN Environmental Assembly agreed to develop such a treaty — which experts say might be the most important environmental accord since the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015 — by the end of 2024. However, consensus on what it should entail has been hard to come by.  
 On one hand are fossil-fuel producing countries and industry groups, who view plastics pollution as a "waste management problem", and want to focus on that instead of curbing production. On the other hand are countries in the European Union and Africa, who want to phase out single-use plastics and introduce production curbs.  
 This "High Ambition Coalition" says that simply "managing" plastic waste to the point where there is no pollution at all is impossible, given the scale of plastic waste generation, and the economics and complexity of recycling. A study published in April in the journal *Science Advances* found

a linear, direct relationship between increasing plastic production and plastic pollution — meaning a 1% increase in production resulted in a 1% increase in pollution. (Win Cowger et al, "Global producer responsibility for plastic pollution", 2024).  
 Critics of the recent research say that the recent research plays into the plastic being a "waste management problem" narrative. "It risks us losing our focus on the upstream and saying, hey now all we need to do is manage the waste better," Neil Tangri, senior director of science and policy at GAEA, a global network of advocacy organisations working on zero waste and environmental justice initiatives, told *The AP*. "It's necessary but it's not the whole story."  
 Notably, plastics industry groups have praised the study. This study underscores that uncollected and unmanaged plastic waste is the largest contributor to plastic pollution, Chris Jahn, the council secretary of the International Council of Chemical Associations said in a statement.



## Applying thought to picking right policy

### COVERNOTE

K. Nitya Kalyani

Easy as one would like to make it for readers, choosing the right insurance policy takes application of the mind. The customer's mind.

There is no escaping that if health policy X has a set of offerings, it may or may not imply the same fit or value for any two persons. As I promised in the preceding instalment of CoverNote and have written extensively about in various earlier instalments, you can make it simple and smooth and do so by yourself.

#### Too many variables

Picking up on one of the points in the end/ former colleague's long rant on health insurance (discussed earlier), 'too many variables was a major problem'.

Too many variables and too many variants is a self-defeating situation because too many choices means no choices. One wishes the regulator or the self-regulatory organisations of the insurance industry would recognise and streamline it as was done with mutual fund offerings.

But, back to how to choose an insurance policy. It is an elaborate process and let us do it justice. Here is a toolkit, revisited and revised!

Let us say you are buying health insurance. To be specific, Today, you can buy one from any general insurance company, life insurance companies apparently will be allowed to offer these policies in the future.

This policy, introduced in the 1984-85 timeframe, when only the four public sector general insurance companies existed, was brand-named Mediclaim. Now, there are several dozen general insurance companies each offering this category with evocative brand names but 'Mediclaim' has come to be used generically for this category.

#### Arogya Sanjeevani Policy

To start the process of choosing, I strongly recommend you pick an insurance company, any company. Let's say ABC General Insurance Company Ltd. On its website you will find details of various health policies and what you need to pick is the one named 'Arogya Sanjeevani Policy, ABC General Insurance Company Ltd.'

#### Mandatory offering

This is a standardised policy devised by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and has to be offered mandatorily by every Indian general insurance company. It has a set of coverages, terms and conditions and even the name is standardised as Arogya Sanjeevani Policy, followed by the company name.

Please study this policy well as it is the template you will use to decide what policy you finally want to buy. What does one look for in a policy? The ensuing instalment of CoverNote will elaborate on that.

#### Premium calculator

But here is some interesting homework for you, one which you will find illuminating. Look for a premium calculator or premium rate chart on the website and make a note of the premium for your choice of Sum Insured and your age-band.

Now, do the same exercise for two more companies.

#### Disparate pricing

You will find a range of rates for the same product! This is because insurers are free to set their premium rate for this policy and this would well be your first glimpse of how disparate pricing is and ponder on reasons why. If you can come up with an explanation or justification, do share it in an email with the Moneywise team and we will try to discuss it.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)



Light on wallet: Chosen wisely, the cards can help frequent travellers save considerably on expenditure. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

## How to decide which travel credit card is best for you

Picking the right card needs in-depth analysis of travel needs, preferred form of value-back, understanding how rewards programme works, how efficiently you can maximise benefits, etc.

### EASE OF TRAVEL

Rohit Chhibbar

Travel credit cards can be an excellent option for frequent travellers. With benefits like complimentary flight tickets, air miles, lounge access, direct discount on travel booking, etc., cardholders can save a significant amount and, at the same time, make trips more convenient.

To find the best travel credit card for your needs, here are a few things to take into account.

#### Co-branded, general

Most travel credit cards with substantial value-back options are generally co-branded with popular airlines such as Vistara, Air India, IndiGo or travel portals like EaseMyTrip, Yatra and Ixigo. The cards often come with complimentary memberships to brand loyalty programmes and discount or accelerated rewards on making travel bookings through the associated platforms. Usually, the points earned on such cards are redeemable only on the partner platforms, thus limiting the flexibility.

On the other hand, brand-agnostic cards such as Axis Atlas and American Express Platinum Travel Credit Card, offer accelerated reward points or air miles on card spends.

The accrued rewards can later be redeemed against various options, including conversion to air-



Co-branded cards carry complimentary membership to brand loyalty programmes and discount/accelerated rewards on travel booking via platforms

line or hotel loyalty points.

Premium all-rounder cards with a high reward rate across categories can also help high-spenders accumulate substantial reward points and redeem them for free flight tickets or hotel stay vouchers.

If you prefer to fly with a specific carrier or make bookings via a particular portal, getting a co-branded card could provide you better savings. On the other hand, general travel cards would suit those who do not have brand inclinations when it comes to travel, instead prioritise savings over brand loyalty.

#### Core value-back

Most travel cards also come with generous welcome or milestone benefits wherein you could avail substantial value-back on reaching a quarterly or yearly spend threshold. For example, Club Vistara IDFC FIRST Credit Card offers 1 complimentary premium economy ticket each on reaching yearly spends of ₹1.5 lakh, ₹3 lakh, ₹4.5 lakh, ₹9 lakh and ₹12 lakh.

While comparing travel credit cards, it is important to check the reward rate, redemption value and the



Brand-agnostic cards such as Axis Atlas and American Express Platinum Travel Credit Card offer accelerated reward points or air miles on card spends

available redemption options. You should also check if it would be feasible for you to reach the spend milestones to avail additional benefits. In case of Club Vistara IDFC FIRST Credit Card, you would be able to maximise the milestone benefit if you can spend ₹12 lakh in a year.

#### Additional benefits

Most cards also provide additional benefits such as complimentary airport lounge access, complimentary membership to airline or hotel loyalty programmes, travel insurance, low or no forex mark-up fee, etc. Though the features should not be the only deciding factor for card selection, they should still be taken into consideration to understand how beneficial the card could be for your travel needs.

For instance, if you travel multiple times in a year, complimentary lounge access could be quite a valuable feature for you. Similarly, if you frequently travel abroad, a card with international lounge access or low forex mark-up fee could be beneficial for you.

Most credit card features come with a list of ex-

clusions and associated terms and conditions.

#### Read fine print

Discount on flight tickets could come with a maximum capping, lounge access could come with spend-based eligibility, flight vouchers could be redeemable only for select journeys. Hence, when choosing a card, it is important to read the fine print to understand if applicable terms and conditions could make it difficult for you to extract maximum value out of the card.

Before you compare cards on the above parameters, you should first check eligibility for the cards and the annual fee you are willing to pay for travel benefits. Highly-rewarding travel credit cards generally fall in the fee range of ₹1,500-₹5,000 but if you are looking for extensive all-round benefits, in addition to travel benefits, you might want to consider premium cards with fee going as high as ₹50,000. Premium cards come with high income eligibility.

Picking the right card requires an in-depth analysis of your own travel needs, preferred form of value-back, understanding how a card's rewards programme works, how efficiently you can maximise the benefits, etc. When chosen by taking the above points into account, the cards can prove to be an asset for frequent travellers and help them save considerably.

(The writer is Head of Credit Cards Business, Paisabazaar)

### Personal Loans

| Name of Lender       | Interest Rate (%) | Loan amount 5 lakh      | Loan amount 1 lakh      | Processing fee                                       |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|
|                      |                   | EMI (Rs) Tenure 5 years | EMI (Rs) Tenure 5 years |  |
| HDFC Bank            | 10.75 onwards     | 10,809 onwards          | 2,162 onwards           | Up to ₹5,499   |
| Tata Capital         | 10.99 onwards     | 10,869 onwards          | 2,174 onwards           | Up to 5.5%   |
| State Bank of India  | 11.45-14.85       | 10,984-11,856           | 2,197-2,371             | 1.50%/Min<br>Rs 1,000 to<br>Max Rs 15,000            |
| ICICI Bank           | 10.85 onwards     | 10,834 onwards          | 2,167 onwards           | Up to 2%   |
| Bank of Baroda       | 11.15-18.75       | 10,909-12,902           | 2,162-2,580             | Up to 2% (Min<br>Rs 1,000 and<br>Max Rs 10,000)      |
| Bank of India        | 10.85-16.10       | 10,834-12,186           | 2,167-2,437             | 0.50%-1%<br>(Min Rs 250<br>Max Rs 10,000)            |
| Canara Bank          | 10.95-16.40       | 10,859-12,266           | 2,172-2,453             | 0.50% (Max Rs 2,500)                                 |
| Punjab National Bank | 10.40-17.95       | 10,772-12,683           | 2,144-2,537             | Up to 1%   |
| HSBC Bank            | 9.99-16.00        | 10,621-12,159           | 2,124-2,432             | Up to 2%   |
| Federal Bank         | 11.49 onwards     | 10,994 onwards          | 2,199 onwards           | Up to 3%   |
| Union Bank of India  | 11.35-15.45       | 10,959-12,013           | 2,192-2,403             | Up to 1%<br>(Max Rs 7,500)                           |
| South Indian Bank    | 12.85-20.60       | 11,338-14,414           | 2,266-2,683             | Up to 2%   |
| UCO Bank             | 12.45-12.85       | 11,236-11,338           | 2,247-2,268             | Up to 1%<br>(Min Rs 750)                             |
| IDFC First Bank      | 10.99 onwards     | 10,869 onwards          | 2,174 onwards           | Up to 2%   |
| Bank of Maharashtra  | 10.00-12.80       | 10,624-11,325           | 2,125-2,265             | 1% (Rs 1,000-₹5 10,000)                              |
| Karnataka Bank       | 11.43             | 11,487                  | 2,297                   | Up to 2% of loan<br>(Min. Rs 2,500<br>Max. Rs 8,500) |

### Car Loans

| Name of Lender         | Interest Rate (%) | Loan amount 5 lakh      | Processing fee                |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                        |                   | EMI (Rs) Tenure 5 years |                               |
| Punjab National Bank   | 8.75-10.60        | 10,319-10,772           | 0.25% (Rs 1,000-₹5,1,500)     |
| Bank of Baroda         | 8.95-12.70        | 10,367-11,300           | Up to ₹2,000                  |
| Canara Bank            | 8.70-12.70        | 10,307-11,300           | 0.25% (Maximum Rs 2,500)      |
| Bank of India          | 8.85-12.10        | 10,343-11,148           | 0.25% (Rs 1,000-₹5,000)       |
| UCO Bank               | 8.45-10.55        | 10,246-10,759           | Nil                           |
| State Bank of India    | 9.05-10.10        | 10,391-10,648           | Nil                           |
| IDBI Bank              | 8.80-9.65         | 10,331-10,294           | Rs 2,500                      |
| Bank of Maharashtra*   | 8.70-13.00        | 10,307-11,377           | 0.25% (Rs 1,000-₹5,15,000)    |
| Indian Overseas Bank** | 8.85-12.00        | 10,343-11,122           | 0.50% (Rs 500-₹5,000)         |
| ICICI Bank             | 9.10 onwards      | 10,403 onwards          | Up to 2%                      |
| HDFC Bank              | 9.20 onwards      | 10,428 onwards          | Up to 0.50% (Rs 3,500-₹8,000) |
| Karnataka Bank         | 8.88-11.37        | 10,350-10,964           | 0.60% (Rs 3,000-₹11,000)      |
| Federal Bank           | 8.85 onwards      | 10,343 onwards          | Rs 2,000-₹4,500               |
| South Indian Bank      | 8.75 onwards      | 10,319 onwards          | 0.75% (Max. Rs 10,000)        |
| IDFC First Bank        | 9.00 onwards      | 10,379 onwards          | Up to ₹10,000                 |
| City Union Bank        | 9.90-11.50        | 10,599-10,996           | 1.25% (Min. Rs 1,000)         |

\*0.25% interest rate concession for existing housing loan borrowers and corporate salary account holders.  
\*\*0.50% interest rate concession to borrowers with credit scores of 800 and above. Interest rate concession of 0.25% to borrowers having credit scores of 750-799.  
Rates and charges as on September 4  
Source: Paisabazaar.com

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## ANDHRA PRADESH



Unity in a moment of crisis: Youngsters join hands in taking the flood-affected people to safety on a boat at YSR Colony in Vijayawada. G.N. RAO

# The wrath of the 'Sorrow of city'

Thousands of victims of the Vijayawada floods had to grapple for food and water to sustain themselves as they battled heavy rain for three days. Even as government relief operations continued to reach the victims, the loss of lives and property due to deluge left a deep mark on the victims. However, humanity keeps afloat the flood-ravaged colonies, writes **Nellore Sravani**

**H**ari Priya, in her night dress, anxiously sobs in silence as she sits with her toddler in her arms on the footpath of a flyover overrun by a crowd, chaos, and despair. With her phone running out of battery, she waits there helpless in the hope of finding her husband and elder daughter, who got separated in the swarm of flood victims that thronged the place to grab water food packets being distributed at a truck.

On seeing her, Nagesh, who was carrying a sackful of buttermilk packets, stops to give her a few packets. He says his family and neighbours in Ajith Singh Nagar could not come out as the roads were inundated by the flood water. "I am taking the buttermilk to give it to whoever needs it in my colony," he says.

September 2 was just another Monday for most people in Vijayawada, the capital region of Andhra Pradesh. The markets bustled as people who had been cooped inside their houses for two days due to heavy rain that lashed the city since Friday came to buy essentials. Most parts of the city were getting back to normal.

Only 7 km away, the situation was anything but normal. From 7.30 a.m. onwards, hundreds gathered around a truck, where food, milk and water were distributed for free, on the Ajith Singh Nagar flyover that connected the submerged colonies to the other parts of the city. Most of them had nothing to eat or drink for the past 24 hours.

"I tried to get a food packet but in vain. The men who stood at the front managed to grab every food packet thrown at us by a volunteer from the truck; I could only get my hands on just two packets of buttermilk," says Hari Priya, a daily wagger, sweating despite the cold weather.

Carrying a toddler in one hand and a stick in another, she waded through more than waist-deep water to reach the flyover from her house in Ajith Singh Nagar, which was inundated. "There is no food at home for the children and no drinking water. When we learned that food was being distributed here, we had to dare to step out," she says.

"We do not have any cash or jewellery with us. We are only worried about lives," says Hari Priya who lives in a small rented room with nothing but a cot and cooking essentials.

Nagesh, on the other hand, says his loss is in the tune of lakhs of rupees as his three bikes, a car, furniture, cash, jewellery, and appliances got damaged by the flood fury. "I don't know who will pay me for my loss. But people at my place need food and drinking water first," he says.

On the flyover, strewn with spill rice, milk, slippers, plastic covers, and water bottles, people, most barefoot and in their night dresses, ran helter-skelter for food, water, and medical help. Pregnant women, women who had just had delivery, children, and elderly persons walked from the inundated end of the flyover to the other, around a kilometre, for help. While some reached there by boats deployed by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the others waded through waterlogged roads on foot.

With the deluge unleashing a never-seen-before devastation on the colonies built on the



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**HARI PRIYA**  
Flood victim at Ajith Singh Nagar

flood plains of Budameru rivulet in Vijayawada, the Andhra Pradesh government immediately sent 22 lakh food packets to be distributed to people in flood-hit colonies on September 3. On September 4, they readied around 18 lakh food packets. While parts of the Vijayawada Central Assembly constituency in Circle 2 of the city were the worst hit, more than 50% of the nearly 4 lakh people living in the 14 divisions were victimised. The total number of people affected in the city, including some from the West constituency, is estimated to be nearly 3 lakh. As many as 25 people are estimated to have died so far from NTR district alone.

#### Relief efforts

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and other Ministers have visited the affected places. "I want to reach every person (affected). Justice has to be done for every one. The first priority for us is to give food to everybody. For this, we are going to operate tractors and deploy volunteers."

Leaders of Opposition parties also visited the affected places and pledged their support to the people there.

Two days of extremely heavy rain (300 mm) in 36 hours in the city and surrounding areas of the district did more damage than inundating the rivers—it increased water levels in streams and rivers. "Until 8.30 a.m. on Sunday, there was no water outside. My husband was to leave for Chennai. The train was at 10.45 a.m., but within 15 minutes, the water level reached two feet high. And within an hour or two, there was six feet of water around the house," Sridevi, an accounts manager at a private firm in Hanuman Junction, recalls. Her family, which has lived in Andhra Pradesh since 1986, says floods are not new to them. "Our house is built on an elevated area. But, still, water came in," she says.

An official from the Irrigation department, who spoke on condition of anonymity, says it was the first time the city had been flooded since 2009. Yet, in 2009, the damage was not this great. "The discharge at the Velaguru regulator, built on Budameru rivulet, was 26,000-27,000 cusecs as of August 31 evening. Of them, 15,000 cusecs were let into the Budameru Diversion



Rendered homeless: A family leaving their inundated house to reach a safe place, wading through the floodwater at Payakapuram in Vijayawada. K.V.S. GIM

Channel (BDC), and the remaining were let into the original course," the official says. Rains in Budameru catchment areas, such as Khammam in Telangana, added to the problem, as streams originating in these places joined the surging waters of the Budameru rivulet, which passes through the heart of Vijayawada, he adds.

According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director S. Stella, extremely heavy rainfall, floods, heat waves and thunderstorms are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

I want to reach every person (affected). Justice has to be done for every one. The first priority for us is to give food to everybody. For this, we are going to operate tractors and deploy volunteers

**N. CHANDRABABU NAIDU**  
Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh

YSR Colony, Ajith Singh Nagar, Payakapuram, Bhavanipuram, among other areas of the city, were inundated by Sunday afternoon.

The NDRF personnel helped thousands of stranded people by distributing food and medicines. "We have made countless trips to the flooded areas and rescued many pregnant women, elderly, livestock and pets," said a group of personnel while taking a rest on the bus. However, many declared that the NDRF boats did not reach the smaller lanes. To tackle this problem, the State government roped officials from the AP FiberNet to use drones to deliver food to places the boats could not reach. By Tuesday evening, 40 drones had made nearly 150 trips, carrying seven to eight boxes of food packets a trip.

One of the worst-hit areas is YSR Colony, where 40,000 people live in apartments provided by the government. "While we had provisions, our neighbours in the same apartment received relief material right from Sunday. However, those at the back could not, since the boats could not reach them," says Parameswar, an auto driver.

"We saw many boats approaching our lanes, but none came to our house. There was a lot of confusion. The officials also did not know where to go and whom to help. We had to wait 10 hours to get my parents and in-laws a boat. We had all the provisions, but there was no water supply due to power cut. That is why we had to move out," Sridevi says.

As a time of despondency, many Good Samaritans rose to the occasion and helped the victims by distributing free water, buttermilk, and other items. "This is my city. I could not look away when the place I call my home was suffering," says Siva Prasad, a samosa vendor who

spent ₹2,000 every day to buy water for people.

Most of the inundated areas are home to daily wagers and low-income people. The government built many apartments in the new RR Peta to rehabilitate the homeless and those from financially weaker backgrounds. Until September 4, people in Old and New RR Peta were yet to receive help, said Hero Sankar, trapped in an apartment, along with 200 others, in the New RR Peta over a phone call. "We have run out of provisions, and there is no water supply," he said, adding that they were using floodwater in washrooms and boiled tank water to drink. Sankar, now a vendor, used to live near the Krishna river bank until 2009. Then, he was rehabilitated to this colony.

"My three grandchildren, a 3-month-old, a 3-year-old and a 5-year-old, are alone with their mother. I was not allowed to go there. I was told the water level was too high to wade through. I cannot help but wait here for help to come," said Durga Bhavani, a domestic help who left the children at home to leave for work at Chitti Nagar. Like Durga Bhavani, many daily wage workers sat outside restaurants and shops at the foot of the flyover, waiting for their loved ones. They had to spend the night on the restaurant's stairs. "Floods are not new. But the severity has increased," says Mruthyanjan Rao, an environmental activist who has studied Kolleru Lake for years. He says the illegal encroachments on the flood basins and Kolleru are to be blamed for the floods.

#### Sorrow of Vijayawada

Budameru, originating in the NTR district, is one of the feeder rivulets for the Kolleru Lake, a Ramsar site. It courses through Gannavaram, Gudivada, and Kalkukurru before joining the Kolleru Lake, where illegal fish tanks have come up in thousands of hectares. "Now, what seems to have happened is that the flood water, which surged through these places, entered the city, and its flow was obstructed due to unauthorised apartments on its way, leading to the slowing down of the flow and thereby inundating the colonies. If the path were clear in Vijayawada, the flow would have been obstructed similarly by fish tanks. In the latter case, the Kolleru would have submerged," he explained. Budameru has acquired the title of 'Sorrow of Vijayawada'. It is not the first time that it has caused misery to people. However, officials have admitted that it was the first time since 2009 that a devastation of such a huge scale has occurred. Encroachments, which have been happening since the 1960s, have changed the course of drains and rivulets, inundating habitations on their way.

As the chaos of the day slences into despair, 74-year-old tea seller Nageswar Rao, who has been living in Ramakrishnapuram on the banks of Budameru for decades, worries how he can recover the loss of over ₹1 lakh he incurred after his house got washed away in the floods. "I will go back to my house after water recedes. It is only here that I can afford the rents," he says.



Victims of flood fury: People, in hundreds, walking on a road submerged in rainwater in Ajith Singh Nagar in Vijayawada. K.V.S. GIM

# UTTAR PRADESH



Women's movements are now curtailed in Bhagatipur village, for the fear of what might happen. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

## The invisible cost of violence

Following the death of two Dalit minors in Farrukhabad district, Uttar Pradesh, women and girls fear that their mobility will be curtailed, especially because the images are eerily similar to those that came out of Badaun a decade ago and Lakhimpur Kheri two years ago, finds **Alisha Dutta**

**Trigger warning:** the following article has references to suicide and murder. Please avoid reading if you feel distressed by the subjects.

In Bhagatipur, a village with no more than 40 houses in western Uttar Pradesh's Farrukhabad district, the arrival of luxury four-wheelers along the narrow road has always signified the onset of election season. However, on August 28, when they came bearing emblems of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Samajwadi Party, it was not to secure the Jatav caste vote. It was because the death of two minor Dalit girls in the village, a couple of days earlier, had made it to the national media.

The cars bearing the BJP's emblem — the lotus — lined up outside a shop-turned-office. The almost-closed shutter was thrown open, and men in Nehru jackets strode into the room. Along its newly plastered walls were photographs of India's Constitution-maker Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Buddha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Lord Ram. Discomfort hung heavy in the air. Police officials, some in uniform, some in civvies, were seated alongside party workers.

The death of the girls had refreshed the public's memory of 2014, when an eerily similar and equally distressing incident had occurred in Badaun, U.P. On August 27, the Internet was flooded with the juxtaposition of two photographs: one was a decade old, of two Dalit teenage cousins' bodies hanging from a mango tree. The other, a couple of hours old, was of two teenagers hanging from two ends of the same *dupatta*, again, from a mango tree.

The Internet had forgotten that in 2022, another teenage minor Dalit sisters had been gang-raped, murdered, and hung from a tree in Lakhimpur Kheri district.

In 2022, the National Crime Records Bureau report showed that U.P. had registered 1,430 crimes against girls in the 12 to 16 age group under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. This was the third highest in the country, after Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The same year, U.P. saw 15,368 cases being registered against Scheduled Castes (Dalits), the highest in the country. The State has been recording the highest number of such cases across the country since 2020.

### A dark night

The girls' bodies were first spotted by Brijesh, 27, who runs a cycle-tyre repair shop. At the crack of dawn, he had stepped out of his one-room house with a *lota* (mug) to relieve himself in the mango orchard, 300 metres away. In Bhagatipur, while most houses have an indoor bathroom, some still

cannot afford one.

Used to being mocked for his limp, Brijesh's sleepy eyes scanned the area for teens and young adults, many of whom would publicly bully him. Seeing none, he walked through the rain-soaked mud to the mango orchard. In the next few minutes, the village had been rudely shaken out of its slumber by the news of the girls' deaths.

A middle-aged woman froze on hearing his screams. Her 15-year-old daughter and her 17-year-old friend had been missing since the night before. "Before I could even think, my neighbour rushed into the house, hugged me, and broke down, saying their bodies had been found in the mango orchard," she said, wiping away tears.

The night before, the duo had gone to the temple, about 400 metres away, to watch the Janmashtami tableaux commemorating Krishna's birth. One of their fathers, Raj (name changed to protect privacy), said, "They had stepped out in the evening, but came back home by 9 p.m. when it began to rain. But in half an hour, as soon as the rain subsided and they heard the sounds from the tableaux, they left for the temple."

Around 12.30 a.m., as the temple sounds died down, his eyes watched the main entrance. He heard the faraway voices of people walking through the *gali* (lane), going home. Those gradually died down, but there was no sign of the two best friends. "As time went by, I got scared. We checked our neighbours' houses and called relatives to ask if they had gone to their places, but no one knew anything," Raj added.

A neighbour later said she had seen them in the temple in the evening, but was certain they weren't there at night.

At 3 a.m., the two families decided to resume

their search in the morning. Dawn brought on horrors they hadn't imagined.

In the next couple of hours, kin from villages across western U.P. had reached the girls' home to be with the families. They offered condolences, but also theories about what could have happened. Villagers and visitors went to the spot in groups to take pictures and play detective.

### Police reaction

Unlike 2014 and 2022, the State police were prepared to put out the flames before the Opposition or the media could fan it. "Everything happened very quickly. They came, brought down the bodies, took them for post-mortem, and cremated them the next day," the father said.

A senior officer at the Kayamgunj police station, under whose jurisdiction Farrukhabad falls, said there was a lot of pressure because of the sensitivity of the case. Forty-eight hours after the police had found the two bodies and even after they had been cremated, an FIR was not lodged, and no investigation had begun.

Ten years ago, too, the investigators were in a rush to close the case, and to date we do not know what happened to our daughters

### VICTIM'S FATHER

Badaun

Section 194 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita states that the police can take cognisance of an alleged case of suicide and register an FIR if "there is any doubt regarding the cause of death". At the orchard, the police had left behind used gloves, plastics with U.P. police emblems, and packets of tobacco. YouTubers crowded around the tree shooting videos and broadcasting to followers. The tape cordoning off the area was torn. Another officer said the team had found one mobile phone at the orchard and one SIM card on one of the girls. "The SIM card has not been sent for *jhaanch* (inquiry), but we get to know that the mobile phone belongs to a cousin, who had come to their house to charge his mobile phone," he said.

Srikrishna Gautam, a local BJP worker, said unlike the Badaun case, this time the police had decided to choose an investigating officer from the same community, lest the public accuse them of having "*svarna* (upper caste) investigators trying to cover up a hate crime".

In the next 24 hours, Superintendent of Police (SP) Alok Priyadarshit told the family and the me-

dia that the post-mortem report had stated that the death was due to ante-mortem asphyxia (death due to hanging) and the bodies bore no signs of sexual assault. The girls had taken their own lives, he said.

The families, which had seen the bodies, disagreed. They claimed there were marks of physical assault on the bodies and thorns in the hair. "How can two girls hang themselves with the same *dupatta*? If at all they did, how come the heavier girl was not hanging lower than the lighter one? This is murder. My daughter has been murdered," the father of one of the girls said.

Amid theories floating in the air around Bhagatipur, on August 30, about 72 hours later, the police lodged an FIR and arrested two men: Pawan, 22, and Deepak, 23, from the village, for abatement to suicide. Deepak runs a tailoring shop in the area; Pawan is his friend and co-worker, the police said.

"One of the girls was going through a heart-break since Deepak had started seeing another girl. They were also harassing the two girls, which must have been a trigger for them to take their lives," said the SP. While the police proceeded to close the case, the families refused to believe the police's version.

### The past and the future

Badaun's Katra Sadatgunj village, where the 2014 incident took place, is about 70 km from Bhagatipur. For the father of one of the victims, the eagerness of the law enforcement to close the case did not come as a surprise. "Ten years ago, too, the investigators were in a rush to close the case. To date, we do not know what happened to our daughters," he said, standing near the mango orchard. The family lives just a few paces from here and is easily alerted to media presence.

The family still visits the court twice or thrice a year. "Every court hearing costs us at least ₹10,000, including the legal fee and transportation cost," he said. Their contention is that three youth, all brothers living in the same village, had gang-raped and murdered the girls. However, the case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which submitted that the girls had killed themselves.

In the year of the deaths, the forensic science laboratory had submitted a report that stated there was no evidence of struggle prior to death, nor were there internal injuries. The report further noted that the girls were not sexually assaulted prior to death. The CBI had submitted before the court that one of the girls had been intimate with one of the men.

A decade after the tragedy, the family still has a rule. "Every woman is accompanied by a man when they leave the house," said the father. While the young cousins had access to phones then, the girls growing up in the family now are no longer given devices. "After you lose two girls, you want to ensure that every girl in your family is safe," adds the father of the other victim.

In Bhagatipur, 15-year-old Priya was part scared and part upset with what had happened to her peers. "Now, my parents will use this incident to not allow me to step outside and go to fairs," she said.

Shilpa Phadke, one of the authors of the book *Why Litter?*, said restricting women's mobility post high-profile cases of violence against women is society's knee-jerk reaction. "This is primarily why women don't report sexual abuse, fearing a higher level of restricted movement and surveillance," she said.

(If you are in distress, please reach out to this 24x7 helpline: KIRAN 1800-599-0019.)



Family members mourn the death of the two Dalit girls in Bhagatipur, Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ABSTRACT



**Erratic climate:** The view from YSR Colony in Vijayawada on September 8. G. H. RAO

# How changes in the level of Arctic sea ice can change monsoon patterns in India

Unpredictable, erratic rainfall has become the norm for the Indian monsoon. New research reveals that less sea ice in the central Arctic leads to lower rain in western and peninsular India but more rain in central and northern India

Arkatapa Basu

Yadav, Juhl et al. 'Contrasting response of regional spring Arctic Sea ice variations on Indian summer monsoon rainfall', *Remote Sensing of Environment*, Vol 311, September 1, 2024.

**I**ncessant rainfall has wreaked havoc in India's southeast, leaving at least 17 dead in Andhra Pradesh and thousands homeless and at the mercy of floods in Telangana. The Indian Meteorological Department has also warned of heavy rains in parts of Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi.

Unpredictable, erratic rainfall has become the norm for the Indian monsoon. Once a bringer of relief and hope to the subcontinent, these rains are now a herald of drought and floods.

Climate change is an important reason why. However, a closer look into climate models shows the intricate play of surface temperature, pressure gradients, air currents and even sea ice that is responsible for bringing rain to the Indian landmass. In a study published in the journal *Remote Sensing of Environment* in June, researchers from India's National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, and South Korea's Korea Polar Research Institute have found that seasonal changes in the Arctic sea ice affect the Indian monsoon as well.

**Making of a monsoon**

The Indian summer monsoon rainfall (ISM) over the Indian subcontinent, from July to September, and with most of the rains recorded in July and August, is one of the most prominent monsoon systems in the world.

In summer months, sunlight warms the

Central Asian and Indian landmass more and faster than the surrounding ocean. This creates a low pressure band at the Tropic of Cancer called the intertropical convergence zone. Trade winds blowing from the southeast are subsequently deflected towards the Indian landmass due to the Coriolis force and have low pressure after they cross the equator. As they blow over the Arabian Sea, the winds pick up moisture and deposit that as rain over India.

Over the landmass itself, this southwest monsoon splits into two. The Arabian Sea arm brings rain to the west coast while the other arm travels to the Bay of Bengal and brings rain to India's eastern and northeastern parts. The arms finally converge over Punjab and Himachal Pradesh as the Arabian Sea arm moves inward and the Bay of Bengal arm moves along the Himalaya.

The ISMR is much more complex than scientists first anticipated. In the last two decades, climate models have shown that the surface temperatures of the Indian, the Atlantic, and the Pacific Oceans affect the ISMR. The circum-global teleconnection (CGT), a large-scale atmospheric wave flowing at the mid-latitudes, seemed to significantly influence the monsoon as well.

**The influence of Arctic sea ice**

In recent years, scientists have also suggested that the declining levels of Arctic sea ice, due to climate change, could influence the monsoon's temperament. In the new study, researchers used observational data from 1980 to 2020 and climate models (specifically Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phases 5 and 6) to check how Arctic sea ice levels affect atmospheric circulations that in turn

influence the ISMR.

The results revealed distinct and at times contrasting patterns. According to the paper, less sea ice in the central Arctic leads to lower rain in western and peninsular India but more rain in central and northern India. On the other hand, lower sea ice levels in the upper latitudes, particularly in the Barents-Kara Sea region encompassing the Hudson Bay, the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Sea of Okhotsk, delay the monsoon's onset and render it more unpredictable.

Several atmospheric systems also influence this pattern. The scientists found that when sea ice levels in the central Arctic increase, the heat transferred from the ocean to the atmosphere triggers a cyclonic circulation at slightly lower latitudes, like in the north Atlantic. This bolsters the Rossby waves, fast-flowing streams of air high in the atmosphere created by the earth's rotation and differences in temperature and weather systems that move west to east. "To put it simply, imagine giant loops in a river of air high above us. These loops can push warm or cold air across the planet and steer storms around, changing weather patterns as they go," Avinash Kumar, an NCPOR scientist and one of the study's co-authors, told *The Hindu*. The enhanced Rossby waves result in high pressure over northwest India and low pressure over the Mediterranean region. This in turn strengthens a narrow, concentrated band of wind, called the Asian jet stream, over the Caspian Sea, causing the subtropical easterly jet – a jet stream blowing over the Indian subcontinent during summer – to shift northward. As a result, an anomalous high pressure region is created over Central Asia, disrupting atmospheric stability over the Indian landmass and

bringing more rain over western and peninsular India.

On the other hand, low sea ice over the Barents-Kara Sea region triggers a series of air currents that produce an anomalous high pressure over southwest China. This correlates with a positive Arctic Oscillation – high pressure over the northern Atlantic and Pacific oceans along with a weakening of the CGT, which connects weather events in different parts of the world.

As sea ice levels decrease in the region, heat rises from the Barents-Kara sea, creating an anticyclonic circulation (calm, clear skies) over northwest Europe. This disturbs the upper atmospheric region over subtropical Asia and India.

This instability, coupled with high surface temperature of the Arabian Sea and the moisture picked up from the surrounding water bodies promotes high rainfall over northeastern India while leaving central and northwest regions of the country without much.

**Does climate change also play a role?**

Now that scientists know a little more about the forces that conspire to bring or withhold rain over India, what can we say about the role of climate change?

"Climate change, by accelerating the reduction of Arctic sea ice, exacerbates the variability and unpredictability of the ISMR," Dr. Kumar said. "Lower Arctic sea ice can lead to more frequent and severe droughts in some regions while causing excessive rainfall and flooding in others."

Apart from highlighting the physical pathways in which the Arctic sea ice affects the Indian monsoon, the current study shows the urgent need to expand research on climate dynamics and for scientists to prepare more accurate forecasts of the ever-changing monsoons.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

## He is very inept at his new job

I am going to have a bit of a lie-in today as I just ran a marathon in the morning

S. Upendran

"Tell me, how do you pronounce lie-in...p...?"  
 "The first syllable sounds like the word 'in', while the 'ept' sounds like the 'ept' in 'slept', 'kept' and 'wept'. The word is pronounced in-EPT with the stress on the second syllable. Any idea what it means?"  
 "Doesn't it mean not very skilful? When you're 'inept', you're not good at something."  
 "Very good! That's exactly what it means. When you say that someone is inept, what you're suggesting is that the individual is terrible at what he does. Naresh went to an inept accountant, and ended up losing all his money."  
 "I was told by several people that Jai is an inept dentist."

"Really? I've gone to him a couple of times, and I've had no problems with him. 'Inept' can also be used to mean not very capable or clumsy. The Vice Chancellor's inept remarks led to the students going on strike."  
 "The UN has often been criticised for its inept handling of the West Asia problem."

"One can also be 'inept' at something. Rajiv is quite inept at sports."  
 "I'm quite inept at dealing with mechanical problems."  
 "I think everyone knows that! You're also socially inept."

"Socially inept? Are you saying that I'm not good at dealing with people?"  
 "Yes! A person who is socially inept finds it difficult to interact with people. He feels uncomfortable in their presence. Please don't send Sujatha to meet our clients. She's socially inept."

"How about this example? In the presence of women, Suresh becomes socially inept."

"Sounds good! What's a socially inept person like Harish doing in the marketing department?"

"One of the advantages of being the CEO's nephew, I suppose? It was a pretty hectic week at the office. Interested in an early morning trek tomorrow?"  
 "No chance! I plan to lie in till noon tomorrow."

"Lie in? Lie on what?"  
 "When you 'lie in', you stay in bed longer than you normally do."

"In other words, you sleep longer than you usually do."

"It doesn't necessarily mean to sleep longer than usual. All it means is you remain in bed longer than usual. I woke up around seven, but decided to lie in."

"When I was in school, my parents never allowed me to lie in. I was promptly woken up at six o'clock."

"By the way the expression 'lie in' can also be used as a noun. Tomorrow being a holiday, my friend Sunitha is planning to have a bit of a lie-in."

"It's difficult to have a lie-in when you have two small kids at home."  
 upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

## 2024 has been a major year for elections. Here is a quiz on some elections that have already occurred this year

Srinivasan Ramani

QUESTION 1

Name the party that could not contest the Pakistan general elections held in February 2024, because its symbol was stripped by the election commission and yet, independents who contested with the support of the party emerged as the single largest grouping in the National Assembly.

QUESTION 2

January 2024 was the first time in Taiwan that a party won two consecutive presidential polls, after direct elections were introduced in 1996. Name the party and the candidate who went on to become the eighth president of Taiwan.

QUESTION 3

Name the candidate proposed for the post of Prime Minister by the New Popular Front which emerged as the single largest coalition in the French legislative elections. Instead of her, who was named by the President Emmanuel Macron?

QUESTION 4

For the first time since Apartheid ended in South Africa, the African National Congress won less than 50% of the vote in the 2024 general elections. Name the opposition party which finished second and with whom the ANC went on to form a national unity government.

QUESTION 5

The first El Salvador president who was re-elected since 1944; name this leader who won the elections held in February 2024, with 84.65% of the popular vote.



**Visual question:** Name this newly elected parliamentarian. What was her achievement? FILE PHOTO

Questions and Answers to the September 6 edition of the daily quiz:

- This process is primarily used to produce green hydrogen. **Ans: Electrolysis powered by renewable energy**
  - A key advantage of solid-state batteries over traditional liquid electrolyte batteries. **Ans: Increased energy density and increased safety**
  - The primary by-product of using hydrogen as a fuel in hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. **Ans: Water vapour**
  - This country currently leads in electric vehicle adoption. **Ans: China**
  - The unique technique that is used in EVs to capture energy that the vehicle has due to its kinetic energy. **Ans: Regenerative Braking**
- Visual:** Identify this Nobel laureate. **Ans: John. B. Goodenough**  
**Early Birds:** K.N. Viswanathan| Ashraf Basha| Tamy Biswas| Sadhan Kumar Panda| Atul Gaur

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

Word of the day

**Enconce:** fix firmly  
**Synonym:** settle  
**Usage:** He enconced himself in front of the television.  
**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/enconcepro  
**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ɛn'kɒns/

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

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

**NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**Accessibility-related complaints filed on govt. app since 2021**

**1,441** The complaints were lodged on the government's flagship Suganya Bharat mobile application. A partnership has been established with Mission Accessibility and I-STEM to develop the app. #1

**Number of fatalities from undiagnosed fever in Gujarat**

**12** Despite primarily appearing to be cases of pneumonitis, panchayat members of a local district in Kutch said doctors had not been able to accurately diagnose the fever, which was also causing difficulty in breathing. #1

**The number of CRPF troops placed in Chhattisgarh**

**4,000** The troops have been placed in certain areas of Bastar in Chhattisgarh as part of a strategy to match the Union government's latest resolve of ending the Maoist problem by March 2026. #1

**The number of people killed in Russia's strike on Poltava**

**58** In one of their most lethal attacks on Ukraine, Russia attacked a military education institute. Officials have not said how many of the victims were military or civilians. The Ukraine President repeated his calls for more air defence systems. #1

**The amount of rice that India sent to drought-hit Malawi**

**1,000** in metric tonnes. In March, the government of Malawi declared a state of disaster following drought in 23 of the country's 28 districts. #1

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Unusual sight: Rain clouds seen, following reports from the Pakistan Meteorological Department of a potential cyclonic storm that could develop over the Arabian Sea, at Clifton Beach in Karachi, Pakistan on August 30. REUTERS

## On uncommon cyclones in the Arabian Sea

Why does the north Indian ocean have two cyclone seasons while all other cyclogenesis regions have just one? How is climate change affecting the region and adding to the unusual activity? Why was there a lot of excitement over Asna, a rare August cyclone?

**EXPLAINER**

Raghu Murtugudde

**The story so far:**

The north Indian Ocean supplies a large part of the moisture required to generate the 200 lakh crore or so buckets of water during the summer monsoon. That implies a lot of evaporation from the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, which requires these seas to be warm enough to allow evaporation. Warm tropical oceans also tend to be hotbeds of cyclones. And yet, the north Indian Ocean is the least active region of the world's oceans vis-à-vis the number of cyclones. The combination of some factors that favour cyclogenesis and some that suppress it make this area unusual in terms of cyclone seasons, numbers, and the response of the ocean and the cyclones to global warming.

**Why is the Indian Ocean unique?**

The Indian Ocean receives a lot of attention for its monsoonal circulation and the dramatic seasonal wind reversals to the north of the equator. But it's also unique because it has 'oceanic tunnels' connecting it to the Pacific Ocean and the Southern Ocean. The Pacific tunnel brings a significant amount of warm water every year in the upper 500 m while the Southern Ocean tunnel brings in cooler waters below about 1 km.

The Arabian Sea warms rapidly during the pre-monsoon season as the Sun crosses over to the northern hemisphere. The Bay of Bengal is relatively warmer than the Arabian Sea but warms further and begins to produce atmospheric convection and rainfall. The trough that eventually leads to the monsoon onset over Kerala arrives in mid-May itself over the Bay of Bengal. The post-monsoon season is the northeast monsoon season for India, and produces significant amounts of rain over several States.

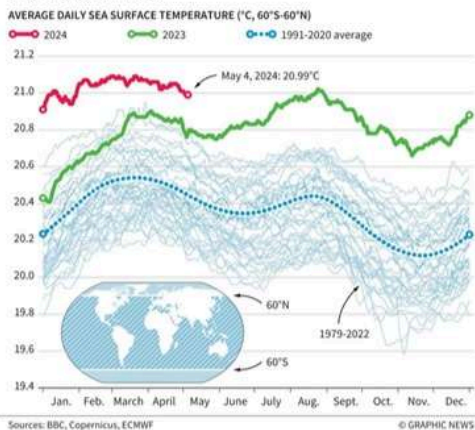
All these wind patterns and sea surface temperatures influence cyclogenesis throughout the year over the north Indian Ocean and sustain the stark contrast in cyclogenesis between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

**Does climate change play a part too?**

Climate change amplifies the uniqueness of the Indian Ocean. More heat is coming in from the Pacific Ocean now while the Southern Ocean is also pushing in warmer waters. The Indian Ocean is warming rapidly due to these inputs, plus atmospheric changes in winds and humidity. The north Indian Ocean and the monsoon are now responding to

**Warming temperatures**

More heat is coming in from the Pacific Ocean now while the Southern Ocean is also pushing in warmer waters. The Indian Ocean is warming rapidly due to these inputs, plus atmospheric changes in winds and humidity



Sources: BBC, Copernicus, ECMWF

related climate change drivers from tropical oceans as well as from pole-to-pole influences. The Ocean's rapid warming is now reported to be affecting the heat uptake by the Pacific Ocean and the sinking of heavy waters in the north Atlantic Ocean. The Indian Ocean is essentially acting like a clearinghouse for ocean warming during climate change. All these region-specific idiosyncrasies play into cyclogenesis, cyclone numbers, and their responses to climate change over the Indian Ocean.

**Are cyclones common?**

During the monsoon itself, the strong southwesterly winds – or the so-called low-level jet – drive a strong evaporation and mixing of cold subsurface waters with the surface waters. Thus the Arabian Sea becomes significantly cooler during the pre-monsoon season. The strong convective activity over the Bay of Bengal produces many low-pressure, or cyclonic, systems during the monsoon but they rarely grow into cyclones.

This is because the strong monsoon winds vary in strength and direction from the surface to the middle atmosphere. This variation is called vertical shear and it tends to strip off the energy from any

cyclone that may be trying to grow.

The net result is that the dominant cyclone season is uniquely split into the pre- and post-monsoon seasons over the north Indian Ocean. All other cyclogenesis regions have a single cyclone season during the year.

The main impact of the monsoonal circulation is that the warm ocean, the heat content, and the atmospheric convection favour cyclogenesis over the north Indian Ocean. This leads to cyclones being formed during the pre-monsoon and the post-monsoon seasons. However, the Arabian Sea has much less convective activity during the pre-monsoon and is relatively less prone to cyclogenesis. The northeast monsoon and dry continental air ends up cooling the Arabian Sea post-monsoon.

The number of cyclones in the Arabian Sea is thus about half of that over the Bay of Bengal in both seasons.

Thus, the cooler temperatures, stronger wind shear, and the relatively low convective activity over the Arabian Sea make the Arabian Sea relatively a desert for cyclones.

Some upward trend in the number of cyclones was reported from 2010 onwards but the Arabian Sea has been eerily calm the last few years.

**What is Asna?**

There was a lot of excitement recently about a rare August cyclone – named 'Asna' – born from the transition of a strong land-born depression onto the warm Arabian Sea. This is the first north Indian Ocean cyclone in August since 1981. The depression that grew into this cyclone itself was unusual in terms of its powerful growth over land. Low-pressure systems are typically born over the Bay of Bengal and traverse the core monsoon zone to bring about 60% of the total seasonal rainfall.

These ocean-born depressions can feed off of prior rainfall (as soil moisture) as they pass over India. There is some evidence that these low-pressure systems are now contributing to extreme rainfall events, but they have been stuck in a corridor for over a century. The unusual growth of the low-pressure system that brought deluges to western India fed off the soil moisture from excess rainfall since the beginning of the season. It was big enough to start hitting the warm northern Arabian Sea as it approached the western end of land. The ocean supplied the energy required for convection and to retain, and even, grow in strength.

Once its transition to the ocean is complete, it grew into a regular cyclone, but as a remarkably unusual land-born cyclone. The warming over the Arabian Sea has already been reported to be related to the northward shift of the low-level jet, which itself is driven by rapid warming over West Asia. Cyclonic storm Asna did cause nearly 50 deaths and left a trail of damages to crops and properties. It dissipated over the ocean eventually due to dry desert air being entrained into the circulation.

As the English writer Daniel Defoe said, "Expect nothing and you'll always be surprised." The warm 2023-2024 that resulted from a combination of global warming and El Niño, with a likely contribution from underwater volcanic eruptions, has produced plenty of surprises in terms of extreme events across the planet. The monsoon's evolution has also been unusual, especially since the forecasted strong La Niña hasn't emerged yet. The rainfall distribution remained as unpredictable as ever with a wet peninsular India and a strange mix of wet and dry regions over the country's north.

A low-pressure system is unusual but its amplification over land is. Its dash across land onto the ocean is another unexpected event. We didn't expect it and obviously were duly surprised.

Raghu Murtugudde is professor, IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor, University of Maryland.

**THE GIST**

The Indian Ocean receives a lot of attention for its monsoonal circulation and the dramatic seasonal wind reversals to the north of the equator. But it's also unique because it has 'oceanic tunnels' connecting it to the Pacific Ocean and the Southern Ocean.

The main impact of the monsoonal circulation is that the warm ocean, the heat content, and the atmospheric convection favour cyclogenesis over the north Indian Ocean. This leads to cyclones being formed during the pre-monsoon and the post-monsoon seasons.

There is a lot of excitement right now about a rare August cyclone – named 'Asna' – born from the transition of a strong land-born depression onto the warm Arabian Sea. This is the first north Indian Ocean cyclone in August since 1981.

# THE IDEAS PAGE

## The hijacking of facts

In its depiction of intelligence and security issues, 'IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack' obfuscates context, misrepresents reality



RAMANATHAN KUMAR

**THE HIJACKING** OF Indian Airlines flight IC 814 from Kathmandu to Kandahar on Christmas Eve, 1999, which culminated, a week later, in the humiliating release of three jailed terrorists — of whom two were Pakistanis — in exchange for the passengers and crew on board, was a searing experience for India's intelligence, national security and diplomatic establishments.

From the early 1990s, Indian intelligence had been engaged in a protracted, covert war against Pakistan's ISI, which had been exploiting the weaknesses in Nepal's security architecture and the open Indo-Nepal border to mount effective, plausibly deniable operations against India. This included the infiltration and exfiltration of terrorists trained in Pakistan, smuggling of high-grade explosives and weapons for attacks in India and the infusion into the Indian market of counterfeit Indian currency printed in Pakistan to augment the ISI's war-chest and destabilise the Indian economy. From the mid-1990s, however, unpublishable but effective security co-operation between Nepal and India foiled many of the ISI's designs. The plots disrupted are too numerous to recount. As the 20th century drew to a close, Indian intelligence appeared to be gaining the upper hand in the shadowy battle against their Pakistani adversaries in Nepal.

Then came the hijacking of IC 814 which took the Indian agencies by surprise. That Pakistan, the ISI and its proxies were involved was, of course, not difficult to fathom and it did not take long for the terrorist organisation involved — the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) — and the principal actors — whose primary motivation was to secure the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, chief propagandist of the HuM incarcerated in a jail in Jammu, to be identified. But the gold standard of intelligence is forewarning that leads to preemption. No amount of post facto investigation, however brilliant, is a substitute for foreknowledge and prevention in the intelligence business.

Indian intelligence was unable to prevent the hijacking of IC 814 because, in the months preceding the event, it had temporarily lost access to certain valuable assets and the consequences of the vulnerability thus created. At a time when Pakistan was vigorously pursuing its policy of bleeding India by a thousand cuts, were not adequately anticipated. This is not an unusual phenomenon in the world of intelligence and the assets were revised soon after the event but the damage had been done. That the terrorists had acquired Indian driving licences and passports, which enabled them to accomplish their mission with relative ease, was another bitter pill to swallow. Equally galling was the failure of the national crisis management system that allowed the aircraft to take off from Amritsar. The aircraft had been forced to land due to shortage of fuel. The reality that India was friendless in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban



C.R. Sankar

from 1996 to 2001 when the dominance of Pakistan and the ISI over its protégés was complete was also a far cry from the situation prevailing today.

This is the background and context that has been obfuscated, wittingly or unwittingly, in the Netflix series *IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack* which comes close to being a parody in its cavalier treatment of serious intelligence and security issues. The suggestion that the hijacking was masterminded by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda or that the plot originated in Afghanistan, rather than Pakistan, verges on the absurd. HuM leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, a prominent asset of Pakistan's ISI, was doubtless a signatory to the famous fatwa issued by bin Laden's International Islamic Front in 1998 against the "Jews and Crusaders" but, unlike Masood Azhar's closest associates, the Al Qaeda leadership had no interest in securing the release of the HuM's portly propagandist who subsequently went on to form his own organisation after falling out with Khalil over control of the HuM's assets. Speculative reports in the Pakistani media about the presence of the Al Qaeda-Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)-HuM linked Pakistani terrorist, Amjad Farooq among the hijackers cannot be taken as an established fact, absent any corroborating evidence. The depiction of the R&AW representative in Kathmandu and the assertion that Al Qaeda smuggled 17 kg of RDX into the aircraft in the Nepalese capital both beggar belief. And, finally, as the series itself acknowledges, the names of the Pakistani terrorist Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar of the Kashmiri

terrorist organisation Al Umar Mujahideen, were specifically included in the list of terrorists whom the hijackers wanted to be released at the behest of the ISI which spared no effort to twist the knife once India's helplessness became obvious.

The shortcomings of films and series like *IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack* which claim to be "inspired by real events", but end up presenting a misleading and distorted version of reality, are related to a common malaise: Half-baked research. This, in turn, raises the related issue of the progressively tighter restrictions imposed on the retired personnel of our intelligence and security agencies who have been barred from writing on subjects pertaining to their specialised domains without prior vetting by the organisations in which they served. These blanket restrictions are counterproductive, for they discourage the knowledgeable from educating the public on matters in which the latter have a legitimate interest. Short of divulging sensitive operational details, specialised sources and methods, the disclosure of which is likely to have an adverse impact on national security, retired personnel of our intelligence and security establishments should be encouraged to express their views, perspectives and unique insights in public without inhibition. A policy to the contrary risks impoverishing the public discourse on matters vital to our national security.

The writer is a former special secretary in the Research & Analysis Wing. Views expressed are personal



MANOJ KUMAR JHA

## Government is not the nation

Constitution helps we, the people, to distinguish between the two

**JUST TWO YEARS** short of the country's 80th Independence Day is perhaps the right occasion to think through the contemporary understanding and more importantly, willful misunderstanding of patriotism in our part of the world. It is also an occasion to unpack the aggressive clamour around *deshbhakti* but displaying little care about the substance within it.

The historian Eric Hobsbawm argued that nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is its past. The justification for a nation against others is derived primarily from the past. Hobsbawm can be relied upon to know this. After all, it is historians who produce the past. However, Hobsbawm probably could not foresee that once produced, the nationalism project moves beyond historian(s) and their craft's control. He probably could not also imagine in his long engagement with academia and people's movements that a time would come when politicians with counterfactual inclinations would emerge the world over and prop up their had-it-been-so version of history against established historical facts.

My aim here is not to get into the nitty-gritty of a historian's craft but to share some of my own insights into how patriotism is being imagined and performed in these fraught times. In India, the modern nationalism project took shape during the freedom struggle. It was moulded by the values that inspired the movement — truth, non-violence, liberty, inclusiveness, and progress.

Though one could go on and add a few dozen more values, ideas and impulses, it is important to recognise that these values were not impositions from above but that they prevailed through countryside meetings, street conversations, political rallies, and demonstrations for over five decades. These are also the values that shone through in the Constituent Assembly debates. Justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity formed the constellation that lit up the early hours of the morning sky over the young republic.

The Constitution gave the people an "idea of India" that was not singular but a toolbox of ideas of India. It never believed in majoritarian ideas of nationalism because the civilisational ethos of India always remained antithetical to such interpretation. Using this toolbox of ideas, we, the people of India, were able to forge a modern and progressive nation, bringing together extraordinarily diverse communities. Our love and affection for the nation on produced is patriotism.

With the Constitution in our hands, we, the people of India, know how to distinguish the nation from the government. The Constitution gave us a clear and unmistakable understanding that we are sovereign. Whenever a government elected by us sought loyalty and devotion, we, the people of India, were rightly alarmed. Even when it was posed as a test of our patriotism, we, the people of India, did not flinch once before renouncing such efforts. As and when efforts have been made to dilute or take away our rights, we, the people of

India, have not shied away from the path of democratic resistance. Many of us need no help to remember the tactics used during the Emergency. Similar tactics are being employed now by the current regime. Sometimes shouted through megaphones, sometimes as dog whistles. Sometimes from television studios and at other times through online whisper networks.

A spirit of nationalism, guided by particular ideals and values, won us our freedom. We created a nation. However, patriotism sustains us. Patriotism, felt as a deep love for our society and cultures, makes us a better people. Patriotism, manifested as a longing for our shared future, makes us behave better.

This regime has, unfortunately, turned nationalism into a 24/7 spectacle whipping up the baser instincts of people. The game-masters work a frenzy not only among the willing and the reluctant players but also among the spectators. The objective of this game is simple — unquestioning loyalty and total submission. This is opposed to the patriotic values of the freedom struggle which defined our nation but stay true to the shape of electoral politics. For spectators, it also provides endless distraction from constitutional ideals and values.

There are no prizes for the winners either. While the players are immersed in the game world, a family member may have lost their job, a qualifying exam paper may have leaked, and a size of the thali may have shrunk. But the penalties are aplenty. Following one or the other draconian law,

the government will confiate questioning it with critiquing the nation and put such individuals behind bars.

In the 78th year of our independence, we must have a football field of a distance between "loving your government" and "loving your nation". Holding the government accountable to the people is the hallmark of true patriotism. By questioning and challenging wrong and arbitrary government actions, citizens ensure that their country remains true to the ideals and values that shaped this nation. The first step in this direction would be to not accept propaganda by the government at face value.

If the government is inefficient, corrupt, or harmful, it undermines national interests. A partisan and divisive government is not interested in the well-being of the nation; it is interested in trimming the nation down to a size to fit its narrow ideology. By working against the ideals and values that forged this great nation, it is undoing the nation itself. We must acknowledge as a collective that a true patriot cannot wish harm on some members of we, the people of India. True patriots care deeply about the well-being and progress of their nation, the whole nation.

Let us pay heed to our first prime minister who warned that majoritarianism in the cloak of nationalism is a dangerous ploy which has the potential to devour the foundational values of the nation itself.

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

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is incumbent on our leaders to better familiarise themselves with LGBTQIA+ policies so that they are not out of step with their younger and more progressive electorate and with the rest of the world."

—THE KATHMANDU POST

## Five sutras for digital infrastructure

As the digital world becomes increasingly complex, need for dependable solutions has never been greater. Citizen Stack fills the gap



AMITABH KANT AND MADHUMITHA PREMA RAMANATHAN

**INDIA'S REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT** within over 80 per cent financial inclusion in just six years has garnered global acclaim, especially as a beacon of hope for the Global South. This feat demonstrates how India has successfully achieved digital and financial inclusion at scale for over a billion people. Consequently, a key highlight of the G20 summit in New Delhi in 2023 was the emphasis on digital public infrastructure.

India's G20 task force recently released a comprehensive report outlining a global strategy for digital public infrastructure development. The country now shoulders the responsibility of enabling countries worldwide to achieve digital sovereignty, financial inclusion, and self-reliance.

As this vision unfolds, the digital landscape is bustling with diverse stakeholders — from private enterprises and government bodies to non-profit organisations and think tanks — all striving to develop and promote their DPI solutions. Amid this dynamic environment, two fundamental questions arise: How can we discern authentic and reliable DPIs from the multitude of offerings? And, crucially, what distinguishes a "good DPI" from a "bad DPI"?

In the many digital public infrastructures, the challenge lies in identifying authenticity and maintaining the core essence of the practice. A good DPI should harmonise technology with societal needs, ensuring security, scalability, and inclusivity. As we navigate these complex landscapes, the principles of authenticity and fidelity remain our guiding lights.

The Citizen Stack emerges as a trusted ecosystem in the proven success of the India Stack. India Stack, a comprehensive digital infrastructure platform, has already demonstrated its efficacy and security on an unprecedented scale, serving over a billion citizens. This established foundation lends Citizen Stack a distinct advantage in terms of credibility and reliability. However, what truly sets Citizen Stack apart is its role as a regulatory body or auditor, not a manufacturer of DPIs. It certifies and authenticates DPIs, ensuring they meet stringent standards of quality and security.

As the digital world becomes increasingly complex, the need for dependable DPI solutions has never been greater. Citizen Stack, endorsed by the Government of India, stands as a paragon of excellence and authenticity in this domain. This signifies a commitment to quality and trustworthiness that few can rival.

The Citizen Stack's model is not just about technological prowess; it embodies a holistic approach to digital infrastructure that prioritises security, scalability, and inclusivity. The Citizen Stack-approved DPI

platform design ensures that it can cater to the diverse needs of a vast population while maintaining stringent security protocols to protect user data and privacy. By acting as an auditor, it guarantees that the DPIs it certifies are reliable, secure, and beneficial to the public.

In an era where digital solutions are proliferating and promises abound, the ability to identify a truly reliable and original platform is crucial. Citizen Stack offers this assurance. It is not just another DPI solution; it is the gold standard against which other solutions can be measured.

To delineate what constitutes a "good DPI", Citizen Stack has formulated five guiding principles, or sutras. These principles serve as the benchmarks for evaluating the integrity and efficacy of DPI solutions.

One, uphold the citizens' relationship with the market for the state. Ensure that the digital infrastructure is free from adverse influences that could distort this relationship.

Two, safeguard citizen empowerment and privacy. Implement a consent-based system for sharing data, prioritising individual empowerment and data privacy.

Three, prevent lock-in by competing monopolies. Ensure interoperability to prevent citizens from being trapped by monopolistic entities.

Four, techno-legal regulation. Combine public technology and law to govern ethical tech use, ensuring innovation, security, and societal rights in the digital age.

Five, public plus private innovation. Promote innovation through public and private sector collaboration, while avoiding domination by corporate interests. The future roadmap should be driven by public good, not corporate monopolies. Technology implementation should prevent exploitation by state or corporate actors.

These guiding principles are non-negotiable. A DPI must meet all these criteria to be classified as a "good DPI". While countries may choose to adopt DPIs that fall short on one or more of these principles, Citizen Stack remains committed to advocating for DPIs that uphold these high standards.

Citizen Stack represents a commitment to excellence in digital infrastructure, nurturing the trust and reliability found in the most respected and time-tested practices. In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital public infrastructure, it stands out as a beacon of integrity and innovation, ensuring that digital solutions serve the public good while adhering to the highest standards of security and inclusivity.

As we advance into an increasingly digital future, the principles and practices exemplified by Citizen Stack will be crucial in building and maintaining the trust necessary for widespread adoption and success. Whether through the harmonious balance achieved via India's ancient gift of yoga or the modern offering of digital public infrastructure — both selflessly given to the world — authentic quality and reliability serve as essential foundations that underpin our societies. India is dedicated to enhancing this model of fidelity for the benefit of the global community.

Kant is India's G20 Sherpa and former CEO, NITI Aayog and Ramanathan is a DPI advocate for Citizen Stack

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TIES THAT BENEFIT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Facing East" (IE, September 7). The boost to a high-level partnership with Singapore reflects India's rising economic heft and place in world affairs. Adding a new dimension to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's eastward trip was a visit to oil-rich Brunei, which may give impetus for collaborative efforts in the crucial semiconductor sector, which is going to define how the world is going to move forward in several break-through technologies areas. Additional agreements signed during PM Modi's visit, on digital technologies, education, and health, underscores the multifaceted nature of this partnership.

SS Paul, Madia

### FUTILE ACTIONS

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Insurgency at its end" (IE, September 7). With 159 Maoist cadres having been killed in anti-Naxalite operations by security forces in 2024, this year has been a major setback to the left-wing extremist movement in India. The success in taking on Maoists is also a consequence of the weakening base of support for the insurgents as intelligence is a vital component of the operations. The insurgency and the counter-operations have taken a huge toll on the tribal population. Far from reaching any of its lofty

goals, the Indian Maoist movement has only brought misery for those whom the insurgents claim to fight for. The earlier they realise the futility of their ideology and work towards using spaces in the Indian democratic system to articulate concerns, the better it would be for the tribals who are caught in this crossfire between security forces and the Maoists.

Khokan Das, Kailash

### INDO-CHINA DISPUTE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "At strategic crossroads" (IE, September 7). China's hegemony and bullying tactics are frequently employed to further its policy of expansionism and domination. Pakistan remains in tow to harm India's interests at LoC and the international fora. Though China professes that it will resolve the disputed issues by mutual cooperation and mutual respect, it does not move in that direction. More than twenty meetings have ended without any conclusion. India is in the process of strengthening the LAC and it may take three years to match the Chinese. So long as the trade balance, one to ten, is heavily tilted in China's favour, it won't care to attend to cool other flashpoints. The situation is complex, both hostile neighbours need to be reined in in the strategic, economic, political, social and diplomatic spheres.

Subbash Vaid, New Delhi



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

LET IT PLAY

Delay in release of 'Emergency', the film, is disturbing. It points to a troubling ease with powers of censorship

ANY EXCESSES AND horrors marked the 21-month-long interregnum when India's robust democracy was put on hold by the Indira Gandhi regime. They included forced sterilisations, bulldozing of homes, mass arrests of political opponents and pliant compliance...

Ever since its trailer was released last month, Emergency — directed and co-produced by BJP MP Kanganana Ranaut who also plays Indira Gandhi in the film — has been at the centre of controversy. As a report in this newspaper revealed, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) had cleared the film for UA (with parental guidance) certification subject to three cuts and a fact-check on disparaging comments about India and Indians by Richard Nixon and Winston Churchill...

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry and the CBFC also do well to remember the tale of Kissa Kuan Ki. The film satirising Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi was banned and later the destruction of its negatives even became a criminal case.

In defence of peaceful protest

In RG Kar case, Court cautions state on putting its might against protestors, urges reframing of citizen action



SHAHRUKH ALAM

IN A DISTINCT departure from recent tradition, the Supreme Court (SC) of India chose to acknowledge "nation-wide protests" and address "issues that the protests have brought to the forefront". It initiated suo motu proceedings into the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kollata, thus choosing to recognise the "agitations and protests as a moment of national catharsis" and worthy of institutional response.

In the present case, the popular protests centre on the sexual assault and murder of a trainee doctor inside hospital premises. The gruesome murder was followed allegedly by a series of lapses and procedural breaches by the hospital and the investigating authorities.

In the first hearing, the court clarified that the incident in the hospital may have been the immediate cause of the suo motu proceedings, but it intended to consider wider issues relating to violence at the workplace. The court did not, however, contemplate "intersectionalities" — the point where several "margins" intersect.

As the court cautions the state from putting its might against protestors, it might be a good time to question the forms that such state action takes. Sometimes, it simply dismisses a cause as fake or motivated, and chooses not to engage with it (as happened with the farmers' or wrestlers' protests); at other times, the state actively delegitimises protestors as 'biryani eaters', 'urban naxals' and 'andolanjevis', and follows this up with lathi charges, arrests and prolonged criminal prosecutions.

instances of violence. But even in terms of the less nuanced view, which examines sexual violence in the mainstream, as a problem of all women, the court has limited itself to a particular context. It has framed issues only in relation to monitoring violence against health-care professionals on hospital premises.

Moreover, the directions seeking to make hospitals safer for health professionals are focused on greater policing and increased surveillance. Frisking and armed guards at hospitals (or universities) is a very particular reaction to the problem of violence. Alternative responses would require informed debates on public health spending, healthcare workers' rights and transparency of treatment protocols.

However, the SC order has provided openings on related issues. It validates the importance of media reports in a context where the protesting public cannot trust state narratives. The state's response in the past has often been to discourage reporting from contentious protest sites, even to arrest journalists for trying to incite violence.

But the most important endorsement by the court is towards the legitimacy of peaceful protests. It said repeatedly during the hearing: "Let not the power of the state be unleashed on peaceful protestors. People [are] speaking to the media to communicate their views. Let us deal with them with a great deal of sympathy. It's a time of national catharsis."

This may be our cue to attend to the present constitutional crisis, where illegal and selectively retaliatory action against demonstrators has become normalised. Courts have mostly been ambivalent about aggravated actions by governments against protestors, including demolishing homes and businesses.

As the court cautions the state from putting its might against protestors, it might be a good time to question the forms that such action takes. Sometimes, it simply dismisses a cause as fake or motivated, and chooses not to engage with it (as happened with the farmers' or wrestlers' protests); at other times, the state actively delegitimises protestors as

"biryani eaters", "urban naxals" and "andolanjevis", and follows this up with lathi charges, arrests and prolonged criminal prosecutions. The court has also distinguished between "protestors" and the "mob" of hecklers that came to break the protest, and has chastised the police for retreating as gangs vandalised property and intimidated protestors.

This chain of events is familiar, too, and akin to vigilante mobs intimidating and sometimes attacking protestors for being "traitors", and the police using these threats as justification to forcibly dismantle protests. Often, in the past, the police has left protestors to the mercy of such mobs, or used disproportionate force themselves, for example attacking students in libraries and hostels. But their unkindest cut has been to blame and prosecute protestors for provoking a mob into violence.

The state may, in its defence, try to distinguish "good" protestors and protestors from "bad" ones. It might claim that in the latter case, protests were disruptive and not peaceful. But the court's sympathetic treatment, in the present case, of the Indian Medical Association's withdrawal of medical services in protest, which may be perceived as disruptive, provides us space to rethink good/bad protests. It is often the state and statist media that frames them one way or the other, and public opinion is formed on that basis. It is also often the state that makes selective and unsubstantiated allegations about certain protests being in bad faith, violent or disruptive. The courts have been equally evasive in their response to disproportionate state action upon protestors based on unproven allegations of violence. Public opinion has been equally uncritical. Perhaps this is an opportunity to have new jurisprudence on the law of protest — one that doesn't judge protestors as good/bad on the basis of one's political preferences, or on the basis of the state's dismissal of them, or even on public opinion.

Many protestors remain in jail years after the event. This order sees citizen action differently. It may open up the space for criminal cases against protest leaders to be taken up all together, suo motu, and re-examined.

The writer is a Supreme Court advocate

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Swachh Bharat Mission shows what is possible by sustained intervention and schemes going beyond their initial targets

THE BUILDING OF around 11 crore individual household latrines under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) has averted 60,000-70,000 infant deaths annually, according to a recent study published in the prestigious science journal Nature. That shouldn't come as a surprise. Open defecation is a known source of water and food contamination, besides disease transmission through the fecal-oral route.

Moreover, it isn't just early child mortality rates that need to come down. Equally important are stunting (low height-for-age) and wasting (low weight-for-height). These are, again, a result of both inadequate nutrition and poor absorption from recurrent diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid attacks caused by contaminated food and water. That's where a national sanitation programme like SBM could have a transformative role along with the Jal Jeevan Mission. The latter, which envisions providing safe drinking water through tap connections to all rural households by 2024, is also being taken up at scale. The Nature study has demonstrated district-level toilet access of 30 per cent and above corresponding with substantial lowering of infant and under-five mortality rates.

The Modi government has made implementation of schemes at population scale one of its key signatories. Some — notably SBM and Jan Dhan — have been successful. Universal access to bank accounts has not only allowed subsidy and welfare payments to be directly transferred to beneficiaries, but also facilitated digital transactions through UPI and other mobile-based protocols. Toilets for all are, likewise, not just about ensuring dignity; they address a major pathway through which millions of Indians are repeatedly exposed to enteric pathogens. But there are, equally, schemes that have been not-so-successful (Soil Health Card) or whose effects aren't yet visible (Jal Jeevan). Ultimately, it's a matter of sustained intervention and schemes going beyond meeting their initial numerical targets.



KHINVRAJ JANGID

THE WAR WITHIN ISRAEL

Netanyahu's handling of Gaza crisis has led to unprecedented public unrest

ISRAEL IS SINKING in the quicksand of the Middle East — the war in Gaza seems to be going nowhere, the hostage deal looks unlikely, Iran-Hezbollah-Houthis are abrasive, there is growing international condemnation and isolation, and long-time allies are tired. Such external challenges have been part of Israeli politics, foreign policy and society for decades. There is now a far more dangerous threat from within: The army and government are at odds about the Gaza war. Yoav Gallant, the defence minister, is speaking against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for abandoning hostages, shifting the geopolitics of the war, and not making a political decision about what will come after Hamas in Gaza. Gallant and other security agency heads no longer hide their lack of faith in the government.

There is another immediate cause for concern against the current government and its policies in the West Bank. The army is fighting another mini-war against the Israelis who live in various settlements in the West Bank for attacking and killing the Palestinians. The head of Shin-Bet (the internal intelligence of Israel) has called these attacks Jewish terrorism and asked for the immediate intervention of the Prime Minister against his coalition partners. This is an issue that Netanyahu doesn't want to address because he fears the government's collapse. His coalition partners, like Itamar Ben-Gvir, the current Minister of National Security, keep provoking people to defy the army and the police. He and some other ultra-religious and nationalist leaders speak without any qualms against the two-

state solution and unilaterally change the status quo in Jerusalem over religious places. These developments are far more destabilising for Israel's national security and its war management in Gaza. In the middle of such domestic chaos came the news of the dead bodies of the hostages in Gaza who were executed by Hamas just before the arrival of the Israeli army. The six hostages survived their captivity for almost 11 months in the tunnels of Gaza and were to be freed if there was a hostage deal in June or July. The news of their deaths moved lakhs of Israelis, who came out in massive protests, around 3,00,000 people in Tel Aviv and 2,00,000 in other cities, against the government. This weekend, Israel's largest labour union, Histadrut, called for a general national strike, which shut down almost all sectors of the economy and Israel's only international airport for a day. Histadrut represents close to 1,00,000 government workers (including the diplomats and ambassadors stationed abroad) in Israel. It acted against Netanyahu when he wanted to bring in judicial reforms that were much against the spirit of democracy and institutional checks and balances in March last year. Interestingly, the previous national shutdown occurred after Yoav Gallant, the defence minister, publicly opposed the Prime Minister for dividing the country and the army.

The national strike was only for a day, and the country resumed the union not beyond such a shutdown. However, the Hostage and Missing Families Forum can now get thousands of people on the streets as the public

anger against Netanyahu has been at an all-time high since October 7. He seems more anxious about the growing criticism of his war policy by the army and particularly Gallant. Can he carry on with his maximalist war policy in Gaza? If the military disobeys, can Netanyahu afford to sack the defence minister (the last time he tried, he had to backtrack because of popular support for Gallant)?

Israel is at war with itself in the middle of the ongoing war with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. Israelis have grown impatient about political fights between the religious and secular nationalists. They have been disenchanted with political leadership after Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres were they found no one with a vision for a better future or a solution to the conflict with Palestinians. The army remains the last bastion of unity and hope for the Israelis. Could the army take over in Israel for some time? That is not an unusual fate for countries in the Middle East. Israel fancied itself as a Western, developed, democratic and modern state, and more or less that ambition was fulfilled. Now, the country resembles its regional neighbours with shaky and corrupt leadership, violent protests, erosion of law and order, religious extremism, and perpetual political instability. Israel has strong allies when it comes to its war with others, but it is more exposed and vulnerable.

The writer is professor and director, Centre for Israel Studies, Jindal School of International Affairs, O P Jindal Global University, Sonapat

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



SEPTEMBER 9, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

LD AGAINST ALLIANCE
SPMALAVYA, Lok Dal general secretary, came out against the proposed alliance or united front as an alternative to the Congress (I) in the coming Lok Sabha elections even though the party president Charan Singh has been holding formal discussions on the proposal with the leaders of the non-communist parties including the Janata, Congress (S), DSP and the Janwadi Party.

ASSAM VOTER ROLLS
ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER Hiteswar Saikia and several of his cabinet colleagues arrived in the

Capital for fresh consultations with the central government on the Election Commission's proposal to treat the 1971 electoral rolls of the state as the basic document for revision of voters' lists. They met Home Minister P V Narasimha Rao and held detailed discussions on the commission's proposals.

CONGRESS 'TAKEOVER'
PM KHAN, who was persuaded not to undertake a fast at the AICC (I) office, claimed that about 150 Congress (I) members of the Lok Sabha were frustrated over the increasing "takeover" of the party by opportunists and time-servers. Even during the last Parliament

session, many MPs had approached him to call a meeting to discuss the issue. But he had told them that things could be sorted out at the level of PM Indira Gandhi.

NTR VS BHASKARA RAO
EVEN THOUGH A campaign had been launched against N T Rama Rao, the Bhaskara Rao group was only willing to wound, afraid to strike. Rama Rao apparently had reports of it in the US. He sent back home a close aide, a state intelligence officer — who incidentally was also with Nandini Satpati in Orissa when her government fell — to get an authentic report about the revolt brewing in the party.

CONTRAPUNTO

There's no clarity. There was never meant to be clarity  
—CHARLES BUKOWSKI

# Step Aside, Ms Buch

High finance regulators like Sebi chief have a special responsibility to stay above suspicion

Madhavi Puri Buch came to the job of Sebi chief with almost a halo around her — the first woman in this high profile, high responsibility post, a bright finance pro from the private sector who can make the regulator less fussy. But when she leaves office end of term, a cloud of intense suspicion will have replaced the halo. The only way she can change how this story ends is by voluntarily stepping aside, pending the results of an impartial inquiry she should ask for herself.

Most public office holders, and indeed many in high profile private sector jobs, in this country view such a response as a strategic defeat. But if you are not guilty — Buch has insisted her financial transactions do not imply impropriety or conflict of interest — stepping aside is a strategic win. It shows confidence. Staying on the job as more and more questions of integrity swirl around, strengthens perceptions that something's off. But the bigger reason Buch should take this course of action is that it is expected of a person tasked with keeping markets clean.

Regulatory jobs in high finance have a sharper version of the Caesar's Wife principle built into them. Even suspicions about the possibility of a conflict of interest must be avoided by those with power over market rules. The very nature of Buch's job demands that she steps doing it for now. Those who argue against this will point out that so far markets haven't displayed nervousness centred around allegations against the Sebi chief. There are two arguments against this. First, markets don't have a moral dimension. Second, on the reasonable assumption that more questions about Buch may surface, markets may respond with apprehension if the quantum of suspicion hits a tipping point.

There are already three sets of questions on potential conflict of interest around three different business entities — Adani group, Wockhardt, ICGI — that were put under the regulatory lens by Buch-led Sebi. Perhaps, Buch's actions in all cases were free of any bias, as she has insisted. But the best way to demonstrate that is by allowing an impartial inquiry to look into Sebi's workings. And a Buch-free Sebi is precondition for a fair probe.

Buch may be summoned by a parliamentary committee. That's a good thing. In fact, Parliament, like US Congress, should question regulators often. But Parliament doesn't have the power to ask Buch to step aside. If she can't find in herself the moral courage to do the right thing, then govt should step in and do it.

# Up With The Best

Our para athletes' great showing at Paris is a reminder of need to create more disabled-friendly spaces in India

India's excellent performance at the Paris Paralympics is testament to the calibre and dedication of our para athletes. With 29 medals — 7 gold, 9 silver and 13 bronze — our contingent delivered its best ever performance. Even more heartening is the fact that as many as 10 women have done India proud. Each medal winner represents an extraordinary story of triumph in the face of adversity. Take Sumit Antil. He repeated his Tokyo performance, winning a gold in men's javelin (F64). Ditto for shooter Avani Lekshkar, who became the first Indian woman to win two Paralympic gold.

Performance turnaround | Paris also reiterates how quickly a country's sporting fortunes can change. As recently as London 2012 and Rio 2016, India had bagged just one and four medals, respectively. Increased funding and provision of resources by the Centre and corporate bodies has clearly made all the difference. This must be carried further since India participated in just 12 of the 22 sporting categories at Paris.

India's unfriendly environment | Amidst this success, let us not forget what our para athletes have had to battle, besides disability, to win glory. For, India remains a disabled-unfriendly country. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 sought to make all public spaces disabled-friendly in five years, but its implementation has been far from satisfactory. The Centre has even cut budgetary outlays for schemes under the Act. It is hardly a surprise then that private buildings and transport systems have failed to fall in line, even in metro cities. The success of our para athletes should serve as a reminder that changing this would not just allow persons with disabilities to give their best but it is also what the country owes them.

# Hello kitty

On (not) being a childless cat lady in US

Rosa E Soto



JD Vance has got it all wrong. It's actually hard to be a childless cat lady in America. I tried putting in papers to adopt, met a three page questionnaire with every crazy question you can imagine, and got told that they would not adopt out kittens to women without other animals or kids.

They did helpfully point out that all their available cats and kittens are posted on the Chance at Life Cat Rescue website. I could check them out there. They mentioned that Wren, for example, is an all-black female kitten.

But then came the kicker: They said that since I had no other cats at home, if approved, they hoped I would consider adopting two. Perhaps Wren and one of her siblings, Chickadee or Forest.

Their philosophy is that kittens and cats should be with a sibling or playmate. The only time they adopt out cats separately is when someone already has a cat in the home or they have a cat that prefers or needs to be an only cat. Here is what they said: "Kittens and cats with playmates are less lonely and don't get bored which means less likely to get into trouble."

This made me feel like Murphy Brown from the show *Murphy Brown*. Back in 1992, when that character, a journalist, consciously decided to raise a baby on her own, none other than veeep Dan Quayle blamed it for a breakdown of family values. He said a prime-time character "supposedly" epitomising "today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman" ought not to be "mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice". In response, in the show, Brown schooled Quayle, that his definition of family was painfully unfair when millions of children were growing up in non-traditional families. Is it billions now?

My friends have been telling me about animal shelters that do not have such a ridiculous stipulation. One points out that even this prickly one will get a litter with an odd number of kittens! Another says that not all cats go by set rules. And most cats are loners because they're not conditioned to live as part of a pack. I really want a black kitty I've never had one. So if you hear about one, let me know.

# Kamala Vs The Crazyies

US social media game has changed since 2020. Trump is no longer acing it. But weird right-wing disinformation is still thriving, seeding doubts that will be consequential if Harris wins by a narrow margin

Jeffrey Layne Blevins



Columnist based in Ohio

Kamala Harris's nomination has energised the Democratic Party's social media game in a way that we have not seen since Obama's presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012. Her campaign's TikTok account boasts over 4m followers, engaging younger voters with viral content. At the same time on X, the Harris campaign account is steadily trouncing Republican rivals on a daily basis.

X, when it was Twitter, used to be Trump's ace in the social media game, where "the Don" is now clearly slipping. Stock prices for his own vanity platform, Truth Social fell to a new low last week, which dovetails with the social media outlet's steady decline in users this year. Trump created Truth Social after being kicked off Twitter, for inciting the violence that occurred at the US Capitol on Jan 6, 2021, while the US Congress was trying to certify the 2020 presidential election results. Although his political ally Elon Musk acquired Twitter, changed its name to X, and restored Trump's account, he is bound by an agreement with his own company to post any campaign-related announcements first on Truth Social.

The lagging performance of Trump's media business and social media campaigning comes while the broader political landscape is shifting away from him. Democrats have surprisingly rallied around Harris, in a way that did not occur during Hillary Clinton's 2016 run for the presidency.

At the same time, some Republicans, such as US Senator Mitt Romney, have begun distancing themselves from Trump's wholly unsubstantiated claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him. Others, such as former US representative Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, have gone as far as formally endorsing his Democratic challenger, Harris. Last week, Dick Cheney also announced that he will vote for Harris. From the Republican point of view, this is a stunning dispatch from a staunch conservative who served as VP to George W Bush.

But will any of this make a difference to the 2024 election results? The doubt arises because in many other ways, politics on social media during this campaign season looks a lot like it did in 2016, with a

profusion of disinformation from right-wing political influencers. Recently far-right operatives have falsely claimed that an apartment complex in Aurora, Colorado had been overrun by a Venezuelan gang. Fox News bolstered these claims on its cable network, along with Musk, while Trump has been citing the false info in campaign speeches. Together, they are creating an echo-chamber of disinformation, intended to inflame fears



to amalgamate on partisan media outlets and within extremist political rhetoric, reducing its believability.

What makes this kind of disinformation even more vexing is that it plays heavily into the emotions of fear and anger. My own most recent research on digital politics in an age of digital emotion, examined the content of political posts on X for which certain ones resonated with followers. What my co-author and I learned is that rhetorical strategies employed by Trump and far-right influencers since 2016 rely on the power of emotion and hyperbole in crafting their political and cultural narratives. And they do so with great effect, compared to more reasoned forms of discourse.

The political left often tends to try to counter misinformation and hyperbolic rhetoric with expertise, facts, context, and nuance. However, this approach alone simply does not work, especially within the current US political climate in which social media users have hardened ideological views.

Since deciding news media as "the enemy of the people", Trump has primed his followers to distrust experts, journalists and others. Personal beliefs and emotions expressed in short soundbites and memes are more likely to resonate with voters on the political right.

One lesson that Democrats and the Harris campaign can take from our study is that the most effective social media influencers use a range of rhetorical strategies to make a single point, including emotional language and humour, in addition to rational evidence and logic. So far, the Harris campaign seems to have embraced this approach especially in its use of humour and ridicule, which are powerful emotive devices.

Social media will not determine the outcome of the 2024 election, but it will shape the American public's perception of the result. If the popular vote and college results are decided by a narrow margin in Harris's favour, it will be easier for Trump's predetermined claims of election interference to resonate. And this will help the idea that the vote was somehow "rigged" against him, to take hold among the political right. However, if Harris can win by a large margin, it is less likely that rank and file Republicans will follow along and support Trump's assertions of voter fraud.

The writer is an independent journalist and professor, School of Public and International Affairs, University of Cincinnati.

# How To Get The Best Out Of Criminal Code's New Idea

As community service gets included as a sentencing option in BNS, probate officers can be made part persons for convicts awarded such reformatory penalty

Vijay Raghavan and Saugata Hazra



Columnist based in New Jersey

Justice reform measure in India that's practised in many parts of the world, community service is to have offenders go through a programme of a sentencing option, whereby they're placed in unpaid positions with non-profit or tax-supported agencies, to serve specified numbers of hours, to serve or work within a defined time limit. In the Sanjeev Nanda hit-and-run case had ordered the accused to pay ₹50L to GOI within six months. This was to be used for compensation to victims of motor accidents where vehicle owner, driver, etc could not be traced, as in hit-and-run cases. On default, he may be ordered to undergo a simple imprisonment. SC further ordered the accused to do community service for two years that the social justice ministry would arrange for. On default, he'll have undergone simple imprisonment for two years.

What it is for | In BNS, the provision for community service applies only to petty offences of a new Quantum hasn't been specified for any of the offences.

Broadly six types of offences can attract community service sentencing: public servants engaging in unlawful trade, persons failing to appear before a court despite an order issued by it, first-timers committing theft of value lower than ₹5,000, persons defaming, drunk persons appearing in public places, and for suicide attempts that intend to prevent a public servant from doing their duty.

Who it is for | There exists a law, the Probation of Offenders' Act, 1958, under which convicts — in offences where maximum sentence doesn't amount to life imprisonment or death — have the benefit of being released on a bond of good behaviour (up to three years)

or under supervision of a probation officer (PO), who functions under court jurisdiction.

While granting such release, courts arrive at their decision based on a pre-sentence investigation report submitted by the PO. This takes into account the nature of offence, offender's socio-economic and family background, antecedents, and offender's prospects of reformation and rehabilitation, once guilt is proved.

Since a framework for alternatives to imprisonment is already provided for in the statutory regime of probation, the same may be extended to include a structure for community service. It can be an option before the judge in cases where maximum sentence is three years or less, or in cases where maximum sentence is seven years or less, and the offender is a first-time offender or a youth offender below age 21.

For how long | The roadmap for implementation of a community service order can start with the convict opting for such service in lieu of imprisonment. It should specify number of hours of community service per week for a convict. A way will have to be devised to calculate appropriate number of hours a judge may award in lieu of imprisonment.

There's considerable variation in calculating number of hours of community service for a sentence. Finland uses a ratio of 1 hour in lieu of each day of imprisonment. Spain stipulates 8 hours against a day of imprisonment. Minimum number of hours is around 40 and maximum around 750 hours, as in Australia. An order can specify a minimum number of hours per week.

Who'd be in charge | Such service can include regular counselling, retraining, re-entry into education, or attending de-addiction programmes, supervised by a

community service officer (CSO) or PO.

Since the system of POs already exists in most states, these officers may be given additional charge as CSOs with more training. They would remain in touch with the offender and maintain a record of number of hours completed every month.

Where will convicts work | A community service structure needs a network of recognised voluntary organisations (NGOs), which can be enlisted to improve social responsibility of the offender towards the community. Work awarded should not be degrading in nature. Convicts can volunteer work in public sector organisations in healthcare, education, civic rights, child care, elderly care, legal rights and education, community and rural development etc.

CSO or PO would need to immediately report violations of conditions. Based on good behaviour and satisfactory reports from placement organisations, the victim, the offender, and the offender's family, the number of hours after at least half the hours of the community service sentence is completed.

Noting that "crime...affects at least three parties: the victim, the community and the offender,"

Canada's top court in *R vs Proulx* observed, "A restorative justice approach seeks to...address needs of all parties...through rehabilitation of offender, reparations to victims and to the community, and promotion of a sense of responsibility in the offender and acknowledgement of harm done." Community service instead of jail can lead to a less punitive and more restorative form of justice system.

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# Calvin & Hobbes



# Sacredspace

These things will destroy the human race: politics without principle, progress without work, compassion, wealth without work, learning without silence, religion without fearlessness, and worship without awefulness.

Anthony de Mello

Karan Singh

The world today is in turmoil. Wars, the ultimate symbols of negativity, are raging everywhere. There are wars in Europe, wars in Asia, wars in Africa, wars in Latin America. As a result of these thousand-year-old conflicts, every week, but that seems to be written off as collateral damage. There is no sense of sympathy with the victims of those wars. In addition, climate change with all its erratic weather events has created havoc around the world. Between flooding and drought, hurricanes and tornadoes, melting of glaciers and species extinction, large sections of the world population are suffering the direct impact of global warming. Several island states will disappear soon, and we will be faced with a new category of environmental refugees.

What as we individuals can do in such a turbulent and European philosopher Arthur Koestler who predicted that the human race was programmed for self-destruction because of an engineering defect in the human brain, thereby the thinking and feeling aspects are not adequately coordinated. While we know what we should be doing, we do not do it, and while we know what we should not be doing, yet we do it. This is reflected in 'Duhassana's' enigma in the Mahabharat when he says, "I know what is correct but I am not attracted to it. I know what is wrong but I am attracted to it."

At present we seem to be following the greater the outer turmoil, the deeper the inner integration must be, otherwise humanity, which is at a precarious tipping point, may tip over, but not to speak of the new threats and

challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence and multiple implications. The world of course, is constantly changing. 'Sanyak Sansariti Hi Sansar', and we all have to adjust ourselves to the rapidly changing situation. It is not really a question of age, but rather our ability to face and confront the problems before us. A collective can be very useful in this context. For example if people in a moballa, colony, decide to band together in saving the environment. The same is true with movements against drug use, alcoholism and faulty hygiene. These are all building blocks towards creating a healthy society. Corruption, unfortunately, almost seems to have entered our DNA, and here again it is only committed individuals who can fight against these social evils. In the final analysis the compassionate and dedicated individual remains our only hope in the dystopian world that surrounds us.

# THE SPEAKING TREE

that each one of us try to find within ourselves the fountain of peace and harmony. If enough individuals around the world are prepared to look within and find the spiritual core of their being, it can make a difference to the destiny of the human race.

# Not All Easy Riding On EV Subsidies

**Domination of Chinese automakers a worry**  
Nitin Gadkari's suggestion that subsidies to EV makers are no longer needed has some merit. Production costs have declined as the technology matured, and consumers have overcome anxiety over buying EVs. In India, EVs had a 6.3% market share last year, a 50% jump from the prior year. Globally, the market share of EVs in 2023 was over 15%, with China accounting for 60% of worldwide sales. EV subsidy has three components — to facilitate production, roll out charging facilities, and to alter consumer behaviour — with an interplay among them. Without a drop in production costs, consumers won't buy. And buying decisions are framed within available charging infra.

Germany and France have stopped production subsidies but continue with purchase credits. Production subsidies were fouling government budgets, and their withdrawal has slowed electric transition for European automakers. European consumers still harbour doubts over their govs' capacity to subsidise charging infra and have slowed EV purchases. The US has a cheap oil natural advantage in producing fuel-injected cars and Republicans under Donald Trump have denied climate change. Japan remains sceptical about EVs being the most efficient pathway to energy transition. The Japanese auto industry has bet big on hybrids that are gaining as EV subsidies are scaled back.

Underlining these concerns is the EV domination by subsidised Chinese automakers. Markets will resist becoming dumping grounds for cheap Chinese EVs and govs will balk at the bill. China has run up in subsidising infra and buyers. The US, EU and Japan are seeking to protect their car industries during the energy transition, and a race to the bottom with production subsidies may no longer be viable. India is late to the party. Yet, it may need to revisit its EV subsidies to incorporate global factors into play.

# India, Get Off Your Backside, Be Active

It's no Olympian secret that Indians aren't racking up miles on the fitness scoreboard. Whether it's due to lack of public infra, climatic conditions, cultural factors or a mindset that favours the couch over the court, the numbers are telling. A first-of-its-kind national survey on sports and physical activity by Dalberg Advisors, Asia Pacific, and Sports and Society Accelerator shows that 200 million Indians are 'inactive' by WHO standards, which state that adults need 150 mins of activity a week, and children and adolescents 60 mins a day. Even more troubling is the gender divide: girls in urban India are hit the hardest, and for women, three-quarters of their time is consumed by household chores and caregiving, leaving little room for a proper workout.

Several misconceptions keep women from engaging in physical activity — pregnant and menstruating women shouldn't exercise, fears of injury, and the belief that muscularity is 'too masculine', along with the notion that women above a certain age shouldn't do sports. None of this is backed by science. The truth is that exercise offers too many benefits to ignore. While these myths persist, sports goods firms see India as a growing market for athleisure products. Decathlon plans to invest \$52.6 cr in India over five years, and Reliance Retail is gearing up to launch its own sportswear segment. Go! has been working to promote both physical activity and sports — two distinct areas — through initiatives like the yoga push and Khelo India. While these are positive steps, what's needed to get more people moving is to first emphasise the link between sedentary lifestyles and health costs. Additionally, improving access to parks, pools and other recreational facilities is key to encouraging people to hit the ground running.

**JUST IN JEST**  
When Vikram and Betal compete to argue the pros and cons of competition

# Develop Your Non-Competitive Streak?

**Vikram:** Competition is overrated — people running around to prove they're better than everyone else. People spend their lives trying to beat others instead of aiming to be the best versions of themselves.  
**Betal:** Oh, come on. Competition is the essence of life. Without it, we'd just be watching people jog for fun.  
**Vikram:** Exactly! Imagine the tranquillity. No more fans yelling their heads off. No more businessmen getting into the trap of one-upmanship but actually focusing on their own work. Kids not getting crushed by 'adult' ideas of failure or loss...  
**Betal:** Then what? Meditate together? Hum 'Om' instead of shouting 'Goal'?  
**Vikram:** That would be great for the soul. And think of the savings on those overpriced tickets or displays of wealth. You could buy a small island with that money.  
**Betal:** True, but then what would you do on your island? Play non-competitive beach volleyball?  
**Vikram:** I'd build sandcastles. No competition, just pure creative happiness. The Japanese in 8th-14th c. would play a form of football, kemari, the object of which was for all the players in a circle to keep the ball from touching the ground by kicking it about in the air.  
**Betal:** So, who wins?  
**Vikram:** Exactly. Everybody.  
**Betal:** Fine, you win.  
**Vikram:** Actually, we both won.

# Tomorrow's Harris-Trump debate could make or break, setting the tone for the final stretch

## It's Prime Time in America



**Seema Sirohi**

If the last presidential debate forced the exit of Joe Biden, the one tomorrow could determine whether Kamala Harris is still having a hot 'brat summer' or plateauing. Will she expand her tiny lead over Donald Trump and land a prosecutorial punch or two? Or will Trump pin Harris down as Biden 2.0 and irreparably tie her to illegal immigration and inflation?

The unscripted, high-risk, high-yield 90-minute drama will see both candidates trying to knock the other off their game to create 'viral' moments. A fumble here, a faux pas there, can make for effective campaign ads. An error or performance lapse is a minimum requirement, and a sterling one is desirable. Trump must reach beyond the cult of MAGA and reach independents with a sober, steady performance that doesn't descend into name-calling.

**Harris' honeymoon is ending.** Her lead over Trump is narrowing in some state polls

Harris must also expand her coalition (Blacks, Latinos, women) and reach out to sections of white men, especially those in rural areas.

Both nominees are prepping hard, although Trump won't admit it. Harris happily does — it's her first presidential debate, and she wants to be seen as the underdog. The p-ops are intense. Her team fought hard to have



**Keep the popcorn ready**

misses unmentioned when the candidates are not speaking, betting on Trump talking over her and coming across as a bully, but ABC News refused. It's Trump's seventh debate, counting three face-offs with Hillary Clinton in 2008, two with Biden in 2009, and one in June, which changed the course of the election.

The Democratic Party's message is still unclear from Biden to Harris — unsettled Trump and his attack lines are all over the place. After she is not Black, she is not smart, it has settled on Harris as a kaffe from California who wants open borders and give free healthcare to illegal immigrants. 'Conrade' Kamala's price control on food will lead to empty shelves and bread lines — she will Make America Worse Again. Plus, she is not 'tough' enough to stand up to Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping. Subtext: She is a woman.

Republicans desperately hope Trump sticks to policy issues even if he remains a prolific practitioner of self-sabotage who routinely goes into damage mode. They want him to bury

Harris under illegal immigration, which surged (6.5 mn from 2021-23) during the current administration, no matter how the Democrats try to finesse the issue. Even Democratic major of large cities are fed up trying to house, feed and school the thousands coming in. On the economic front, inflation (2.9%) and food prices (up 22% from 2020) remain key issues, with job creation appears to be slowing down.

**LETTER FROM WASHINGTON**  
Harris will paint Trump as the master of Project 2025, a 900-page document of extreme right-wing policy proposals that are so scary

Harris will paint Trump as the master of Project 2025, a 900-page document of extreme right-wing policy proposals that are so scary they're trying to disown it

Harris will paint Trump as the master of Project 2025, a 900-page document of extreme right-wing policy proposals that are so scary they're trying to disown it

# 'Do We Have a Procedure for That?'



**Tushar Gore**

"Tushar, we have a problem" is the most famous line in Apollo 13, the 1968 Tom Hanks-starring movie about the near-catastrophic accident on the 1970 US lunar mission, and subsequent engineering heroics to get the astronauts safely back to Earth. For me, though, the most memorable line is: "Do we have a procedure for that?" This line, and its variants referring to written procedures, appears at least 10 times in the movie.

Written procedures are at the core of any system designed to improve and sustain safety and quality. Written procedures and documentation of completed work are the first steps towards achieving two main goals of a high-quality system:

- **Reduction in variability:** This is achieved by different personnel following the same set of written instructions — preferably written as instructions with detail.
- **Traceability of activities:** This outcome is a natural consequence of writing down completed work as it

helps in tracking down causes of any out-of-trend variation.

Apollo 13's screenwriter and director deserve credit for including dialogues pertaining to a topic as mundane as procedures. Perhaps, those personnel consulted during the making of the film highlighted the criticality of written procedures in safe and consistent operations during high-risk activity such as space flight. (A Netflix documentary, Apollo 13 Survival, was released last week, which may shed more light on this matter.)

Importance of well-written procedures, best instances of working well: Safety and quality incidents are often traced to lack of a detailed and well-articulated procedure.

Our systems are excessively reliant on memory and verbal communication. From the silliest example of order-taking at a restaurant, to banks, today, nuclear cities, to construction projects, there are instances of working with verbal information exchange — and a subsequent dependence on memory to store this communication — leading to issues in the execution of the work.

Ken Kesey's dedication to systems from the developed world isn't a preferred agenda. India has a rich tradition of highly sophisticated oral information transmission systems, even as we don't fully appreciate these past achievements.

This system was perfected to make our ancient hymns pithy, and in the appropriate rhyme and meter to facilitate easy memorisation and perfect transmission. Without any means of writing in that era, perfect transmission was essential to avoid the domino effect of compounding mistakes during each round of verbal transmission.

Ample availability of recording instruments makes the reliance on memory unnecessary. Furthermore, complex instructions cannot be recast into pithy lines that aid memorisation. Transition to well-written documents must happen.

A stored past does not mean showing aside retail made shopping snazzy — the dread of kirana owners is fast turning into existential despair. Till now, they have always found a way to fight back, changing their value proposition — neighbour hood presence, convenience, and then delivery. Now, increasingly they're running out of stock. The problem for them is QC rests on the very identical first principles of business that kirana used to thrive on.



**Arjit Barman**

time in over two decades — ever since modern retail made shopping snazzy — the dread of kirana owners is fast turning into existential despair. Till now, they have always found a way to fight back, changing their value proposition — neighbour hood presence, convenience, and then delivery. Now, increasingly they're running out of stock. The problem for them is QC rests on the very identical first principles of business that kirana used to thrive on.

Leveraging the existing convenience store/deli/deli convenience store model, particularly among the urban affluent — these QC unicorns have become force multipliers, adding more efficiency through tech and data science, lowered logistics costs, and pricing advantages that can wipe out 25,000 stock-keeping units (SKUs) instead of 200.

Such is also predicted on advertising. Those revenues are, in turn, dependent on the reach and discovery orientation of any platform. Being fast doesn't automatically jack up ad prices. On commerce platforms, add brands and categories with the click of a button and corner more ad real estate since they have the backend to support the advertisers.

QC disruptions can only pack so much. The assumptions that these QC companies are making will fall short if they start comparing with Amazon or Flipkart. Value retailers like DMart will offer a much more scientific metric when selling rice and milk. The early trends in advertising will soon plateau, and the struggle will begin.

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that Trump is desperately trying to disown it just as the Democrats are trying to pin it on him. In a Project 2025 world, women will have no reproductive rights, workers' union rights, illegal immigrants no human rights. Church and state will become one. Big oil will rule, polluters won't pay. Harris will also renege on her promise to end the Jan 6 attack on the Capitol and his refusal to accept election results.

Millions of Americans and others around the world are expected to tune in, popcorn in hand. After who wins the debate and ultimately the election matters from Washington to Warsaw, from Detroit to Delhi. Predictions are coming thick and fast. Alan Lichtman, a history professor known as the 'Nostradamus' of US elections for his 40-year record of correctly predicting the winner, has declared Harris will win. However, prominent pollster Nate Silver thinks otherwise. Using complex modelling, he said last week that Trump's chances of winning were increased from 38% to 58.2%, his highest since the end of July.

Here's the ground situation: Harris' honeymoon is ending. Her lead over Trump is narrowing in some state polls, making the path to victory more unpredictable. The race remains a toss-up with razor-thin margins. Also, we've seen in the past two elections for a variety of reasons (skewed samples, people hiding their true feelings) and may do so again.

To repeat what's now an American political cliché — the election will be decided by a few thousand votes in the battleground states. If Trump is elected, the night of the bag before he is ridden bowed out, he no longer does. If Harris rode the 'joy' train to crowded rallies, she has a tough sell against Trump's policy minimalism may not be adequate against Trump's hyperbole. But, then, he can always self-destruct.

entreprenurial spirit. And Jaguad does work in certain situations. A team trained extensively and exclusively to follow written procedures can freeze when thrown into dynamic and unpredictable situations. In comparison, those are sudden and unforeseen disruptions — accidents, system failures, pandemic restrictions, a new competitive threat, unrest — and individuals can get pasted with an 'instruction manual' to follow.

Such situations do demand this entreprenurial and creative spirit. They're ways to keep things alive, and yet keep the organisation running based on set procedures in 'normal' times.

Next up for that matter: Iro, can also do jaguad. The entire return flight of Apollo 13 subsuquent to the accident is evidence. One stand-out example was the solution to absorb excessive fuel created by a 500-lb fuel cell in the small lunar module. This was 'engineered' by retrofitting the saturated absorbents in the lunar module to the absorbents in the difference. By the way, the spacecraft using available materials (including socks).

Yet, even in the jaguad, written procedures played a seminal role. As they should in any systems valuing high quality.

The writer is MD, Research Laboratories, Bengaluru

## THE SPEAKING TREE

### Detoxing The Mind

SANT RAJINDER SINGH

Humanity has been on a timeless quest for happiness, peace and joy. Despite our best efforts, we cannot find lasting happiness in this fleeting world of illusion because everything in this world is temporary. When we seek lasting happiness in that which is temporary, we are bound to experience disappointment. Medical researchers speak of the body-mind-spirit connection and the body-mind-spirit connection is taught by the saints and mystics. Actually, it is the mind that gives our emotional state. When the emotional state is not good, we experience unhappiness. To be in a good emotional state means that we cleanse the mind of the toxins that defile it. We need to learn to detox the mind, much like we detox the body of toxins that make the body ill. To detox the mind, we need to take the mind and our attention, which is currently focused in the outer world, and refocus it within ourselves where the divine treasures await.

God resides within us and when we invest, through the process of meditation, we experience the closeness of the Divine. As we start to experience this love, we find there is no sweeter nectar than God's love in all of creation. This love enrals us and uplifts us. Anchoring into the stability of the Divine's love, which is eternal, we are bathed in happiness and that makes us oblivious to the ups and downs of life.

## MELODY FOR MONDAY

### Kaise Bani

Sundar Popo

Sundar Popo's hit 'Kaise Bani', from his 1988 album, 'Nani Aru Nana Don't Cry', may not come across as the most sophisticated of melodies. But it's not a simple song. It's a song that sparkles with darkness. A cornerstone of the 'chutney music' genre that blends Bhojpuri folk traditions with Caribbean rhythms, Popo's rendition of this old Bhojpuri song is poignant and funny. And therein lies its genius.

The lyrics, a delightful mix of Bhojpuri and English, tell the story of a man who falls in love with a woman who is a widow. The lyrics are a mix of Bhojpuri and English, tell the story of a man who falls in love with a woman who is a widow. The lyrics are a mix of Bhojpuri and English, tell the story of a man who falls in love with a woman who is a widow.

They were both drawn to and repelled by — tell the quirky tale of a wine-loving grandpa and grandchild. The author is a Mumbai-based writer, Kaise Bani! — appreciating the small pleasures in life with all its trials, tribulations, challenges and triumphs. The author is a Mumbai-based writer, Kaise Bani! — appreciating the small pleasures in life with all its trials, tribulations, challenges and triumphs.

## Chat Room

### Recognise and Support Them

Arrives: Five 'Takeaways' from the Paralympics by Borja Majumdar (Sep 8), India has had impressive performances at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. The success at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics has helped raise awareness and support, but continued efforts are needed to ensure sustainable growth in the sport. Unfortunately, Paralympic Games don't excite too many sports buffs in India, and para-athletes are not regarded as 'real athletes' at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics has helped raise awareness and support, but continued efforts are needed to ensure sustainable growth in the sport. Unfortunately, Paralympic Games don't excite too many sports buffs in India, and para-athletes are not regarded as 'real athletes' at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics has helped raise awareness and support, but continued efforts are needed to ensure sustainable growth in the sport.

GREGORY FERNANDES  
Mumbai



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

I've never known any trouble than an hour's reading didn't assuage  
Arthur Schopenhauer

# Centre must stand up and be accountable on critical issues

SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Buch cannot just catch a break. After she was first targeted by US-based short seller Hindenburg alleging that she continued to hold interests in offshore funds that were used by the Adani Group to pull off the 'largest con in corporate history', Buch is now facing charges from the Congress that has alleged that she has continued to earn income from the ICICI group where she once held a leadership position. If that wasn't enough, now employees of SEBI have shot off a letter to the Union government alleging that she is responsible for a toxic work culture within the organisation.

The flurry of allegations has led to growing calls for the head of the country's top regulator to step aside in the wake of the allegations and, if not anything else, to allow for a fair probe. That hasn't happened yet and is unlikely to happen given the defiant tone struck by the government and the regulator so far. Instead, however, the government and SEBI have maintained complete silence regarding the allegations not even coming out to refute them or to defend the chief regulator perhaps out of the fear that giving any kind of response will stir the pot even further.

**The ruling party has not once agreed to initiate a fair investigation or even made an effort to appear serious about delivering justice**

The response, instead, came from the ICICI Group, which, in a statement, said that the monies paid were retirement benefits as a result of services rendered earlier. There are also reports that Buch, being the chairperson of an independent regulator will have to answer to Parliament.

However, the lack of a response compounded by an unwillingness to even recognize that there might be a problem points to a larger malaise afflicting this government viz the lack of accountability.

Be it rail accidents, the ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur that has recently flared up resulting in six deaths, the allegations of sexual harassment and rape levelled against the BJP's Brij Bhushan Singh or the myriad cases of corruption that several top ruling party functionaries are facing have all been met with a stonewall of silence. Not in a single case has the ruling party agreed to institute a fair probe or even pretend that it is serious about bringing justice even if it meant bringing its own party's functionaries under the scanner.

It is as if the ruling party believes itself to be beyond reproach. But more than that, there appears to be a fear that any acknowledgement of a shortcoming by the government in power will somehow make the government in power seem only human, taking the shine off its self-styled halo and giving legitimacy to the Opposition parties and their allegations, which the Prime Minister has long derided as being undeserving, unqualified and lacking the legitimacy to be a contender on equal footing with the ruling party.

There is also the fear, in the case of the allegations against Madhabi Buch, that an acknowledgement of improper conduct, however innocuous, will open the floodgates not just into her functioning, but in her role in allowing the Adani Group, led by longtime Modi supporter Gautam Adani to get away lightly by refusing to seriously probe charges of pulling off the largest corporate con in history. The dominoes, once set in motion, will inevitably lead back to the Prime Minister himself, given Adani's known proximity to the PM since his days as the Chief Minister of Gujarat. The rise of the two has mirrored each other.

It is exactly the duplicity that is threatening not just democracy, but even the social fabric of the State, as can be seen in Manipur as well as in several other States of the country. Its implications will be felt for decades to come and the damage will be left for generations to undo.

# Our women are not safe anywhere

With every passing day it is becoming abundantly clear that women's safety is more of rhetoric than reality in our country



PACHU MENON

The writer is a resident of Margao who strongly desires to bring about some socially relevant changes with his musings

The societal revulsion over horrendous crimes against women has prompted demands for swift judicial decisions which adequately deal with the perpetrators of the atrocious acts.

But not serving to be anything more than knee-jerk reactions, such displays of anguish over the horrendous acts committed by the political class fail to inspire the sort of confidence that interventions by the highest powers in the country ought to have inspired.

The Kolkata 'horror' has once again served to emphasize the fact that the healthcare industry in the country is one of the most dangerous job sectors in the country today.

If the call centres and their shift-culture instilled an apprehension of insecurity amongst its women employees which the authorities on their part failed miserably to allay, the violence against doctors and nurses is that harsh reality which keeps on unfolding new tales of dreadfulness each more sordid than the other.

But the nation as a whole has refused to come to terms with the enormity of the situation, preferring instead the comfort of treating every case as a one off incident, and seems to have had no compunctions about it either.

Obviously we Indians seem to depend on the media attention garnered by each case to empathize with the victim. It is not that violence against women and girls is unheard of in this country, but it is always the publicity generated that serves to intensify the wrath of the nation against the perpetrators.

Creating a widespread perception of guilt even before such cases land in court, trials by the media have served to swing public opinion against the alleged culprits.

But how effective has the media been in ensuring a safe and secure environment for women? Through its relentless efforts has the fourth pillar of democracy come anywhere near abolishing gender bias which is seen as that major hurdle responsible for the miserable condition of women in our country!

However, while glorifying the media for exposing the demons in our society, has anyone ever stopped to ponder over the safety of women journalists and media workers!

The safety of women in our society is a



very complex subject which unfortunately has not gained the sort of attention that it actually deserves. The viciousness of the abhorring acts notwithstanding, issues related to women and their safety do not seem to make any impression on the public if not spiced with the right dose of sensationalism.

With every passing day it is becoming abundantly clear that women's safety is more of rhetoric than reality in our country. No wonder, incidents of sexual violence against women are spoken about in a very matter-of-fact way even today.

The absence of feelings or emotion, especially when such a frame of mind would be a natural expectation considering the gravity of the situation, is that response such incidents evoke generally.

The Justice Hema Committee established by the Kerala government in response to the 2017 actress assault case, uncovering instances of harassment and exploitation of women in the Malayalam Cinema industry, has opened a Pandora's Box of problems for 'Mollywood'.

To say that the release of the committee report almost five years after it was submitted has been revelatory would be an understatement. It puts into correct perspective the male domination in Mollywood that has given cause to a number of unpleasantness. Prompting a belated #MeToo movement in Malayalam cinema with many prominent actors, directors and technicians in the industry at the receiving end of harassment and rape charges, the Hema Committee report has also very convincingly managed to expose other incongruities in Mollywood which hitherto were confined to the realms of 'filmy' gossip.

The dissolution of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) executive committee citing moral responsibility due to allegations of sexual

abuse by some actors against committee members, according to me, has been an impromptu response to complaints that tend to be more serious than what it really conveys.

Sexual harassment, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion of women are rampant practices that are not unheard of in the film world. But it is the way the 'superstar' culture in Mollywood managed to re-write and re-script male dominance in the Malayalam film industry, especially of the leading men, that has come as a huge shock.

With so much danger lurking around the corner, behind its glitter and glamour, the dark and gritty side of the film world that goes beyond all the make believe we are obsessed with was never so much in evidence.

The series of sexual harassment allegations which rocked the Malayalam film industry has not only pushed it towards a deep crisis but has also succeeded in putting the spotlight on the darker side of the industry.

But the point is, will the sudden flurry of activities in the aftermath of the tabling of the Justice Hema Commission report bring about radical changes in the Malayalam film industry ensuring an unbiased and safe place for women to work in!

The very fact that there has been an urgency shown in demands for panels similar to that of Hema Committee from 'Sandalwood' and 'Tollywood' in order to help uplift and empower women in Kannada and Telugu film industries speaks for the shortcomings in this regard which have characterized the film industry in general.

Let us accept it! Women in the country are not safe.

Described as one of the most dangerous countries for women in Asia; India, despite its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, is notorious for its high rates of sexual violence and harassment.

Unless the country can afford a safe environment for its women, how can it justify its status as a developing nation!

India, despite its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, is notorious for its high rates of sexual violence and harassment

## THE INBOX >>

### Govt needs to act quickly on bad roads

The authorities using the dry spell in the monsoon to fill the potholes is small consolation, enabling a little smoother ride for devotees. However, one begins to wonder how long will this process of repairing potholes continue? Seems like it will continue as long as we don't build good quality roads.

Even in cities like Mumbai, we have a large number of potholes throughout the year. Some of the main roads get temporarily repaired. We spend a huge amount of money on repairing the roads, is it worth it? While ensuring a smoother ride during the Ganesh festival don't you feel the general public is entitled to good roads in the first place? Will that become a reality?

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA, Mumbai

### Increase drone subsidy to boost agriculture

Several farmers in the state are facing the issue of their transplanted paddy being damaged after remaining under water following the recent rains.

It is learnt that drone technology can come to the rescue of the farmers by reviving the damaged crop. This method was effectively used at the Tolleband water body at Beraulim to revive the damaged paddy which was transplanted recently.

The drone technology was reportedly used to undertake special spraying of area over the fields to revive the damaged paddy. This method also controls the weeds which have made an extensive presence in the fields after the rains. The program has reportedly been supported by Indian Council of Agricultural

### Radicalisation a threat to youth

Radicalism is intuitive and poses many questions at a time when large section of society has become almost blind and supports, every move of any political party in India.

Radicalism in any religious context is dangerous and equally causes disruption in a progressive society like ours.

India is a home to the largest youth power compared to any other country. But it is disheartening to see majority of our youth being distracted by a handful of people, while the rest of youth of our country is busy shaping their future or struggling to support their families due to job satisfaction of other various reasons.

DIOMEDES PEREIRA, Corlim

Research in terms of equipment and financial assistance and could be a model to revive paddy fields across the state. Ideally every successful farmer needs to possess a drone which can be used to improve the yield in their farm. However the cost of drones seems prohibitive.

The government needs to increase the subsidy on purchase of drones for agricultural purposes which will go a long way in bringing the Goan youth back to farming activities in the State.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

### Fitting tribute to Monte Cruz

The late Francisco Monte Cruz will continue to live in the collective memory of every Goemkar.

The former sports minister of Goa -- who passed away recently at the age of seventy-nine -- has received a posthumous honour.

The incumbent regime has decided to name one of the stands at Goa's iconic Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Fatorada after Monte Cruz who had created a history by overseeing the construction of this stadium in the shortest

possible time. The folklore has it that to host the prestigious international Nehru Cup back in 1989, Goa needed a stadium of international standards. This challenging task fell on the shoulders of the then sports minister of Goa.

Francisco Bab burnt the midnight oil. He put everything at stake. He moved into a make shift office at the construction site and kept a watchful eye on the construction activities round the clock.

He made it a mission of his life to get the stadium ready for the Nehru Cup in 1989. This tribute to the legacy of Francisco Bab is a testament to the adage, "Hard work always pays in the end".

IRIFAN GHETA, Bangalore

### New faces in Cong a boost for party

Two new faces in Congress party have given boost to Haryana. The new faces are Dargal Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia who threw their hat in the political ring.

The two wrestlers are of opinion that it's only Congress who stood behind them in their need and difficult times. The two are likely to contest forthcoming elections in Haryana.

The Congress has declared 31 seats in the State and with these two joining it will give boost to the party. Vinesh Phogat disqualified from Paris Olympics feels it's a revenge to her call on women harassment in sports. Both have vowed to support the sports women and take cognizance of harassment and hardship the women face in sports especially in wrestling field and in selection process.

The two have been in sports for long time and know things happening in the sports field and how they are treated. The joining of two will encourage women to join politics.

RAJU RAMAMURTY, Vasco

## OPEN SPACE >>

### Goa in need of better public transport

Better times might be in store for us in the near future, but let's change the current situation which is in the hands of the concerned authorities -- Goa's transport system, which desperately needs a push. The State has around 1900 buses plying, among which 520 is that of KTC. Infact, the frequency of buses in certain rural areas are still very low as compared to well-connected major cities. Moreover, after 7 pm, the frequency of public transport system gets highly questionable. Sadly the issue is plaguing office goers who encounter overwhelming rush during the peak hours. Probably, there might have been some policies in the past, but unfortunately they are now in cold storage. In keeping a balance and human approach towards this issue, there seems to be a need of at least more 800 buses. Evidently, Goa is a tourist destination, and public transport is like a major backbone pertaining to it. Furthermore, Goa is also visited by low budget tourists who prefer public transport over highly equipped sophisticated transportation. Eventually, taking into consideration the current scenario, the State Government ought to come out with certain stringent measures as far as public transport system is concerned, along with its extension for the evening hours.

JOSEPH SAVIO DESOUZA, Rajasthan



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



MY VIEW | STAT-CRAFT

MINT CURATOR

# E-commerce is reshaping jobs and consumer welfare in India

A survey's findings highlight a need for targeted support and policy interventions to ensure everyone gets to benefit from it



**RAJESH SHUKLA**  
is managing director and chief executive officer of People Research on India's Consumer Economy.

India's e-commerce landscape has grown significantly over the past decade, becoming a crucial part of the country's retail ecosystem. As consumers increasingly turn to online shopping, the sector's expansion raises questions about its impact on employment and consumer welfare. A recent report of Pable India Foundation (PIF) in collaboration with People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE) offers insights into these effects, based on a survey of consumers, online sellers and traditional offline retailers across urban India. The survey, conducted across 33 cities in 21 states and union territories, included over 12,000 participants—8,209 online consumers, 2,031 offline sellers and 2,062 online sellers.

One key revelation is the widespread adoption of e-commerce in urban areas. Over 90% of respondents spend more than one hour online each week, with 40% spending over 10 hours. This engagement drives e-commerce activity, with 85% of users shopping online weekly. Additionally, 67% of respondents reported making purchases on e-commerce platforms within the last 30 days, highlighting a growing dependence on online shopping for daily needs. These platforms meet a broad range of consumer needs, from electronics to daily essentials, delivered with the convenience that defines online shopping.

In terms of payment preferences, the study shows that 'cash on delivery' (COD) remains the most popular method, used by 90% of respondents, followed by UPI at 8%. While other digital methods like credit and debit cards are available, they account for less than 10% of preferred payment options. This reliance on COD and UPI reflects ongoing trust issues with other forms of digital transactions, suggesting a need for efforts to build confidence in such payments.

The study also assesses the broader impact of e-commerce on consumer welfare, focusing on six metrics: convenience, competition, consumer confidence, access and inclusion, cost-effectiveness and grievance redressal. Convenience emerged as the most significant driver of consumer welfare, allowing consumers to shop easily from home. Competition, offering consumers more choices and increased consumer confidence are also positive factors. However, cost-effectiveness and grievance redressal scored lower, indicating that consumers still face challenges in resolving issues and finding the best prices.

While e-commerce growth has benefited consumers, it has posed significant challenges for traditional offline retailers. Only 10% of offline sellers have listed their products on e-commerce platforms, with Flipkart, Amazon and Meesho being the most common. The low adoption rate highlights barriers faced by small, traditional



retailers in moving online, such as technological challenges, lack of digital literacy and concerns over increased costs and competition. The survey found that 27% of offline sellers who had previously listed their products online eventually withdrew, citing these challenges.

Despite these hurdles, there is growing acceptance of digital payment methods among offline sellers, with 54% using point-of-sale (POS) systems. However, a significant portion—30%—still do not use digital technologies, potentially putting them at a disadvantage. This resistance underscores the need for policies that make digital tools more accessible and user-friendly for small businesses.

In terms of employment, the e-commerce sector has seen a marked increase in job opportunities. The survey shows a 42% net increase in management roles among online sellers, reflecting the growing complexity of e-commerce operations. Other roles, including marketing, sales and customer support, have also seen significant growth, all critical for maintaining competitiveness in the digital marketplace. However, this growth has led to a churn in the workforce, with traditional roles being replaced by tech-driven positions, underscoring the need for reskilling.

The survey also found that online sellers are increasingly adopting digital technologies to improve their operations. About 58% use digital marketing tools, while 54% employ retail operations management software. This has contributed to higher sales and profitability, with 30% of sellers reporting a rise in sales and 42% noting an increase in profits due to their adoption of digital tools.

The findings of this study carry important policy implications. The gap in digital adoption between online and offline sellers suggests the need for government intervention to support traditional retailers. Policies that promote digital adoption through subsidized training programmes and improved access to digital infrastructure could help bridge this divide. Financial incentives to encourage small retailers to list their products on e-commerce platforms could also enhance their participation in the digital economy.

Addressing trust issues with digital payments is critical. Strengthening consumer protection laws, especially for digital transactions, and launching awareness campaigns on the safety of online payments could reduce reliance on COD and foster greater trust in non-UPI digital transactions. To sustain the positive employment impact of e-commerce, addressing the skills gap is essential. Investing in vocational training programmes focused on digital skills, such as social media management and data analysis, could help workers adapt to the evolving job market. Also, improving infrastructure for logistics and delivery services will be crucial as e-commerce continues to grow.

While e-commerce offers significant opportunities for growth and innovation, it also presents challenges, particularly for traditional offline retailers. The findings highlight the need for targeted support and policy interventions to ensure that the benefits of e-commerce are widely shared across the economy. As e-commerce expands, addressing these challenges will be key to ensuring that the digital revolution benefits all sections of society.

# Focus on harms to hold social media platforms accountable

A vibrant debate in Malaysia could offer other countries some cues



**CATHERINE THORBECKE**  
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In July, a popular TikTok creator in Malaysia reported to local police that she was being harassed on the platform by users threatening to rape and kill her. A day later, Rajeswary Appiah died by suicide. One of those accused of cyberbullying her later pleaded guilty to communication offences on TikTok and was hit with a \$23 fine. Malaysia's communications minister said that the suicide was the "straw that broke the camel's back" as he defended the nation's sweeping new social media licensing requirements that are set to take effect next year. But could this far-reaching and opaque attempt to regulate Big Tech companies have prevented the tragedy?

How to hold tech firms accountable for the real-world harms that emerge from their services has become the most difficult governing test of our time, being debated across the globe. Elon Musk's X went dark last week in Brazil amid a regulatory spat, and France last week charged Telegram founder Pavel Durov with complicity in crimes committed by his app. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta Platforms, meanwhile, accused the US government of pressuring him to censor pandemic-related content on his platforms.

The divisive debate tends to fall into a simplistic trap that pits any regulation of Big Tech against freedom of expression, and content moderation as some form of censorship. But the reality is much more nuanced. In Malaysia, a diverse country of some 34 million, this ongoing global debate is set to face its highest showdown.

Malaysia said that it will require all social media and messaging platforms with more than 8 million users to apply for a regulatory licence and abide by yet-to-be finalized conditions. Companies claim this will hamper business and are arguing for self-regulation. Civil society organizations fear it will erode free speech and usher the country "towards the path of an authoritarian regime." Despite the backlash, the government is forging ahead with the plan, saying it aims to curb scams, cyberbullying, and protect young people online. Yet it's hard to know what this regulation will truly do, as the guidelines haven't been finalized.

Malaysians are right to be concerned about speech restrictions, and not in a flawed and self-serving billionaire kind of way. Avenues for freedom of expression have narrowed and the government still uses repressive laws to silence critics. Amnesty International said in a report, "Licensing is also used to exploit editorial control in the media. Malaysia plunged to 107th this year on the Reporters Without



A cyberbullying-driven suicide has raised a furor in Malaysia.

Borders World Press Freedom Index, down from 73rd last year. As traditional news ecosystems shrink, many Malaysians, like in the rest of the world, have turned to voicing opposition online. It now seems the authorities are trying to censor content there as well. The government made the highest number of takedown requests to TikTok last year worldwide, skyrocketing from five such requests in 2021 to 2,292 requests in 2023.

Worries that this attempt to tame social media could be abused to further choke free speech are warranted. A news outlet quoted the deputy prime minister as saying licensing could help check the spread of negative perceptions of the government. Malaysian officials are right to want to regulate this industry, and a licensing scheme shows potential, but they must offer specifics about how exactly this plan will hold Big Tech to account. Until they do, it's not clear how licensing social media would prevent the kind of cyberbullying that led to Appiah's death, even though it's hard to imagine anyone would argue that trolling a woman online with threats of violence would constitute free speech.

We have to start somewhere. Malaysian lawmakers are looking at criminalizing cyberbullying and finding ways to up the accountability of platforms—even without the licensing law. Officials said TikTok pledged to look at what went wrong with that case and offer full support. More than anything, it seems that simple step could've helped prevent the attacks on the influencer the most.

The battle is a sobering reminder that these platforms cannot be relied on as the main vehicles of civic discourse. They are not just press or town squares; they are businesses with growth models that are inherently opposed to social cohesion. Divisive, inflammatory content often drives better user engagement than complex or boring truths. It's not as simple as free speech versus content moderation.

Policymakers should focus on the actual harms as they craft regulation. Malaysia's vibrant society has shown resilience in rebuffing attempts to repress speech, but online abuses have also exposed a need for better safeguards. How this showdown played out could serve as a testing ground for other jurisdictions.

MY VIEW | GENERAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

# Even Unified Pension Scheme can acquire a sell-by date

RAJRISHI SINGHAL



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Success has many fathers, then reversal in established policy frameworks also have multiple origin stories. This is especially true when the policy regime has support across the ideological spectrum. The government's decision to introduce a unified pension scheme (UPS), after consistently backing the new pension system (NPS), has left its in-house NPS cheerleaders dumbstruck. The sharp policy volte-face cannot be explained by a single factor. But, first, what is UPS? As the first word "unified" indicates, it combines features of NPS (which is 'defined contribution'); the final pension payout being determined by amount invested) and the old pension scheme, or OPS (which has a 'defined benefit', promising a predictable amount to pensioners every month). The NPS, launched by the 1999-2004 Atal Behari Vajpayee government, was the culmination of a decade-long policy debate over reforming India's creaky pension regime. Multilateral institutions had been 'nudging' the government as part

of long-term structural macro reforms to review the pension regime for government employees, given the increasing—and unfunded—burden on the fisc. In January 2000, a report from Project OASIS (a government-appointed committee) recommended the NPS architecture.

The NPS has prevailed across different political regimes primarily because there was consensus on enforcing fiscal discipline and a shared recognition that scarce government resources needed productive and prudent deployment. Made compulsory for all government employees joining on or after 1 January 2004, NPS had close to 8.5 million central and state government employees enrolled by March 2023. Yet, come August 2024, the government thought it fit to introduce the UPS. So, what has changed? Two political factors seem to be at play here.

The first is the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party promising to reintroduce the OPS during campaigns for various assembly elections, even though these promises failed to yield uniform electoral dividends. Five states—Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand—reintroduced the OPS, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has continued with the OPS after coming to power in two of those states. The

tremors are spreading to other states, with trade unions there demanding a return to the OPS. Meanwhile, op-eds and policy briefs kept warning of impending economic disaster from continued OPS adoption.

These warnings were drowned out by political imperatives, which became a bit more urgent after the 2024 Parliament election results. The BJP's loss of Lok Sabha seats in three key states—Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra—reflected the electorate's discontent at multiple levels.

The urgency has intensified with four state assembly elections scheduled before year-end: Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir. An *Indian Express* report ([shorturl.at/8Ze9p](https://www.indianexpress.com/article/india/ops-2024-1078299)) has pointed out that during the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP's share of postal ballots in these four states had reduced from its 2019 level, providing some indication of displeasure with the pension system. Postal ballots are mostly cast by senior citizens, persons

with disabilities, government officials either on poll duty or serving in locations removed from their constituencies, consular staff in overseas locations and defence personnel.

The sharp reduction in the share of postal ballots must have given the BJP think-tank a reason to pause and reconsider its contented stand on pension.

But there is a larger issue at play here. While the BJP's actions might betray political expediency, or demonstrate a willingness to jettison ideology for realpolitik, a deeper systemic malaise could blunt even the UPS's utility over time. Deepak Mohanty, chairman of Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority, provided a clue during a recent speech: "Indian ranked 45th out of 47

countries in the Mercer CFA Institute Global Pension Index-2023. The Index measures the efficacy of a country's pension system on three parameters; our scores were: on Adequacy (41/9), Sustainability (43/9) and Integrity (56/5). The scoring denotes that our pension system is reliable but lacks in providing ade-

quate replacement income." The former central banker has a valid point. Most pensioners need adequate post-retirement income to meet daily livelihood requirements, which include more frequent healthcare bills. But, investments have not been yielding much. Mohanty's same speech gives a break-up of the NPS investment pattern: 54% in government bonds, 24% in corporate bonds and 19% in equity. With 78% of investment locked in fixed-income securities, the zeal to keep interest rates low to favour corporate borrowers has depressed coupon rates and adversely impacted returns.

Weight this against elevated and continuing food inflation as well as galloping inflation in healthcare costs. There is bound to be pent-up anger with healthcare getting increasingly privatized and costs shooting beyond the reach of most Indians. There is a lesson in all this, which was ignored while importing ideologies without the supporting structures: either the government funds part of the pension liabilities (as it has belatedly recognized), or increases investments in government healthcare. Or it could bring in tighter regulation to discipline errant private healthcare providers and insurers. Alternatively, it could do all three. Otherwise, even the UPS might acquire a sell-by date.

## OUR VIEW

## MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION



## Speedy execution is key to India's chip ambitions

A semiconductor pact with Singapore follows similar deals with the US and EU. As our own fabs emerge, we could look forward to strategic autonomy in this vital field if we move fast

India's new semiconductor pact with Singapore, like similar deals forged with the US and EU last year, exhibits a resolve to put an Indian stamp on a sector characterized by input shortages, supply chain disruptions and geopolitical tension between the US and China. These factors have prompted many countries to invest in chip-making and design ecosystems, while diversifying supplies, the feeder networks for which are dominated by a handful of countries like the US, China, South Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan. In setting up our own wafer fabrication units, or fabs, we expect to reduce costs as well as uncertainty over access to chips needed for electronic devices, drones, electric vehicles, solar panels and artificial intelligence (AI) applications. In the global context, this is clearly the way forth.

India's US deal, signed last March, aims at semiconductor supply chain resilience, mutually beneficial research and development (R&D) and developing talent and skills. The EU agreement inked last November covers R&D and innovation, talent creation, partnerships and the exchange of market information. The broader goal is to make India one of the world's top five global destinations for chip-making by 2030. Joining hands with Singapore makes sense as it offers us better access to advanced technologies, a proficient workforce, cutting-edge tech universities, wafer-fab parks, a business-friendly environment, strong intellectual property (IP) protection and also a gateway to Southeast Asian markets. The island state has attracted a vast roster of companies that design, manufacture, package and test chips, with many of the world's major players among them. That said, while Taiwan makes high-end chips of 7 nanometre and less for smartphones, lap-

tops and AI models, Singapore makes 'mature node chips'—of 28nm or more, like fabs in India plan to—that are used in appliances, cars and industrial equipment. Further, Singapore's labour, fuel and electricity costs are the highest in Southeast Asia (nearly 15% more than in Malaysia, according to a BCG index). India, on its part, has a relatively inexpensive but strong talent pool in software engineering, industrial equipment and IC design, and is home to over 2,000 semiconductor design engineers. Intel, Texas Instruments, Nvidia, AMD and Qualcomm have design and R&D centres here. Of course, we expect to host wafer fabs too. So far, New Delhi has approved four projects, worth over ₹1.5 trillion, including Micron's and an alliance between Tata Electronics and Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp, all of which are expected to churn out 180,000 wafers a month once ready to roll. With the Adani Group and Israel's Tower Semiconductor also planning to set up a \$10 billion semiconductor fab, we will have the building blocks for local microchip-making that cover the critical value chain of design, fabrication, assembly, testing, marking and packaging. India's \$10 billion fund meant to attract big chip-makers could move the needle further.

India, like Singapore, is not making high-end chips, but given that nodes of under 10nm account for less than 5% of global chip capacity, the strategy of making larger chips is sensible, as it takes lower upfront investments and these chips are unlikely to get outmoded too soon, a risk borne in the race at the AI-led front end. With foreign deals and fabs, we may finally be able to ease our semiconductor struggles. But, even as we subsidize our chip goal by policy, we must ensure speedy execution of these projects.

## Effective law enforcement is the commitment India must renew

Small yet practical steps can make a difference that political moves to satisfy public outrage won't



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

Why do ordinary citizens across the country have to demand justice for the victim of a heinous crime at a Kolkata hospital? If we peel away the extraordinary brutality and the political dimension and get to the core of the matter, we find that people have no confidence in the law enforcement system. It was the same in Pune a few months ago, where people had to get out onto the streets to ensure that the accused in a hit-and-run case, a 17-year-old son of a prominent builder, was prosecuted properly. People are angry. People are outraged. But beneath it all, people are showing that they don't trust the police and the lower judiciary to deliver justice.

If we have to prevent crimes against women, we have to get better at preventing crime in general. Unfortunately, our politics and public discourse is better at symbolic and symptomatic actions. In response to moral panics, we tend to demand fast-track courts, special laws and exemplary punishment. It is easy for the establishment to accede to these demands because they satisfy public anger. Their overall effect on law enforcement outcomes is ignored. Few stop to think that fast-tracking some cases means many other cases are de-prioritized. Indeed, the business of prioritization is itself the cause of much of the

corruption, politicization and injustice that citizens so despise.

We need a different approach. A systemic solution requires us to upgrade the law enforcement system and bring it into the Information Age. Police, prosecutors and lower courts have simply not scaled up with the explosion of population, technology, social change and diversity in the country. In most places, law enforcement officials are just satisfying; they lack the capacity, mandate and motivation to do anything more. Fixing all that is broken is akin to moving a mountain. Yet, mountains can be moved if millions of people push in the same direction.

The discussion on police reforms remains stuck at implementation of the Supreme Court's 2006 ruling in the *Prakash Singh* case. State governments have been loath to implement the order because it would mean political leaders relinquishing personal control over the coercive apparatus that they covet. As much as these structural reforms are desirable, we need to think of other politically feasible reforms that take us in the right direction.

Here's an example. In 2017, I asked the gifted data scientist Karthik Shashidhar to help analyse data relating to crimes against women in a large, relatively well-governed south Indian state. He found that the conviction rate for all crimes was abysmally low (less than 1% for molestation, for instance). It was worse in the state capital. Cases took a long time to investigate and on an average took one-and-a-half years to be brought to court. There they languished for years and decades. As Karthik concluded, this leads to a perverse situation where victims are discouraged from reporting crimes and potential offenders are undeterred from committing them.

Despite what you read in books and see on television, our police forces do not have an adequate number of trained detectives, forensic specialists and prosecutors. Karthik and I found

that setting up specialist investigation units within police departments and publicizing successful prosecutions can deter crimes. These units can select cases from across the state based on a combination of severity and random sampling, so that there is an overall sense that perpetrators will be brought to court promptly. Further, setting up case progression units, with personnel trained in project management techniques, can help navigate the thickets of courts and bureaucracy. Such measures will have a deterrent impact across the board. At the margin, they will deter potential perpetrators from committing crimes. Successful prosecutions will gain media attention and amplify the effect.

Reforms such as these are well within the capacity of state governments and do not require the drastic reforms that politicians are wary of. These are the type of immediate demands that protesters ought to make of their state governments.

Such small changes can yield big improvements, but we also need a national policy commitment towards transforming law enforcement. India's new penal code will not magically lead to better outcomes. The experience of the *Prakash Singh* ruling is instructive. It makes some good recommendations, but these are nearly two decades old and based on a public interest litigation filed a decade before that. There is a case to revisit the ruling's issues in the context of changes in technology, economy and society.

What is clear, though, is that without a determined cooperative federal push, forward movement is unlikely. A national blue ribbon commission, composed of the Union home ministry and all state governments, is a way forward. Yes, commissions often take long and their reports gather dust, but they create policy anchors that show the way forward.

That's one big step better than groping in the dark in despair.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

In the age of AI, it's often said that data is the new oil. Yet the real limitation we face isn't the availability of data but of processing power.

CHRIS MILLER

## MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

## Why Indian cities may remain as unliveable as they are

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoded'

As an Indian, my standards are so low that my idea of exciting urban development is a Nitin Gadkari tweet. I enjoy reading the plans of the minister for road transport and highways—his great projects, how he would punish Indians who don't follow the law (this part especially), how he hopes to replace vehicular horns with the sound of Indian musical instruments, and how very soon road travel from Chennai to Bangalore would take only two hours. I did try to point out to him on X that right now Bangalore to Bangalore is two hours. I do not seriously believe he can change my quality of life, but he is the only politician I know who at least gets the fantasy right. And I so enjoy reading his tweets that sometimes look furtively behind my shoulders to see if I am alone.

Usually, Indian politicians don't give any hope when they speak of our urban future. They speak of nonsense things like 'smart cities' and 'twin cities.' The fact is India's politicians and people have worked together

to make Indian cities among the most unliveable and ugly places on earth.

India is obsessed with the image of its airports. Otherwise, across a vast landscape, India is an urban catastrophe. I believe this will not change. There is no hope. I can think of only two phenomena that convey an accurate representation of modern India. One is the Olympics and the other is any Indian town. The games expose how poorly run India is and how unkind we must be to each other to fare so poorly even against small nations. Our cities convey the same.

Politicians are blamed a bit too much for what is essentially national character. The political stamina that Indians have for useless issues, if a fraction of that emotion were dedicated to our decrepit civic infrastructure, the lack of parks and beauty, our lives would be instantly richer. But that is not going to happen.

One of the reasons our lives will not improve is that India is unable to change its attitude towards how to treat Indians. India treats all its people as though they are poor. In the administrative subconscious, there is a feeling that this is enough for Indians, they don't deserve more, they don't want more. Just imagine, wherever you are, what are the meetings scheduled in your municipal body

today? You think they are going to discuss how to make roads endure, lane discipline, proper medians, working signals and how to make the city aesthetically so that it can serve the well-being of residents?

Traffic is not the greatest enemy of urban life. Many great cities in the world have that. Take Bangkok, for example. It has terrible traffic. Even though its efficient metro system makes life somewhat bearable, the fact is that it has very bad traffic, and like in India, its upper middle class prefers car travel despite the jams. But Thais have such high civic sense and public dignity that Bangkok cannot match the misery of any Indian metro. India has never seriously tried to change the public behaviour of Indians.

India's most influential people do not seem to believe in the idea of a city. Somehow, they do not appear to crave order or aesthetics or the comfort of ordinary people. Also, maybe they intuitively feel that the chaos and ugliness of public life also make

the poor feel that the country has not left them behind. At any given point of time, visually, India never alienates its poor.

Except at fancy airport terminals. India's urban mess may also come from what is widely viewed as a political virtue—the fact that modern India was not governed long enough by its cultural elite. There was a lot of democracy very soon. The elite can be despicable, but they always know how to live well. Every great city in the world has been a beneficiary of the vision of a social elite and the ease with which they could enforce codes of social behaviour.

The fundamentals of modern India were created by its elite, but they did not prevail long enough to nurture its cities. Some of India's early leaders did not think cities were important. Gandhi, for instance, wanted to bet big on villages. He was a famous evangelist of bhyanne, but he seemed indifferent to urban planning. He wanted Indian children to learn handicraft even before their formal primary education (an

idea that lurked in the first five-year plan). The failure of the modern Indian elite is more interesting. For centuries, migration was always something that the unfortunate had to do. People fled nature and persecution. But many developing nations endured a new kind of migration where the luckiest people migrated to expand their luck. For several generations now, the cream of India has migrated abroad or been in migration mode. It is not as though they hold the secret to improving urban life, but what the elite's migration did was lower their stake in home, and in reforming home. All successful nations were transformed by their elite. When a society's luckiest people do not have high stakes in home, we get modern India. In this phenomenon also lies our only hope. The Indian upper class never fully enjoyed migration. Now India has prospered enough to hold some attraction for the new economic elite, especially those who do not fully feel they belong in the West. It costs little to see the few lords in India and many find living here better than having to endure Western order and culture. So, they may have a growing stake in making Indian cities liveable. They may want safer roads, and, who knows, even parks, clean air and lane discipline.

**Our lives are unlikely to improve so long as India is unable to change how it treats Indians**



The climate bill has finally come due. Right now it is being paid by the smallest and most vulnerable. Small island communities are among the first to pay the price of climate change but no one will escape forever

Biron Waga

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

## POLITICAL PARTIES MUST INTEGRATE GREEN FOCUS INTO POLL AGENDAS

As India marches towards its goal of Viksit Bharat with rapid economic growth, one of the most pressing issues—rising pollution levels to environmental degradation—is conspicuous by its absence in electoral agendas. A study of air quality data collected from January to June this year by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air shows 15 of the hundred most polluted cities in India are in Haryana. The study also reveals that all Haryana cities exceeded the safe limits for PM10 level set by India's National Ambient Air Quality Standard and the World Health Organization.

Haryana is just a month away from choosing a new government. The state is a classic example of how rapid industrialisation and urbanisation can worsen pollution levels. Yet, no party has made this scourge a part of its political discourse. Perhaps, Indian parties can learn from how political outfits in other nations contribute to society by making impactful interventions. For example, political parties in western countries have played an important role in drawing public attention to environmental disasters and the need for adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

India has been witnessing extreme weather events as a result of climate change. A rare cooperative activity that combined cloudburst and high wind uprooted over one lakh trees in Telangana earlier this week. The town of Joshimath in Uttarakhand is sinking. Indiscriminate felling of trees and construction activity is playing havoc with the fragile Himalayas, which are witnessing frequent landslides. The melting glaciers and dying rivers are threatening life and livelihood. India's monsoons have become erratic and in recent years, extreme rainfall has led to catastrophic floods. Poor urban planning, wetland encroachment, and deforestation have compounded the impact of floods. India's long coastline makes it vulnerable to cyclones whose increasing frequency has been largely attributed to rising sea surface temperatures. The time for action is now. Recurring disasters underscore deeper issues, namely unplanned and unchecked development. This, combined with weak environmental regulations, has spelt disaster. India needs stronger environmental laws that must be enforced strictly. A good start is to get political parties to integrate environmental policies with their electoral agenda. The voters need to demand their right to clean air and water, and sustainable cities and towns.

## KERALA ON RIGHT TRACK TO IMPROVE BUSINESS EASE

KERALA sprang a surprise in the latest Ease of Doing Business Reforms ranking, released by the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Thursday, by topping the chart. The state, long pilloried for its industry-unfriendly character and recurring labour strikes, has been taking proactive steps in recent times to promote businesses and woo investors. And these efforts seem to be paying off. Of the 10 citizen-centric reform areas and 20 business-centric areas considered for the ranking, Kerala topped in implementing seven citizen-centric reforms and two business-centric reforms.

The two business-centric reforms where it emerged as a top performer are: facilitating utility permits for business and paying taxes. The citizen-centric reforms are: online single window system, certificate issuance by urban local bodies, certificate issuance by revenue department, providing utility permits, public distribution system, transport, and employment exchange.

To put things in perspective, Kerala's performance in the more important Ease of Doing Business ranking (not to be confused with the latest EODB-reforms rankings) is still below par, though it has been making progress. Kerala stood at the 15th place in 2022, a remarkable jump from the 28th position in 2019. While Kerala's gains over the past two decades in terms of human development indicators—high life expectancy at birth, low death rate, balanced male-female ratio, high literacy rate, and low poverty incidence—are commendable, its image as a "business-unfriendly" state was coming in the way of attracting investments. Also, the delay in clearances, especially at the local self-government level, often frustrated investors, especially small and medium players. Big investors, however, do not face such delays as they have access to the powers that be—which highlights the disturbing lack of a level playing field.

The ranking shows Kerala is moving in the right direction, slowly plugging the bottlenecks at various levels. Also, it will help the state showcase itself and tell investors it means business. The Communist government has sent out the message that it wants businesses to come so they can create jobs for youngsters who are growing restless due to lack of opportunities. Kerala still has a long way to go in terms of providing a good environment for businesses to thrive, but it must be said that it has begun well. And as they say, well begun is half done. Now, the government should ensure that the momentum is not lost.

### QUICK TAKE

#### KEEP CLOSE EYE ON MPOX

INDIA has reported the first mpx case (earlier called monkey-pox) in several months. The WHO recently declared the outbreak of a new variant of the virus a public health emergency of international concern. India detected 30 cases of an older strain between 2022 and March 2024. The disease, which at times can be fatal, has a few recommended vaccines. But the vaccines take a few weeks to become effective. There is no need to panic. But India should stock up on the vaccines, step up surveillance of travellers from central and western Africa, where the disease is endemic, and increase awareness about the infection.

WHEN it comes to regime changes, Leftists, it would seem, make common cause with Islamists, little realising that the latter only think of them as useful idiots, easy to dispose of after the expiry of their use-by date. As we have seen in the recent violence in Bangladesh, when not just Hindus or Awami League supporters but Leftists were the targets of systematic, even murderous, ferocity.

But what we may not have realised is how seculars are similarly corralled and marshalled to silence violence against Hindus, not only in Bangladesh or India, but in the US, Europe, Australia, or elsewhere. The "H" word is anathema and, under all circumstances, must be camouflaged.

If Hindus are attacked, killed, abducted, raped, held for ransom or extortion, the appropriate substitute is 'minorities'. If their temples are attacked, objects of worship or reverence vandalised, then other victims of murderous mobs, such as Christians or Buddhists or 'tribals' must also be mentioned in the same breath. The civilised antidote to the spilling of Hindu blood, it would seem, is not black ink but whitewash.

The same illogic is applied on both sides of the subcontinent. Take the case of Anubhav Sinha's Netflix series on the hijacking of IC 814. A leading media person and commentator, by no means a Hindutva-supporter, has called it "an expensive PR job for the ISI". The BJP media cell outraged over the falsification of the hijackers' names. This, however, is not entirely true. The hijackers did use fake Hindu names, such as "Bhola" and "Shankar". Also non-religious, even nonsensical, nicknames such as "Doctor", "Chief", and "Burger".

But this only ends up masking the real identity of the hijackers. Naive viewers may think they were Indians or Hindus. Why were the real names of the hijackers—Sunny Ahmed Qazi, Shakir, Mistri Zahoor Ibrahim, Shahid Akhtar Sayed, and Ibrahim Athar—not revealed? Or that they were Pakistani operatives, controlled by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) or its proxies? Several fact-checkers who weighed in on the side of Anubhav Sinha and his team do not reveal this. The geopolitical, strategic, Pakistani, Islamist angles in the story are suppressed.

On the other hand, leading Muslim opposition leaders have even asked why people are objecting to IC 814 when they accepted fact in *The Kashmir Files*. Surely they don't expect terrorists and

Victims must be accurately named, not only for reasons of historic veracity, but also to expose and apply pressure on their oppressors and aggressors

## WHY ACCURATE NAMING IS SUCH A BIG DEAL

MAKARANDR PARANJPE

Author and commentator

### RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE



victims of terrorism to be treated in the same manner? But, who knows, perhaps they do. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, as the cliché goes. Or, to cite another cliché, terrorism has no religion. Perfectly true, except when it means never mention the terrorist's religion, especially if it is Islam or Sikhism.

The whitewashing, let us admit, is there for all to see, but not exactly in the manner that it has been called out. Instead, the ploy that we observe in many previous Bollywood blockbusters is to humanise terrorists, gloss over the Islamist religiosity that supports their actions, mitigate their murderous violence and disre-

gard for human lives, and instead amplify their gestures of kindness and friendship. The sharp sword held over the neck of the victim is invisibilised, as is the threat to kill one hostage at a time if demands are not met. Instead, the singing, joking, or calling a hostage sister and gifting her a shawl, is what is emphasised.

Today, a similar whitewashing is playing out in another yet-to-be-released movie, Kangana Ranaut's *Emergency*. Because Sikhs can never be terrorists or assassins of those they were paid and pledged to protect—according to Sikh religious authorities who have asked for its banning. As for Hindus? Remember Gul-

zar's *Maachis* (1996)? The Khalistani terrorists, backed by ISI, are shown as romantic and misguided heroes.

The "real" culprit, who plants bombs in buses, played by Om Puri, is called "Sanatan". I've never heard anyone being named thus, but Gulzar decides to use it to object the source of evil. No one noticed or marked the source in that case called "Hindu communalism" and is today known as Hindutva. But in the end, it is not the ideology of political Hinduism that suffers as much as ordinary Hindus all over the world. It is they who bear the brunt of violence and hatred; it is they who are demonised and dehumanised; it is they who become expendables, cannon fodder for violent ideologies and ideologies.

The common target of Islamists, Leftists, and seculars alike is what used to be called "Hindu communalism" and is today known as Hindutva. But in the end, it is not the ideology of political Hinduism that suffers as much as ordinary Hindus all over the world. It is they who bear the brunt of violence and hatred; it is they who are demonised and dehumanised; it is they who become expendables, cannon fodder for violent ideologies and ideologies.

Now the seculars in Bangladesh are pressuring the seculars in India not to use the "H" word when it comes to the violence and atrocities of the regime change. Don't talk about the killing of Hindus, they say, don't tarnish the popular movement against Sheikh Hasina as either Islamist or CIA-sponsored. Portray it as a peaceful, progressive and secular people's movement, led by brave students from all communities, against an unpopular dictator. The dirty secret that is being denied is that Jihadis are often times paid for their mercenary atrocities by being permitted to loot, kill, rape, or hold to ransom Hindus and other targeted groups like the Yazidis or Armenians.

We fell for this earlier, by not publicising or internationalising the genocide of Hindus in Bangladesh during the 1971 liberation of the country from Pakistan. Today, leading journalists are asking India not to take up the cause of Hindus in Bangladesh. But this is wrong both morally and strategically.

Victims must be accurately named, not only for reasons of historic veracity, but also to expose and apply pressure on their oppressors and aggressors. Wherever and whenever Hindus are targeted, we must name the victims and speak up for them. The dirty secret that is being denied is that Jihadis are often times paid for their mercenary atrocities by being permitted to loot, kill, rape, or hold to ransom Hindus and other targeted groups like the Yazidis or Armenians.

(Views are personal) (Tweets @MakarandParanjpe)

## THE EARLY LIFE OF A SECULAR SAINT



RENUKA NARAYANAN

### FAITHLINE

happy as a normal little boy could be, safe in the love of his parents and siblings. His father, Subrahmanya Iyer, was a school supervisor for the British government and had him admitted to the English school to give Ginni and his brothers the best possible modern education available. Ginni's mother Mahalakshmi was of distinguished descent. Her long-ago ancestor was the great 17th century musicologist Venkatamakhin, who had mapped Carnatic ragas into the grid called the *72 Melakarta*. Another ancestor was Govinda Dikshitar, who had been a

"A *Mangalam* is a blessing," explained his mother. "It is in *Raga Madhyamavati* which is linked to *Raga Kharaharipriya*, Sri Rama's favourite raga. It is like a return gift from the musician to the listeners, wishing them well-being and repentance for any sins, knowing or unknowing."

Ginni grew particularly fond of the songs of 18th century scholar-saint Muthuswamy Dikshitar, whose pen-name was 'Guru Guba'. This meant 'Kartikeya', the same as Ginni's name 'Swaminathan'. "He really describes the gods well," Ginni told his mother. "I can almost see them when you sing his songs."

That year, Ginni's father took the family to a town nearby where the 68th Shankaracharya of Chanchipuram was on a visit. The family looked up to him as their spiritual guide and went to seek his blessings. The Shankaracharya's eye was caught by Ginni. "Come closer, child," he said, and Ginni, not shy in the least, came forward at once. The seer asked Ginni a number of questions about prayer, practice and music. He was greatly surprised by Ginni's confident, precocious answers. Ginni too found him deeply interesting. There was a gentle, deep air about the seer that impressed him. A line from Bible class came to mind: "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled."

A few months later, news came that the 68th Shankaracharya had passed away of age. The new Shankaracharya, a very young man, was Swaminathan's cousin. But he, too, died of a sudden sickness, and Ginni, in his absolute shock, was taken away to be installed as the 68th Shankaracharya. Kneeling on the floor of the cart he was taken away in, he repeated the only mantra he knew, 'Rama, Rama', in fright. His parents were informed and could not object. They were allowed to see him one last time, already in the shaven-headed, ochre-clad dress of a sanyasi, and left weeping.

How this little boy, taken at just 13, overcame his homesickness and evolved into a great saint is a deeply poignant tale, which I will tell another time, if you wish.

(Views are personal) (sheebab09@gmail.com)



Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati was the 'Mahaswami of Kanchi', the 68th Shankaracharya of the ancient Kamakoti Matha. While deeply learned, he was simple and accessible, and reportedly had a wicked sense of humour

minister of the Nayak kings of Thanjavur and had worked very hard to improve the conditions of temples and ghats by the river Kaveri. Music ran in her blood and she taught Ginni to sing in many ragas.

"Listeners should know how to enjoy a song whether it is in a light or weighty raga," she taught Ginni. "One should be broad-minded because although tastes may differ, music is everybody's birthright. A song should touch the heart. That is the yardstick, not anything else. *Raga Todi* has weight while *Sindhu Bhairavi* is light. Both touch the heart."

A thought struck Ginni. "Why do all concerts end with a *Mangalam*?" he asked.

## MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

### Census fears

Ref: *Caste moulds the RSS colossus* (Sep 8). There is nothing wrong in the RSS changing its policies on caste census and reservation. The RSS is not against devolution of power among the socially depressed sections. But its fear of parties missing the census to split the Hindu vote bank is not unfounded. **G Nataraja Perumal, Belagavi**

### Political sludgery

Backward castes deserve their crumbs of power purely on the basis of welfareism, not for the purpose of divisive parochialism. Using caste as a unit is preferred to misusing it as a part of political sludgery, as caste-free society is achievable in near future. **Venkat Desikan, Chennai**

### Flexible RSS

RSS has proved to be more accommodating of the diversity in India than the BJP. Be it the joint statements issued to support caste reservation or giving the call for an end to the Manup violence. In this era of Modi 3.0, with the BJP falling short of the majority mark and the growing hostility of the RSS towards Nuj Adityanath, it will be interesting to see how this parent-child relationship is maintained. **Aparna Vats, Bengaluru**

### Mediate violence

Ref: *6 more dead in Manipur violence, CM meets vop* (Sep 8). The death of six more people in Manipur is unfortunate. The clashes have resulted in the deaths of at least 230 individuals. To put an end to this violence, PM Narendra Modi must visit Manipur and mediate between the two communities. **P Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai**

### Justice delayed

Ref: *Delay in execution agonising for death row convicts* (Sep 8). After the president, the Supreme Court has also expressed displeasure in the delay in delivering justice. However, it is unfortunate that neither of them have suggested any remedy to eliminate the delay. First and foremost, the number of adjournments allowed in a case should be capped at three. Similarly, whenever the first appellate court upholds the lower court verdict, no further appeal should be allowed. **Unnikrishnan Nair, Kuthiathode**

### Paralympic inspiration

Ref: *Last leg to insurgency, net Sema spirit* (Sep 8). Hets off to 40-year-old soldier Hokato H Sema for winning a bronze medal in the Paris Paralympics after the loss of a leg in 2002 in a counter-insurgency operation in J&K. He is a source of inspiration, resilience and determination to all. **NA Joseph, Ettumanoor**





## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## The Kargil admission

Pakistan must do more to bridge trust deficit

PAKISTAN army chief Gen Syed Asim Munir has uttered the K-word. K stands for Kargil, not what the Rawalpindi Generals are perennially obsessed with — Kashmir. Addressing the Defence and Martyrs' Day event on Friday, Gen Munir mentioned the 1948, 1965, 1971 and Kargil wars — all in the same breath. This public acknowledgement of the 1999 conflict by none other than Pakistan's top military officer debunked the improbable theory that 'private freedom fighters' were solely involved in the intrusions. Even former PM Nawaz Sharif had stopped short of naming Kargil when he admitted earlier this year that Islamabad had violated an agreement with Delhi, signed by him and then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in February 1999.

It is common knowledge that the Kargil misadventure was orchestrated by then army chief Gen Pervez Musharraf. Smarting from the 1971 defeat, Pakistan tried to turn the tables on India but came a cropper. Why would Gen Munir mention it now, weeks after India celebrated 25 years of the Kargil triumph? After all, the Pakistani military is firmly in the saddle, with the Sharif brothers under its control and the 'uncooperative' ex-PM Imran Khan behind bars. This could be an attempt to give the impression that Pakistan is finally coming to terms with its unpleasant past and is keen to learn from its historical blunders. Notably, PM Shehbaz Sharif said at the same event that his country desired peace with all neighbours.

Despite these statements, coupled with overtures such as Pakistan's invitation to PM Narendra Modi to attend the SCO meeting in Islamabad next month, India has no reason to let its guard down. The trust deficit persists, with the Jammu region reeling under a spate of attacks linked to Pakistan-trained terrorists. Ironically, Pakistan is itself battling a surge in terrorism in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Gen Munir would be well advised to clear the air about his military's role in terror attacks across the LoC.

## Take balanced stance

Amend law to avoid ASI-Waqf boards conflict

THE ongoing dispute between the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and various Waqf boards over the control of heritage monuments underscores the need for a balanced and thoughtful approach. The government must ensure that it upholds secularism while addressing this sensitive issue. At a recent parliamentary panel meeting, the ASI named over 120 monuments under its protection that are also claimed by Waqf boards. The ASI contends that some of these sites were declared Waqf properties long after being classified as protected heritage. The Opposition, however, accuses the ASI of misrepresenting facts and displaying political bias.

The ASI has flagged valid concerns that religious bodies are modifying or adding to the original structures, compromising the historical authenticity of these monuments. Unauthorised constructions like madrasas or washrooms built by Waqf boards have reportedly altered the original fabric of some protected sites. However, it is important to acknowledge that such structures are often linked to religious practices.

Instead of adopting a confrontational stance, both the ASI and Waqf boards should engage in dialogue to resolve these differences. A collaborative approach would help protect these monuments while also respecting religious sentiments. This conflict highlights a larger issue: many heritage sites in India also have religious significance, such as the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya or the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi. The government must clearly define the responsibilities of both the ASI and religious bodies to prevent disputes. Amending the Waqf Act and related laws could help manage such sites without infringing on heritage or religious rights, ensuring a harmonious balance between preservation and faith.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1924

## In memoriam

THIS day 26 years ago, Sardar Dyal Singh Majhi, the founder of this paper, was gathered to his fathers. This termination of his earthly career was, however, only the end of his physical life. The moral and spiritual parts of his life — the only parts of a man's life that are of enduring value — still continue to inspire in the traditional and philosophical sense of those terms, but in the more palpable sense, that the great work to which he dedicated his life is still alive and shows no signs of early decay. And that work, be it remembered, did not concern any particular or isolated aspect of his country's life and activities, but was coextensive with its whole life. In politics, in the sphere of social reform, education and philanthropy, the Sardar associated himself with all that was beneficent and progressive in the forces around him. He was a pillar of the Indian National Congress, and the founder of the first distinctly political organisation in this province. He was one of the first men in this province to join the Brahma Samaj which then, as now, stood for the highest ideals in the domain of social reform. He was the first among the wealthy men of this province to realise the supreme need of spreading the light of education among the people, not only general education such as is imparted to the youth of the country in schools and colleges, but education which is imparted to adults by means of libraries, reading rooms and newspapers. In much of this, he was distinctly ahead of his times in his own province. In all of it, he was abreast of the most advanced of his contemporaries in other provinces.

## J&amp;K deserves a govt that can deliver

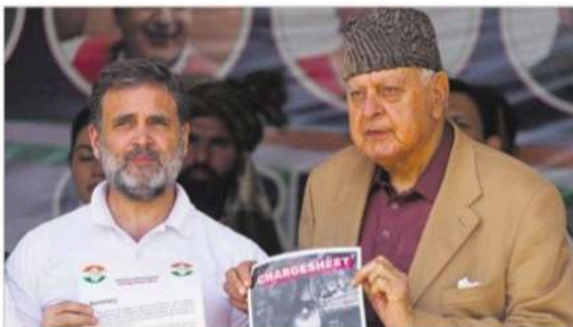
Failed promises have been the hallmark of the Centre's administration of the UT

WAJAHAT HABIBULLAH  
FORMER BUREAUCRAT, J&K CADRE

ON December 11, 2023, the Supreme Court directed that Jammu and Kashmir's statehood be restored 'as soon as possible'. The learned judges, led by none other than the Chief Justice of India, also noted that the Legislative Assembly elections need not await the restoration of statehood, and issued a direction that the polls be conducted before September 30, 2024. A simple reading of the judgment will amply demonstrate how the spirit of the law was conveniently circumvented by reliance on the letter of the law.

In a telling statement in the concluding pages of his judgment, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul pleased that the Union set up a 'truth and reconciliation Commission' just like South Africa did after the apartheid era. "This Commission should be set up expeditiously before memory escapes. The exercise should be time-bound. There is already an entire generation of youth that has grown up with feelings of distrust and it is to them that we owe the greatest duty of reparation," he wrote. This was the voice of an anguished Kashmiri at what had become of his people, echoing what had been the demand of a former Chief Minister while in office — Omar Abdullah.

Now a Union Territory, the erstwhile state was brought through a Home Ministry notification under its administrative control to the extent of being as close to the Union Government's administration as is the UT of Delhi. And it is to the executive of this entity that elections will be underway soon, but without Ladakh, which is a separate



PARTNERS: Ferooz Abdullahi's National Conference, in alliance with the Congress, has struck a chord with the people. ■

UT without a legislature. At issue in this election is the restoration of self-government to the people of J&K, a status enjoyed by the citizens of every state in India, ruled by governments of their choice through a system of elections enervated by many of the world's democracies — from legislative assemblies down to the level of panchayats. The restoration of statehood is the centrepiece of the campaign of the Congress's Rahul Gandhi. Set against this is only a string of failed promises and outright flak that have been the hallmark of the Home Ministry's administration of the UTs of J&K and Ladakh. This is then the issue at the core of the campaign since the people across the two UTs will no longer countenance a government that cannot deliver.

In a remarkable pincer at restoring democracy, District Development Councils (DDCs), crafted with dexterity by talented bureaucrats BVR Subrahmanyam, then Chief Secretary of J&K, had been established in 2020. In an election sweep by an alliance of UT parties, it was elected without more authority than a cipher for the local police station house officer.

The Smart City signage across Srinagar marks sites of sewage effluents, open roads, damaged culverts or potholed manholes,

The very fact of wide public participation will demonstrate that democracy has at last come into its own in J&K.

supposedly under repair but with not a labourer in sight, only harassed citizens. Yes, there has been much activity in road-building in the main streets of Srinagar, but these including the faded boulevard, have been rendered unmotorable. That's because wide pavements, used as I have seen for myself, by no stroller whatsoever, have been built along the roadside, strangling motor traffic, which now has to crowd nose to tail. A proud young Municipal Commissioner escorted me to the renovated umbragey Pato View market that bridges the Residency and Maulana Azad roads, which together pass off as Srinagar's Connaught Place. Apart from the fact that the dashing young man was unable to step into the market without being surrounded by 10 armed men in black with LMGs cocked, there were no customers in the market despite it being the high noon of the tourist

season. And I was told that this frenetic building activity was being ably conducted by seasoned contractors from prosperous Gujarat, with migrant labour from UP, Bihar and West Bengal. So, what did the Kashmiris get out of this?

Sadly, the tale is the same with every other promise. Rates of employment have fallen sharply despite the promise of jobs, with many of the vacancies filled both in Jammu and Kashmir divisions with recruits from elsewhere. The recent extension of Scheduled Caste facilities to Pahar or Rajput communities in Jammu division amidst a loud proclamation by Home Minister Amit Shah has gone nowhere since there are no jobs to be had, reserved or otherwise. Medical facilities have suffered, with nursing homes shuttered and patients travelling to Delhi for remedies. The prestigious Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, instead of being restored to its heyday of the 1980s, when it was equipped with state-of-the-art facilities — and where I was pulled back from the brink of death after an accident in 1993 when I was the Divisional Commissioner of Kashmir — is now languishing under a junior bureaucrat.

This will also explain why Ferooz Abdullahi's National Conference (NC), in alliance with the

Congress, has struck a chord with the people, be it his admirers or adversaries of yore. He is seen as the tallest regional leader who led his party to victory in Kashmir (winning two seats out of three) in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections; in Ladakh, the NC-led independent candidate won. He led the PMJD (People's Alliance for Popular Declaration) to a win in the DDC elections.

This also explains why there is such a proliferation of candidates, even those that have had a declared separatist outlook. State Congress leader Tariq Qarn has complained on TikTok that this is a ploy by the ruling party at the Centre to divide the Opposition. The release of several former leaders of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami from prolonged detention in the recent past and their grudging willingness to consider participating in the electoral process would appear to offer such a view. It might be recalled that their foremost leader at the close of the 20th century was Ali Shah Geelani, the apostle of the stridently separatist Hizbul Mujahideen.

Nevertheless, while the integration of a former Hurriyat leader like People's Conference chairperson Sajid Lone into 'mainstream politics' was anything but painless, the success of Engineer Rashid in the parliamentary elections, which he won from Baramulla — a worsening none other than Omar Abdullah — has opened a door to new students, which in turn will open the way for universal participation in the electoral process, a process which to my mind holds the key to the ultimate resolution of the integration of J&K into India. Whether the upcoming election is looked upon as an exercise in formality as it will end up in forming a legislature with scant authority, the very fact of wide public participation will demonstrate that democracy has at last come into its own in J&K and give India the roadmap to its future with what was and hopefully will be the people of the state of J&K. ■

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Kashmir is the real test of secularism in India. — Mahatma Gandhi

## The eternal mystery of 'horn ok please'

SHANKAR GOPALKRISHNAN

AMONG unsolved mysteries, 'horn ok please' will rank right at the top. This message is written/painted behind almost every truck. One day, the puzzle of the Mohenjo-Daro script will be solved. But 'horn ok please' shall continue to confound us.

I surmise that 'horn ok please' must be some kind of 'maharaja' like 'tat' from 'asi', I am sure the meaning is subtle and sublime. I try my best to understand it by rearranging the words. Does it mean 'All is ok with you? Then, please sound the horn?' Or 'Is your horn ok? Then, please sound it!' Whichever way I look at it, I am dissatisfied with the interpretation.

I can gauge from the style of honking the mood of the person behind the wheel. If it is a short, crisp 'beep' at each crossroads, it reflects a 'cheery' person. All is good with him and with the world around him. A person who is in a mad rush to reach the railway station conveys his impatience with a continuous round of 'beep-beep-beep'. His intent is clear through the horn, 'Get out of the way, you slob! I have no time!'

The horn can also convey anger. This is apparent when the traffic signal turns green and the vehicle in front shows no urgency to start. The horn is sounded with a certain 'continuum' in the duration — it is one long 'beep-beep'. The horn taunts the person, 'You sleepy head! Wake up and drive away!'

The horn can indicate frustration too. This mood is sensed when I am stuck in a traffic jam. For 45 minutes, I stay rooted to the same spot. I have no idea what the delay is all about. 'When is this jam going to dear? God, I cannot take this anymore!' How do I express this intense frustration? By honking! I honk without reason, knowing fully well that there's no one to hear me or respond to my plea!

The entire gamut of human emotions — *shringshans, randsa, bibhatas* — you name it, the *naam-naam* can be conveyed through a simple horn.

It is 3 am. All is quiet. Pin-drop silence. Peace and tranquility reign. Like a blanket, the night has spread itself out, enveloping the world in its cosy ambit. And then comes the anti-climax. Out of the blue, the burglar alarm sounds from one of the parked cars. It screeches the living daylight out of us. It is a high-pitched shriek, followed by a continuous 'clank-clank-clank' and then, it's back to the shriek. This pattern continues: 'shriek-clank-clank-shriek-clank-clank'. Street dogs bark in anger. The entire neighbourhood is wide awake, some people peering out of the balcony. Imagine if every car was fitted with this monstrous horn!

After 20 minutes of mayhem, sanity returns. Maybe the burglar walked away with the car. I cannot thank him enough. Maybe the owner turned the alarm off. Maybe a Good Samaritan came with a cricket bat and smashed the car windows as well as the horn. Whichever way, I go back to sleep.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## A bitter pill to swallow

Apropos of 'IC 814 lays bare an uncomfortable truth' (The Great Gatsby; the IC 814 hijacking episode, dramatised in the Netflix series, forces its viewers to confront an uncomfortable truth — India's weakness in the face of adversity. The 1999 incident that saw the release of three terrorists to ensure the safety of the passengers underscored the country's vulnerability. The helplessness of the government of the day, despite then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh's best efforts, highlighted India's limited leverage. The series has compelled Indians to acknowledge that we are not as strong as we believe. The truth is, we were weak then, and perhaps we are still weak. Our inability to stand up to China, the recent spate of terror attacks and widespread corruption are weighing us down.

SABHIPREET SINGH, BY MAIL

## Holding a mirror to the state

Refer to 'IC 814 lays bare an uncomfortable truth'; it was an insightful read. Good statesmanship is all about acknowledging mistakes and foibles and going for course correction to right the wrongs. There is no point in denying that the state owed to the demands of the hijackers to save the passengers' lives. The author has done well to point out that weakness still exists. There is no let-up in the unrest in Manipur. Our soldiers deployed in the border areas still fall prey to terror attacks every now and then. It is time to acknowledge the flaws and vulnerabilities in the country's security framework and work to address them.

AMT BANERJEE, MUMBAI

## India can play the peacemaker

Apropos of the news report 'After Putin, Modi says India can resolve Russia-Ukraine conflict', India can play the role of a mediator in the war as it enjoys good ties with both Russia and Ukraine. PM Narendra Modi has already expressed India's readiness to contribute to peace efforts. New Delhi can bring the two warring nations to the negotiation table. Besides, India can alleviate the plight of those bearing the brunt of the war by supplying humanitarian aid to those stranded in the conflict-torn regions. Once the war ends and

a sense of normalcy is restored, India can also help rehabilitate the affected families.

OPPRASADA RAO, HYDERABAD

## Down with freebies, subsidies

With reference to the editorial 'Punjab bites the bullet', fiery populism is sadly the order of the day. Politicians offer countless freebies and subsidies ahead of elections to woo the voters. Our leaders, bereft of morals, know that such schemes can bleed the state exchequer dry. But all they care about is staying in power. It is time for them to wake up and put the interests of the nation above their ulterior motives. They must be mindful of the toll that such unrealistic schemes and tall promises can take on the state treasury.

SAUDERSHAN WALIA, AMRITSAR

## Take steps to ease fiscal stress

Punjab was a financially prosperous state for decades. But successive governments have bled the state exchequer dry by relying heavily on subsidies to stay in the good graces of the voters. In view of Punjab's burgeoning pile of debt, the AAP government must take steps that can improve the fiscal health of the state. The Punjab Cabinet's decision to hike the value-added tax on petrol and diesel is a step in the right direction. The withdrawal of the previous government's decision of subsidised power can also help ease the fiscal stress. The ruling regime in any state must not shy away from taking decisions that may not be popular or politically wise but beneficial.

NJ SINGH CHATRALI, KAPURTHALA

## A relatable read

With reference to the middle 'The high-tension entrance test': I loved reading the writer's account of the nerve-racking experience she had. It is safe to say that many people could relate to it. It is common for one to feel anxious or apprehensive before a test, interview or audition. And being surrounded by strangers only adds to the stress. But it is in moments like these that one must stay positive and not be overcome with fear.

GURINDER PAL SINGH, RAIPURA

Warning signs

Himachal-like fiscal conditions must be avoided

Himachal Pradesh is facing significant financial difficulties, which not only expose the state's ailing fiscal health but have also triggered a political schism between the Congress-ruled state government and the key Opposition party — the Bharatiya Janata Party. The economic distress in the state can be attributed largely to heavy borrowing, rising pension and salary budgets, the provision of freebies, and insufficient revenue generation. At ₹1.17 lakh, Himachal Pradesh has the highest per capita debt in the country after Arunachal Pradesh. In fact, the state's outstanding debt has ballooned from 37 per cent of gross state domestic product (GSDP) in 2021-22 to an estimated 42.5 per cent in 2024-25.

The fiscal deficit jumped more than 1.5 times from 4.05 per cent of GSDP in 2022-23 to 6.4 per cent in 2023-24. Even in 2024, the fiscal deficit, according to the Revised Estimate, was pegged at 5.9 per cent, a 130-basis-point increase over the Budget Estimate. The revenue deficit was also higher at 2.6 per cent of GSDP in the Revised Estimate compared to 2.2 per cent in the Budget Estimate. The state's revenue expenditure as a proportion of its total expenditure is among the highest in the country, at around 90 per cent. Notably, the state government is now reported to be contemplating rolling back a few subsidy schemes such as subsidised power for hotel owners, free water supply in rural areas, and subsidised bus fares for women in an attempt to improve its finances.

According to the Reserve Bank of India's report on state finances, the states finance only 58 per cent of their revenue expenditure from their own sources, suggesting the need to improve fiscal capacity. Recent studies have pointed out that state finances were less impacted by the pandemic, and despite improvements in goods and services tax collection in recent years, some states need significant fiscal reorientation. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Review Committee in 2018, for instance, had recommended a ceiling of 20 per cent debt to GSDP for states. The data, however, suggests that 12 states had debt to GSDP in excess of 35 per cent. In 2023-24, while around 24 states had debt stocks worth over 20 per cent of GSDP.

The proliferation of subsidies for electoral gains is one of the reasons for rising debt levels in states. In the short run, this may not affect their capacity to borrow because the market doesn't differentiate much among states based on their fiscal capacity primarily due to the belief that the Centre will ultimately step in to provide support. However, sustained higher deficits in states will create risks. Continued high borrowing will keep pushing up the interest burden and with large committed expenditure states will find it difficult to undertake developmental work, affecting India's overall growth and development in the long run. It is thus important that expenditure is significantly rationalised by making state budgets more balanced. Some states, including Himachal Pradesh, have decided to go back to the old pension scheme for state government employees. This will further increase pressure on state finances, which could have been easily avoided. Given the high general government debt and deficit, India requires a broader debate on its finances. Rising competitive populism could seriously undermine the country's long-term potential.

Enabling environments

The differently-abled remain excluded

Indians can justifiably take pride in the country's stellar performance at the 2024 Paris Summer Paralympics with 29 medals — seven gold, nine silver, and 13 bronze — participating in four of the 23 disciplines on offer. The 2024 medal haul represents a significant improvement from the 19 at Tokyo, with India shooting up on the medal tally rankings from 24 to 18. India is only the third developing country to figure among the top 20 in the medal tally at Paris, behind Brazil (at number 6) and Uzbekistan (at number 13). Much of this success has been attributed to robust support from the Government of India, which spent ₹74 crore on this edition of the Paralympics, up from ₹26 crore spent during the Tokyo games, and hired 77 coaches (as against 45 at Tokyo). All 84 athletes representing India were backed by government schemes with access to international coaches and exposure to international events. This year, a recovery centre was established at the Games Village for Indian para-athletes.

This encouraging support and significantly better outcomes at the Paris games point to the need to sustain the momentum to enable India's para-athletes to hit new heights in international events. Though the government generously supports para-athletes at the highest levels, it needs to extend with greater vigour its existing programmes at the grassroots, where, as several medal-winners at Paris attested, private corporate support is sparse. Though supporting para-sports is a mandated activity under the corporate social responsibility rules in the Companies Act, only a handful of large business houses — such as Tata, Reliance, JSW, Mahindra — care to underwrite up and coming para-athletes. Some public-sector banks, the Indian Railways, and the defence services also weigh in.

The relative success at Paris also indirectly highlights a key deficiency in the enabling environment for India's differently-abled people, a fact to which several para-athletes alluded in interviews. Firm statistics are not available but estimates of the proportion of differently-abled people in India vary from 5 to 8 per cent of the population and covers people suffering both mental and physical disabilities. Though the proportion is not large, the absolute numbers in a country with a population of 1.4 billion are substantial. Yet, one of the striking features of Indian public spaces and utilities or public-facing private spaces is the lack of facilities for differently-abled people. Wheelchair-friendly ramps, grab bars, special toilets, public transport and so on are conspicuous by their non-existence. The railways are a good example of the hostile environment, with steps on trains located so high and designed so steeply as to challenge even the mildly disabled. Stops of between two and five minutes at stations along the way make it near-impossible for the physically challenged to disembark safely. Low-floor buses are similarly scarce outside big cities. Few hotels, bar the super-premium ones, offer disabled-friendly facilities, as do few banks, law courts, and secretariats for citizen services. Ironically, then, India demands a higher standard of fitness for its differently-abled people to access basic facilities. As India proudly banks in the warm glow of the success of its para-athletes at Paris, political and corporate leaders may want to apply serious thought towards making the country a kinder, gentler place for differently-abled people.



ILLUSTRATION: ASAY MOHANTY

Genetic destiny or hard work?

... a looming debate on what drives success

"Let's go with this candidate," said a person on our three-member committee tasked to select an Indian Institute of Management director from among the five short-listed candidates.

"Why, what is it about his resume that made you recommend him," I asked.

"I know his father and brother... they are a talented, hardworking family," said the person.

I was uneasy. So, I asked, "Why? Does talent run in families?"

"It always does, hasn't it been proven by modern science that intelligence and other traits are passed through genes? If you don't believe me, please read the book *The Bell Curve*," he said.

I was dumbfounded. I knew 50 years ago everything was accomplished in India (and perhaps the world) through "family connections", and skill and talent were assumed to pass on from father/mother to son/daughter. But hadn't we moved on to assess merit by other means? For example, how relevant is his resume/prior work experience...

What is true is that while all of us have been busy coming to terms with the internet and its related dazzling breakthroughs like artificial intelligence, which we must celebrate as well as be worried about, there has been another and perhaps

an even more dazzling technological wave slowly making its way into our lives and that goes by the initials DNA.

DNA is what chemists call a "molecule" and its full name is deoxyribonucleic acid. Unlike other convoluted chemical names, from which we can safely look the other way, scientists are making claims about DNA that are frightening and difficult to ignore. They say, for example, "DNA is unique to each individual and is passed from parent to child".

If it was just chemical things which were different for each species of animals, birds, or even human types, we would again look the other way, yawn, and let our scientist friends babble away and entertain each other and their conference attendees. But right now bigger claims are being made.

The start of this rancorous debate in this area was the book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (published in 1994). This book made a startling assertion that the intelligence of a person, as measured in IQ tests, is determined largely by the genes that the person inherits from her/his parents. It also made the even more startling assertion that the average IQ score differs



AIT BALAKRISHNAN

across various racial and ethnic groups because of their inherited genes, and (even more controversially) that intelligence, measured by IQ, significantly influences socioeconomic outcomes in American society. The book controversially discusses racial differences in IQ and suggests that society is increasingly stratified by cognitive ability, leading to a "cognitive elite".

While this book caused a lot of controversy, many of us worry that current research in the DNA area may be steered in this awful direction: To "explain" socioeconomic differences in society. On the other hand, DNA-related research shows much promise in helping us understand the specific genetic and chemical basis of specific diseases. This knowledge is making it possible to develop new drugs and therapies targeting specific pathways involved in disease progression.

And, hold your breath, my dear Indian reader, the figure at the centre of many of these innovative breakthroughs is a Tamil boy, born in Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu in 1952: Venkataraman (Venki) Ramakrishnan. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2009 — together with Thomas Steitz and Ada Yonah. Venki Ramakrishnan didn't achieve this feat doing his research in India. He graduated in physics from Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, moved on to Ohio University for his PhD and then worked through multiple US research institutions. His autobiographical book *Gene Machine* is a lovely read.

All this sounds great but among many thinkers there is a growing worry that there is a bigger danger looming — our "modern" belief that effort and hard work built on good education lead to success in life may shift completely away to a belief that only inherited traits matter.

Or could it be the current excitement that the "gene" will be the pivotal trigger to society and nothing else matters may just be like what we have seen in the past: That mastering the structure of the atom (that gave us electronics, synthetic chemicals, etc) and then mastering the byte (that gave us computers, mobile phones, artificial intelligence, etc) were all that were needed to make the world a better place and creating nice benefits for society as a whole. But we have learnt that just as the atom and the byte needed careful societal control to prevent damage to society, perhaps, so does the gene, particularly in debates such as "genes versus merit".

The writer (ajit@rediffmail.com) is devoted to understanding the societal construction of technology

Rate cuts and stock prices

Investors worldwide are positioning themselves for a stock-market surge, encouraged by signals from the US Federal Reserve (Fed) that it will soon begin cutting interest rates. After all, the conventional belief is that stocks rise when the Fed cuts rates. Expectations of a 0.5 per cent cut at this month's Fed meeting are growing, since inflation has cooled significantly, and is now near the Fed's target of 2 per cent. Will rate cuts truly lead to higher stock prices? Disappointingly enough, the historical data shows that interest-rate changes — whether increases or cuts — are not strongly correlated with stock-market performance, as measured against broad market indices like the S&P 500. Let's begin with a recent example: Rate increases.

In mid-February 2022, I had speculated in these columns whether markets would actually rally if the Fed raised rates to combat inflation. This hypothesis contradicted the orthodox belief that markets fall during rate increases and rise during rate cuts. My view was derived from the publicly available data. For instance, between mid-2004 and mid-2006, the Fed raised rates 17 times, yet the S&P 500 gained 46 per cent. Similarly, from December 2015 to December 2020, the Fed raised rates nine times, from 0.25 per cent to 2.5 per cent, and the S&P surged from 1,900 to 2,800. Interestingly, the index wobbled in 2018 toward the end of the three-year rate-increase cycle, not at its outset.

So, what happened in 2022? Amid continued rate increases by the Fed and the ongoing Ukraine conflict, markets did indeed dip for a few months. Yet, defying conventional wisdom, markets rebounded even before the Fed had completed one-third of its intended rate increases. The S&P 500 hit a low of

around 3,500 in October 2022, and then climbed to 4,600 by July 2023; as rates went higher, so did the index. During this period, the Fed raised rates six times, from 3.25 per cent in November 2022 to 5.5 per cent by July 2023. Intriguingly, after the Fed paused its increases in July, the S&P 500 declined until October. From October onward, however, the index surged relentlessly to 5,650 until a sharp correction last week, all while the economy contended with a high 5.5 per cent rate. In a full cycle, the rates rose from 0.25 per cent to 5.5 per cent and were held there for a year. Yet the markets continued to march higher — seemingly to a tune different from the Fed's.

This isn't the first time a presumed correlation between the Fed's rate changes and stock market movements proved unreliable. What about the opposite scenario — do markets rise when the Fed cuts rates? Here too, the relationship is weak. The most striking example comes from 2008. In January 2008, the Fed cut rates from 3.5 per cent to 3 per cent following a market crash. By March, Bear Stearns collapsed, prompting another 0.75 per cent rate cut to 2.25 per cent. In April, the market spiralled downward between June and September, when Lehman Brothers collapsed in September.

By October, rates were slashed to 1.5 per cent, then to 1 per cent, and by December, down to 0-0.25 per cent. Despite these drastic cuts, the 2008 crash ranks among the most severe in modern history, with the S&P 500 plummeting 50 per cent from January to March, precisely when the rate fell from 3.5 per cent to zero. Far from boosting the market, the cuts could not even prevent a crash. The same pattern had occurred in 2001: The Fed cut rates from

5 per cent to 1.25 per cent by November 2002, yet the S&P 500 dropped from 1,530 in August 2000 to 794 in September 2002, only recovering after March 2003.

Why, then, do many persist in believing that interest-rate movements are strongly correlated with market performance? Perhaps it's intuitive: If money — the lifeblood of the market — becomes more expensive, it seems logical that markets would falter. Yet, other factors are at play, explaining why stocks can rise even as rates increase. Fundamentally, the Fed raises rates in response to robust economic growth (which may manifest as higher inflation). In a strong economy, corporate profits grow, leading to rising stock prices. Stocks are less concerned with conventional wisdom than with corporate fundamentals and valuation. As the economy expands, the Fed increases rates incrementally. If growth remains solid, corporate profits rise, lifting stock prices. A strong economic growth rate can prompt further rate increases. This cycle of rising rates and rising stock prices illustrates that the Fed often follows the economic cycle — it doesn't lead it.

Could the unthinkable happen now, that is, could markets fall when rates are cut? It's possible, under the right conditions, which is slower growth. When the Fed stops raising rates, it can signal that economic growth is already slowing (that Fed lags, not leads), which could hurt corporate profits, and, consequently, stock prices. Sometimes, even rate cuts can't reverse a downturn if prior hikes were too aggressive. When growth slows — whether due to rate hikes or other factors — markets react negatively. Of the many forces shaping stock prices, economic growth, corporate profits, and valuation are paramount. These deserve more attention than interest-rate movements alone.

The writer is founder of www.moneylife.in and a trustee of the MoneyLife Foundation. @moneylife



IRRATIONAL CHOICE  
DEBASHIS BASU

April, rates were further reduced to 2 per cent, yet the market spiralled downward between June and September, when Lehman Brothers collapsed in September.

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called him, "Daddy Vee".

If the campaign was hard, the presidency itself was brutal. The problems came fast and furious — a "Quasi-War" with France, wandering military, a fertile press and recurrent yellow fever epidemics that made Philadelphia, the second capital of the United States, even more toxic than it already was. Small wonder that Adams went on extended vacations back to Massachusetts.

One trip lasted so long that his supporters were unsure if he was coming back — an observer complained that the invisible president was giving off an "air of abdication".

The members of Adams's own Federalist Party were not much better. Alexander Hamilton constantly intruded against Adams, hoping to run a foreign policy all his own, and perhaps to create a standing army that would report to him. Happily, the leaders of the early republic survived all of the back-stabbing and mudslinging to build a better, more coherent nation.

Adams was at the centre of that success. Chervinsky gives him credit for beating back the threats and enlarging the office. Toward the end of his term, he found the authority that was implied, but not entirely understood, inside the presidency. He fired disloyal Cabinet members and developed a principled, forceful diplomacy. Impressively, he had few of the racial anxieties that made life so complicated for his successor. He supported the formerly enslaved in what would become Haiti, then in the throes of

a revolution against European powers. (Jefferson reversed this policy, and no US President would acknowledge Haiti's independence until Lincoln.)

Chervinsky reminds us that Adams set important precedents in his failures as well as his triumphs. Specifically, he showed great character when it became clear that he had lost the election of 1800 to his own V-P. That was a bitter pill to swallow, but he accepted his defeat — another precedent — and quietly went home on the day Jefferson was sworn in. Once again, he valued his country above himself.

As recent events have proved, that is not always the case. Adams may have served only a single term, but it was a term of consequence, marked by a peaceful exit from the office he had fought so hard to win. He survived a humiliating vice presidency and four years of slings and arrows (from friends as well as enemies) to leave his country in a stronger place. It is hard not to be reminded of another single term of consequence — the one we are in.

The reviewer is a distinguished lecturer at Macaulay Honors College of the City University of New York and the author of Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days to Washington ©2024 The New York Times News Service

The US veep and destiny



BOOK REVIEW

TED WIDMER

Given the excitement around Tim Waz and JD Vance. It is a useful preview of how the vice-presidential campaign will unfold. Adams has long felt those saddled with the task. As John Adams, the very first veep, wrote to his wife, Abigail, in 1793, "My Country has in its wisdom contrived for me, the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived".

Still, it mattered to be V-P, especially as George Washington's presidency was winding down. By then, Adams had already done a great deal to will the United States into existence, helping Thomas Jefferson draft the Declaration of

Independence and arranging a loan from Europe to sustain the new republic.

But Adams seemed to shrink during his vice presidency. Washington paid him little mind and excluded him from cabinet meetings. Except for rare moments when he might break a tie in the senate, he mostly languished on the periphery, unnoticed except by those who made fun of his pudgy frame. It was not a great time for "His Rotundity".

All of that changed one night in March 1796, when Washington informed Adams that he would soon step down. It was their first real conversation in seven years. Suddenly, everything was up in the air, and Adams realised, as Kamala Harris recently said, that destiny had taken a hand.

The historian Lindsay M Chervinsky revisits this moment in *Making the Presidency*, her timely account of how Adams ascended to the highest office in the land and transformed it. She does not offer a full biography of Adams — for that, David McCullough and Joseph J Ellis remain essential — but she deftly probes the way the second American president

wielded power in the final four years of the 18th century.

Chervinsky, the director of Washington's library at Mount Vernon, is a capable guide to the vertiginous highs and lows of brief, turbulent presidency. She argues that Adams did a great deal to steer the balky ship of state toward a safe harbour. It is healthy to be reminded, in another precarious moment, just how fragile democracy felt during the twilight of Washington's presidency. The transition to Adams was far from guaranteed, and from the moment he took office, the vultures were circling.

Washington had run unopposed, twice, but his departure released pent-up energies. With very little time to plan, Adams and Jefferson entered the field in the first competitive presidential election. It quickly turned vicious. There was sludgery on both sides, and foreign interference as well (the French tried to help Jefferson). Adams prevailed, but the system had many kinks to be worked out, including the awkward fact that Jefferson became vice-president (or as Adams

# THE ASIAN AGE

9 SEPTEMBER 2024

## To ensure a better future in J&K, reach out to its youth

**E**lections are the time for political parties to amp up their rhetoric, and the three-phase elections to the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, scheduled to start on September 18, aren't any different. Rhetoric is all about catching the attention of the target community, and hence it is not often subjected to tests of fact. However, a uniform line of argument would do well, especially for the BJP, which is running the Union government. Any thought shared in public by its senior leaders on the future of Jammu and Kashmir and the relations with Pakistan will be keenly watched for.

Home minister Amit Shah and external affairs minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar would emphatically rule out the possibility of improving any kind of relationship with Pakistan — be it resumption of talks for trade or those on the Line of Control. Mr Shah has said there is no scope for parleying with the Pakistani government until terrorism is completely eradicated. He has, however, expressed the Centre's willingness to engage with the youth of the Union Territory. Mr Shah's statement is aligned with the position of the Government of India expressed in no uncertain terms by EAM Jaishankar that the "era of uninterrupted dialogue with Pakistan is over".

**Rajnath Singh conceded the value of improving relations. 'We want improved relations with Pakistan,' he said, and added, 'but, first of all, they should stop terrorism.'**

The two ministers were restating what has been the NDA government's approach to Pakistan over the last 10 years, except for the very short period when there were signs of the government making an attempt to reach out to the Pakistani government. In fact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a short, unannounced visit to Pakistan in 2015 and met then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, raising hopes of a thaw in the relations. The dynamics of Pakistan's internal politics and the continued support it has extended to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir ensured that all those hopes died a premature death. India has made no overtures to the neighbour since and in fact hardened its position instead.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh has toed the government line, albeit with a slight difference in tone. While the home minister and the external affairs minister have made it appear as if the neighbour does not exist for India, Mr Singh acknowledged its presence and conceded the value of improving relations. "We want improved relations with Pakistan," he said, and added in the same breath, "but, first of all, they should stop terrorism."

The BJP has every right to put its policy on Pakistan down in black and white. It may be remembered that the NDA government under Atal Behari Vajpayee had also expressed its willingness to have a better relationship with Pakistan but that was ended by the Pakistani misadventure in Kargil. The Modi government's initial overtures were never returned in the same measure either. It is at this point that Mr Shah's statement on the willingness to initiate talks with the youth of the valley becomes significant. However, Mr Shah and the government should not forget the fact that hundreds of Kashmiri youth who were apprehended during their protests against the Union government's hollowing out of Article 370 are still languishing in jail. A beginning can be made by taking a relook at their cases. Hardline positions hardly take a political cause ahead. As the defence minister suggested, an acknowledgement of ground realities will be a great way to start the process.



## 'Act East' policy demands relook, but N-E peace key



**Manish Tewari**  
State of the Union

**T**he Act East Policy (AEP) has been one of New Delhi's most enduring and consistent foreign policy strategies since the end of the Cold War. Initially launched as the Look East Policy, it primarily focused on strengthening economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asian nations. Over time, this approach has evolved into a broader strategy, including deeper engagements with East Asian countries like Japan and South Korea, and addressing the economic and strategic needs of India's Northeastern region by promoting cross-border economic ties. However, recent political instability in neighboring Bangladesh and Myanmar has raised serious concerns about the policy's effectiveness, indicating that a significant reassessment may now be necessary.

A sudden shift in the neighbourhood. The political landscape in Bangladesh underwent a dramatic change with the ousting of Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024. Her administration, long viewed as a stable and friendly neighbour to India, fell amidst widespread protests. For India, which had fostered a strong relationship with Hasina's government, this development marks a significant setback. This shift has strained diplomatic relations between the two countries and cast doubt on several critical infrastructure and connectivity projects vital to India's strategic interests.

The immediate fallout from this political turmoil includes the suspension of train services and the stoppage of goods and people moving across the India-Bangladesh border. A more pressing concern for India is the possibility that the new leadership in Bangladesh might shift its alignment towards China or even, ironically, Pakistan

whose deprivations in the first place led to the creation of Bangladesh. These are nations with which India shares complex and often adversarial ties. The intricate foreign policy strategies under the current government in Bangladesh, now headed by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, may be less willing to sustain the close cooperation that previously existed between Bangladesh and India. Such a shift could result in geopolitical realignment that negatively impacts India's security and economic interests.

Navigating relations with the interior government could be difficult for India. The Yunus administration has hinted at a potential reevaluation of the bilateral relationship, suggesting that Memorandums of Understanding previously signed with India might be reviewed or even cancelled if they are deemed unfavorable to Bangladesh. This, along with increased scrutiny of Indian-funded projects and renewed discussions on contentious issues like the Teesta water-sharing treaty, highlights the complexities India faces in preserving its strategic interests in the region.

The dilemma of engagement in Myanmar: The strategic and economic significance of Myanmar to India is considerable, especially for advancing India's influence in Southeast Asia through the Act East Policy and strengthening ties with ASEAN countries. However, political turmoil in Myanmar, stemming from the military's takeover in February 2021, poses a serious challenge. On Feb. 8, 2024, the Myanmar government decided to terminate the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar after fencing the border between the two countries. This decision, along with Myanmar's decision to support the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar after fencing the border between the two countries, poses a serious challenge. On Feb. 8, 2024, the Myanmar government decided to terminate the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar after fencing the border between the two countries.

The India-Myanmar-Thai trilateral Highway, linking Manipur in India's northeast with Mae Sot in Thailand via Man-

**The Yunus administration has hinted at a potential reevaluation of the bilateral relationship, suggesting that MOUs previously signed with India might be reviewed or cancelled if deemed unfavorable to Bangladesh.**

delay and Bagan in Myanmar, is a crucial project. While about 70 per cent of the highway has been completed, progress on the remaining 30 per cent has stalled due to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. Similarly, the ambitious trans-Asian railway link intended to connect New Delhi with Hanoi, has made little tangible progress. Furthermore, the future of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, designed to link the eastern Indian port of Kolkata with Sittwe in Myanmar's Rakhine state by sea, is also in jeopardy. The recent capture of Palaw by the Arakan Army has further complicated the situation, casting doubt on the completion of this strategically vital project.

The northeast region of India is of immense strategic importance due to its unique geographic location, bordering Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bangladesh. This pivotal position makes the region a gateway to Southeast Asia, placing it at the heart of India's AEP. However, ongoing ethnic tensions in Manipur, often referred to as India's "gate way" to Southeast Asia, threaten to derail India's ambitious plans under the AEP. These conflicts have far-reaching implications for the Northeastern region, which has historically been plagued by ethnic strife and insurgencies. The instability spilling over from neighboring countries, coupled with the influx of refugees from Myanmar and Thailand, poses a significant challenge for India. Addressing these needs is essential for ensuring that the Act East Policy continues to advance India's strategic interests.

The Indian government's decision to suspend the Free Movement Regime,

which facilitated the movement of people across the India-Myanmar border, not only underscores security concerns but also disrupts the social and economic lives of border communities. For India's vision of a "shared destiny" under the AEP to succeed, stability in the northeastern states is essential. The future of the AEP extends beyond improving infrastructure; it hinges on fostering peace and trust both within the region and with neighboring countries. Navigating a new reality: Given these challenges, it is evident that India's Act East Policy needs a comprehensive reassessment. The policy's core components of economic engagement, connectivity projects and strategic alliances are increasingly strained by shifting political and security dynamics in the region. The recent political upheavals in Bangladesh and Myanmar, combined with persistent tensions in India's Northeast, highlight the need for a more adaptable and nuanced approach. India must reevaluate its traditional alliances and explore new strategies that include broader political engagement, humanitarian considerations, and a recalibrated approach to regional cooperation. By doing so, India can better protect its interests and ensure that the Act East Policy remains effective in an increasingly volatile environment.

India's Act East Policy has the potential to significantly alter the geopolitical and geo-economic landscape of the region, especially in light of rising Chinese influence. Rooted in the principle of a "shared destiny," the AEP emphasizes equal roles for all nations. The northeastern region of India is crucial to this policy, and its future success is heavily dependent on achieving peace, stability and development in these states. Addressing these needs is essential for ensuring that the Act East Policy continues to advance India's strategic interests.

The writer is a lawyer, and former Union Minister. Views expressed are personal. Twitter handle: @manishantewari.

## LETTERS WHITHER POLITICS?

Last week, Bangladesh religious affairs adviser A.F.M. Khalid Hossain said "harassment of Hindus is not communal, but political". If this is so, then why a Hindu youth, Utsab Mandal, who had no political identity at 19 years of age, was killed, that, too, in front of the 560 model mosques built by Hindus is all communal. If it is not, why are the Hindu temples being attacked while the mosques aren't? If people are outraged by the rule of Sheikh Hasina Wajed, how about the 560 model mosques built by her? Why have those been left unscathed? Singer Rahul Anand's house was attacked, too, and he was evicted, even though he was not involved with Awami League politics. And if this be politics, why justify that politics?

**Sitangshu Guha**  
Dhaka

## CONSCIENCES DEAD

**WE ARE SUCH** a dead lot. The whole nation was out on streets protesting the horrific rape-murder in a Kolkata hospital, but since that, has failed to stir our consciences as Ujjain witnessed an equally shameful act on the streets in broad daylight. Our conscience has gone in the bin as instead of helping the victim the passersby kept busy recording the horror on their mobiles (as if they were senseless investigators collecting evidence for the court proceedings). Could someone tell them it is better to stop a crime than to record evidence? Would the homeless passersby have done the same had it been a close relative of them instead of a ragpicker?

**Syed Abdul Monim**  
New Mumbai

## BENGLI MUSLIMS

**THE VULNERABILITY** of Muslims increases manifold if they are Bengali speaking. Sabir Mallik, a Bengali speaking migrant scrap collector from West Bengal, was lynched in Haryana. Bengali speaking migrants were also attacked in Odisha. Even a chief minister is now giving hate speeches against Bengali Muslims. Recently, the CM of Assam said that he would take sides against "Myra Muslims", a discriminatory euphemism for the minority Bengali Muslim community in the state. Mr Himanta Sarma Biswal also said that he would not let them "go to Upper Assam". The Supreme Court of India should take suo motu cognisance of the matter.

**Sujit De**  
Kolkata

**₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Sujit De (Sep. 6). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.**

## Mediation hopes rise in Ukraine

**T**he first signs of the possibility of inclusive and direct talks towards a resolution of the Ukraine war came in the Russian President Vladimir Putin's comments last week in Vladivostok when he said China, Brazil and India will be interested to provide a helping hand in trying to bring about peace.

India's NSA **Ajit Doval** will be travelling to Moscow to take this breakthrough of talk of peace further with a peace plan showcasing PM Narendra Modi's readiness to play the mediator in the Ukraine war that has raged for 30 months without an end in sight.

India and China have a key role to play in resolving the conflict, says Italian PM **Giorgia Meloni** and her words on the subject carry some weight as Europe has far greater stakes in the war ending. Only when peace returns can Europe's energy resources, mostly imported from Russia, find a measure of security as the sanctions on buying energy from Moscow would have to end too.

Europe must seize the mood of the moment when peace in Ukraine is being talked about to get Mr **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** to the table. How the US views the war in Europe is a riddle as currently its aid to Ukraine to fight may have helped the military-industrial complex much more than the billions of dollars poured in to buy armaments, missiles and planes.

It is not certain that Ukraine's PM **Zelenskyy** views India's peacemaker initiative without scepticism as he has had an axe to grind over the lack of support from India in UN resolutions condemning Russia's invasion and the continued bombing of his country.

It might have been a brilliant war strategy on the part of Russia to take some of Russia's land in the Kursk province, but it cannot be much of a bargaining chip if talks are not initiated soon as Russia's counter in the Donbas is inflicting more territorial losses now.

Both countries need no reminding that peace is always the desirable ideal, no matter the history of the region. If appears the mediators named by Mr Putin have the best chance of convince him into calling it off as Ukraine and its Western allies find themselves in a stalemate with Russia in a sharply bipolar world.

## THE ASIAN AGE

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## Bhopinder Singh



## Trying to breach the glass ceiling: Can gender be made irrelevant?

**T**he countries of the Indian subcontinent can take pride in putting women leaders in high office long before the rest of the world. The world's first elected woman Prime Minister was Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1960. India's "Iron Lady" Indira Gandhi emerged soon afterwards, in 1966. Other pathbreakers in the region were the first elected female Prime Minister in a Muslim country, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan in 1988, and were followed by Bangladesh's Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed in 1991 and 1996, respectively. Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi has been the virtual leader of the masses, though her victory in 1990 was disallowed and her party took over as late as 2015. Even Nepal has had Bidevi Devi Bhandari as its President in 2015.

However, the global champion of democracy and all kinds of progressive movements, the United States of America, has not had a woman in the top job. While women have made it to the posts of vice president (Kamala Devi Harris), secretary of state (Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton) and Speaker of the House of Representatives (Nancy Pelosi) and even been presidential candidates (Hillary Clinton won nearly three million more popular votes than Donald Trump in 2016, but still lost in the electoral college)

— they didn't make the final cut for the Oval Office in P.T.U.S. The United States remains amongst the 113 countries worldwide that have not had women in the top position.

One of the metastasising theories of gender discrimination and sexism that is frequently bandied about is that countries with strong militaristic culture and nuclear warfare/whirl are naturally averse to women at the top. This holds good not just for the United States but also for Russia and China. Implicit in this flawed logic is that women would not be "tough enough" in difficult situations, that might lead to declaring war. But this theory is negated by the examples of Israel's Golda Meir (1969-1974), the United States' Margaret Thatcher (Falklands War, 1982). So many others, such as Angela Merkel, Jacinda Ardern, Tsai Ing-wen, etc. held their own and navigated their countries with a rare combination of nerves of steel, decisiveness, and empathy, all rolled in one.

It is in this backdrop that Hillary Rodham Clinton reignited the hope of breaking the "highest, hardest glass ceiling" at the recent Democratic National Convention in Chicago last month. Putting on Kamala Harris to defeat the ultra-macho appeal of Donald Trump, Hillary recalled the collective journey of American women:

"Together, we've put a lot of cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling... When a barrier for one of us, it clears the way for all of us... She then alluded to a so-far missing piece of the American Dream to suggest: "On the other side of that glass ceiling is Kamala Harris raising her hand and talking the oath of office as 47th President of the United States." However, it is an anomaly that hasn't been pitched aggressively enough by Kamala herself. Perhaps she doesn't need to state the obvious and may tacitly pitch the same in the final stages to win over the fence-sitters. Right now, she is focusing on the winning with the "prosecutor versus felon" theme that reiterates the fact that Mr Trump has been formally indicted in multiple jurisdictions and convicted of 34 felonies, it seems to be working, as she is statistically ahead.

Earlier, "electability" had been a code phrase for convenient male preference. But with a reassuring record as vice-president in the shadow of a perceptibly shaky President Joe Biden, Kamala has already started getting under the skin of Donald Trump with statements like: "In those roles I took on perpetrators of all kinds: predators who abused women, fraudsters who ripped off consumers, cheaters who broke the rules for their own gain. So, hear me when I say, I know Donald Trump's type". This has left Mr Trump with no choice but

to up the ante and create even more space for "self goals".

Mr Trump personifies the term "abuse of power", and history is instructive that the more power he has been afforded, the more power (especially women) he has hurt. In a wounded and polarised world, Kamala Harris brings personal experience of so many societal prejudices — race, ethnicity, immigration, religion, colour and gender. She could affirm for gender, like President Barack Obama managed for race.

Conversely, voting for Kamala on account of her gender is also sexism — therefore, traction for her should really be because she is inherently more qualified, competent and likely to govern America more effectively. In an ideal world, gender should not be a part of the conversation. By not over-emphasising gender, Kamala is confidently pitching her opinions, policies and experiences — this by itself should be enough, though sadly isn't, given the regressive beliefs of some people. Therefore, the importance of shattering that glass ceiling. Eventually, how Kamala Harris will fare as President will have nothing to do with gender.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general and a former lieutenant-governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry.



**Periodic reset**  
India needs to engage with ASEAN consistently on trade and security

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Brunei and Singapore last week was part of a deliberate focus on India's "Act East" policy by the government in its third tenure. Not since 2018, when ASEAN leaders were in India for a summit and the Republic Day parade, has New Delhi reached out to the region in such a short time span. He is expected to travel to Laos for the ASEAN-India summit, the Philippines, and Indonesia, later this year. In addition, New Delhi has laid out the red carpet for the Prime Ministers of Vietnam and Malaysia. The message to reconnect with each of the countries in South East Asia, and even forge new ties, is well considered and overdue. Mr. Modi's visit was the first bilateral visit by any Indian Prime Minister. This neglect of ties with a country that has strategic ties with the U.S., trades ties with China, and is situated in the middle of ASEAN is telling. While India's trade with the ASEAN region has doubled in the past decade, it has actually declined with Brunei, with India ramping up its oil imports from Russia since 2022. The two sides do not have a strategic partnership, although the leaders discussed defence and geo-strategic issues, and Mr. Modi took a veiled jab at China. The two sides renewed their space cooperation, which hinges on Brunei hosting an ISRO station, and it remains to be seen whether other discussions on trade, investment and energy cooperation will bear fruit. In Singapore, the spotlight during Mr. Modi's visit was on semiconductors, given that Singapore is a major player in all parts of the electronics supply chain. As India seeks more technical expertise and investment in rare earths and chip making and Singapore seeks to defray some of the growing land and labour costs of its semiconductor industry, the two could make a perfect fit, also de-risking the process from U.S.-China-Taiwan tensions, American protectionist policies and Chinese predatory practices. This could also correct the drop in Singapore's FDI levels into India.

Hopes for more intense exchanges in technology, trade and investment can be realised only if the India-ASEAN engagement is more consistent. India's exit from the ASEAN-led RCEP in 2019 was a blow, and cuts India out of a large regional FTA. While New Delhi has refused to revise the decision despite ASEAN's entreaties, it must update the 2009 AITIGA and the 2005 CECA with Singapore. India's commitment to "ASEAN centrality" on all strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific has been warmly received, but it needs to coordinate more closely on geopolitical issues including Myanmar, the South China Sea and Quad engagement. While India's historical ties with the region date more than a millennium, modern ties need a periodic reset, as governments have carried out in the past with the "Look East" policy (1992) and the Modi government's Act East policy (2014).

**Policy paralysis, a weakened public health sector**

The public health needs of a population are diverse and perception and prioritisation vary across the social strata. Public health policies are those decisions made by the government based on the resources available to address people's health needs. Public health needs include those felt by people (felt needs) based on their lived experiences and those projected upon (projected needs) them by experts – the architects of public health policies. The recent Union Budget has been critiqued for its inadequate focus on the social sector, specifically the public health sector. Public health policies of the government in the last decade indicate that there has been a severe paralysis when it comes to public health policies without any real prescription that addresses the felt needs of people.



**Mathew George**  
Head of the Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod, Kerala

**Felt needs in public health**  
Public health needs can be broadly categorised into three groups: First, are the diseases of poverty such as tuberculosis, malaria, undernutrition, maternal death, bouts of illnesses due to food and water-borne infections leading to typhoid, hepatitis, and diarrhoeal diseases faced by the poor and the vulnerable. These problems attain greater significance as attempts to prevent these also pose challenges of addressing livelihood and are non-negotiable from a rights perspective.

Second are the problems of the middle class and those better off on issues that are related to environmental pollution – air, water, waste management, lack of drainage facility and failure to ensure healthy foods and eateries that pose threat to everyday lives, most of which are due to poor infrastructure development and poor market regulations. The list goes on if we add road traffic accidents, climate change and the rise of chronic illnesses. These are also applicable to the first group but may not figure within the hierarchy of priorities.

Third, and the most popular needs in public health, are the curative care needs of a population. Provisioning of curative care is the most critical and controversial policy question in public health. The three levels of curative care envisaged are primary, secondary and tertiary. The poor and the vulnerable rely on primary health-care institutions of the public sector for primary-level care, as it is the most affordable and is closer to their places of residence. Secondary-level care was historically neglected and is still inadequate against population norms. Shortage of infrastructure including health professionals in these facilities aggravates the problem. Tertiary-care needs for curative care among the poor are the focus of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) under Ayushman Bharat.

A history of Indian public health policies in the last decade shows that the National Rural Health

Mission, which was started in 2005, and followed by the National Health Mission (NHM) of 2013, were a clear departure from the then existing National Health Policy of 2002, which proposed the commercialisation of health care. It was the NHM's focus on strengthening public sector health care through architectural correction that has revived an otherwise sinking health system after the reform period of the 1990s. Efforts were taken to follow the principles of primary health care while strengthening the institutions of primary health care by implementing the national health programmes through them, thus building goodwill and trust among the people about public sector health care. This was obvious from the health infrastructure available in India, which was reported as 1,53,655 sub centres, 25,308 primary health centres (PHC) and 5,396 community health centres (CHC) as per the rural health statistics, 2015. The impetus created by NHM would have been capitalised had subsequent policies strengthened the secondary- and tertiary-level health care in the public sector. Instead, the focus has shifted entirely on publicly funded health insurance schemes (PFH) such as the PMJAY under Ayushman Bharat since 2018. PFH schemes were implemented by the governments of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and others as an add-on to the overall strengthening efforts under the NHM then.

**Private health care, the real beneficiary**  
The real beneficiary of PFH schemes in the Indian context is private sector health care. First, a health insurance cover ideally implies covering all health-care expenses, globally. It is unique that India's health insurance scheme covers only hospitalisation expenses under the scheme. This is based on the market logic that if 50 crore people (2 crore households are the beneficiaries of PMJAY) are enrolled in the scheme, only 2.5 crore people will have an actual need for hospitalisation annually as per epidemiological data.

Further, the outsourcing of secondary and tertiary-care services to the private sector at market rates under the scheme is an open acknowledgement by the government of its failure and a lack of intention to strengthen secondary- and tertiary-level public sector health care in the country. The implication is that the remaining 100 crore population who are not covered under any government schemes are forced to have highly commercialised medical care for their illnesses, incurring an expenditure at market rates. Thus, by monopolising the market for health care, private hospitals pretend to offer services to the government at market rates, at the same time ensuring that the remaining two-thirds of the population must depend on them by making sure that public sector health care is weakened.

The last nail in the coffin of the public health system is the recent transformation of sub centres (PHCs) and CHCs into health and wellness centres (HWC) in February 2018. The highlight was to declare that 1,50,000 HWCs were established as new institutions in rural areas, when numbers more than that were already in existence (RHIS 2015). The proposal was to have a community health officer, expected to render treatment to a rural population by completing a bridge course. This has transformed the original mandate of sub centres from rendering outreach activity to that which provides curative care. Doctoring gained its acceptance through its act of diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. Instead, the proposal to equip a community health officer to practise medicine minimally results in the new professional becoming a dignified chemist. The failure to offer curative care in its entirety by any institution will shatter the trust of people in those institutions.

The latest of this was in a 2023 directive to rename all the HWCs (sub centres, PHC and CHC) to 'Ayushman Arogya mandir'. One could not find any clear justifications for this name change. Several questions arise on how this name is of significance to a non-Hindi speaking population. How does the term 'mandir' resonate as the title of a secular health institution?

**Threat to public health system**

Public health challenges are diverse in a country such as India and there is a need to address these across social groups without fail. For the vulnerable and the poor, prevention programmes and health promotion activities become a luxury when their day-to-day livelihoods are not addressed. It is basic primary- and secondary-level curative care that are their felt needs in public health. Historically, institutions of primary health care were entrusted with this responsibility and were delivering preventive and promotion activities close to their home, by making it culturally and contextually relevant.

The major curative care challenge posed across the country is the loss of trust towards health-care providers (private sector due to commercial interests) and public sector due to overcrowding of health care with inadequate infrastructure due to low provisioning.

The government has slashed the limbs of the public health system by not strengthening secondary- and tertiary-level care in the public sector and instead favouring the growth of the private sector. Finally, the institutions of primary health care – the lifeline of India's public health system – were weakened by projecting them as curative care centres, for popularity and branding, without acknowledging their purpose in health programmes and their interconnections with grassroots-level institutions of health care.

*The views expressed are personal*

**Wide open**

With more state support, Indian Paralympians are on a high

Following the disappointment of several near-misses in the recent Olympics, India's best-ever show of 29 medals for an 18th place finish in the Paris Paralympics is reason to celebrate. From four medals and 43rd spot in Rio 2016 to 19 medals and 24th rank in Tokyo 2020, this is a significant ascent and depicts the Indian Paralympians' constant improvement in sync with the increased government support. Since the challenges are different, it may not be fair to compare the achievements of the para-athletes with those in the Olympics. India's performance in the 2024 Paralympics reflects its para-athletes' quest for excellence despite the unimagineable odds they face. Of the seven gold, nine silver and 13 bronze medals, the majority (17 in all), came from para-athletes. The javelin throwers and high jumpers contributed the most, with four medals in different categories classified as impairments. Para-badminton (five), para-shooting (four), para-archery (two) and para-judo (one) completed the country's medal tally. Shooter Avani Lekhara and javelin thrower Sumit Antil, who set a new Paralympic record, defended their gold medals, high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu claimed his third successive medal, 17-year-old armless archer Sheetal Devi became the youngest Indian to win a medal and Harvinder Singh won the first para-archery gold.

Preethi Pal bagged India's first-ever track medal as she picked up a bronze in women's 100m T35 event followed by another in 200m and Kapil Parmar captured India's first para-judo medal. Nagaland's 40-year-old Army man Hokato Sema, who shone as a shot putter despite losing a leg in the line of duty in the prime of his youth, cornered glory to underscore the indomitable human spirit. Overall, the spectators' response to the Paralympics 2024 was heartwarming – organisers sold over two million tickets for the Games. The Stade de France witnessed a near-capacity crowd thronging the iconic venue daily to watch and support the heroic efforts. It was a huge encouragement for the 4,400-plus para-athletes competing in 549 medal events in 22 sports and might contribute to the growth and acceptability of para-sports. It complemented the French authorities' attempt to make the Paralympics more inclusive, which is apparent from the emblem, mascot, and motto – Games Wide Open – used for the Olympics. The successful conduct of the Paris Paralympics and the Indians' praiseworthy performance should draw more government and corporate support for these athletes in India to ensure improved shows on the field and a better life as part of the mainstream.

**With or without Chinese companies is the question**

Notwithstanding the government's coalition status after the 2024 general election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sounded confident in being able to carry forward his intention over the last decade to transform India into a global manufacturing hub. The launch of the 'Make in India' project in 2014, and later the Production Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme to attract domestic and foreign capital, are supposed to be a part of this agenda. The Bharatiya Janata Party's election manifesto had three pages dedicated to manufacturing ambitions across different sectors. The Union Budget for 2024-25 provides a big fillip for the PLI scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing through the allocation of ₹6,125 crore, an increase from around ₹4,499.04 crore in the 2023-24 Budget (₹4,489.46 crore as per revised estimates). The government's focus on building expertise within the country is also visible in the allocation of ₹1,148 crore to research and development in the electronics and IT sectors, up from ₹600 crore in the 2023-24 Budget (₹1,000 crore as per revised estimates).



**Anand P. Krishnan**  
A Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi NCR, and an Adjunct Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi

**'Make in India' and China's presence**  
Interestingly, one of the biggest beneficiaries of the 'Make in India' project in the electronics industry are Chinese smartphone companies. Their operations in India have spanned a decade, during which they have become dominant market players. According to the International Data Corporation's Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone tracker, four of the top five best-selling smartphone brands at the end of 2023 were Chinese, with a combined market share of slightly over 50%.

That Indian consumers are one of the largest users of smartphones with the android operating system (whose market share as of 2023, is about 70%) has worked to the advantage of these companies. Chinese brands contain a range of applications catering to the diverse Indian tastes. These companies have expanded their production with active support from central and State governments. Well-thought out strategies in

introducing separate sales and marketing operations for each individual brand, teamed up with domestic manufacturers to claim benefits of the PLI scheme, and are now increasingly seeking equity partners. This illustrates their adaptability to survive, evolve, and outlast phases of turbulence, while retaining consumer confidence. The promise and the potential in the sheer size of the Indian market, encourages this approach and a willingness to prepare for the long haul. However, while the Indian government ploughs on with measures to dilute and limit Chinese involvement – this includes attracting Taiwanese investments – there remain serious constraints.

Manufacturing of all smartphone components entirely in India, along with a robust supplier network, requires development of ancillary industries, clusters for technological knowledge-sharing, uninterrupted power and water supply, and better working and living conditions for the workforce. India possesses none of these at scale at the moment. Chinese companies also remain reluctant to share technology without clarity on their equity participation.

**Attempts at some Indianisation**  
The entry of Tata Electronics as a contract manufacturer of smartphone devices is a noticeable example of growing Indianisation. It began by taking over the India operations of Wistron, and have covered much ground in their negotiations to acquire Pegatron, both Taiwanese suppliers for corporations including Apple. Meanwhile, Chinese smartphone companies have treaded cautiously, by gradually beginning to comply with the Indian government's directives. They have brought in Indian distributors, streamlined their structure by

introducing separate sales and marketing operations for each individual brand, teamed up with domestic manufacturers to claim benefits of the PLI scheme, and are now increasingly seeking equity partners. This illustrates their adaptability to survive, evolve, and outlast phases of turbulence, while retaining consumer confidence. The promise and the potential in the sheer size of the Indian market, encourages this approach and a willingness to prepare for the long haul. However, while the Indian government ploughs on with measures to dilute and limit Chinese involvement – this includes attracting Taiwanese investments – there remain serious constraints.

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**Ground reality**

The push by India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and Ministry of Commerce and Industry to ease visa norms for Chinese technicians, within days of the new government taking office, underscores the difficulty for the government in conditioning and controlling both Indian and Chinese companies in the short to medium term. The Government's Economic Survey, released a day before the Budget advocates promoting Foreign Direct Investment from China rather than being fixated on the China Plus One Diversification strategy of major multinational companies. Clearly, New Delhi will need to maintain a delicate balance between developing home-grown players and allowing continued Chinese investments and operations of Chinese companies in order to achieve its manufacturing objectives.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**On the boil**  
The already volatile situation in Manipur appears to be worsening with drone and rocket attacks. It is alarming. The anguish of the people is understandable. The ruling party in the State and Centre appear to be unwilling to make course corrections in policies. It is strange why no change in the leadership is being contemplated by the Centre.  
**D. Sethuraman,**  
Brentwood, Tennessee, U.S.

**AI and job loss**  
The ILO's report on job displacement due to AI and automation cannot be brushed aside. There needs to be a balanced integration of automation and human labour. Industry leaders need to implement this, by

giving it much thought.  
**Samir Ali,**  
Mothari, East Champaran, Bihar  
**At the Paralympics**  
India's para-athletes have made the nation proud with their best-ever medal haul. Every medal won shows

struggle, dedication, and the refusal to accept limitations. The message is clear. Perseverance, dedication and talent can overcome even the greatest of challenges.  
**Lakshminarayanan P.,**  
Chennai  
Going forward, many more talented para-athletes need to be identified and encouraged from the school level in India with the help of specially-trained teachers even in regular schools.  
**Dr. V. Purushothaman,**  
Chennai

## the hindu businessline.

MONDAY - SEPTEMBER 9, 2024

## Data clarity

SEBI take on household financial savings clears the air

**T**he Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has done well to review the existing methodology for computing savings by households in the securities market. With its access to granular data on the markets, the stock market regulator has been able to identify shortcomings in the existing methodology and suggest appropriate changes, as discussed by it in a recent working paper. This is much needed because the savings of households are a significant component of the national income and under-reporting of this number could impact policy making.



The data of financial savings of households, disseminated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has not kept up with the changing investor preferences, including new instruments which have found favour with Indian households or the expanding category of investors. This has resulted in understatement of the annual investments by households into securities by ₹1.25 lakh crore in 2022-23 and ₹2.8 lakh crore in 2021-22. The value of securities held by Indian households could be ₹60 lakh crore higher in 2022-23 and ₹63 lakh crore higher in 2021-22, going by SEBI's methodology (total financial assets are 103 per cent of GDP). SEBI's computation appears more comprehensive. The RBI accounts for annual investment by households in securities by accessing data on actual mutual fund investment from SEBI and imputing a certain fixed percentage of primary issuances of equity and debt as household investment.

Similarly, RBI takes only the mutual fund investments of households into account when computing their investment into securities markets. SEBI has added investments of NGOs, charities, trusts and other non-profit organisations serving households. It has calculated net primary and secondary market investment in equity and debt based on actual data at its disposal. It has also included investment by households in REITs, InvITs and Alternate Investment Funds, besides mutual funds, while computing the flow of money, as well as the value of outstanding stock of investments. While computation by the RBI of financial assets in securities could be improved by adopting SEBI's methodology, there could be other gaps in the central bank's data on financial assets of households.

RBI includes legacy investment instruments such as bank deposits, investments in small savings, pension and insurance funds, besides mutual funds. But other investment channels which are in vogue now, such as investments in overseas securities, cryptocurrencies, unlisted shares, portfolio management schemes, etc., are excluded from its computation. It may be a good idea for the RBI to review the entire list of household financial assets. Outstanding stock of household financial assets, which stand at ₹280 lakh crore towards the end of FY23, as per the latest RBI data, will be revised higher to ₹340 lakh crore under SEBI's methodology. These numbers suggest that household net financial savings are not as low as previously estimated; the gap between physical and financial assets is not as large either.

## FROM THE VIEWROOM.

## No room for nuanced discourse

Anjana PV

As human beings, we all form our opinions based on our own experiences, as well as what we hear, read, and observe. The rise of social media has expanded our access to a diverse range of topics, allowing us to speak out, and form opinions more freely. These platforms have become essential spaces for expressing our views, contributing to a world enriched by multiple perspectives but also made chaotic by conflicting narratives.

While social media liberates us to express our opinions, it can also become a battleground where dissenting voices are attacked if they do not align with the majority viewpoint. The discourse on these platforms often seems to exist only in extremes — black or white, with little room for the nuanced, "grey" perspectives that lie in between.

For example, supporting a politician or an ideology on social media often means being expected

to endorse everything they do, without exception. Once you express support, the expectation is to remain unwavering, no matter what actions or behaviours that politician or ideology might exhibit. Because many social media users are accustomed to seeing only stark, polarised opinions, those who express more balanced, nuanced, or "grey" viewpoints often face backlash or mass criticism.

This environment, where opinions are either embraced or attacked, has silenced many individuals from voicing their true thoughts. Although social media has given us new opportunities to speak out, it can also push people into silence, especially if their views differ from the majority. Those who don't conform to popular opinion risk becoming targets of cyberbullying.

Our world should be a space open to a variety of thoughts and ideas, including those that exist in the grey areas. We need to promote and embrace nuanced opinions, recognising that issues are rarely just black or white.

## The case for only two terms

An unlimited terms system doesn't seem to work either to the advantage of PMs, their parties or, by corollary, the country

LINE &amp; LENGTH.



TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

**T**here has been a flood of commentaries on Narendra Modi, on how the last general elections have reduced him in stature, power, authority and ideas. Alongside is the fact that in September 2025 he will complete 75 years and the legitimate question whether he will apply his own "retire at 75" rule to himself.

As far as third terms are concerned, it is important to remember that no leader who has been elected for a third term of five years anywhere in the world has done well.

Whether it is the odd British prime minister in the 18th century, or more recently like Tony Blair, or closer home like Jawaharlal Nehru or Indira Gandhi, or first the Marxists and then Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal and Shriyati Chauhan in MP, the third term has been terrible for them and those they governed.

The exception was Modi who abandoned his third term as Chief Minister to become Prime Minister. But now he, too, has run into the old third term problem. It's early days yet but the signs are not very propitious. One crude way out of this problem is not to get elected a third time, either by stepping down after two terms or by doing what Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin have done — declare yourself head of state and government for life. But this is not an option in India.

And both Messrs Putin and Xi have run into difficulties. Even they aren't denying that.

## TWO TERMS ONLY, PLEASE

That's why I have been writing on and off for the last two decades that we need a constitutional amendment that limits any prime minister or chief minister — but not his or her party — to just two terms. The unlimited terms system doesn't seem to work either to the advantage of prime ministers, their parties or, by corollary, the country.



PAY-OFF. One major advantage of longer terms for leaders is that it would reduce the frequency of general elections

The Europeans also don't have any restriction on how long the head of government can serve. That is why Angela Merkel went on and on. But her chancellorship became increasingly poor to trouble after the first two terms. She was forced into absurd political arrangements that eventually diminished German power. Indeed, people snigger when you mention Germany now.

But the Japanese prime minister can continue indefinitely. In practice, few complete their four-year terms. The Russians used to limit the terms for their presidents but the loophole was that it was for two consecutive terms.

**We should probably opt for a single seven-year term.** That is a long enough time for any leader and his/her party. Beyond that every leader outstays his or her effectiveness.

President Putin thus became prime minister Putin, and then again president Putin after one term as prime minister.

The Americans didn't have any limit till 1947 when they limited the terms of the president to two terms, consecutive or otherwise. Just before this happened Franklin Roosevelt had been elected President four times. But he died before he could complete his fourth term.

The Koreans allow only one term of five years for their president. There is thus a vibrant and constant leadership churn in parties. Not to labour the point, countries that limit the terms of the heads of government and/or state generally avoid embarrassing political stalemates. It's not the best solution but it's better than unlimited terms.

Note that there is no limitation on the parties. All they need to do, as in many countries, is to find a new leader. They always manage to do that.

There is, of course, the French model or exception where the head of state and head of government need not be from the same party. This is the case right now and it's happened only once before at the

end of the 1990s. But they have a very clear division of responsibilities. The French president has a two consecutive term limit since 2008.

## HOW TO DO IT

Assuming, with good reason, that a fixed term is desirable, how can we do this in India? One option would be to have a fixed term for both the legislature and the office of PM/CM of four, six, or seven years. After all, what's the sanctity of 60 months? It's just a random number. It could well be 55, 63, 67 or anything else.

One major advantage of longer terms would be that it would reduce the frequency of general elections. This is something we badly need to do. Another advantage is that a PM and a CM can stop worrying about re-election in their second terms. This is what happens in the US, for example. We should probably opt for a single seven-year term. That is a long enough time for any leader and his/her party. Beyond that every leader outstays his or her effectiveness. It is, after all, a high stress job and no one can perform consistently well.

## E-commerce revolution is not inclusive enough

MSMEs that are not digitally savvy, or are unable to deal with compliance issues, could fall by the wayside

Sabina Dewan

**E**-commerce poses a significant challenge for jobs. At a time when India is confronting an employment crisis, being clear-eyed about how unfolding trends like e-commerce are affecting the quantity and quality of jobs is critical to managing its disruptive effects.

Recently, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal expressed concern over the growth of e-commerce and its employment impact. The minister highlighted the possibility that half of India's market could become part of the e-commerce network in the next decade, a development he described as "a matter of concern".

Forecasts (by agencies such as BCG) suggest that India's e-commerce market will grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.79 per cent between 2024 and 2028. This is almost at par with the US' 11.82 per cent, but it outpaces projected global e-commerce growth of 9 per cent. Online retail in India accounts for approximately a quarter (Invest India estimates) of total organised retail.

As e-commerce grows, a key concern is how it will impact India's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) — an important source of employment, engaging approximately 111 million workers.

Among the touted benefits of e-commerce are its potential to provide businesses market access that extend beyond their physical location to a wider geographical radius, and the prospect of boosting exports.

While there may be true for some businesses, they don't apply to the majority. Given that most of India's businesses are unregistered micro enterprises, they confront several obstacles while engaging in e-commerce.

Rapid adoption of online payment systems and UPI among small businesses is often cited as evidence of the propensity of businesses to take on e-commerce. But meaningfully engaging in e-commerce goes beyond that.

## A LOT OF PAPERWORK

The registration of businesses onto platforms requires a lot of paperwork. There are laborious on-boarding processes and platform fees. How do you make sure your shop/product is competitive and stands out among others? These challenges, and additional barriers like access to finance and procurement, are more pronounced for women who engage in e-commerce as artisans or small-scale producers.

Some evidence suggests that businesses that are online are more productive, but that's because to get online and benefit from it, the business must be a 'better' business to begin with.



E-COMM. Threat to labour protection

For many such small businesses, e-commerce starts and ends with adding some app-based delivery personnel and having a UPI payment system. A consolidation of businesses is inevitable when only the fittest survive. This will squeeze out MSMEs.

Beyond the impact of e-commerce on MSMEs, there are questions around whether e-commerce is generating new jobs? E-commerce will create some new positions within firms, for example, in digital marketing and management. What distinguishes e-commerce from traditional, offline supply chains is the use of technology, data, and information to power decisions and connect stakeholders.

But such job roles call for a higher level of education and skill. For those that acquire relevant education and

skills, e-commerce offers some opportunities, but these jobs are inaccessible to most. Efficiency also means fewer positions.

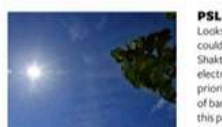
A large share of the e-commerce supply chain relies on platform workers. Estimates trying to quantify e-commerce jobs count this form of task-based work as jobs; they are not. The expansion of e-commerce is creating more opportunities for income generation by breaking traditional jobs into task-based gigs. This kind of 'gigification' means that a growing contingent of workers are self-employed with service contracts that don't provide for labour protections and entitlements.

Women's employment at the e-commerce supply chain, like in traditional supply chains, is gendered. They are more likely to be found in packaging and warehousing than in delivery or high-skilled positions.

E-commerce is on the rise. The genie cannot be stuffed back into the bottle. But it is disingenuous to deny the disruptive effects of this phenomenon on the quantity and quality of jobs in India. Managing the impact is not a matter of more or less regulation, but appropriate and effective regulation to enable businesses and workers to adapt to the pace and scale of disruptions.

The writer is President and Executive Director of the Just Jobs Network

## BELOW THE LINE



**PSL dilemma**  
Looks like even the auto bigwigs couldn't make RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das budge on including electric vehicles (EVs) within the priority sector lending (PSL) ambit of banks. At a banking conference this past week, an astute auto industry honcho tried to pin the RBI Governor down on whether EVs — two-wheelers, three-wheelers and four-wheelers and the creation of charging infrastructure for them — could be included as part of the PSL framework. A case was being made for their inclusion, more so when tractors have already been allowed to be part of PSL. However, the RBI Governor, with his signature calm, dodged the question, reminding everyone that PSL is already replete with claims. Das didn't outrightly dismiss EVs though, noting that "they're important". But here's the

kicker! The RBI Governor highlighted that the benefits of anything that is brought under PSL, need to go down to the lower rungs of society and for now, it's still up in the air.

**New bull at NSE**  
The National Stock Exchange's new bull sculpture unveiled on Friday has made some feel uneasy. "The bull, a symbol of financial strength and upward momentum, has deep roots in stock market history. What makes this sculpture unique is the inclusion of figures surrounding it, each representing diverse participants and contributors to India's progress," said CP Radhakrishnan, Governor of Maharashtra, while inaugurating the event. However, superstition-struck market men think otherwise. According to them, on January 12, 2008, BSE had installed a bronze bull statue on the lines of the New York Stock

Exchange, indicating boom time in the share bazaar. However, after that the market crashed across the globe and it took nearly seven years for the BSE Sensex to regain its peak. With the NSE now installing the "bull" statue, almost in similar market and economic conditions, has the market achieved its peak already, wondered some worried market experts. However, some are hopeful this time the jinx will be broken.

## 'External elements'

In a world where every office mishap is attributed to 'external elements', SEBI's latest explanation about its internal staff unrest takes the cake. Faced with vociferous protests from its employees complaining about a toxic work culture (read: shouting, scolding, and public humiliation), SEBI's response was pure gold: It's all the fault of those pesky 'external elements'! Perhaps, the winds from

the Bandra Kuria Complex? May be even the neighbour's cat? Or even ISI? While the employees claim they're simply tired of public shaming at work, the official stance seems to suggest a conspiracy theory worthy of a Bollywood thriller. Will these external elements ever be unmasked? Perhaps we need a new SEBI task force or a JPC probe to get to the bottom of this.

## Organic rice exports

After businessline raised the issue of irregularities in the export of organic rice, APEDA and the Department of Revenue Intelligence (DIR) swung into action. APEDA came up with measures to check the irregularities, while DIR prevented ships from setting sail. However, a little bird says both agencies lowered their guard last week after having worked "wonderfully" the week before.

Our Bureaus

# Opinion

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2024

## A weak link

Current policies to boost manufacturing need pace; focus on frontier sectors promising

**T MAY SOUND** ironic that manufacturing and agriculture, the two sectors that remained at the centre of India's policy discourse and formulation, both before and after economic liberalisation, have found their shares in the gross domestic product (GDP) shrinking through these periods. Services, however, have made strides with much less ostensible policy support. In the case of manufacturing, the policy objective of raising its weight in the economy is demonstrably stated — the latest goal being to up gross value added (GVA) by manufacturing to a quarter of the economy. As regards agriculture, the proclaimed intent is to make it remunerative for those depending on it for income, while ensuring food surplus for the country. It can't reasonably be expected (or set as a goal) for this primary sector to outpace the economy and raise its share in it.

Manufacturing GVA grew faster than the broader economy in the last four quarters, but only with ample support from a severe post-FY20 stagnation that made the base decidedly favourable, and an incidental dip in input costs. Economists predict a faltering of the sector in the current and the next two quarters, thanks to cost escalation, and a weakening of the base support. To be sure, there isn't any appreciable rebound of the sector yet, which actually ceded ground in recent years. At constant prices, manufacturing GVA was 1.6% of GDP in FY13, and only declined to 1.5, 8% in FY24. The earlier decades weren't any different either. This is despite the fact that support measures for the manufacturing industry over the years have been too many. Currently, these include production-linked incentives, import substitution policies, (canalisation, tariff walls, non-tariff barriers), and concessional corporate tax rates for new units.

In addition, sector-specific support is being provided to investments in frontier areas like solar modules, wind turbines, hydrogen electrolyzers, semiconductor wafers, and in defence production. The reforms in the fuel/non-fuel mining and electricity sectors, larger government funding of infrastructure, asserted new institutional arrangements for infrastructure financing, and re-modelling of public-private-partnerships are expected to help too. So are the steps to ease logistics, labour market rigidities, and land use policies. Moreover, over 4,420 industrial parks/zones are now spread over 560,000 hectares of land, giving manufacturing units the facilities of ease of doing business, and cost mitigation via government-backed common infrastructure, and single-window approvals. The Cabinet has recently approved 12 new "future-ready industrial cities".

While the intent behind these policies can't be lighted, the proximate cause for their sub-optimal outcome is that they have been unequal to the task of addressing the relatively lower level of competitiveness of the domestic industry. More fast-paced reforms of the kind already tried would have produced more tangible results, including in labour-intensive sectors that have underperformed, and now seem to be in graver crisis. Policies that guard against concentration of capacities, and ensuring more even allocation of factors of production ought to be explored.

Downstream industries must not be held hostage to larger upstream units. The current focus on quickly transitioning into higher-end (even capital-intensive) manufacturing cannot be faulted. Future success depends on moving apace with the technological world and innovative zeal. Policy energies are rightly being spent on creating an ecosystem for semiconductor production, making India a global hub of green hydrogen and its derivatives, robotics hardware, and such. Such policies will have multiplier effects, and create jobs across the economic value chain.

## Big Fed rate cuts needed for the young and jobless

**DESPITE WHAT YOU** may have heard from the doomsayers, the US labour market is hardly falling apart at the seams. Layoffs are still extraordinarily low and a report Friday showed that the overall unemployment rate slipped to just 4.2%. This is not an economy that's heading for an imminent recession — far from it. It is, however, a uniquely challenging labour market for recent graduates and other new entrants trying to find their first job. That's reason enough for the Federal Reserve to start lowering interest rates, perhaps even aggressively.

In his closely watched speech in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, last month, Fed Chair Jerome Powell told the public that he and his colleagues wouldn't "seek or welcome further cooling in labour market conditions." Most people took that to mean rising layoffs, which can contribute to a negative feedback loop in economic activity. If people lose their jobs, they'll curb consumption, and those employed in other parts of the economy may eventually lose their jobs as well. That's not happening, and we should all take some comfort in that.

But a labour market can exhibit alarming weakness in other ways as well. In this bizarre post-pandemic economy, companies are adjusting to uncertain times by dramatically cutting hiring, a trend that has been continuing as Fed keeps policy rates at a two-decade high. For the most part, unemployment has moved up over the past six months because adults entering the labour force aren't finding jobs.

About 718,000 new entrants to the labour force (such as high school and college graduates) were unemployed as of August, the most since April 2017. If you add in "reentrants" who have worked before but were recently out of the labour force (such as parents who took time away to focus on kids), the numbers are still well above pre-pandemic norms from 2017-2019. As the overall unemployment rate has climbed to 4.2% from 3.7% at the start of the year, about half of the move has come from entrants and reentrants who don't immediately find work.

If the Fed doesn't take meaningful action, odds are that component of unemployment will continue to rise. We see that in the hires rate — the percentage of new hires per 100 employees — which sits at just 3.3%, a level consistent with the frustrating labour market of a decade ago, when the US seemed to be experiencing a "jobless recovery". We also see it in the swiftly declining numbers of job openings in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

If young people and former stay-at-home parents can't find jobs, that's a problem for the entire labour market. It means that companies are light on the skills and perspectives that, for instance, parents and recent graduates bring. It also means that the next generation of managers is getting a slow start to their careers — an issue that could weigh on their savings and the economy years and decades down the road. That's why Fed policy makers should see the soft labour market for entrants and reentrants as a challenge that demands policy action.

Encouragingly, policy makers are paying attention, with Fed Governor Christopher Waller saying in remarks Friday that "the current batch of data no longer requires patience, it requires action." He also said that he would advocate for "front-loading rate cuts if that is appropriate", though it would depend on data flow.

Inflation has been moderating for two years running, and policy makers have plenty of room to reduce rates just to get to a "neutral" policy stance that's neither restrictive nor stimulative. The challenges facing new workers tell me that they should lean toward "faster" rather than "slower." That means a 50-basis-point rate reduction at the policy meeting later this month. There's no point in waiting for profits to accelerate to kick rate cuts into high gear when so many willing and ready workers are already struggling.



JONATHAN LEVIN

Bloomberg

## REGULATING RESOURCES

POLICY INTERVENTIONS SHOULD BE REVIEWED FOR INDIA TO REALISE AGROFORESTRY POTENTIAL

# Missing the trees for the wood

## SANJEEV SANYAL NAVEEN BALI

Respectively, member, EAC-PM, and senior manager, Koan Advisory Group



but also position itself as a leading exporter. This shift would create significant economic opportunities for farmers, artisans, and wood-based industries, stimulating growth across ancillary sectors and boosting livelihoods.

Agroforestry is also important for augmenting soil organic content (SOC). Enhanced SOC means improved groundwater retention, reduced reliance on irrigation and fertilisers, and increased nutritional value. According to the National Rainfed Area Authority, SOC levels have plummeted from 13% to a dismal 0.3% over the past 70 years. The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education champions agroforestry as a cost-effective remedy for reclaiming India's 97 million hectares of degraded land.

Yet, purely conservation-driven forest policies have fixated on protecting existing forest cover, inadvertently hampering tree cultivation beyond these boundaries. The National Forest Policy of 1988 sought to bolster tree cover but imposed stringent restrictions on tree felling. The landmark Godavari case of 1996 further entrenched these restrictions, stymieing tree felling nationwide. These policies have discouraged private stakeholders, notably farmers, from engaging in timber cultivation. As a result, imports have gone up fourfold since 1996.

**Issues with agroforestry are another example of seemingly well-intentioned policy interventions leading to negative consequences**

Adding to the complexity is a bewildering regulatory maze across states, each with its own set of laws governing tree cultivation, harvesting, and transportation. Madhya Pradesh, for instance, is governed by the MP Lok Vaniki Act 2001, the MP Land Revenue Code, 1959, the MP Adm Jan Jatiyon Ka Sanrakshan (Vrakshon Me Hit) Adhiniyam, 1999, and the MP (Forest Produce) Transit Rules, 2000. Maharashtra, similarly,

operates under the Maharashtra Felling of Trees Act, 1961, the Maharashtra Land Revenue Code, 1966, and the Bombay Forest Rules, 1942. Farmers must navigate this bureaucratic labyrinth, securing permits from a multitude of departments. Further complicating the process are arbitrary species exemptions.

Moreover, to transport timber, farmers must obtain permits from the origin state and comply with the destination state's regulations, often necessitating the hiring of intermediaries. To streamline this, the government of India launched the National Transit Pass System (NTPS) in 2020, an online platform designed to simplify timber transportation. However, adoption has been lackluster, with only 15 states and three Union Territories on board and a mere 86,000 applications processed to date. Around 86% of the

applications have been filed only from three states — West Bengal, Telangana, and Jammu and Kashmir.

To surmount these obstacles, we propose three interventions. First, deregulate high-value native timber species such as teak, gurban, and meranti. This would reduce forest department restrictions and empower farmers to negotiate directly with buyers. Second, leverage blockchain, microchips, and digital tagging technologies to create a transparent, online system for monitoring tree stock and transit; this would prevent illegal felling of forest lumber (the main factor behind all the restrictions). Finally, mandating all states to integrate with the NTPS portal and expand its remit to include felling permits, thereby establishing a single-window clearance system.

These proposed reforms are not without precedent. India has previously liberalised regulations for bamboo and sandalwood to encourage their cultivation and curb illegal felling. The 2017 amendment to the Forest Act, 1927, reclassified bamboo as grass rather than a tree, and Karnataka's Sandalwood Policy of 2022 incentivised sandalwood cultivation on private land by removing restrictions and permitting open market sales. Although sandalwood regeneration is a slow process, these regulatory simplifications are anticipated to increase private sector participation in high-value wood cultivation, reduce illegal felling, and decrease dependence on imported Australian sandalwood, ultimately boosting farmers' incomes.

The above issue with agroforestry is yet another example of seemingly well-intentioned policy interventions leading to negative unintended consequences. This is why all such interventions should be periodically reviewed and adjusted.

Views are personal

## Under the shadow of PMO



### RISHI RAJ

rishi.raj@expressindia.com

**DISTINGUISHED BUREAUCRAT** TV Somanathan recently took over the new Cabinet secretary. An IAS officer of the 1987 batch, Somanathan has held important positions, both at the Centre and the state government of Tamil Nadu. In recent times, he's best known for his role as secretary in finance secretary from where he moved to his new role, which also makes him the head of the civil services.

As KM Chandrasekhar, a former cabinet secretary, writes in his book, *As Good as My Word*, "To reach the top of the civil service is, by and large, a bridge too far for the majority of civil servants. Most servants cannot even aspire to the position." So, Somanathan certainly needs to be applauded for reaching there.

However, stepping back from matters of protocol, it's time to examine whether the role of Cabinet secretary has got undermined over the years with the power shifting to the principal secretary to the Prime Minister. The Cabinet secretary remains the de jure head of civil services but the de facto powers vest with the principal secretary. Is it good, how has it happened, and what is the future of the Cabinet secretary's role?

Since India opted for a parliamentary system of government, the need for a Cabinet secretary was always there. The office has primarily three roles — serving as secretary for all Cabinet agendas and meetings; coordination with other central ministries; and as head of the civil services handling postings and transfers of civil servants.

Unlike the presidential system of government where the President is directly

elected by the people, in the parliamentary system the Prime Minister is the leader of the party that has a majority in the Lok Sabha. Thus, by nature and definition, the PM is the first among equals — primus inter pares. Therefore, while the Cabinet secretary serves the Cabinet, the principal secretary serves the PM.

As in many other spheres, India adopted the system of having a Cabinet secretary from the British. Before the adoption of the portfolio system in the government of India, the Governor-General in Council disposed of all governmental business, the Council functioning as a joint consultative board. As the amount and complexity of the government's business increased, the work of various departments was distributed among the members of the Council, with the Governor-General or the Council collectively dealing with only the more important cases.

This procedure was legalised by the Indian Councils Act, 1861, during the time of Lord Curzon, leading to the introduction of the portfolio system and the inception of the Executive Council of the Governor-General. The secretary of the executive council was headed by the private secretary to the viceroy, but he did not attend the council meetings. Lord Willingdon first started the practice of having a private secretary by his side at these meetings. This practice continued and in November 1935, the viceroy's private secretary was

given the additional designation of secretary to the executive council.

According to Chandrasekhar, the link between the viceroy and his council is the reason why the Cabinet secretariat continues to this day, housed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The humble beginnings of the position is probably why the room of the Cabinet secretary is markedly smaller than that of secretaries in charge of various ministries and departments, he says.

The inherent tension between the offices of the Cabinet secretary and the principal secretary to the PM is also rooted in history. Chandrasekhar writes

**Whether it's piloting policies, making appointments, or coordinating with other ministries, the PMO calls the shots**

that apparently there was a difference of opinion between Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, with the former preferring a strong Prime Minister's Office and the latter a strong Cabinet secretariat. This went to Lord Mountbatten, who left it to Nehru to decide. Ultimately, Nehru decided to retain the Cabinet secretariat. Ever since, there has been a sense of unease between the PMO and the Cabinet Secretariat.

Under Indira Gandhi, the PMO became supreme in all matters, and her principal secretary, PN Haksar, emerged as the most powerful official in the government. The committed bureaucracy, later extended to a committed judiciary, was his brainchild.

During PV Narasimha Rao's time when economic reforms were carried out, the supporting role from the bureaucracy

As the planetary system of government becomes more prime ministerial in nature, the Cabinet secretary has lost much of its powers

came from his all-powerful principal secretary, AN Verma. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, was also the go-to man for resolution of any conflict over policies or between personalities. In fact, during Vajpayee's time, the Cabinet secretariat lost the role of coordination of security matters when the position of National Security Advisor was created and Mishra occupied this post also.

During his first term in office (2014-2019), PM Narendra Modi had two officials in the PMO. While Nripendra Mishra served as principal secretary, PK Mishra was the additional principal secretary. The roles were demarcated with Mishra overseeing policy and PK Mishra in charge of all appointments. In 2019, Mishra stepped down, and Mishra became the principal secretary.

The short point is that whether it's piloting policies, making appointments, or coordinating with other ministries, the PMO calls the shots. Therefore, the balance of power has swung towards the principal secretary, especially under a strong PM. The position of the Cabinet secretary has become more like the upper house of the Parliament — about which it is said that when it agrees with the lower house it's being superfluous, and when it disagrees it's being mischievous.

Of course, personalities matter. The outgoing Cabinet secretary, Rajiv Gauba, did a fine job and protected his turf, and one is sure Somanathan will do no less. However, as the parliamentary system becomes more prime ministerial in nature, the erosion of powers of the Cabinet secretary is given.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Elections in the valley

The expectation is that the upcoming Assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir will bring a semblance of democracy in the Union Territory and enable its people to have a say in their future. Much will hinge on voter turnout and the government that is formed. While there is unanimity among the political parties in restoring statehood, opinions diverge greatly between the Bharatiya Janata

Party and the regional parties on the restoration of Article 370. By fulfilling the legitimate political aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and by desisting from doing anything to fray the delicate cultural cloth that is Kashmiriyat, India can give the people a sense of belonging to the nation and integrate them and validate its democratic credentials and its commitment to pluralism. It must be left to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to decide if the last 10 years is

really a "golden period", as described by Amr Shah. From the election, democracy and the will of the people must emerge the winner.

—G David Milton, Manuhandcode

### OEMs vs dealers

Articles of "Auto dissonance" (FE, September 7), original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) dispatching high volume stocks to their dealers is a common phenomenon in both passenger vehicles and two-wheeler

industries. The festive season is round the corner, so OEMs are banking on it. But having said that, it would always be beneficial if OEMs do not go overboard and pile up huge inventory levels with dealers and force the latter to be bogged down completely. Inventory levels have to be sustainable for dealers and it is non-negotiable that OEMs and dealers are aligned.

—Bal Govind, Noida

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

# Mice study claims to have found long COVID's 'real' perpetrator

The current concept of SARS-CoV-2 pathogenesis is that the inflammation triggered by the virus damages the inner lining of blood vessels and starts a clotting process during which fibrin is deposited in the blood. The new study has flipped this concept, finding that fibrin is reportedly the driver of COVID-19 inflammation

Puneet Kumar  
Vipin M. Vashishtha

In scientific circles, the SARS-CoV-2 virus is well-known as a vasculopathic agent: a damager of blood vessels.

The dominant respiratory symptoms associated with COVID-19 are largely due to clotting and inflammation in the blood vessels of the lungs (rather than the direct involvement of the airways). Its more severe complications, including neurological ones like stroke, are rooted in vasculopathy as well.

### Lack of correlation

Persistent thrombo-inflammation is an important mechanism in a complex web of factors that leads to the myriad symptoms of post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection – a.k.a. long COVID. This condition continues to affect millions of people worldwide even after high population immunity and the significantly lower incidence of severe COVID-19.

This is why blood thinners have played a significant role in managing the complications due to COVID-19. Sadly, researchers have found that these complications aren't correlated with the severity of initial COVID-19, meaning a person can have these complications after mild or even asymptomatic COVID-19 infection.

Large knowledge gaps exist regarding the mechanisms underlying the blood's difficulties with clotting (coagulopathy), their consequences, and treatment options for the resulting inflammation and neuropathology.

### Turned on its head

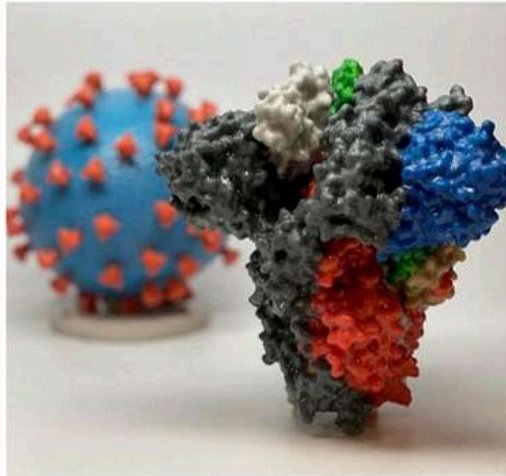
A study published in *Nature* on August 28 provided a new perspective on this scenario and has seeded hope of a breakthrough in managing these cases.

The study was concerned with fibrinogen and fibrin, two components of blood that play important roles in clotting. Fibrinogen is a soluble protein that is formed in the liver and subsequently converted to the insoluble fibrin.

Whenever the body bleeds, the event triggers a carefully controlled cascade of processes that finishes with a clot.

Uncontrolled or abnormally triggered clotting is the root cause of clotting-related complications of several clinical conditions, including those of COVID-19 and long COVID.

The current concept of SARS-CoV-2 pathogenesis is that the inflammation triggered by the virus damages the endothelium, or inner lining, of blood vessels. This triggers the clotting process during which fibrin is deposited in the



A 3D print of a spike protein of SARS-CoV-2 in front of a 3D print of a SARS-CoV-2 virus particle. The spike protein (foreground) enables the virus to enter and infect human cells. NIH/NIAD-BML

blood.

But the new study has turned this concept around. Using a mouse model of COVID-19, the researchers showed that fibrinogen and fibrin actively bind to the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and that this relationship drives the inflammation and the complications in the lungs and the brain. That is, rather than being part of the effect, fibrin is reportedly the driver of COVID-19 inflammation and neuropathology.

**The spike protein-fibrin combo**  
The team has provided stepwise evidence to support its findings. First, the researchers demonstrated the binding of the trimeric spike protein with fibrinogen with significant affinity.

They also showed the spike protein and the fibrinogen become localised in high concentration in the lungs (during an experimental infection with the virus).

The researchers also reported that a specific binding site, called  $727-305$ , on fibrinogen is where the spike protein attaches itself. (Conversely, there were multiple sites on the spike protein where the fibrinogen could bind itself. One in particular, called  $spike_{103}$ , the researchers identified as the "best".) Next, they showed that the interaction of the spike protein with the fibrinogen, and fibrin, leads to an altered clot structure



Whenever the body bleeds, the event triggers a cascade of processes that finishes with a clot. Uncontrolled or abnormally triggered clotting is the root cause of clotting-related complications of several clinical conditions, including those of COVID-19 and long COVID

that resists being broken up (lysis). This correlates well with the lower-than-usual effectiveness of clot-dissolving drugs in people with COVID-19. Further, the researchers showed the abnormal clot could trigger inflammatory activity that becomes worse when the fibrinogen is converted to fibrin. They also showed that the fibrin-spike protein combo altered immune pathways.

### Not related to vaccines issue

We know that the spike protein continues to circulate in the body of patients who have long COVID even after the active infection has cleared. So the researchers studied the role of the fibrin-spike protein combo in a post-infection scenario as well. Here, they reported a fibrin-dependent mechanism that elicited

an inflammatory response in the presence of the spike protein but even if there was no active infection.

Importantly, the researchers have said this is *not* the mechanism underlying the rare clotting-related complications associated with COVID-19 vaccines based on an adenovirus vector. These complications are instead related to the adenovirus component and aren't seen in vaccines based on other platforms that also use the spike protein.

### A monoclonal antibody option

The study is interesting because it demonstrates a possibly attractive therapeutic strategy that could change the way we manage COVID-19 and long COVID.

In fact the researchers found that monoclonal antibody 5B8 binds to the  $727-305$  site of fibrinogen and could keep the spike protein at bay and prevent all the resulting complications. This antibody also doesn't alter the normal functioning of fibrinogen and doesn't induce its own clotting-related side effects.

They demonstrated this therapeutic strategy in a mouse model of COVID-19. An affinity-matured derivative of 5B8 modified for human use has already entered phase I clinical trials to assess safety and tolerability. If it successfully completes this phase, it is likely to enter into phase 2 where researchers will assess clinical endpoints.

### Proceed with caution

This said, although the study appears to be a path-breaking advance, critics have rightly argued that this is a preliminary animal study and that there is still a long road ahead.

Further, although the researchers have repeatedly stressed the importance of the study's findings for the management of long COVID, the study duration was not long enough to qualify as a study of long COVID *per se*.

Most conclusions in the study are based on hypotheses and extrapolations that will need to be confirmed by more studies specifically planned for that purpose.

Finally, the researchers' conflict of interest is important: many of the co-authors are associated with companies that manufacture fibrin antibodies and are also patent-holders for the development and therapeutic use of antibodies.

(Puneet Kumar is a clinician, Kumar Child Clinic, New Delhi. Vipin M. Vashishtha is director and paediatrician, Mangla Hospital and Research Center, Bijnor. [kumarchildclinic@gmail.com](mailto:kumarchildclinic@gmail.com), [vipinpisita@gmail.com](mailto:vipinpisita@gmail.com))

## THE GIST

Thrombo-inflammation causes the symptoms of post-acute sequelae of long COVID. This condition continues to affect millions worldwide even after high population immunity and significantly lower incidence of severe COVID-19

Researchers have found that long COVID complications aren't correlated with the severity of initial COVID-19. A person can have these complications after mild or even asymptomatic COVID-19 infection

The study demonstrated a therapeutic strategy to manage COVID. A derivative of the 5B8 antibody has entered phase I clinical trials. If it completes this phase, it is likely to enter phase 2 where researchers will assess clinical endpoints

## BIG SHOT



Security officers check the railroad tracks as the Soyuz MS-26 mission launch vehicle is transported from the assembly hangar to the launch pad ahead of crew, at the upcoming lift-off with the next International Space Station (ISS) crew, at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, on Sunday. REUTERS

## WHAT IS IT?

### Planetary protection: keeping out 'toxic aliens'

Vasudevan Mukunth

In space missions from the earth to another planetary body, planetary protection is the idea that it's important to preserve the biospheres of the earth and the body against contamination by "alien" microbial life.

It's an important principle of interplanetary missions, such as from the earth to the moon or Mars. It stems from the idea that we ought to keep the planetary biosphere "pristine" and from being "corrupted" by influences that may not exist had the space mission not been undertaken.

On September 5, China announced it would be pulling up the date for Tianwen-3, its ambitious Mars sample-return mission, to 2028, tentatively ahead of the U.S. During the announcement, the mission's designer said it would abide by the planetary protection principle.

The principle has a legal basis in Article IX of the Outer Space Treaty (1967). It states that parties to the treaty explore outer space while avoiding "harmful contamination and ... adverse changes" in the earth's and the body's environments due to "the introduction of extraterrestrial matter."

An important way to "clean"



A model of NASA's Viking 1 lander, which became the first spacecraft to land on Mars in 1976. It was designed and operated to facilitate planetary protection. ILL PHOTO

spacecraft ahead of interplanetary missions to conform to the planetary protection principle is to fully assemble the vehicle and bake it in a dry room for three days at 120 degrees C. This increases the costs and the technical strength of the spacecraft, but such are the demands of keeping biospheres 'clean'.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Daily page'

# India-US relations need a reality check



**YOGESH GUPTA**  
FORMER AMBASSADOR

**T**HE Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, is on a visit to the US.

The visit has few precedents. The Biden administration is giving considerable importance to it, as was evident when US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti met Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on September 3 to discuss the details of this trip. Enjoying the status of a Cabinet minister as LoP, Rahul is expected to meet senior officials in the US administration, business and technology leaders, diplomats, academics and members of the Indian diaspora. Not many Cabinet ministers get such wide access.

Last year, PM Modi's state visit to the US in June had generated considerable excitement. President Biden had then described the India-US ties as "one of the most defining relationships in the 21st century". That visit had led to several major agreements about providing technologies for manufacturing F414 jet engines in India, setting up of new semiconductor plant, sale

of 31 MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones, cooperation in other critical and emerging space technologies and other fields.

Though it was clear even at that time that India and the US had differing positions on several issues, including the Ukraine conflict, as India had refused to criticise Russia directly in view of its close and historical ties. On the issue of human rights too, the two countries had different perspectives, though Biden had downplayed the issue when pointed questions were raised about the human rights record of the Modi government.

However, during the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September 2023, both countries showed better cooperation as India, with support from the US, was successful in forging consensus on many difficult issues such as the Ukraine war, climate change, admission of African Union as a new member and a separate agreement on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. The G20 had emerged as a robust platform against the prevailing pessimism where the developed, socialist and developing countries could come together to negotiate on complex problems.

Serious differences, however, had begun to emerge between India and the US immediately after the summit. Biden had reportedly wanted to hold a joint press conference with PM



**DIVERGENCE:** The US expects India to strongly support its foreign policy initiatives, but the latter can't meet them due to differing interests.

Modi. But India was reluctant because of the possibility of Biden indulging in a veiled criticism of India's human rights policies following the arrest of some Opposition leaders earlier. India did not want to mar a successful summit with criticism of its human rights record before G20 leaders. Biden did his presser after reaching Hanoi but nursed a grievance that he was denied that opportunity in New Delhi.

These differences on the issue of human rights deepened when Canadian PM Justin Trudeau claimed (without furnishing evidence) in September last year that there were 'credible allegations' of the Indian government's involvement in the murder of

India and the US will need to show more mutual accommodation to maintain a decent relationship.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Khalistani activist, who was killed outside a gunwara in Surrey in June 2023. In November 2023, the US government said it had arrested Indian national Nikhil Gupta in Prague for allegedly conspiring to assassinate another Khalistani terrorist, Gurbaj Singh Pan-nun, on American soil. The US claimed that Gupta, a businessman, had tried to hire a professional killer who turned out to be an undercover US drug enforcement agent, and was acting on the advice of an Indian government employee engaged in security and intelligence work.

Since the US allegations pointed to a nexus between organised criminals, gun-run-

ners, terrorists and others, India agreed to set up a high-level inquiry committee to investigate the matter. Over the next several months, the US made a huge fuss about "Violation of human rights of an American national", ignoring India's concerns that Pannun was a banned terrorist who was threatening Indian organisations and prominent personalities on American soil without any restraint. These developments further impacted India-US ties as Biden declined India's invitation to be the chief guest at the Republic Day function this year. The Quad Summit, scheduled for January in New Delhi under India's chairmanship, was also postponed after Biden's refusal. Various high-level visits and intensive bilateral engagement, seen in the previous year, also suffered considerably.

Amid India's General Election earlier this year, there was criticism of the Indian government's human rights record and charges of India's democratic backsliding by the American and European media, NGOs and pro-government agencies. It appeared that the US government, sensitive about foreign interference in its electoral process, had let loose all its agencies to weaken the electoral prospects of the ruling party in India.

Biden was cold towards PM Modi during an informal

meeting in Italy on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in June. The Biden administration also found PM Modi's visit to Russia in July "irksome and uncomfortable", though Modi had told President Putin that he must find a peaceful solution to the Ukraine conflict. This visit to Russia was also devoid of new substantive agreements. Washington was so disturbed by this visit that the US Ambassador in New Delhi warned India not to take its friendship with the US "for granted".

Bangladesh's political situation, which led to PM Sheikh Hasina's exit and reports of an alleged coup engineered by the CIA in collusion with the ISI further exposed the underlying differences between India and the US about their perspectives on Bangladesh. In August, American diplomats were seen meeting Opposition leaders in Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar and other states/UTs.

The US expects India to strongly support its foreign policy initiatives, but the latter can't meet them due to differing interests. Because of their antagonism towards China, India's growing economy, its need for US investments, technologies and military equipment, the two nations cannot be adversaries. However, they will need to show more mutual accommodation to maintain a decent relationship.

# Unreliable data inevitably leads to flawed conclusions



**ATANU BISWAS**  
PROFESSOR, INDIAN STATISTICAL INSTITUTE, KOLKATA

**I**N his January 2023 address, then UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had stated that the country needed to reimagine its 'approach to numeracy' since we live "in a world where data is everywhere and statistics underpin every job."

But should data always be trusted? In 2020, then Conservative UK PM Boris Johnson had stated that there were 1,00,000 fewer children living in poverty at the time than at the end of the previous Labour government's tenure. However, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer claimed that 6,00,000 more children were living in poverty under Conservative rule. Interestingly, the government's statistics backed both claims, according to Georgina Sturge, statistician of the House of Commons Library. Thus, both were correct, but how?

Sturge's 2022 book *Bad Data: How Governments, Politicians and the Rest of Us Get Misled by Numbers* shows how crucial data, including that from the government, is riddled with inconsistencies,

guesswork and uncertainty. Data disasters from recent political history, including some of Brexit's antecedents, are used to illustrate the book, which is upfront about the flaws and gaps in the data.

Sturge examines case studies of some of the most contentious topics, including gender disparity, immigration, Brexit, hate crimes, poverty and the state of education and healthcare. There is some dispute about what constitutes poverty, contributing to the discrepancy between Starmer's and Johnson's numbers. Sturge queries the definition of poverty. Is it a failure to provide for fundamental needs? And should television and access to the Internet be included among them? Also, should it cover the capacity, say, to pay an unexpected bill of a moderate amount?

Neither the unemployment data in the 1980s nor the crime statistics of the 1990s or 2000s for the UK were perfect. The UK government has altered the definition of unemployment and the method for registering and counting unemployed people numerous times over the past 50 years. Once the union insurance claims were added to the claimant count, it was then demanded to include anyone who was 'actively seeking work'. Broader metrics are currently being used, and they account for those who are actively seeking employment as well as the larger group of people who are not, for various



**UNSATISFACTORY:** Data alone is insufficient for the purpose of statistical literacy.

reasons, Sturge claims that nine 'significant' changes have been noted by the UK Office for National Statistics, making it impossible to compare the series over time.

Understandably, in such a scenario, it is difficult to assess whether the situations are getting better or worse, since we either do not count certain things or we do not count them consistently. According to Sturge, irregularities occur in the UK crime or health statistics since the same people who are responsible for reducing crime incident or disease numbers are responsible for recording those numbers. "We don't know how many people died from Covid-19 or whether crime is going up or down," she wrote. Furthermore, disparities

Appropriateness of the metric of measurement is immensely important.

in the approach often distort the meaning. For instance, the data from telephone interviews used for the crime survey during the Covid-19 pandemic may not be comparable to the data from in-person interviews conducted before and after the pandemic.

Besides, if we don't know the underlying narrative, data just can't paint the whole picture. Sturge's book has the lovely historical anecdote of the origin of the term 'cobra effect'. Apparently, in 19th-century Delhi, a reward was offered for those who caught and killed the cobras that were overrunning the city. The public health risk posed by the venomous snakes, however, persisted even after locals reported wheelbarrow

loads of dead cobras to the authorities. It eventually became evident that many people had chosen to breed cobras with the intention of killing them and claiming a reward, and a significant number of these farmed cobras were escaping and attacking people.

Again, only data is not enough; the appropriateness of the metric of a measurement is immensely important. For example, rather than revealing general gender differences, the gender pay gap highlights the underrepresentation of women in top posts at firms. So, while helpful, this statistic is not very nuanced. In his 2019 book *Bad Data: Why We Measure the Wrong Things and Often Miss the Metrics That Matter*, Canadian urban designer Peter Schryvers drew attention to the drawbacks of data analysis and stressed the need to apply appropriate metrics before making key decisions in the environment, corporate and healthcare sectors.

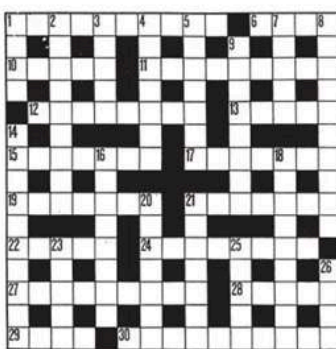
Economist Joseph Stiglitz, recipient of the 2001 Nobel Prize, once stated: "What we measure informs what we do. And if we're measuring the wrong thing, we're going to do the wrong thing." Of course, there are tons of other examples beyond those two books on bad data. The GDP, which is frequently criticised as an inappropriate indicator of growth, is a crucial one. A small number of wealthy individuals con-

tribute far too much to the GDP. Besides, there are more flaws in the GDP calculation process. In mid-2013, the US Bureau of Economic Advisers had modified its GDP calculation methodology, resulting in an overnight growth of 3 per cent in the US economy. Ghana moved its base year from 1993 to 2006 in 2010, resulting in a GDP growth of 60 per cent and its transformation from a low to a lower-middle-income country. Similarly, Nigeria's GDP grew by 89 per cent all at once when this was 'rebased' in 2014; it surpassed South Africa to become Africa's largest economy. And all that magic happened without any additional economic action.

Artificial intelligence (AI), too, is not always correct and unbiased. Bad training data or the intrinsic bias of the data used to train AI models is one of the primary reasons for that. Training data should be vetted to be free of racism, sexism and any other form of discrimination. However, it's almost impossible to guarantee that, particularly since AI requires massive amounts of training data.

Therefore, statistical literacy is important for both our daily lives and politics, and data alone is insufficient for the purpose. However, the more general query still stands: Is it possible to draw any significant conclusions from data that seems flawed? Is no data preferable to bad data?

## QUICK CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- Facilitate development (4,3,3)
- Radiate (4)
- Passive form of protest (3-2)
- Compliance (9)
- Make known (8)
- Grossly stupid (5)
- Soothing song (7)
- Power of endurance (7)
- Aid in time of need (7)
- Regret for wrong done (7)
- Fashionable (5)
- Avoiding extremes (8)
- Make less severe (9)
- Obtain with effort (5)
- Tolerant (4)
- In one continuous period (2,1,7)

### DOWN

- An assumed attitude (4)
- Bitterly hostile (9)
- Bracing (5)
- Spume use (7)
- Bernal (7)
- Hair-colouring dye (5)
- Pinfold (4-6)
- Deny (8)
- Narrow escape (5,5)
- Frivolous (8)
- Withdrawing (2,7)
- Unchecked (7)
- Recify (7)
- Book of maps, charts (5)
- Oarsman (5)
- A hanking (4)

### Saturday's solution

**ACROSS:** 1 Canvas, 5 Joste, 8 Under oath, 9 Bar, 10 Test, 12 Overrule, 14 Bamboo, 15 Eligible, 17 Eligible, 18 Veil, 21 Dog, 22 In the dock, 24 Happy, 25 Daugson.  
**DOWN:** 1 Count, 2 Noit, 3 Airt, 4 Starve, 5 Inherent, 6 Sab judice, 7 Earnest, 11 Summing-up, 13 Solidity, 14 Breadth, 16 Elated, 19 Laken, 20 Vein, 23 Owe.

## SU DO KU

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

## SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

## CALENDAR

- SEPTEMBER 9, 2024, MONDAY
- Shaka Sarwat 1946
  - Bhadrapad Shaka 18
  - Bhadrapad Pankshiti 25
  - Hijari 1446
  - Shukla Paksha Tithi 6, up to 9.54 pm
  - Vaishnvi Yoga up to 12.32 am
  - Vishakha Nakshatra up to 6.04 pm
  - Moon enters scorpio sign 11.29 am

## FORECAST

| CITY       | MAX | MIN |
|------------|-----|-----|
| Chandigarh | 34  | 26  |
| New Delhi  | 34  | 25  |
| Ambikar    | 34  | 25  |
| Bathinda   | 35  | 26  |
| Jalandhar  | 35  | 26  |
| Ludhiana   | 34  | 26  |
| Bhivani    | 33  | 27  |
| Hisar      | 34  | 26  |
| Sirsa      | 35  | 28  |
| Dharamsala | 29  | 18  |
| Manali     | 26  | 15  |
| Shimla     | 24  | 16  |
| Srinagar   | 30  | 15  |
| Jammu      | 34  | 22  |
| Kargil     | —   | —   |
| Leh        | 25  | 10  |
| Dehradun   | 34  | 24  |
| Mussoorie  | 24  | 18  |