

THE ASIAN AGE

15 AUGUST 2024

Time to recognise bail, and not jail, is the rule

The Supreme Court ruling that the judicial dictum, bail is the rule and jail is an exception, is applicable to offences under special statutes like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, under scores the primacy of India's democratic Constitution and the fundamental rights enshrined in it in governance.

The judges were categorical in ruling that courts should have no hesitation in granting bail when a case is made out irrespective of the nature of the allegations of the prosecution. In a stern message, it has reminded the judges that, if the courts start denying bail in deserving cases, it will be a violation of the rights guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, which mandates that no person shall be deprived of his life or liberty except through the process of law.

The pattern that is emerging from the series of rulings by the apex court appears to be that it wants only those who are proven guilty of a crime punished. The process of the law cannot become the punishment irrespective of the nature of the alleged crime or the law invoked and the executive arm of the government should not weaponise the law against people.

Governments have the mandate to run the country as per the law but some people in governments have notions of time slip into a notion that those very same laws can be used to keep innocent people muzzled. They very well know that the person whom they would arrest and prosecute may not be convicted after a long and protracted trial but their immediate purpose will be served when they have been put behind bars without bail for long periods of time. The immediate application of the anti-terror law will have a cascading effect of silencing on the government's critics. The UAPA, for example, would mandate that an accused is not eligible for statutory bail before spending 180 days in jail with no chargesheet against him. The draconian Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, makes bail virtually impossible as a judge needs to be prima facie convinced that the accused is not guilty of the offence even before the trial ahead of granting bail.

Studies have come up with startling findings that the anti-terror law has been rampantly used against weaker sections of society, especially backward classes and minorities. Given the lower courts' disinclination towards grant of bail, which has been the highest court at times blinked at the way people's liberty was taken away by the state.

The assertion of the apex court that it will act as the guardian of the people's right to liberty is a refreshing thought and a reassurance of the democratic freedoms that we earned after a long and painful struggle.

Yunus keeps Bangla on mend

The Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus who, as head of the caretaker government, has taken on the onerous responsibility of bringing back order to Bangladesh made a pitch for unity when visiting the Dhakeshwari National Temple and meeting the leaders and representatives of the Hindu community.

In saying that everyone's rights should be ensured irrespective of religion, he has given voice to the most appropriate feelings when members of the minority communities in Bangladesh, including about 13 million Hindus, are living in fear after mobs ran amok and influenced a course of dramatic events that culminated in Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fleeing the country on August 5 and seeking refuge in India.

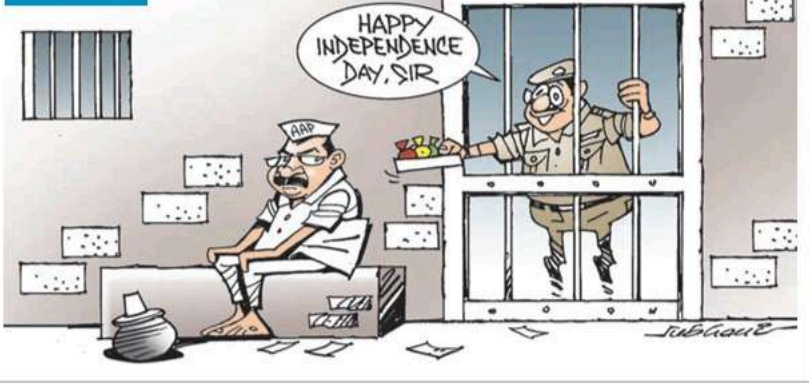
Tasked with bringing things under control after riots led to the killing of at least 450 people, Yunus and his Cabinet members, including two retired generals who have apologised to the Hindus for not being able to protect them during the riots, have been striving to get the police to take over the task of maintaining law and order by patrolling the streets and sending the students back to schools and colleges.

There is no denying the pressures the interim government is working under. With the elections, running high against Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League party, the interim Cabinet had to cancel the observation of August 15 as a "Day of Mourning" as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seen as the liberator of Bangladesh from Pakistan, and many members of his family were gunned down in Dhaka on this day.

Given the political divisions within Bangladesh society, it is on the cards that greater rein may be given to anti-India sentiments even as Sheikh Hasina continues to stay securely in a place near New Delhi. The return of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party is not to be ruled out in the prevailing atmosphere in which all symbols of the freedom movement are being targeted.

With his secular credentials and international exposure as the chairman of the Graman Bank and microfinance guru to the poor of Bangladesh, Yunus is on the path of establishing peace. It is moot whether he can keep divisive Bangladesh politics under wraps until elections are called. His focus is on the mend quickly enough after the chaos, but the long-term future is a lot more uncertain.

Subhani



Will new bifurcation of J&K be a step forward?



Mohan Guruswamy

Five years back the Narendra Modi government had abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution and followed it with the bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union territories (UTs) of J&K and Ladakh. This effectively meant liberating Ladakh from the troubled state, but leaving behind a symbiotic union of two very dissimilar regions, one mostly Muslim and the other mostly Hindu. The Kashmir Valley, of about 6.9 million people, is 98.4 per cent Muslim with Hindus and Buddhists accounting for just 3.6 per cent; and Jammu, with a population of 5.4 million, is 62.6 per cent Hindu and 33.5 per cent Muslims. It only ended up making a bad situation worse.

The new UT of J&K effectively meant an end to full democracy and self government, and leaving an area bigger than many full-fledged states of the Indian Union, with a population of more than 12 million, with a government with much less power and authority than enjoyed by the erstwhile J&K state. For all practical purposes, it has been directly ruled by Delhi. We have seen how the Union government has enucleated the Delhi government, leaving the people of Delhi with little say in their government and living in the midst of a physical and political mess.

"Managing" Delhi is a lot easier, but managing an insurgency-ridden territory striving for "azadi" has been a bone to chew for the Modi government to chew. One thing is almost certain, India has very few more battles for it in the Kashmir Valley and the Muslim-dominated Poonch area of Jammu. The election results underlie it.

When the Modi government and the RSS do not share the aspirations of a modern, egalitarian and truly secular nation, it would be quite ridiculous to expect the people of Kashmir and its leaders to aspire for it. It seems that the lessons of Nagaland have not been learnt by the Centre. Instead of democracy taking a step forward, it has taken a huge step backward.

Kashmir is the northernmost geographical region of South Asia. Until the mid-19th century, the term "Kashmir" denoted only the valley between the Great Himalayas and the Pir Panjal range. Muslim rule was ushered in by Shamsuddin Shah Mir (1339-42), a courtier in the court of King Udayanadeva who seized the throne after his death. The Mughals took control in 1586 during the rule of Jahangir. Akbar, the region came under the control of the Durrani Empire in Kabul from 1753 to 1819, when the Sikhs took over. In 1846, the treachery of Gulab Singh, a Dogra general and governor of Jammu, was repaid when the British gave him Jammu for it and further turned over the Kashmir Valley to him for 75 lakhs.

These treaties formed the so-called princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, and Gulab Singh became its first maharajah. This was also the first time that Jammu and Kashmir became one administrative entity. As governor of Jammu, Gulab Singh had also captured Ladakh and Kashmir. His son Ranbir Singh added Hunza, Gilgit and Nagar to the kingdom. Thus, a composite state of disparate regions, religions and ethnicities was formed. This is reflected in the present-day demographics. The purpose of separat-

The narrative of Kashmir's recent history has taken a distinct course different from the rest of the country. The India heavens are not going to fall if Kashmir becomes an autonomous region.

ing on this is two-fold. Historically, all the regions of Jammu and Kashmir are part of the present narrative of India's composite history. Despite its predominant Muslim population, the history of people of the Kashmir Valley is intertwined with all the different local histories of the many nationalities of present-day India, which is also home to the world's second largest Muslim population. There is no separate Kashmir story as there is for Afghanistan or Nepal. It was always a part of the Indian mainland, except for a brief spell of rule from British India, no tradition or case for a separate Kashmir, like the Tibetans may have or the Pakistanis have.

The J&K, with or without PoK and Ladakh, is an artificial entity of recent origin. Historically, culturally ethnically and linguistically, Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir have as much in common as Tamil Nadu has with Punjab or Assam with Gujarat. The destinies of the people of Jammu have to be delinked from that of Kashmir.

In the new India, old states got subsumed and new states were created. Independent India is the erstwhile princely state of J&K, whether in India or under the control of Pakistan, have by and large settled down under their new national identities, except the Kashmir Valley. It is now India's most intractable problem. It has festered for over 75 years. Did we miss something?

Currently, Dr Somnathan, or TVS, as he's affectionately called within the service, serves as secretary in the department of expenditure and was set to retire in May 2025. However, with this new role, his services have been extended. He will take over from Rajiv Gauba later this month and continue as Cabinet secretary

being a nation bound together by shared history, shared culture and shared ethnicity, it is bound together by shared aspirations assured by the Constitution, written by our founding fathers that shared idealism and nationalism forged by shared experience. While it is amply clear that many, if not most, people in the Kashmir Valley do not share the aspirations that bind the rest of us, history does not offer them any basis for a distinct and independent identity either.

On the other hand, the narrative of Kashmir's recent history has taken a distinct course different from the rest of the country. The India heavens are not going to fall if Kashmir becomes an autonomous region. The Indian republic now has to offer something tangible to satisfy most aspirations in Kashmir, and we are talking only about Kashmir. Instead, it seems that by linking Kashmir in an unnatural union with Jammu and bringing them under Delhi's direct rule, India is only offering the troubled people of Kashmir a choice of lockbooks. India must seek to accommodate Kashmir with an autonomy that will satisfy the aspirations nurtured by this long period of revolt.

With accession to Pakistan or a complete independence not options, an acceptable via media must be and can be found. The breakthrough for that must happen in the minds of the rest of India. The heavens are not going to fall if Kashmir becomes an autonomous region within India. The extent of autonomy then becomes the only matter for discussion. We can afford to be generous. But it appears that the Narendra Modi government is still not ready for it. It lives under the delusion that all is well.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, has held senior positions in government and industry

LETTERS TIME TO REMEMBER

Assam has a long and rich history of resistance against British rule. First it was Tarun Ram Phookan, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury and Gopinath Bordoloi who led protests. Then, on September 12, 1942, 18-year-old Kanaklata Barua was shot dead by police while leading a rally to hoist the Indian flag at Gohpur police station. Tilerwari Barua, Khululi Devi, Kumuli Devi, Padumi Gogoi, Golapi Chutiya, Thunuki Das, Jaluki Kachari and Kon Chutiya were also martyred. The sacrifices of Kushal Konwar, Maniram Dewan, Mukunda Kakoti, Malati Mem, Dariki Dasi Barua, Bhogeswari Phukan and Thogu Suta added new fervour to the independence movement. Respect to these martyrs.

Deborsi Gautam Bangor, Assam TAKE BACK THE NIGHT

RIJAJIM SIDHA has called all Bengali women to take back the night following slut shaming of the female doctor who was gang-raped and murdered in a most cruel manner on the campus of RG Kar Medical College hospital on Friday night. What a carnal call! How apposite it is to demand independence for women! After hours at the stroke of the midnight hour of August 15. Now even regressive mothers who hold back their daughters and cripple them so they appear as soft targets and indeed often fall easy prey to aggressors who are otherwise enabled by these very pillars of Indian society will change tune out of peer pressure. But at least this thought will have become acceptable to them and others, and the dialogue for women's freedoms will have gained momentum among the girls and women of West Bengal.

Priyanka Mathur Noida KUDOS TO JNU, JAMIA

IT HAS ONLY been three years since the anti-CAA protests at JNU and Jamia Millia. At that time, people supporting the government had spread all kinds of lies about these two renowned institutions. They were called the tukde tukde gang. They were called Pakistan supporters. A BJP MLA from Rajasthan, Mr Gyanesh Ahuja, even alleged that 3,000 used condoms and 2,000 bottles of liquor are found every day on JNU campus. This year, as per the Govt's own National Institutional Ranking Framework, JNU and Jamia Millia Islamia have ranked second and third, respectively. Kudos!

Jang Bahadur Singh Jamshedpur

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu
As Vaidya's exit looms, Indian Oil getting ready for a new leadership
In the coming weeks, Shrikant Madhav Vaidya's extended tenure as chairman of Indian Oil Corp Ltd (IOCL) will wrap up, and the search for his successor is already in full swing. Last week, a three-member search-cum-selection committee, led by Malika Srinivasan, chairman of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB), including petroleum secretary Pankaj Jain and former HPL chairman M.K. Surana, interviewed about a dozen candidates to find the right fit. The selection process, held at Shastri Bhawan — the heart of the ministry of petroleum and natural gas — saw a mix of internal candidates from IOCL and at least one strong external contender. While early signals suggest a frontrunner has emerged, it might be a while before we know for sure who will take the helm of this Fortune 500 giant. Notably, when a search-cum-selection committee (SCSC) stops in, it has the authority and discretion to choose the best candidate for the job. Mr Vaidya, originally set to retire on August 31 last year, was granted a one-year extension, pushing his retirement to this month, on a re-employment and contract basis. Rumour has it that he might stay on for a few more weeks to ensure a smooth transi-

tion, pending the final nod from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC). So, while the wait continues, it's clear that the process is designed to be thorough, ensuring that IOCL's next leader is chosen with care. CHOOSING THE RIGHT PS & OSD Several Union ministers in the Modi 3.0 era are reportedly caught in a tricky situation regarding the appointment of their private secretaries (PS) and officers on special duty (OSD). While these ministers have their own preferences for these crucial roles — often based on personal rapport or past working relationships — they find themselves constrained by a set of precedents that govern their choices. Before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls concluded, the department of personnel and training (DOP&T) prepared a comprehensive list of officers eligible to serve as PS and OSD. This list includes many who served Union ministers during the Modi government's previous term. According to sources, the ministers have been subtly informed that they must choose their PS and OSD from this predetermined list. Those who quickly understood and accepted the rules have already secured their preferred officers.

However, others, still hoping to navigate around these restrictions, are stuck in a state of indecision, unsure of how to proceed. This situation underscores the ongoing tension between personal preference and bureaucratic protocol, a dynamic that's quietly shaping the inner workings of this government. Ministers must now balance their desire for trusted aides with the need to adhere to the guidelines, highlighting the complexities of governance under Mr Modi, even in the most routine decisions. NEW ERA FOR CABINET SECRETARIAT When the Centre announced Dr T.V. Somnathan as India's 33rd Cabinet secretary, it came as a pleasant surprise across the civil services. One Union secretary humorously remarked, "The finance secretary-designate is now the Cabinet secretary-designate." Currently, Dr Somnathan, or TVS, as he's affectionately called within the service, serves as secretary in the department of expenditure and was set to retire in May 2025. However, with this new role, his services have been extended. He will take over from Rajiv Gauba later this month and continue as Cabinet secretary

until at least August 2025. Given the recent trend of extensions, many expect his tenure to be extended further. TVS's career spans over three decades and is marked by significant achievements. He has held key positions, including joint secretary in corporate affairs and economic affairs, and was one of the first to join the Prime Minister's Office under Mr Modi in 2014. He played a critical role in shaping fiscal policy, especially during challenging economic periods, and contributed significantly to the Union Budget and initiatives like the Atmanirbhar Bharat stimulus package and the National Monetisation Pipeline. What's particularly interesting is that TVS might be the only Cabinet secretary who has never served as a district collector, despite his extensive experience. With a PhD in economics, along with qualifications as a chartered accountant and cost accountant, there is no doubt that the economy will be of special focus during TVS's tenure. Love them, hate them ignore them at national level is the best response and Dilli's beloved. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com

[OUR TAKE]

Blow to ease of doing business

Retrospective taxation powers for mineral-bearing states must be weighed against the signal they send on business on policy certainty

The Supreme Court's (SC) judgment granting states the power to tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands was one thing, but giving this taxation retrospective applicability is quite another, and altogether unwelcome. The first instance — the apex court's July 25 judgment — was in keeping with the principle of fiscal federalism with a well-reasoned distinction drawn between mining royalties and tax. But Wednesday's ruling rejecting a "prospective-levying-only" tether on the taxation powers, which the Centre and tax assessors sought, deals a body blow to the ease of doing business in India.

Mature tax jurisdictions avoid retrospective action when there is no intent to penalise for past wrongdoings, given how policy certainty remains a key consideration for businesses and their investment decisions. Indeed, grandfathering principles apply even in case of prospective policy changes, in order to protect those who had made investment decisions on the basis of past policy. This makes India's case a double whammy for mining companies.

The chaos that could result is foreseeable since there is no route for companies to pass on the tax liability likely to arise to the end users. There are enough examples in India's taxation history to demonstrate the perils of retrospective taxation, the most prominent one in recent times being the Vodafone case.

The SC has sought to limit the damage by setting April 1, 2005, as the cut-off date, barring states from charging penalties and interests on these demands and allowing a 12-year payment period starting FY27. But these measures are hardly any reprieve.

The allure of windfall gains will be hard for states to resist, but they would do well to weigh this against the signalling value it would have for potential investors. Hurting investor confidence won't impart mineral-rich but economically backward states the fiscal strength they need. The Centre can, of course, amend the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act to circumscribe the states' powers here, but that would be opening another Pandora's box, and challenge the principles of federalism. States must keep their competitive edge in mind as they go about implementing the SC decision.

Public health care needs a cure for touts

The multiple roles that the accused in the Kolkata doctor's rape and murder juggled in the government hospital where the latter was employed, expose how the inadequacy of public health care infrastructure and personnel has led to a network of touts and middlemen. This is true even in the best government facilities, including in the national Capital. Touts lubricate everything at these facilities, creating under the massive footfalls they receive, from booking ambulances to even arranging for blood. Informal as this ecosystem is, it goes unregulated and leaves patients and their families with little recourse when things go wrong. This has also created a shadow economy of kickbacks and inducements involving public-sector personnel who serve as feeder lines for the private sector (nursing homes when the patients fail to find a bed in the government hospital, diagnostics facilities when the waiting time in public facilities runs into weeks.) Monitoring and weeding out touts, even when attempted, does little to cleanse the system permanently, given the sheer number of patients seeking access and attention, desperately grasping at straws.

Public health inadequacy is exacerbated by the question of affordability. Quality tertiary health services in the private sector remain very expensive for the masses, leaving the public sector as the only option. And despite rising private sector and public-funded health insurance, many Indians still remain entirely without cover, or without adequate cover. Unless public health care's inadequacy and low penetration rates for health insurance are addressed, the issue of middlemen can't be resolved, along with the attendant risks.

[INCIDENTAL]

Gopalakrishna Gandhi

OPINION

Of freedoms gained, lost, and gained again

It is Muhammad Yunus's wise mind, Saroj Devi's generous soul and Arshad Nadeem's pure heart that constitute true independence

It would be false to the ink of this column if I were to deny the plain truth that today, August 15, 2024, the country uppermost in mind is not India, which became free this day in 1947, but Bangladesh. I will be untrue to it if I were not to acknowledge that the leader who dominates my thought today is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder-leader and first president of Bangladesh, who was assassinated on this day in 1975.

And I would be dishonest to a columnist's duty if I were to deny or downplay a third fact. On the day Mujib was to be hanged, Bangladesh was a four-year-old Republic. But India, a 25-year-old Young Republic, was under a national emergency then. Freedoms can be lost to foreign powers, regained from them after bitter and heroic struggles, to be lost again to debilitated legacies of the original heroes and their retainers, to be reclaimed by the people yet again

through irrepressible mass demonstrations of will and guts. So, as India celebrates, as it must, its historic Independence Day today, it must do so not against the traces of mind-dumbing commemoration, but against the tapestry of historical truth and the trajectory of history's bitter lessons. India and Pakistan were anointed on the night of August 14 and 15, 1947, in the altar of hope, they were baptised in the blood of hate.

The hates bridged the hopes; they sought to rob them of their joy, their dreams. And, to use a pet phrase of Jawaharlal Nehru, succeeded "in large measure". The hates were seeded in what was called in undivided India, by senior and respected leaders who espoused it, the Two Nations Theory. The theory was that Hindus and Muslims were two separate people, two separate 'nations', and should be citizens of two separate nation-states. If some propagated this theory, there were those like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, born to Hindu parents, who believed Hindus and Muslims were meant to live together in amity, and those like Khan Abdul Qadir Khan, M.A. Ansari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Kazi Nazrul Islam, born to Muslim parents, who did so too, vociferously.

In the momentum for freedom, hope lost out to hate, and two nations emerged in place of one, until 1971, when humanity resuscitated hope in the eastern half of Pakistan as it revolted against divisions on the basis of religion. Indira Gandhi — he it is said to the credit of that daughter of freedom and of freedom's great fighter — saw that the India that had rejected Two Nations must help East Pakistan become itself again, in freedom, as one nation for all its nationalities. And Bangladesh was born.

India, Mother India, got its freedom from British rule in 1947. As did East Bengal which became in 1947 East Pakistan, until it got freedom a second time in 1971, with India standing beside it in courageous solidarity.

Today, we celebrate this three-in-one freedom — 1947 for India and 1947 plus 1971 for Bangladesh. But we must do more. In all honesty, freedoms can be lost to one's own kind. History tells us that though freedoms, by definition, are inherited, they can mutate and debase themselves. And can scurry towards the examples of history's power-greedy, turf-thirsty, ego. Politics, as a means of service, is ever challenged by politics as a means of control.

When, therefore, an octogenarian devisor of rural credit is suddenly asked to devise ways of restoring



As India celebrates its Independence Day today, it must do so against the tapestry of historical truth and the trajectory of history's bitter lessons

political credit to Bangladesh's shattered polity and frenzied society, and he says Bangladesh is now liberating itself a third time, all freedom-lovers across the world take note.

And as I salute the freedom fighters of 1947 and 1971, I do so too for those who have brought freedom to Bangladesh from its internal un-freedom. But, and this is no ordinary 'but', as in 1947 and 1971, this third freedom too has been sullied by hate. I find it unbearable that crazed mobs should vandalise the statue of Bangabandhu Mujib and the work of art showing the surrender of Pakistan's military to India's military chiefs in liberated Bangladesh. This vandalism recalls the hate behind the Two Nations Theory seeking to smother hope. But even more, I find it intolerable that mobs masquerading as patriots should attack Hindus, their homes and temples.

Salutations, therefore, to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus for saying in no uncertain terms that the attacks on Hindus in the wake of Sheikh Hasina's exit are "heinous" and that they have made him feel "ashamed".

Hasina has asked, "Are the Hindus, Christians, and those of religions other than Islam in our country not Bangla-

deshis?" In a move that fills me with hope, he said exactly what Gandhi said in East Bengal's Noakhali in 1946 as his Hindus felt the Two Nations' whipl. Gandhi asked the Muslims of Noakhali to make the safety of Hindus their concern. Yunus has done the same, and hundreds of protesters have heeded to his call.

I must conclude with a thought about Pakistan. When our very own Neteri Chopra's javelin throw was bettered in the Paris Olympics by that of Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem, Nadeem's mother — Saroj Devi — when asked about Nadeem, said that he is also like a son to her. Nadeem, responding, said that he was grateful that she prayed for him as well and said that she is like a mother to him.

This spirit is what will save the freedoms of our three countries from being abducted by suspicion and fear into baptisms of blood. It is Yunus's wise mind, Saroj Devi's generous soul and Nadeem's pure heart that constitutes for me all that true independence means.

Gopalakrishna Gandhi, a former administrator, is a student of modern Indian history. The views expressed are personal

Infrastructure as frontier for the India-China rivalry

In the 1980s, the Indian and Chinese economies operated at comparable levels. Indira Gandhi had come back to power, bringing political stability. After her assassination, Rajiv Gandhi rose to power, charming the nation but failing in performance. Then, the VP Singh-Chandra Shekhar days of political manipulation and instability followed. All this while, in China, Deng Xiaoping was working on his black-or-white, cat-must-match-mice reforms. In the race started in 1990, China has moved far ahead, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) five times India's.

The economic muscle from strong manufacturing and export orientation helped China acquire diplomatic success. One strategy was to invest in infrastructure abroad and buy the loyalty of the destination countries. Ports in the Indian Ocean rim were easy targets, with cash-strapped but ambitious host countries. Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan are prime instances. There are ports/terminals in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Kenya, Tanzania, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where Chinese companies are debt/equity financiers, contractors or concession-holding lessees. They have not come to India for want of security clearance from the Centre.

Then came the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Belt is for transportation through rail and road networks through land-locked countries. And the Road revolves the old Maritime Silk Road. The New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor claims to have expanded its reach to 523 ports in 124 countries and regions. The parallel development of the China-Europe Railway Express, which operates through a network of railways that traverse Asia and Europe, provides an alternative to the maritime route.

While the Chinese economy lagged starting in the 1990s, India was making slow and steady progress towards liberalising its economy. Our usual excuses for soft governance, like democracy, labour protection, the rule of law, and human rights, and exaggerated official claims of growth, have served to make the masses content. The ascent of Indian professionals to top positions in global companies has made us proud. Our external migration is, in the way, the supply of human capital to the developed world. But what about investment?

India made an early attempt to invest in infrastructure abroad by taking up Chabahar Port in Iran. The challenge was to develop the port circumventing the sanctions

imposed on Iran by the international community — the United States (US) strongly and continuously, followed by the European Union and the United Kingdom, and occasionally by the United Nations. India had to dilly-dally on Chabahar, without honouring the commitments made to Iran, just 76 nautical miles away. China was developing the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. India has finally settled the Chabahar issue, with India Ports Global, a public entity, taking over the management.

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) declared at the G20 Summit in New Delhi is an effort to boost connectivity and economic integration between South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. In addition to India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Greece have identified roles in developing this economic corridor. The Israel-Hamas conflict has affected these plans.

The Adani Group has ventured substantially into infrastructure, especially port development, in various countries. India's ex-minister trans-shipment port is mainly through Colombo Port, where China has developed the southern terminal. Adani has nearly completed the first phase of work on the Vithinjan Container Trans-shipment Port, which can handle Indian containers in a big way. Furthermore, the Adani Group is developing the Colombo Terminal, directly taking on China's Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT).

In Australia, while Chinese interests have dominated 80-year leases for the ports at Newcastle and Darwin, the Adani Group has secured the Abbot Point Coal Terminal in North Queensland. A Chinese company has a port in Haifa Bay in Israel; now, the Adani Group has taken over the original Haifa Port. Adani has entered Africa through the Dar es-Salaam Port in Tanzania. The group has plans for various other countries including Kenya, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Myanmar, not only in ports but also in sectors such as renewable energy and airports.

In most of these projects, there are conflicts of interest between China and India; these cannot be brushed aside as commercial competition — there are geopolitical and strategic factors as well. And the Adani Group has faced protests in several places; it would be naive to believe that these are well-intentioned actions with no vested interests. Many also believe that the Hindenburg report, which hit the Adani Group hard, had Chinese sponsors.

Does port ownership matter? Yes. International trade takes the shipping route for 95% of cargo volumes. While the ports are run professionally, political and diplomatic interests or counter-interests do emerge occasionally. There could be occasions when a strong Indian presence in other countries can improve the relations with the host countries — whether this presence is for infrastructure investment or influential individuals. The government's own resources are limited; now that the Adani Group has shown the way, other Indian corporates in the infrastructure sector could also enter the fray and create more Indian footprints on the world infrastructure map.

K Mohandas is a former civil servant, who retired as secretary, ministry of shipping. The views expressed are personal

ANTONY BLINKEN | US SECRETARY OF STATE

These actions only exacerbate tensions at a moment when all focus should be on the diplomatic efforts to achieve a ceasefire

After a far-Right minister led prayers at the Al-Azha mosque



India needs an 'up or out' policy for its bureaucracy

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi promised that his third term will see big decisions. The challenge now shifts from mere political determination to the bureaucracy's ability to manage the effective implementation of reforms. The question remains: Is the bureaucracy up to the task? The success of Modi's third term hinges on his ability to overhaul the civil service itself.

In 2023, approximately 1.3 million individuals sat for the Civil Services Examination conducted by the Indian Public Service Commission (UPSC). About 1% qualified for the mains, and less than 0.1% eventually became civil servants. This fiercely competitive process highlights the allure of senior bureaucratic roles, marked by significant power, prestige, and unparalleled job security.

However, the system is plagued by inefficiencies, including few performance-linked incentives, and even fewer disincentives, with promotions based on length of service rather than merit. This fosters complacency and demotivation amongst high performers, with performance left to individual self-actualisation rather than systemic inducements. The recruitment system has bred a culture where the sense of having 'arrived' often diminishes the drive for personal or professional development.

In contrast, highly competitive industries follow an 'up or out' policy, where individuals need to either secure promotions within a certain timeframe or exit the organisation. This ensures a dynamic and younger workforce, pushes employees to achieve targets, and helps eliminate stagnation.

Adopting an up or out policy for the Indian bureaucracy can augment its efficiency by ensuring more capable individuals advance to higher ranks. It will reward drivers by making promotions merit-based and nudge bureaucrats to acquire new skills. New-age areas requiring complex and specialised knowledge could benefit from an infusion of fresh, skilled talent. Evidence suggests that the prospect of promotion spurs better performance among bureaucrats. Scholar Anusha Nath's research has found that Union government officers perform better in years when they are up for promotion, particularly where performance is screened, such as their 16th year of service compared to their 15th. Creating regular, formalised performance-based incentives (promotion) and disincentives (exit) could help motivate bureaucrats.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that bureaucrats with temporary positions often exhibit better performance in the hope of becoming permanent. This practice underpins the frequent use of looking after charges for key postings, although it can dampen morale. Instituting

ing a formal system that encourages a regular cycle of promotions and exits could maintain morale, enhance functioning, while shielding bureaucrats from undue political pressures.

The criteria for promotions must be clear and incorporate innovation, integrity, efficiency, and facilitate strategic initiatives, with additional rewards for upskilling and technological proficiency. To avoid creating excessive competition between officers, collaborative ability must be included. The current Annual Performance Appraisal Report system, even with the 2017 reforms like objective grading and 360-degree feedback, still falls short in reducing non-performance.

Further precautions may also be needed to establish guardrails against political interference in promotion decisions, and avoid the creation of a 'committed bureaucracy'. Moreover, evidence indicates that high-skill officers are 47% less likely to be transferred by new governments, signalling that competence is valued (Lakshmi Iyer and Anandi Mani). This suggests that high-performing officers are likely to be retained under an up or out policy. Mechanisms should also be established for officers who are normally transferred for political reasons under the current system from getting lifted under the new one. Shunting should not become culture.

This policy has been long used in the US military. Officers must meet certain benchmarks to qualify for promotion, and those who fail are often encouraged to exit. This helps maintain a dynamic and competent leadership. In recent years, the military has tweaked this policy to retain talent, but could be instructive for India. Retention of talent is unlikely to be an issue in India, given the cut-throat competition to get into the services. Currently, there are very few resignations (less than 10% annually as per government data), and mostly at the early or late stages in the bureaucrats' career. The possible increase in attrition can also be managed by increasing the morale, accounting for those who might leave. This can also open the doors for lateral entry, which the government has sought to introduce.

In the BBC series, *Yes Minister*, minister Jim Hacker introduces a radical proposal of giving honours only to those civil servants who achieved budget cuts. Secretary Humphrey Appleby calls this a dangerous precedent. The up or out policy is also likely to face similar opposition. By introducing it gradually or as part of broader reforms, the government can truly strengthen India's famed steel frame.

Chetan Aggarwal is a public policy professional who has recently graduated from the Harvard Kennedy School. The views expressed are personal



Ports are important because global trade uses shipping for 95% of cargo volumes

Curbing auto emissions

Testing and prevention methods need an upgrade

IV Rao
Sharif Qamar

Deteriorating air quality is a major health concern for most of the Indian cities, and one of the major reasons for this is vehicular emissions. Despite tightening of norms in the automotive sector, by mandating Bharat Stage-VI (BS-VI) standards for tailpipe emission and fuel efficiency standards, as well as the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) regulations for passenger vehicles, there is no visible improvement in air quality.

Apart from rising number of vehicles on the roads, the presence of old and inefficient vehicles is a significant reason for poor air quality. There has been limited success in phasing out old polluting vehicles. As ownership changes hands, vehicles move from cities to peri-urban areas and finally to rural areas.

REAL-WORLD NUMBERS

Studies reveal that emissions during actual driving conditions exceed laboratory tested figures, often by substantial margins. This underscores a critical gap between regulatory standards and environmental impact. In some developed as well as developing countries, efforts are on to achieve real-world emission numbers before rolling out internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. In the US, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a mandate to randomly pick up privately-owned vehicles and test them at the National Vehicle and Fuel Emissions Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Every year, about 150 such vehicles from across the country are tested under the agency's surveillance programme. Any discrepancy witnessed during the check is taken up with the respective manufacturers and detailed investigation ensues.

In India, the regulatory authorities are making efforts to shift from Modified Indian Driving Cycle (MIDC), equivalent to the New European Driving Cycle designed in 1980s, to the Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure (WLTP) while testing ICE vehicles in the laboratories for compliance. The move towards WLTP, already adopted under European Union law, is a welcome and commendable step, however it is almost impossible to replicate real world driving cycles under



EMISSIONS. Lab tests do not reflect ground reality

different geographical and climatic conditions.

Besides stringent fuel economy and emission norms, the actual on-road performance of the vehicles is dependent on the driving behaviour, and road and traffic conditions. The recent draft proposal of Bureau of Energy Efficiency for CAFE-III and CAFE-IV norms for M1 category—that is, passenger vehicles weighing less than 3.5 tonnes—as well as the shifting to BS-VII regime, will be a game changer in the automotive sector.

While passenger cars and heavy-duty vehicles are regulated for green-house gas emissions, smaller vehicles like two-wheelers and light/medium-duty vehicles, which account for much of new ICE vehicle sales, also need comparable regulatory control.

The Pollution Under Control certification, predominantly reliant on idle mode testing, fails to capture emissions during real driving scenarios. This outdated approach undermines efforts to mitigate vehicular pollution effectively.

Efficiency improvements are pivotal in the battle against transport emissions. By promoting technologically advanced ICE vehicle designs, governments can foster a shift towards more sustainable transportation solutions. However, bridging the gap between emissions standards and real-world performance remains a formidable challenge, necessitating robust testing methodologies aligned with actual driving conditions.

Achieving meaningful emission reductions demands collaborative efforts from automotive manufacturers, regulatory bodies, and civil society. Manufacturers must prioritise innovation in emission control technologies, while regulators must enforce stringent compliance measures.

Rao is Distinguished Fellow, and Qamar is Associate Director, The Energy and Resources Institute.



MD GYASUDDIN ANSARI
RUDRA SENSARMA

The Finance Minister had the unenviable task of presenting a Budget which would sustain the fiscal discipline promised in the Interim Budget in February but at the same time contain enough new proposals for the remaining eight months of the financial year. While the debate over the revenue measures or tax changes in the Budget rages on, it is important to take stock of the expenditure proposals that have long term implications for the economy. Theory of economic growth tells us that long run prosperity is achieved by enhancing physical capital, labour force, human capital and availability of natural resources. The Budget seems to have followed this theory to the T.

The allocation of 3.4 per cent of GDP towards capital expenditure in the Budget is the highest in 20 years. There is some shuffling of priorities though. While schemes such as AMRUT and Smart Cities have suffered budget cuts, there is a hike in allocation for national urban digital mission and e-bus Sewa scheme. The emphasis on roads, highways and railways continues with increase in capex for these key transport infrastructures. Long term interest free loans have been promised to State governments for investing in infrastructure. Infrastructure creation boosts the productivity of the economy, crowds in private investments, thereby raising GDP per capita in the medium to long run.

The sustained public investments along with policies such as the production linked incentives scheme are finally yielding results as seen in growth of private capex by 9 per cent in FY24. However, this has not trickled down to create sufficient jobs and the Budget has taken on this challenge head-on. Successful implementation of the proposed employment linked incentives will help. The policy of reimbursing employers the wages of new workers and their EPFO contributions (up to a limit) will reduce hiring costs and act as a nudge to create jobs. India has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the developing world. The announcements of creating working women hostels and crèches, support for women-specific skilling and enhancing market access for women enterprises will go a long way in reducing the gender gap in the labour force.

The Micro, Small and Medium



Budget will foster long-term growth

RIGHT MIX. The thrust on capex, MSMEs, and human capital through education and skilling bodes well for the economy

Enterprises (MSME) sector is the biggest job generator in India, contributing 62 per cent to employment. However, many MSMEs find it difficult to cope because of low accessibility to funds, especially during crises. Consequently, their loans get marked as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) which further hinders credit access. The MSME sector has received a massive stimulus in this Budget. A new credit assessment model will enable public sector banks to use digital footprints for credit scoring and, thereby, lend to the smallest of firms.

The reduced turnover threshold of buyers for mandatory on-boarding on TRoDS platform (from ₹500 crore to ₹250 crore) will help more MSMEs to unlock their working capital. The enhanced credit limit for MUDRA loans (from ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh), new SIDBI branches, setting up of e-commerce export hubs and a new credit guarantee

Infrastructure creation boosts the productivity of the economy, crowds in private investments, thereby raising GDP per capita in the medium to long run

scheme for manufacturing will provide additional credit support to MSMEs. These proposals will help sustain the post-Covid momentum in the growth of MSME credit and add lakhs of jobs in the economy.

GENEROUS HIKES

Human capital formation is key to productivity and therefore education and skilling are thrust areas in the Budget. Allocation to higher education is up 8 per cent this year with emphasis on digital education, technical education, AI and innovation. There is a thrust on National Education Policy (NEP) through generous hikes in allocation for STARS (Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States) scheme to improve teaching quality and governance and PM SHRI (Schools for Rising India) scheme that intends to upgrade 14,500 existing schools to create new standards in school education. With the Covid pandemic delivering a setback to teaching and learning, it is critical to transform higher education and school education for shaping the workforce of the future.

An important contribution of the NEP has been to recognise that education and skilling go hand in hand

and are best not separated. However, special efforts for skilling may still be required for the youth entering the workforce. The Budget has proposed to upgrade 1,000 industrial training institutes through hub-and-spoke model and increase loans for skilling and education. The government will fund a new internship scheme for the youth, helping them acquire valuable work experience. Coming to natural resources, the Budget has several proposals for energy security. These include rooftop solar plants, pumped storage for electricity, nuclear reactors and advanced thermal plants.

The gains from these initiatives will be seen in the coming years. But the importance of laying the foundations now for Viksit Bharat 2047 cannot be overemphasised. Time is running out before India loses the demographic dividend in 2041 (when the working age share of the population will peak at 59 per cent). Short term temptations to turn populist must be resisted with fiscal discipline and a steadfast control over long-term spending. The Budget needs to be commended for staying the course.

Ansari is Assistant Professor of Economics, IIM Kashipur, and Sensarma is Professor of Economics, IIM Kozhikode. Views are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 15, 2004

Directors' pay rises faster than staff's

The pay of directors on board Corporate India is rising faster than what is paid to employees down the line in the past three years. This emerged out of an analysis of the financial performance of 300 companies that are part of the S&P CNX 500 index.

Rights for BCCI matches: Zee emerges highest bidder

The Board of Control for Cricket in India is all set to get richer. The highest bid by the Zee Group for the telecast rights of cricket matches to be played in India over the next three years has touched a whopping ₹1,206 crore. Sources in the broadcasting industry said that ESPN Software India Pvt. Ltd. which owns ESPN and Star Sports, is a close second. It has offered to pay ₹1,140 crore, while national broadcaster Prasar Bharati is willing to cough up ₹704 crore.

GTB is history; Oriental Bank takes charge of operations

Global Trust Bank (GTB) branches across the country have started functioning as branches of Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC). The government sanctioned the scheme for amalgamation of GTB with OBC. Customers of GTB would be able to operate their accounts as customers of OBC.

Agricultural R&D needs a reboot

Kushankar Dey

A Budget 2024-25 aimed to lay the foundation of Viksit Bharat, agriculture and allied activities received heightened attention among the nine priority areas.

In this context, a few issues need to be addressed: What could be the thrust areas of agricultural research? And what should be the modalities of a review conducted at various levels of a federal structure?

For example, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) operates at the Centre, ICAR coordinating units and State State Agricultural Universities at the zonal and State levels, and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) at the district level.

Given the budget constraints, the review should focus on competitive funding and chart priority research areas by revisiting a policy document on agricultural R&D policy in India—the funding, institutions, and impact (Pal, 2017).

First, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and the Department of Agricultural Research and Education

(DARE) should make a concerted effort with CGIAR institutions, donor agencies, multilateral development banks, and agribusiness corporations to perform a comprehensive review of the following areas: research planning and monitoring; impact assessment, and revenue from basic and strategic research; decentralisation relating to improved institutional efficiency and accountability; prospective planning and competitive funding for improving the relevance and efficiency of research projects and outcomes; research partnership through resource sharing and synergies; and efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of extension networks, such as the Agricultural Technology Management Agency, on-farm productivity, farmer income, and sustainability.

REVAMP RESEARCH SYSTEM

Second, there is a need to revamp the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) by designing a comprehensive performance evaluation system and tenure track implementation for the career progression of ICAR and KVK scientists. To embrace these principles



FARM SECTOR. Needs tech support

for the lab to land research, scientists must develop their capacity to conduct multi-disciplinary research in problematised areas.

The contingent effectiveness framework must be adopted in agricultural research systems to evaluate the prospect of technology transfer for commercialisation, called the "go to the market" strategy.

Third, farmers and land registry data curated by the Agri Stack project can help scientists revamp crop-regional planning-enabled cropping. So, planned funding to set up a digital technology-enabled agriculture research lab is critical to induce productivity and resilience in agriculture.

Fourth, the National Programme for Organic Production has been in place to promote organic agriculture through a voluntary certification or participatory guarantee system. However, compliance must be in place to ensure traceability and transparency of the organic agri supply chain.

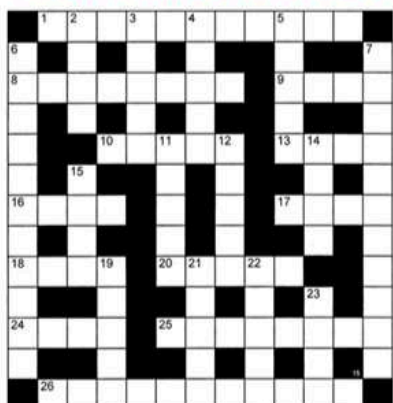
Certification and branding might remain a lapsed issue until the All India Coordinated Research Projects commission adequate field trials and validate results to differentiate between organic and non-organic agri produce.

Budgetary allocation to agriculture and allied activities for 2024-25 is 10 per cent of the total budget. The total R&D expenditure in India as a percentage of GDP has been stagnant at 0.6-0.7 per cent for the last two decades. It is much lower than in the US (2.8 per cent), China (2.1 per cent) and Israel (4.2 per cent).

Agricultural R&D needs facilities and funds, while digital goods, organic agriculture and FPO promotion can only complement this effort.

Dey teaches at IIM Lucknow. Views are personal

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2504



EASY

ACROSS

- Given to dispute (11)
- Reasoning, a row (8)
- Head-infesting parasites (4)
- Fetch with one (5)
- Dull explosion (4)
- The same (L) (4)
- Broad smile (4)
- Is departed (4)
- Piece left over (5)
- Dull pain (4)
- On the side breeze (9)
- Spontaneous (9)
- translator (11)

DOWN

- Wild party (4)
- Minute-measuring device (5)
- Silk voile (5)
- Young night-bird (5)
- Nitrous oxide (8-3)
- Principal actress (7,4)
- Metal clubs (5)
- Donor (5)
- Number of cattle (4)
- Miserly (4)
- Throw out (5)
- Brittle potato portion (5)
- Go bad, as egg (5)
- Create (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- What's inside it with notes of debt given to dispute (11)
- Are not shortly to hold what sticks with logical reasoning (8)
- Among several icebergs one doesn't want to find them ahead (4)
- Go and get bride initially a token of engagement (5)
- The unfinished rude contents will have a dull sound (4)
- One to demur at loss of ancient city was the same in Rome (4)
- Look pleased to telephone the last to begin with (4)
- Is stuck on somebody departed? (4)
- An untidy bit of a fight (5)
- It hurts English finalist to be in service he can't return (4)
- To crank it is a drawback on the side breeze is blowing (8)
- He tells one what another says, in other words (11)

DOWN

- Did Best bite his head off at such a wild party? (4)
- What counts minute-wise is to send the money back-up (5)
- Linon on inventory showing up as a different fabric (5)
- Small bird throwing in the towel (5)
- Showing one's amusement, droop over the anaesthetic (8-3)
- She is the first to be on the stage (7,4)
- Presses the clubs one clapped people in (5)
- George the Fourth and Queen Elizabeth seen at present time (5)
- Was informed, one hears, of a number of animals (4)
- Intend to be average-string (4)
- Throw one right out of Crete around 1st July (5)
- Having a wavy surface, it may be brittle (5)
- Be a bad egg and move through the water without a top (5)
- Compel one to manufacture something (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2503

ACROSS 1. Reckless 4. Acid 8. Due 9. Frail 10. Aim 11. Literal 12. Brine 13. Kettledrums 17. Chaff 18. Butcher 20. All 21. Lured 22. Rap 23. Dots 24. Persists

DOWN 1. Riddle 2. Chest 3. Stall 5. Cranium 6. Dampier 7. Elaborated 9. First of all 14. Epaullet 15. Scrawl 16. Grapes 18. Barge 19. Hires

Lifting the veil

Disclosure from segregated FPI portfolios important

The Adani-Hindenburg controversy led to a focus on the gaps in foreign portfolio investor regulations which appeared to allow some entities to conceal the identity of the ultimate beneficiary. A recent consultation paper released by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is an attempt to tighten the disclosure requirements in offshore derivative instruments and investments through segregated portfolios, by making the provisions of the August 2023 circular applicable to them. The circular was applicable to FPIs in general.



The circular says that granular details regarding the natural person owning or having economic interest or exercising control over the FPI should be disclosed to the depository participant if more than half of the FPI's assets are concentrated in a single group or its total Indian assets exceeds ₹25,000 crore. Making the circular applicable to p-note holders, however, appears pointless. P-notes are issued by FPIs registered with SEBI to foreign investors in other jurisdictions. The subscribers of p-notes are typically hedge funds and other global investors who trade across markets. They prefer speed while making their trades and prefer p-notes due to the ease, it offers. Asking these investors to make onerous disclosures could lead to the closure of this investment channel. SEBI already has strict guidelines regarding the kind of investors who can purchase the p-notes, methods of transfer of these instruments and reporting requirements and so on. These rules are sufficient in ensuring that only serious investors use this channel. While greater disclosure of owners of segregated portfolios is needed, the regulator need not worry about the ultimate beneficiaries of p-notes.

P-notes are no longer a significant source of FPI funds, with share of these instruments in total FPI assets declining from 44 per cent in 2006-07 to 1.9 per cent now. With the total value of p-notes outstanding at just ₹1,34,633 crore, it is highly unlikely that this route is being misused by Indian promoters. The FPI issuing the p-note has been tasked with collection of information regarding all the holdings of the p-note subscriber and disclosing it to the depository participant. It will be difficult for the issuers to verify if the disclosures made to them are complete since these investors are likely to hold assets across countries.

That said, application of the August 2023 circular on segregated portfolios is important as these multi-level structures are quite opaque and the ultimate beneficial owner can be hard to determine under existing rules. The paper notes that as of July 2024, 35 FPIs held investments through segregated portfolios; of these, one FPI had 86 sub-funds. Promoters can hold additional stake in their companies through such structures or support their stock price. Additional disclosures here are desirable and easier to implement.

FROM THE VIEWROOM.

Nemour's moment of triumph

Mahika Sundaresan

Escaping the clutches of systemic chains, Kaylia Nemour changed her nationality and claimed a victory in the same land that had wronged her.

Nemour had dominated French junior competitions since she was 13. Her promising career took a dramatic turn when the French Gymnastics Federation (FFG) announced new training protocols: aspiring Olympic gymnasts were required to relocate to a central training facility in Paris and work with new coaches, consolidating credit for their successes under a national banner.

Nemour refused to leave her hometown and her coaches. In retaliation, the FFG barred her from competition, defunded her local training centre, and stripped her coaches of their roles.

The FFG's attempt to control and marginalize Nemour was not merely about sports — it was a struggle for power.

Determined not to be silenced,

Nemour, a French Algerian by birth, decided to represent Algeria instead of France at the Olympics this year.

She went on to win Algeria's first gold in the Olympic uneven bars in the same land that wronged her, earning even the admiration and support of the French.

Nemour's choice to compete for Algeria is more than securing her right to compete; it's a powerful nod to Algeria's history of resistance and independence from French colonization.

Her journey is more than a tale of a young gymnast defying the odds; it's a powerful story of reclaiming dignity and asserting national identity in the face of persistent colonial attitudes.

Having emerged victorious, Nemour's story demonstrates that true success goes beyond winning medals — it's about standing up for oneself and championing a greater cause in the process.

By overcoming the FFG's obstacles, Kaylia Nemour has emerged as a symbol of resistance and resilience, both in sports and beyond.



UPI databases should be interactive

PREVENTING SCAMS. Stakeholders should gather a common set of data points for each complaint, distinct from their data objectives



DEEPTHI GEORGE ANUBHUTI SINGH

UPI has seen record-breaking growth, with over 13 billion transactions recorded in April 2024 alone. Its popularity and ease of use have made it a target for fraudulent activities. In its Annual Press Conference, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs) reported a rising trend of financial cybercrimes. The *modus operandi* (MO) of these scams is varied and dynamic.

When one scamming MO is thwarted, others emerge immediately. As fraudsters become more sophisticated, effective regulatory coordination and data-sharing among system participants are critical to safeguarding users at scale and thwarting bad actors' attempts, be they individuals or organised crime syndicates.

Scammers not only exploit social engineering tactics and users' naivety of certain UPI features to defraud users, but often also compromise security PINs, KYC information, SIM cards, or bank accounts through malicious URLs or apps without directly interacting with users.

While awareness campaigns and in-app security measures can help protect users from scams before they occur, post-scam recourse channels for the users, as well as streamlined complaint registration, information sharing, and investigative methods, are equally critical.

Today when users try to contact their UPI app over which the fraudulent transaction may have occurred, or the bank they are associated with, they are redirected to the nearest police station,

the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) or its helpline number, 1930, where they can file a complaint.

This then triggers an initial investigation by the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) of the respective jurisdiction. The underlying database of NCRP is the Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting Management System (CFRFRMS). Data on frauds is also available in other databases including RBI's DAKSHI, the Ministry of Home Affairs' CyberSafe, NPCI's Real-Time Fraud Risk Monitoring and Management System, and the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS).

From publicly available inputs, it is difficult to gauge whether all these databases interact with each other. Fraud data in silos can result in fragmented investigative efforts that are less effective in nabbing criminals and recovering money. An opportunity for robust fraud intelligence is also foregone.

Banks, third-party application providers (TPAPs), and regulatory authorities like the I4C and the Reserve Bank of India all play critical roles, but a cohesive strategy for fraud reporting and management is harder to implement.

The existing infrastructure provides a solid foundation upon which certain enhancements can be implemented. We discuss these below.

Fraud victims must be allowed to approach any platform for filing their complaint — their bank, the UPI in-app redress platform, or the NCRP — such that the complaint details get shared with a centralised database

MULTI-CHANNEL PLATFORM
A multi-channel reporting mechanism for digital financial fraud is essential for effective coordination. Victims of fraud via UPI may intuitively reach out to their TPAP or bank to file their concerns, but redirecting them to a different platform may cause drop-offs in the registration process.

It may be helpful to reimagine a future where fraud victims can approach any platform for filing their complaint — their bank, the UPI in-app redress platform, or the NCRP — such that the complaint details get shared with a centralised database. Such a technological solution would serve as a single point of entry for all fraud reports, enabling real-time and digitised data collection and analysis.

All stakeholders, including banks, TPAPs, and customers, would be able to access this platform to report both successful and attempted frauds. Such a system can ensure that all relevant data is captured promptly and as accurately as possible, providing a comprehensive view of the fraud landscape.

STANDARDISED DATA COLLECTION
The presence of different databases for fraud reports may be reasoned by the different objectives that each entity seeks to fulfill. While RBI's objectives may be supervisory, NCRP's is investigative.

However, to enable efficient, consistent, complete, and easily analysable data sharing, all stakeholders would have to gather a minimum common set of data points for every complaint, which is complementary to their data collection objectives, and follow a set of data-sharing protocols for this data that can then enable fast analytics.

These common data points may include the defrauded amount value, bank account or mobile number or UPI

ID into which the money had been directed, bank account details of the complainant, MO of the fraud, and any other screenshots or recordings that the complainant may have.

GRADED ACTIONS
With standardised fraud data points from multiple databases centralised at a common technological system, robust and expansive analysis of the data inputted into it will be possible.

Insights that will now be enriched from data points from other databases can include the veracity of incoming complaints, the background risk profile of the account accused, and the risk associated with such a complaint.

The risk score assigned to each complaint can guide stakeholders' actions with respect to such a case in real-time.

A high risk score associated with the accused bank account in a complaint may trigger the freezing of such an account, while a moderate risk score may imply banks/TPAPs must flag such risk to users who may be transacting with this account, and a low score only requires that the account be actively monitored.

Such graded and risk-proportionate action will result in the efficient use of investigation resources of LEAs, simultaneously creating an intelligence engine rich with historical data on frauds and the actions that they triggered.

The system can also dynamically update the score, which will in turn update the graded response expected from banks, TPAPs, mobile network operators, e-commerce platforms, and LEAs.

Fostering real-time inter-agency collaboration and developing tech-system-driven intelligence can help India build a resilient and secure digital payment ecosystem.

The writers are Researchers at Dvara Research

SEBI's proposal to reshape insider trading norms

The recent paper on 'connected persons' aims to bring in more transparency and fairness for investors

P Saravanan
A Paul Williams

In a bid to fortify the integrity of India's securities market and protect investors, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has unveiled a consultation paper proposing a sweeping overhaul of the regulations governing 'Connected Persons'.

The existing definition of connected persons has been criticised for its broad scope, leading to potential ambiguity and challenges in implementation.

WHO ARE CONNECTED PERSONS
At its core, a connected person refers to an individual or entity that has a direct or indirect influence over the decision-making process of a listed company or is in a position to impact its financial affairs.

The current definition of connected persons under SEBI's encompasses a wide range of relationships, including family members, business associates, and entities with shared financial interests.

SEBI proposes a more nuanced definition of connected persons, focusing on those with a substantial influence or control over a listed company's affairs. This would involve considering factors such as shareholding

patterns, management control, and contractual relationships.

The consultation paper suggests expanding the list of transactions that require disclosure and approval when involving connected persons. This is aimed at capturing a wider range of potential conflict-of-interest scenarios.

SEBI proposes making the disclosure requirements more stringent for transactions involving connected persons. This would include detailed information on the nature of the relationship, the terms of the transaction, and the rationale behind it.

The regulator is also considering introducing stricter penalties for non-compliance with connected person regulations. This is intended to deter potential violations and ensure greater adherence to the rules.

INVESTOR IMPACT
The proposed changes, if implemented, would have far-reaching implications for both listed companies and investors, reshaping the landscape of related party transactions and insider trading regulations.

Listed companies would face increased scrutiny of their transactions with connected persons, necessitating greater diligence and caution. This would require companies to establish robust internal controls and compliance



MARKET REGULATOR.
Investor-friendly proposals aims

mechanisms to ensure adherence to the stricter regulatory framework.

The expanded list of transactions subject to disclosure and approval, coupled with the more stringent disclosure requirements, would undoubtedly increase the compliance burden on listed companies. This could be particularly challenging for smaller companies with limited resources.

Further, the need for pre-approval of certain transactions involving connected persons could lead to potential delays and disruptions in business operations, impacting the company's agility and decision-making processes.

For investors, the proposed changes aim to improve transparency by requiring more detailed and timely disclosures of transactions involving connected persons. This would empower investors with better

information, enabling them to make more informed investment decisions.

By reducing information asymmetry between insiders and the general public, the new regulations would help level the playing field and foster a fairer market environment. The stricter regulations and enhanced penalties for non-compliance would act as a deterrent against insider trading and other market abuses, providing greater protection to investors.

SEBI has invited public comments on the consultation paper, and the feedback received will play a crucial role in shaping the final regulations.

SEBI's consultation paper on connected persons marks a significant step towards strengthening the regulatory framework for related party transactions. The proposed changes, if implemented effectively, have the potential to enhance transparency, curb conflicts of interest, and foster a more fair and equitable market environment.

However, careful consideration of potential challenges and concerns is essential to ensure that the new regulations achieve their intended objectives without stifling market growth and innovation.

Saravanan is a professor of finance and accounting at IIM Trichirappalli and Williams is the Head of India at Sereno Financial

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to leditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to "Letters to the Editor", The Hindu Business Line, Kasturji Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Decline in ethics

This refers to the article "Malpractices in exams" (August 14). The frequency of cheating even in career-building competitive examinations demonstrates worrisome fall in behavioural ethics and character of the youth.

At another level acceptance of bribes by those charged with the responsibility to hold exams fairly strengthen the evil nexus.

An unmeasured but grave consequence of the system is selection of the underserving for jobs that affect citizens' well-being such as in medical, teaching, or engineering. Selection of really honest persons involved in the

examination process and deterrent punishment of those caught in malpractices including the parents of the defaulting candidates is a must.

YG Chouksey

Pune

This refers to the news report "Organic farmers want certification cost lowered" (August 14). It is disappointing to note that the cost of certification to be obtained by individual farmers from organisations on their crop is a whopping ₹1 lakh per crop.

When every step is being taken by the Centre in promoting growing crops organically and preparing the lands

suiting to grow organic crops, the

costlier Certification process would deter many in switching over to organic method of cropping.

Though, the costs under Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-India) are much less when compared to other private

Certification agencies, but unfortunately, the products certified by PGS-India are not recognised outside India. The Ministries concerned need to take steps in freeing the farmers from the

clutches of trader/exporters by allowing them to trade their "certified organic produce" to any

exporter who offers better rates.

RV Baskaran

Chennai

It refers to "Budget falls short in pushing domestic EVs" if the government is serious about green transportation then it has to walk the talk and address both supply and demand side challenges.

The Budget has tried to address supply side issues by providing exemption on customs duty on a range of inputs.

But buyers need clarity on after sales support, infrastructure, battery swapping etc.

Naal Govind

Bang

Food price woes

Measuring the fluctuations in the cost of food materials is vital. But

keeping other luxury items in the same basket cannot reflect the exact status of food inflation. The fact that food has a 46 per cent weightage in the inflation basket is telling.

The idea of removing food from the inflation basket is welcome but a separate index for measuring food inflation is needed.

Providing food to the vulnerable sections at affordable prices is vital. The government could also devise a plan to hold food prices constant for a year.

Using market forces for price discovery can work for goods other than food.

AG Rajmohan

Anantapur

THE IDEAS PAGE

Our freedom, our Constitution

As the tricolour was hoisted on August 15, 1947, Indians were already collectively owning the Constitution-in-the-making, reimagining freedom as a transformation of their lives and rights



ROHIT DE AND ORNIT SHANI

ABOUT SIX MONTHS after India gained Independence, and shortly after the draft Constitution was published in February 1948, the social activist and journalist P Kodanda Rao, criticised its length. The draft ran to 209 pages, 315 articles and eight schedules. "The Indian constitution," he suggested, "may be so short that it may even be made the National Anthem and even inscribed on the National Flag. Only such a document will grip the imagination and evoke sentimental or emotional response, and not one with three hundred clauses which no one will ever know." The final Constitution of 1950 was, however, even longer, with 395 articles, and 10 schedules, and it has continued to expand since then. Nonetheless, the Indian Constitution has become an anthem and a rallying point for its citizens.

This may look and feel new, but in fact, the everyday relevance and invocation of the Constitution has never waned in India from the moment of its making. This could not have been achieved by merely promulgating the Constitution in the name of the people. How, then, has the Constitution become from the time of its making, a site of struggle through which citizens assert their rights and claim remedies?

Publics across India, we discovered based on new archival materials, saw the Constitution-making as pregnant with possibilities for changing their lives for the better. Thousands of diverse groups, associations and individuals from across the length and breadth of the country developed a fever of constitutional expectations, articulating demands of the future Constitution, firing off missives to the Constituent Assembly, putting forward a range of constitutional ideas, wants and aspirations for what was to be, in their word, "our Constitution".

Advocates Gand students, to take one example, convened a conference in Nagpur three weeks after the Constituent Assembly first met with the object of uniting "aboriginal students". They sent 16 demands to the Assembly, which included free and compulsory education, special scholarship, guarantees of government employment to incentivise education and representation in the university governance. The public engagement with the Constitution-making generated a churn of innovative rights claims. Informed by their daily life-experiences, the Indian public thought beyond conventional constitutional ideas, addressing, for example, the disability, sexual violence, child rights and rights to food.

The public-intense engagement with the Constitution-making was unplanned and came as a surprise to the Constituent Assembly. Indeed, just ahead of the beginning of the constitutional debates, Assembly member KM Munshi suggested that the Assembly proceedings should be held behind closed doors to ensure the experts work efficiently, free from public



C.R. Sankumar

pressure. The Indian public, however, had a different idea. They insisted on having a say and in participating. The scale of their demands ultimately forced the Constituent Assembly to open the Constitution-making process to the public. The draft Constitution of February 1948, which was now circulated for public comments, became a best seller with several reprints being sold even on railway stations. The public made it their own by producing unauthorised translations of the draft in numerous Indian languages, including Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, and Hindustani. Through this process, the Indian public was working out the Constitution's potential implications for their lives. They criticised its limits, such as on civil liberties, and attempted to change it. At the same time, they already demanded that the government abide by the draft Constitution.

The Deaf and Dumb Society of India, as one example, pointed out to the Constituent Assembly that granting equal citizenship for all had little value to disabled people unless discrimination built into existing laws were removed, and the disabled were granted reservations in education and government jobs. The Constituent Assembly Secretariat assured them that universal adult franchise in the future Constitution would protect their rights. They responded furiously, stating that adult franchise would mean little to them unless there were constitutional guarantees for education, em-

The Indian Constitution has become an anthem and a rallying point for its citizens. This may look and feel new, but in fact, the everyday relevance and invocation of the Constitution has never waned in India from the moment of its making. This could not have been achieved by merely promulgating the Constitution in the name of the people. How, then, has the Constitution become from the time of its making, a site of struggle through which citizens assert their rights and claim remedies?

ployment, anti-discrimination and their inclusion in the census.

Despite high levels of illiteracy, poverty, scarcity and the uncertainties wrought by the Partition, the Indian public was not a passive recipient of the Constitution, nor were they absent in its making. The process of making the Constitution animated their imagination. They understood what they were getting. And, most importantly, through collective public struggles, Indians made themselves the real protagonists in the theatre of constitutionalism. For the Indian public, therefore, the Constitution was not a sacred book or a textbook, to be interpreted only by "priests" — be they judges or legislators.

Indians made themselves constitution-ists ahead of the Constitution coming into force in 1950. As the tricolour was hoisted on August 15, 1947, their Constitution was already alive. Indians collectively owned the Constitution-in-the-making, reimagining freedom as a transformation of their lives — social, economic, and political. As they have demonstrated during the time of the constitution making and since, they have mobilised in pursuit of this transformative vision persistently.

De teaches at Yale University. Shani teaches at the University of Haifa. Their forthcoming book *Assembling India's Constitution* will be published in 2025 with Cambridge University Press, and Penguin Random House India

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Independence Day celebrations today for millions of this country's citizens will be tempered by the harsh realities of life in modern Pakistan, foremost of which are economic stagnation, political polarisation and resurgent militancy and extremism." — DAWN, PAKISTAN

Caste is system, not classification

Debate on sub-classification of SCs ends up making Dalits pay the price for the plight of the more oppressed among them



MOGGALLAN BHARTI

FEW ISSUES CAN be debated without nuance, least of all matters of constitutional morality. Any policy that expands social justice — including the Supreme Court's verdict on sub classification within the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes categories vis-à-vis reservation benefits — is welcome. This newspaper's editorial, "Deepening justice", (IE, August 2), does so. However, in light of the apex court's judgment, some notions must be clarified to understand the larger "circumstances of social justice" — to borrow a phrase from political theorist David Miller — for SCs and STs.

A set of institutions dispensing social and economic goods, and a state committed to social justice, together constitute the conditions which are indispensable for social justice to become substantive. In simpler words, Dalits, Adivasis and numerous other marginalised communities are at a historical disadvantage, which continues to play out to this day, despite India being in its 75th year as a constitutional republic. The state's abysmal failure in removing caste stigma, ending caste-based violence and the general apathy of the people towards the marginalised all speak to the failure of social justice measures to address the matrix of socioeconomic deprivation that we owe to the caste system.

The first — and necessary — step to meaningfully address the glaring social inequalities in India is to carry out a comprehensive caste census across the country. This must not be limited to disadvantaged groups alone — it must include all the sections of society.

This requires some elaboration. There is no denying the fact that there are communities among SCs who have a minimal presence in higher education and public sector employment. (It bears repeating that the collective share of Scheduled Castes as a whole is significantly low in these sectors, despite reservation.) Caste data from the 2011 National Census — and there has been no Census since — which enumerates SCs and STs, does provide a basic picture of the internal socioeconomic differentiation within these categories. There is a case for doing more here, so that underrepresented communities can be brought into the net of reservation. However, the explanations for the glaring inequalities vis-à-vis accessing reservation isn't in the perceived discrimination of "better off" SCs against "worse off" SCs. There are several other reasons. Let me just go into two of them.

First, while the privileged castes, due to their social positioning, are conspicuous by their presence in almost all the important public institutions of higher education and

public sector employment, the underprivileged, particularly Dalits, have seen significant improvement in their access to higher education only after the promulgation of the Constitution of India. The constitutional republic became a possibility because of the social and political movements that preceded it, and laid down the rules for social and political representation essential for a democratic polity. This politics of representation imbued with the larger philosophy of social justice has been the at the heart of Dalit politics ever since.

Dalits have been striving hard to build a socially just country, in which they participate as equals as envisaged by Ambedkar. That a vast section could only claim their rights because of their empowerment through politics — and one of the most important preconditions of such a politics was to leave their caste occupation and embrace the world of protest, change and emancipation through learning. Effectively then, social mobility among the Scheduled Caste is directly proportional to their untearing from the stigmatised caste occupation. The section that lags behind in their access to reservation is chiefly because of their indifference to this politics of empowerment embedded in Ambedkar's philosophy of a socially, economically and politically just society.

Secondly, and this is connected to the first, the reason for the under-representation of certain sub-castes within SCs is due to their general backwardness arising from low education and income levels, as professor Sukhdeo Thorat, among others, have argued recently. The under-representation of these subcastes owes to truncated capabilities among them — a direct result of the lack of politicisation and not due to the discrimination at the hands of other Scheduled Castes. The impression that the underrepresented among SCs owe their condition to the better-represented social status is due to the ideology of the caste system as a whole, isolated from the larger scheme of graded inequality inherent in the caste system. This diverts attention from the inhuman caste system, and creates an impression that it's Dalits who must bear the responsibility and culpability for those among them who have the least. In reality, their collective disempowerment social status is due to the ideology of the caste system as a whole.

We cannot remain oblivious to caste — some even deny its existence as an axis of inequality — when it comes to the sometimes deplorable behaviour of upper castes while at the same time becoming a conciliation society with concerns about extending reservation benefits for neediest when it comes to Dalits.

I am sure there is a possibility of sub-classification among the upper castes as well. After all, they too are not a homogeneous group of marauding oppressors — there does indeed exist an enlightened sub-set within them that is anti-caste.

The writer teaches at the School of Development Studies, Dr B R Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD)



JAYANT CHAUDHARY

A plan for the young

Skilling can drive India's growth. Budget shows the way

INDIA TODAY IS at a pivotal point where, along with sustained economic growth, we must also harness our demographic dividend. This means empowering people with skills that ensure economic resilience and social inclusion. We must build a roadmap where every member of the workforce has the opportunity to develop useful occupational and vocational skills, upskill to improve the quality of their employment and reskill to utilise new tools for enhancing their competencies. This imperative is particularly relevant for rural India, where equitable access to sustainable livelihood opportunities is not only necessary for economic stability but also social integration.

The next two decades, leading into India at 100 and beyond, could be the most significant in the country's growth trajectory. India is in a position to become the largest contributor to the global workforce. We must, therefore, focus on making the country a global hub for innovation, education, entrepreneurship, and high-quality skills.

The Budget exercise isn't just about placing an account of revenue, expenditure and plans for taxes — ideally, it should also be a statement of intent and resolve. The Union Budget 2024 is a clarion call for an enabling policy framework and ecosystem for the country's youth, who could become catalysts for a high economic growth trajectory. It has

rightfully prioritised the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), putting it at the forefront of enabling and empowering our youth. Key initiatives include a centrally sponsored scheme under the Prime Minister's package that will skill 20 lakh youth over the next five years.

A substantial allocation has been made for Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) for the next five years. Hundred ITIs are to be modernised through a hub-and-spoke model, supported by a total outlay of Rs 60,000 crore. This endeavour has been bolstered by a new centrally sponsored scheme, developed in collaboration with states and industry, to ensure that skilling outcomes meet high standards of quality and relevance — Rs 30,000 crore will come from the Centre, Rs 20,000 crore from state governments, and Rs 10,000 crore from industry contributions, including CSR funding. The capacity of five national institutes will be augmented with the aim of benefiting 20 lakh students, aligning IT training with industry needs and creating a robust pathway for workforce development.

Another major change is the revision of the Model Skill Loan Scheme up to Rs 7.5 lakh, with a guarantee from a government-promoted fund, expected to benefit 25,000 students annually. This will help us lay greater emphasis on outcomes under our key focus areas, schemes, and initiatives which

are set out below.

The Skill India Mission today supports all flagship schemes of the government, such as PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), PM Vishwakarma, PM JANMAN Yojana, Lakhpati Didi, Solar Mission, Green Hydrogen Mission and AI for India. Since its inception in 2015, the Mission has equipped millions of young Indians with the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving job market. As Skill India completes 10 years, it is imperative to reimagine the Skill 2.0 landscape and adopt a comprehensive approach to future development. PMKVY is focused on short-term skill development training. It focuses on the rural youth and has trained over 1.49 crore candidates.

Apprenticeship training has emerged as a cornerstone of skill development and economic growth. Recognising its importance, the Centre has revised the Apprentices Act of 1961 to provide a more conducive training framework. More than 32 lakh youngsters are engaged as apprentices. Integrating apprenticeships into the educational system and linking them to higher education pathways is crucial. To make apprenticeships more attractive, the government shares stipend costs with establishments under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) and has streamlined processes to expedite stipend reimbursements.

An exciting development in this respect is the launch, last year, of the Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) — a platform for all skill requirements. The portal has been envisioned as an information repository for all government initiatives related to skilling and entrepreneurship.

There are also plans to make India a global skills hub by equipping our institutions to meet international demands. Students in these institutions will receive financial support through skill vouchers and skill loans. We will also integrate skilling with general academic education, as per the recommendations of the National Education Policy.

India plans to use its demographic dividend to optimise its role in the global economic growth story. In the coming months, major initiatives will be rolled out to pull skill development at the forefront of India's growth trajectory. A multi-pronged approach that gives every working age Indian an opportunity to have higher quality and skill-intensive employment will not only separate us from the rest of the world but will ensure that we lead the drive to be the world's leading economy by 2047.

The writer is Union Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEMANDING SAFETY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Falling her' (IE, August 14). Doctor's strike across India highlights the risks that medical personnel face in the line of duty. Many states have put in place laws that make violence against healthcare personnel a non-bailable offence, and prescribed fines and jail terms for offenders. However, not many convictions have taken place under these laws. The Kolkata incident underlines the need for workplace safety for doctors and other medical personnel, especially women. Government, hospital management, and society must work towards a safer environment for those who save lives daily. Khelvan Das, Kolkata

TRUMP & MUSK CHAT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Politician & Tech Bro' (IE, August 14). Donald Trump's conversation on X with owner Elon Musk was marred by technical errors. It was the latest mishap for the Republican nominee as he has sought to regain his footing amid a surge in infotainment for his new rival, Kamala Harris. Trump has been trying different ways to break through at a challenging moment for his campaign. Even then, he made at least 20 false claims in that conversation. SS Paul, Noida

ODE TO 'PAAASA'

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'When Guru Dutt met Plato' (IE, August 14). Guru Dutt excelled at portraying sorrow and angst on-screen. His films are cult classics. Paaasa, in particular, shows that the director in him was well-versed in cinematic subtleties. Legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray also admired Dutt's piece de resistance for his remarkable sense of rhythm and fluidity of camera. Sahir Ludhianvi poured the protagonist's bitterness and disillusionment into the songs. Dutt was fortunate to have him. SH Quadri, Bikaner

QUOTA POLITICS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The post-Mandal moment' (IE, August 14). The SC verdict on sub-classification of SCs has expanded the scope of substantive equality in the delivery of justice. It has paved the way for the empowerment and representation of hitherto marginalised communities. However, the responses, particularly from Dalit leaders virtually negating the sub-classification do not align with the spirit of equity. The obiter dicta on creamy layer exclusion can be a fig leaf for politicians to obfuscate the reality of power asymmetry within marginalised communities. LR Murmu, New Delhi

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
GRAMMARIANS DISPUTE, AND THE QUESTION
IS STILL UNDECIDED. — HORACE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Freedom to be and become

The courage to value independence and strive for it begins at home, letting a child ask: Why?



SHANTA GOKHALE

IT WAS EXACTLY six when India became a free country. What a day that was. Memory being what it is, I only remember the mad exultation all around and three close-knit families from the neighbourhood piling into a large van to go see the lights in south Bombay, Victoria Terminus all lit up. The Municipal Corporation too. The Old Lady of Borj Bunder? I'm not sure. What I do remember is thousands of people milling around, grinning without reason.

Winning independence for the country was not winning freedom for citizens. That happened only three years later. I was nine when the Constitution of India came into force and we were granted the rights to equality, freedom of religion, cultural practice, education and, most importantly, to freedom of speech and expression. This is the freedom I fight for as a journalist and writer. This is the freedom at whose altar Salman Rushdie lost precious years of his life being 'protected' and, decades later, his right eye.

For me, the pain of a writer deprived of the freedom to write is encapsulated in an image from Tagore's story 'Khatra'. In this simply-told tale, little Uma's most precious possession is her *khatra*, her notebook, in which she scribbles her unformed observations. Married off at nine, she carries the notebook with her. Without the automatic right to scribble in it in her husband's home, she writes behind closed doors. Uma is discovered. Her three envious sisters-in-law alert her husband. He, educated and supposedly liberal, snatches the notebook away from her, never to return it. Uma lies on the floor sobbing her heart out. The autocratic husband looks on. The sisters-in-law gloat.

As a pre-teen I had a notebook in which I wrote stuff. My mother preserved it for years till I junked it. There were women even then who wrote under pseudonyms, to protect their families from the ignominy of having daughters-in-law who write 'all sorts of things'. A writer needs absolute freedom to

write. Which means she needs absolute freedom to think. Which means she needs absolute freedom to be who she is, or rather to become who she wants to be, her writing being her way to becoming that.

Let us bring Sartre into this for a moment. He said your birth gives you existence. Thereafter, it is your responsibility to create your essence, the you-ness of you. There are those, however, whose minds are so shackled by other people's expectations that, even when they are offered freedom on a silver platter, they do not have the courage to take it. The hero of Sartre's play *No Exit*, cannot walk out of hell even when the door is thrown wide open, because his mind is unfree.

The courage to value freedom and strive for it begins at home and at school. 'Why' is a sound question for a child to ask. If the answer, whether from parent or teacher, is 'because I say so', the child is likely to grow up valuing obedience over freedom and become the kind of citizen an authoritarian state loves.

Fear is the arch enemy of freedom. Machiavelli argues that a ruler who puts fear into his people is better able than the one who preaches love, to suppress dissent and rebellion and thereby preserve law and order. Such a ruler is pathologically unable to deal with the variety that is the human being. He orders uniformity in thought and belief. If left unopposed, he might also go on to dictate the words that writers may or may not use in their stories, the subjects that artists may or may not choose for their work. He does not know that the artist works within a strict discipline of his own making. For freedom is discipline.

We have always had censorship, both official and of the street. Today, social media has taken over from the street. Hurt sensibilities are the egg shells that writers must constantly walk on. Perumal Murugan discovered this to his horror, ultimately leading to his declaration 'Perumal Murugan the

writer is dead.' Writers are not out to hurt anybody deliberately. Indeed, when they are at work, they are hardly conscious of places and people beyond those taking shape on their computer screens.

The ultimate test of a writer's belief in freedom is the freedom she is willing to grant her characters to be themselves. She might begin with a notion of who they are; but if she insists that they must be just that and no more, she has on hand still marionettes instead of human beings. However, if she gives them space to breathe and grow, she creates flesh-and-blood human beings with a will, a language and responses of their own. The writer of fiction is assiduous in trying to seek out the complicated truths of human action and interaction. Literature is the best way of telling such nuanced truths. An autocratic state, having no truck with truth, feels threatened by writers for this reason.

The journalist too cherishes the freedom to seek and report the truth. Her truth is a meticulous assemblage of facts unflinchingly documented. An autocratic state, fearing truth, imprisons its journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that 320 journalists were behind bars worldwide as on December 1, 2023.

Freedom is not a set of abstracte abstractions. Freedom is what we want on the ground. Freedom to practise our professions. Freedom to agree if we agree; disagree if we disagree. New ideas are good for the world. I realise that demands for freedom to dress in a way that makes us comfortable, to eat what pleases our palates, to believe in the gods of our choice (or not believe) come from a place of privilege. If I belonged to the remaining 80 per cent of this country's population, I would have no time to think and talk about freedom. I would be too deeply embroiled in the struggle to live with dignity — clothed, fed and sheltered.

Gokhale is a writer, translator and critic

GUILTY IN BENGAL

High Court transferring doctor's rape-murder case to CBI indicts Bengal police — and points to larger guilt in TMC-ruled state

CHIEF MINISTER OF West Bengal Mamata Banerjee, the leader of the party that sprawls across its social and political landscape, warns her police force that she will hand over a high-profile case of the rape and murder of a doctor, that has sent shock waves across the country, to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) — the Kolkata Police, the implication is, is not upto the task. Her nephew Abhishek Banerjee, heir apparent, resorts to the brutish language of 'encounter' and 'hanging' of the guilty. The Calcutta High Court, citing a plethora of failures on the part of the police and administration, does, in fact, hand the case over to the CBI. In West Bengal, the state has abysmally failed the 31-year-old doctor who was grievously assaulted at Kolkata's RG Kar Hospital. The whataboutery that followed the opacity in the initial handling of the case, and flagrant mistakes such as the appointment of the hospital's principal, Sandip Ghosh, to a plum position at another Kolkata hospital immediately after he resigned, are part of a larger malaise. Banerjee and the Trinamool Congress have been electorally and politically successful, the TMC government has been lauded for its women-centric schemes and for fielding a high number of women candidates in the electoral arena, many of whom are now MPs. But that cannot paper over the disquieting fraying of institutions in West Bengal that is now on show.

It has become imperative, the Calcutta High Court said, for it to 'exercise its jurisdiction falling which the confidence in the public mind would be shattered'. The 'public confidence' seems fragile in Bengal for a reason. Look at the sequence of events in this case. For hours after the young doctor's body was found, the family was not informed. A case of 'unnatural death' was registered, unusual when a murder has taken place in a major hospital in one of India's prominent cities. Why didn't the head of the institution or any of the doctors file a written complaint? Why, as the Court pointed out, had there been no progress in the case after five days? It is no surprise, then, that the victim's family approached the Court, having lost faith in the police of the state.

The crime in Kolkata has once again sparked larger conversations about gender inequality, violence against women and the absence of safe public spaces for them. But before and beyond that discussion, is the issue of law and order and of a shadowy political architecture that is nurtured by the ruling party even as it undermines the authority of its government. As a report in this newspaper shows, the wife of the accused had twice complained that he had assaulted her — and nothing happened. Indeed, when he was arrested, he was at the police barracks. Over the better part of 15 years, the 'Syndicate' — an alleged nexus between local underworld, police, politicians, government functionaries, business — has grown and spread across Bengal, taking a high toll on the health of structures of urban and rural governance. For long, the violence and impunity that marred much of the state was less visible in Kolkata. But when officials, local leaders and even government appointees wield unaccountable clout, there are no spaces that are immune. That is why when the CM and her nephew express outrage, it rings more than a little hollow.

WELCOME STEP BACK

Government must listen to stakeholders, heed their concerns, before it goes forward with draft broadcast bill

IN NOVEMBER LAST year, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had placed the draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill in the public domain for comments. Last month, a new version of the Bill was reportedly shared with a few stakeholders. Several provisions have been met with legitimate criticism. Concerns have been articulated over the government's apparent attempt to exercise greater sway over online content, and curb views that it may deem as being critical of it, raising worries over freedom of speech and expression. Such fears are underlined when a government official, according to a report in this paper, cites the 'role a number of independent content creators played in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls' in videos which made some sensational claims about the government and its senior leaders', as a key reason for the bill.

Several controversial provisions of the draft Bill warrant more careful consideration. It has sought to expand its scope from OTT content and digital news to social media accounts and online video creators. It seeks to expand the definition of 'digital news broadcaster' to include publishers of news and current affairs content, also encompassing independent content creators. This could include influencers on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and X, platforms that provide space to a vast multitude and help amplify news and views. The Bill could possibly include creators who reside outside the country as well — this, though, would run up against the wall of enforcement. These content creators need to intimate the government of their work, set up a content evaluation committee, and ensure its diversity — only programmes certified by these committees would be allowed to run. Such sweeping provisions, which could lead to greater interventions and curbs, posing hurdles for creators in the development of content and in the generation of revenue streams, don't square with the government's own attempts elsewhere to bolster the start-up ecosystem, and invigorate the digital economy.

After a pushback from several quarters, the government has done well to withdraw the draft Bill. The ministry has said that it is 'holding a series of consultations with the stakeholders', and has allowed them till October 15 to place their comments. It has said that a fresh draft will be published after detailed consultations. This is the right step. Such far-reaching regulations, besides being undesirable, will also be difficult to implement. The government must listen to all stakeholders before it goes forward with this bill.

APOSTROPHE APOCALYPSE

Harris' vs Harris's, Walz' vs Walz's — there are no clear winners in this grammar war

TROUBLE IS BREWING in the US ahead of the presidential elections and it has got little to do with ideology or politics. The two sides ranged on either end of the warring field are the apostrophe evangelists and the apostrophe anarchists, broadly categorised as sub-species of the grammar nerds. Their aim: A consensus on the proper use of the possessive when it comes to Democratic candidates Kamala Harris and her vice presidential nominee, Minnesota governor Tim Walz. The snag: The quirks of the English language, with its rich debts to Germanic and French roots, make it difficult to draw a defining line. In other words, where should the apostrophe be? Should it be Harris' or Harris's? Or Walz' or Walz's?

The Associated Press Stylebook, the most commonly referenced media style sheet, has clear directions for the use of the possessive. For singular common nouns ending in the alphabet 's', add another one after the apostrophe (Example: dress's). But when it comes to proper nouns ending in 's', just an apostrophe is good enough (Example: Roger Waters'). So 'Harris' campaign' would be just fine. Only, the anarchists beg to differ. An apostrophe hanging out alone in the end is a letdown of its very purpose, they claim. If one pronounces the 's', why not just add it to the word — 'Harris's campaign'.

Given how the evolution of the English language has come to break free of the Pareto principle — the law of the vital few holding disproportionate determining power — it makes sense to call for a time-out on this. The written word has always been guided by the spoken and if both usages manage to communicate their import, both ought to hold good. Harris's campaign seems to think as much. According to media reports, her press releases have gone with both 'Harris' and 'Harris's'. That's one up for democracy.

A NATION OF ASPIRANTS

It needs the teacher, the parent, the policymaker to stitch safety nets



NANDITESH NILAY

THIS INDEPENDENCE DAY, as we unfurl the flag and sing the national anthem, let's spare a thought for The Aspirant. Of course, all 1.4 billion of us, in this our 77th year, aspire towards the 'better', whatever that may be. But The Aspirant is the young man or woman working hard, away from public glare, to find a tiny door in the massive, impenetrable wall known as the system: Trying to crack an entrance exam, a job interview, find a bed in a hospital or a seat in the sleeper coach — not Vandae Bharat — or a foothold on the ladder that leads to some place higher.

The last few weeks have shown them, and us, that even 77 years into freedom, what a challenge it is. More than 26 lakh NEET examinees spend endless days and nights waiting for the system to decide if they have to take a retset or not, all because of a few corrupt citizens. Three university graduates, all bright and talented, find themselves under rainwater which coalesces with the system to snuff out their lives. All they had hoped for was to become a civil servant and help other aspirants realise their potential in a village, a district. A woman doctor returning after her night shift is raped and killed. We are now fighting a war over her soul on Instagram, calling each other names, rather than confronting the reality that stares at us: India has improved in a million ways since that trist-of-destiny midnight but in a million new ways, it is still a work in progress.

In any society, politics, governance and

citizen behaviour are inevitably extensions of human relationships. How we engage with each other, and how we transact with each other is how relationships play out in our democratic institutions as well — we often forget that our MPs and MLAs are MPs and MLAs because of our vote and our vote is shaped by how we conduct ourselves outside the polling booth. In our schools, homes, and workplaces, do we cut corners, do we take the cheap shot, do we put down a rival? Do we push an application of a friend's child rather than one unknown and less entitled? Morality and ethics are not principles, they are hidden in the list of items in our daily-to-do list.

That rainy day, the students in Rau's basement library would have been studying politics, science, history, geography, disaster management, literature, sociology, India's Five-Year plans and the country's space programme, knowing that they were in a quiet place where they could concentrate. What they could not read was us, their fellow Indians: The owners of that building, the contractor and the municipal corporation officer as well as their teachers who, every day, told them about dreams but were disconnected from their reality and, of course, the local MP, the local MLA, the local *rathna*. It was their job, it was our job, to ensure that no one is killed reading in a library. But we have all got away and this Independence Day, we shall forget.

This Independence Day, let's remember that the key to aspiration is hope and

because of the numbers, more will fail than succeed. So let's pledge to ensure that hope may become disappointment, but it should never turn into despair. That is why each suicide note from Kota is a call for national action and yet, it continues to be treated like an unfortunate postcard from this city of dreams. Talented artists convert their trauma into successful TV shows and our world goes on.

As a first step, can we start thinking of ways other than exams where the odds are as skewed as in a lottery? In a deeply unequal society, how do we design a level-playing field? As parents, how can we stop thinking of our children only in terms of their national examination rank? We need to change. At the heart of this change, lies the fact that a nation of The Aspirant needs a nation of The Teacher and The Parent, who stitch the safety net for all our children. Protection, care and nurture become the key imperatives of policy. The three who died in that Delhi basement working hard chasing their dreams were our children, the doctor who was murdered in Kolkata this week was our daughter. Can this be our pledge this August? Can we say to our children and others' children: Happy Independence Day, you can depend on us.

The writer is the author of Being Good, Aaiye, Insaan Banen and Ethikos. He teaches and trains courses on ethics, values and behaviour



AUGUST 15, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

TDP IN CRISIS

THE TELUGU DESAM government in Andhra Pradesh plunged into a serious crisis with four ministers, including Finance Minister N Bhaskara Rao, resigning from the N T Rama Rao cabinet. The other ministers are: Health Minister S Ramamuni Reddy, Transport Minister S Satyanarayana and Excise Minister T Jeevan Reddy. Jeevan Reddy said: 'We are not satisfied with the dictatorial type of functioning of the Chief Minister.'

PRESIDENT ON I-DAY

THE PRESIDENT, ZAIL Singh, warned the nation that some misguided people and disruptive forces, which precipitated the tragic events in Punjab, were now creating distur-

bances in other parts of the country. 'It is our sacred duty to check these disruptive forces,' Singh said in his address to the nation on the eve of the Independence Day. The supreme task before the country was to eradicate poverty, hunger, ignorance and disease. Violent agitations and extremist activities only put the clock back on this endeavour, he said.

LANKA TAMIL QUESTION

THE ESCALATION OF violence and killing of Tamils in Sri Lanka was once again raised by irate opposition members during zero hour in both Houses of Parliament. Many opposition members of the Lok Sabha, notably those from the DMK, expressed their anguish over the developments in Sri Lanka and called upon the government to come up with a 'fresh state-

ment' on the issue. Subramaniam Swamy said that 'genocide in a big way' was taking place in Sri Lanka.

PAID SEATS IN MEDICINE

DEGREES RECEIVED BY medical students from 'capitation colleges', which are being encouraged by certain state governments, would not be recognised by the Medical Council of India at any cost. The purchase of seats in these colleges by students belonging to affluent families was against the 'ethical principles of science of medicine', according to B N Sinha, president of the Medical Council of India. Sinha lamented that the standard of medical education in the country had been deteriorating because of the apathetic attitude of the state governments.



MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

MINT CURATOR

Lest we forget: Let us start from the beginning of India's journey

The strategic vision of India's freedom leaders laid a splendid foundation for success but are we proving worthy successors?



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As we celebrate Independence Day, let's look back at the distance we have traversed in 77 years. This was India in 1947: Life expectancy was 32 years. Literacy was 18%. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth had been sub-0.5% per annum for over 50 years. Yes, the so-called 'Hindu rate of growth' of our early years of independence was an eight-fold increase over the growth rate in the first half of the 20th century. We had negligible capital. Because the British Raj was about building capital in Great Britain, not in India. And we had dire poverty.

We were far behind not just Europe and America, but even most of Asia. Most Asian countries, even excluding Japan, had life expectancies of close to 50 years and literacy rates several times ours.

We have come a very long way since and we must always remember all those who fought for our freedom, giving up years of their life or even life itself.

Those who put a framework in place: who had the vision, strategy and ability to take a road no other post-colonial nation took.

We do not appreciate enough that the path we took was not the only one possible. It was not inevitable, or even easy.

In 1947, almost no one would have bet on our surviving as an united nation for 75+ years, with a functioning democracy. Our Constitution, which has lasted so long, is itself an outlier in the history of hundreds of constitutions the world has seen.

It took a tremendous amount of thinking and passion, and ultimately, as all of us in business know, execution. Our leaders back then must have prepared the blueprints while they were in jail for years.

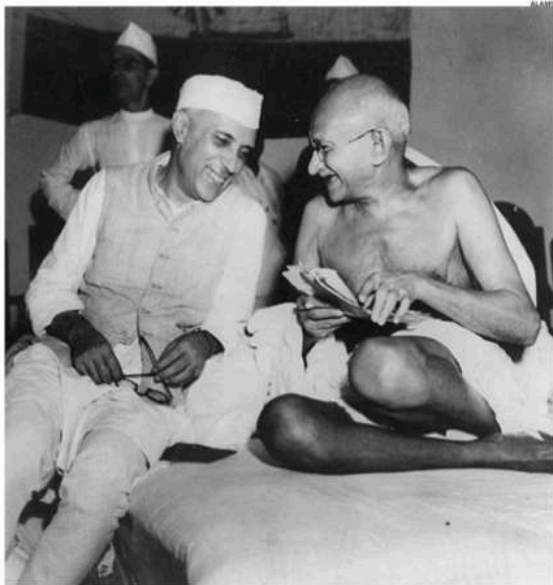
Even a simple thing like universal adult franchise wasn't the global norm and was resisted by many even within the country.

Let alone the developing countries of Africa and South America, even Switzerland gave voting rights to women only in 1971. Canada, Australia and the US gave voting rights to their ethnic minorities only in the 1950s.

There is no parallel till date of a post-colonial nation at anywhere close to those poverty levels making a smooth transition to a liberal democracy.

Most countries fell into various forms of civil strife, some of them suffering military takeovers, and where there were charismatic leaders, they became dictators (Indonesia, for example, and later the Philippines).

And none of those nations had the added challenge that India had in terms of linguistic, cultural, religious and other forms of diversity.



I repeat, none of this was accidental. Consider just one example: Both India and Pakistan had armies which had the same origin, so why is it that Pakistan had military coups and military dictators, and we did not?

In India, there was a step-by-step multi-year process to ensure that the military remains under civilian rule.

Those who founded the country did their bit. Now it is upon us.

Let us not take what we have for granted. Two areas come to mind for focus: Job creation and technology/science/innovation.

The latter is an area where we went above and beyond in our early decades. No other country at that stage of development dreamt of investing in fields like atomic energy and space research.

My home town of Lucknow alone had half a dozen national research institutes in areas as diverse as drugs and botany to paleo-science.

To me, it is an example of how visionaries think versus most of us 'incremental managers'.

We started Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in the 1950s and 1960s, when even till the 1990s almost all of Asia did not have a single management institute—a good 30 years after our IIMs.

This came as a shock to me when I started to travel to the rest of Asia. Another shock was to see how in those countries, everything on their super-market shelves was manufactured overseas.

While we may now scream against protectionism in the early years of independence, without that policy, our domestic industry could not have been established. For example, Verghese Kurien,

the founding father of the dairy cooperative movement, fought tooth and nail to disallow any cheap dairy products into the country even as food aid.

That resulted in India becoming the world's largest milk producer. In many parts of the developing world, including neighbouring Sri Lanka, the dairy industry was killed by cheap imports.

And for my stock-market community, the insistence on local manufacturing and shareholding meant that subsidiaries of many MNCs got listed in India, creating tremendous wealth in the country, and this gave a huge fillip to the investment culture here. Then, in the 1980s, it appeared strange to many, including myself, that a prime minister could prioritize computers and telecom in a poor nation. But that's what vision is about.

These initiatives turned out to be game changers for India, driving economic growth for the next several decades; think of the digital infrastructure we boast about and the infotech services that built India's foreign-exchange reserves and global reputation.

Most importantly, these have been our main drivers of employment, both primary and secondary, helping large parts of the population move up the socio-economic scale.

We have taken our eyes off the ball in the last few decades, though, and are getting left behind in the innovation game, while China is focused on every new area of technology, from neuroscience and biotechnology to renewables and semi-conductors.

Our demographic dividend will also dissipate if we cannot find jobs for young people, especially for women. We need to do our bit to be worthy successors to those who gave us a free nation.

Happy Independence Day! Jai Hind!

Candidate Walz's investments make him an outlier in the US

The lack of stocks in his declared portfolio is an oddity in America



ALLISON SCHRAGGER is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering economics.



Kamala Harris's running mate Tim Walz owns surprisingly few assets.

The big divide in America is not so much between Republicans and Democrats as between people who invest and people who don't. For a man of his means who is running for America's second-highest office, Tim Walz is on the wrong side. In 2022, 58% of Americans owned stock, either directly or indirectly through mutual funds. Based on his 2019 financial disclosures and his 2022 tax filings, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee is not one of them. His files offer no evidence of any asset ownership—no stocks, no bonds, no mutual funds, not even his house the sold it after he became governor of Minnesota—except for a small college savings plan whose investment allocation is unknown.

This might bolster his regular-guy image. But more Americans than ever are now in the market—that 58% is up from 32% in 1989—and not being in the market is no longer a common virtue, or any virtue at all. Investing in the stock market should be a basic part of any balanced portfolio and retirement strategy, and not investing can suggest a lack of understanding of risk management and of financial literacy—especially if you have money to invest.

Neither the US vice-president nor president needs to be Warren Buffett. In fact, it would be better if politicians didn't own individual stocks because of the conflicts of interest that may arise. But someone who just sticks with index funds is also an investor and being one signals important qualities the US should expect from its leaders.

The main reason for Walz's odd portfolio is that he is less wealthy than the average politician. His family's net worth is estimated between \$19,000 and \$30,000. A life in public service and politics does not pay well unless you can supplement it with lobbying, speaking and lucrative book deals—none of which he partook in.

That's admirable. But Walz is not poor; median net worth in America in 2022 was \$190,000, and among households with a net worth between \$100,000 and \$300,000, 59% owned some stock—25% of them outside their retirement accounts. Walz does have a 529 college savings plan worth between \$1,000 and \$15,000. He also had access to a 401(k)-type account, but it's unclear if he participated; his tax filings don't reflect what's in these accounts, and there may be some stock holdings there.

Still, it is strange that he does not have any asset holdings in any other accounts. Walz and his wife have accumulated a defined pension benefit that is valued at about \$800,000. It could be argued that,

since Minnesota public pensions are invested in stocks (and a curiously high amount in private equity), he has some stock exposure. But it is not meaningful, because the state of Minnesota guarantees a pension for life. His net worth does not vary with the stock market, except for perhaps the few thousand dollars in that 529 plan. He is actually much wealthier than he looks on paper, because that \$800,000 is risk-free.

This would be another good reason, from a financial perspective, to invest in the market—be it a very large income floor that is government-guaranteed. He also claims to have a life insurance policy as an asset, which suggests more downside protection and a willingness to pay high fees to avoid risk.

Everyone is entitled to their own investment preferences. Perhaps Walz is just very risk-averse. Or maybe, like a lot of Americans, he's not as financially literate as he'd like to be, and doesn't realize the benefits of investing in the stock market: diversification and the opportunity to benefit from the growth of the US economy.

Either way, it raises the question: Is this what America wants from its leaders? They should be able to tolerate some risk. And taking a long position in the stock market is making an optimistic bet on the future of the US economy.

Walz's investment strategy is in sharp contrast with that of his Republican rival J.D. Vance, who is worth millions but has also made some curious choices. He has as much as \$250,000, a non-trivial share of his \$4.2 million wealth, in Bitcoin. This investment could be interpreted as a bet against the viability of dollar, which also suggests something less than full confidence in the US economy.

The willingness to take balanced risk is an admirable quality in a leader. So is a sophisticated grasp of markets. Avoiding the stock market could be seen as a normal credential, but it could also be a sign of excess caution. America's leaders certainly don't need to be rich or great investors, but they should have some engagement with markets. Not having any investments is not in itself a reason not to vote for someone. There are far more important issues, and all candidates have their idiosyncrasies. But it is sort of weird. **©BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

Why the chimera of scale is a pursuit NGOs should end

ANURAG BEHAR



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

Limitations. Let me emphasize that a significant proportion of NGOs and many funders are not afflicted by these maladies; however, since a large number of funders do act in this fashion, it has a cumulative effect on the NGO sector. In what ways, where, and how does this 'flake-fake' problem show up? Here are a few typical scenarios.

An NGO runs creches in villages. It provides very young children good nutrition, lets mothers go to work, most of whom work as labour in fields or at project sites, and ensures that older siblings do not have to skip school to take care of the children. The funder wants more and more villages covered, which is what the NGO does. But they overlook the fact that many of those villages need more than one creche because they have many more children in that age-group than what one creche can serve.

Why push for such expansion? Because saying "We run creches in 100 villages" sounds better than "We run creches in 25 villages," and nobody outside those villages would know how many children are actually there in any village. This flaky approach creates many problems in its wake, not the least of which is the exclusion of many equally valuable children. Citing larger numbers of a simply graspable geographical or insti-

tutional unit, such as "200 shums" or "300 panchayats," is impressive, while it is not possible to ascertain from a distance if the coverage in a village or slum is adequate. This flakiness of coverage that enables high headline numbers is a comfortable equilibrium between the funder and the NGO.

A second category of such flaky pursuits of scale arises when claims are made about large territories. For example, "We work in five states on skilling" or "We work in 500 blocks on water management." Checking a single level of detail could be enough to reveal that a claim of working on skilling in five states is actually based on working with the relevant department of the state to design a few training programmes. Which then may or may not get used in other parts of the state. Such funders and NGOs are keen to add another state to their work list in an identical manner, rather than get engaged at a deeper level on getting the said skilling programmes implemented. It is not difficult to design a

programme-sitting in the state capital. The real challenges are in getting it implemented at high quality levels for the appropriate people. This requires building on-the-ground capacity—both institutional and in terms of staffing—and then managing engagement, community acceptance and more. But all that is too complex and time-consuming, and requires building deep expertise within the NGO. It is far more convenient for both the NGO and the funder to stay with the easy work and claim large scale by touting large territories. In brief, this kind of flakiness is about claiming scale based on work that is very distant, indirect and uncertain by the time it reaches those it is supposed to.

A third category is formed when the shallowness and low intensity of engagement is deliberately glossed over to establish scale. For example, a claim that "We work in 10,000 schools," when questioned, will often reveal superficial engagement. In many cases, it is the kind where a 'learning

kit' is given to schools, perhaps some brief training is also provided, and that's it. Barely two months after such an initiative, you will see the kits gathering dust. Improving education in schools requires long-term deep engagement with teachers, principals and many other aspects of the overall system. Handing out learning kits is a near futile exercise, as it doesn't lead to improvement in education. But it does enable easy claims of large-scale work in schools.

Some of the best NGOs of the country are also the biggest in terms of real scale. They do not make such fake claims about scale and do not do flaky work. However, their scale may seem dwarfed by those that are indeed flake and flaky. But the truth cannot be escaped if a critical eye is applied to completeness of coverage, how distant the work is from actual implementation, and the intensity and depth of engagement.

The chimera of scale is a pursuit that must be stopped. It diverts resources and attention. It offers a false sense of comfort that big things are happening when nothing much is changing for those who need change. And it also weakens and erodes the credibility of the whole NGO sector. NGOs cannot drive this change, for it's the funders that must transform themselves.

Industrial scale logic doesn't apply to this sector and a numbers chase often yields fake and flaky work

OUR VIEW



Unity in diversity paves India's path to success

The long arc of India's ascent since freedom in 1947 owes much to this basic resolve, bonded as we are to nobody but one another by the Constitution. It's the country's winning formula

The late British prime minister Winston Churchill infamously remarked, "India is merely a geographical expression. It is no more a single country than the Equator." The pugilistic Churchill, no friend of India, seldom hid his distaste for Indians, referring to us once as "beastly people." Ignorance levels have dropped since. Today, we are widely known for what we are: a rainbow nation of mind-boggling diversity, a blend of ethnicities, a profusion of mutually incomprehensible languages, and a host of religions, cultural practices and topographies. Indeed, that is the very beauty of India—brilliantly multi-chrome, not boringly monochrome. Yes, we might have seemed like an artificial construct back in 1947, when the British partitioned the country and the first government of Independent India had the tough job of amalgamating many princely states. But now, no one, but no one, will dispute that we are one country. While many others have split up, we have not only survived as a union, but lifted vast numbers out of grinding poverty.

In GDP terms, India is now the world's fifth largest economy. Best of all, we have not done this through the barrel of a gun, like China, but by empowering every Indian with the right to vote. We have the right to express dissent and change governments, peacefully, through the ballot box. For all the Western criticism of imperfections in our democracy, we have remained one. What's more, we have never seen an insurrection of the kind witnessed by the US on 6 January 2021, when its Capitol Hill was stormed by a mob bent on preventing its election winner from taking office. Instead, peaceful transfers of power after an electoral

loss by an Indian government are so taken for granted that no political party or leader would dare question the verdict of people, no matter how unfavourable. Does this mean all is fine and the promise that "We the people" made to ourselves three-quarters of a century ago has been fulfilled? No. Our economy might be the fifth largest, but we're almost a billion-and-a-half, so our income per head places us closer to the bottom of the global league table. Sure, it is many times what it was at the stroke of that midnight hour in 1947. But, as we have seen from recent tragic events in Bangladesh, higher per capita income in itself does not mean much. Equity matters. What's important is how a country's wealth and income are distributed among its people. Success is about our quality of life, as shaped by access to basic healthcare, education, law-and-order and the inalienable right to life and liberty—free speech included. For all this, promises made by the Constitution must be upheld.

So, as we celebrate our 78th Independence Day, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. While we have come a long way, we have an even longer way ahead before we'll be able to "wipe every tear from every eye," in the words of Mahatma Gandhi. This challenge can only be met through 'unity in diversity.' It might sound like a cliché, but it's clearly the way forward. As it happens, it is also what fosters a free market for ideas, which, as Europe's emergence from its Dark Ages showed, can act as a hotbed of innovation. Hence, we must nurture what unites us, rather than stir up what divides us. If India is to be an oasis of peace and stability in a fractious part of the world, fraught with violence, each of us must work to safeguard our diversity and hard-won freedom.

THEIR VIEW

Freedom and linguistic identity: Is Bangladesh losing its anchor?

Its dalliance with theocratic politics will impact India but we've done well to strengthen democracy



BIBEK DEBROY
is chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister

know Choudhury's poem by heart.

In 1971, the fight for Bengali language and culture resonated in West Bengal. As students, we promptly formed an organization known as 'Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini Sahayogi Andolan Samiti' (Association to cooperate with the Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini). We wore black armbands and demonstrated in front of what was then the Pakistan Deputy High Commission in Kolkata. There were roars of applause when the Pakistani flag was lowered and the Bangladeshi one raised in its place. We roamed around the streets of Kolkata, holding spread-out bedsheets, asking people for donations of money, medicines and clothing.

The Petrapole-Benapole border is a major transit point for Indo-Bangladesh trade. Its infrastructure must have improved vastly (I haven't visited it since 1971), but at the time, its roads were rudimentary and one approached the border through Bangaon. Gathering what we had collected, we took a train to Bangaon and tramped across the border to Jessore Road. It was a daily routine and there was no sign of the Pakistani army. Bengalis on this side emphasized and connected with Bengalis on that side.

Some 15 years ago, I happened to be in Dhaka for a conference. It coincided with the commemoration of 21 February and I happily joined in. Some six years ago, I and my wife visited our ancestral village in Bangladesh and everyone had moist eyes. With more than double the number of Bengalis in Bangladesh than in West Bengal, there was general admiration for the way Bangladesh had established Bengali as a global language and had gone about preserving Bengali culture and identity.

A few days ago, I was in Kolkata and happened to pass what is now the Bangladeshi Deputy High Commission. Several thousand Bangladeshis (probably on medical and tourist visas) were agitating there, aspiring for a new freedom movement. I remembered the past, 1971 resonated with an older generation. It is

a distant memory, as the two countries have pursued different development trajectories. For the new generation in both countries, it is sentimental nostalgia. For India, Bangladesh is a neighbour, often hostile, though there is grudging admiration for its prosperity and improvement in social sector outcomes. (The per capita income of Bangladesh is considerably more than that of West Bengal and has recently surpassed India's figure.) There is no question that the Awami League regime was repressive and post-covid Bangladesh has been plagued by economic problems. Inequality is far higher than in India and there have been unemployment problems. For Bangladesh, India has been the big brother breathing down its neck, netting out unfair treatment.

And after regime change, once the chaos is out of the way, Bangladesh will chart out its own course. There will be tricky foreign policy issues for India. Reminiscent of 1971, there is a refugee problem of sorts, with Hindus in Bangladesh having suffered amid the mayhem and beslam. For the sentimental and nostalgic generation, Bangladesh has been moving away and will move further from the Bengali identity that wrought freedom in 1971. Its shift towards an Islamic republic has been palpable, even before the recent unrest. That will quickly become more accentuated, with spillover concerns for India. There were non-economic reasons behind East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh. Those non-economic reasons, of language, culture and identity, seem to be less pertinent now. Apart from nomenclature, given this month's reign of terror, what is the difference between an East Pakistan and Bangladesh?

As we celebrate Independence Day, there is much to be grateful for. Apart from a brief interlude in the 1970s, our democracy has strengthened in contrast to our immediate neighbours. This may not be palatable to some countries that seek to destabilize India. Notwithstanding their efforts, India will endure.

10 YEARS AGO



MINT METRIC

by Bibek Debroy

With our democracy on display,
Best wishes for Independence Day.
A proud spring in the tread,
The country surges ahead.
Naysayers despondent in dismay.

MY VIEW | WORLD APART

The UK violence makes a case for social media control

RAHUL JACOB



is a Mint columnist and a former Financial Times foreign correspondent.

The UK's image as a multicultural country is the obvious loser from the far-right violence of the past fortnight, but in time these tragic events may have wider implications for the policing of social media everywhere. The role of X in disseminating often-false information and lionizing rabble-rousers, as well as X owner Elon Musk's provocative tweets and irresponsible retweets, are all under the microscope. This week, Thierry Breton, a high-ranked European Union commissioner, issued a strong warning to X over "content that promotes hatred, disorder, incitement to violence". Musk's fan-boy interview with Donald Trump this week as well as his retweets of the inflammatory messages of the far-right's Tommy Robinson will only cement the view that X is all too frequently a megaphone for extremists. Breton's letter to X reminded Musk of X's "due diligence obligations" under the EU's digital services laws intended to police hate speech. X hit back saying that the EU was overreaching as the interview

pertains to US politics. This is true enough, but it was clear that heightened EU concern about X is because of riots in the UK. These were triggered after fake news spread on social media that the man who stabbed and killed three young girls at a dance class in Southport in the north of England was a Muslim immigrant, even though the alleged attacker was born in the UK and is of Rwandan origin. Robinson, tweeting from Cyprus, sought to use the incident to spread ill-will towards Muslims, and in turn mosques were attacked.

At a time like this, it might seem easy to conclude that the UK has not compared the demons of racism that were omnipresent in the late 1950s and 1960s in response to waves of immigration at the time from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent. British member of parliament Enoch Powell, who fiercely opposed a Race Relations Act to outlaw discrimination, notoriously warned of "rivers of blood" in response to immigration. The opposite has turned out to be true. The UK is more productive, more colourful and has superb food today because it has successfully absorbed and assimilated so many immigrants. The Economist in March quoted research that showed that schoolchildren whose first language at home is not English

do about as well as children born in the UK who are native speakers of English. A standardized educational test conducted in many developed world countries showed that "in many European countries the children of immigrants score far worse than natives... In Britain, immigrants' children are a shade behind in reading and a shade ahead in maths." The Economist reported. More than three quarters of the children of immigrants expect to go to university; for the native born population, the percentage is 62%. Part of the explanation is surely that among recent immigrants, the UK, like the US, is cherry-picking well-qualified ones. Even so, these statistics say a lot about successful integration.

Indians converted as many as 163,500 visas to work in the UK in 2023 and Zimbabweans 46,200. Poles, who used to have easy access to the UK before Brexit, had dropped to less than 2,000.

This weekend, I happened to be reading British writer Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's mem-

oir of family food and the experience of being forced out of Uganda in the 1970s and settling in the UK. One of her anecdotes involves her mother being told by a London bus conductor that she should get off the bus because she smelled like a "currypot." I was shocked at many levels, but also because such a thing could never happen in London today and was so far removed from the welcoming London I encountered in the 2000s. Before I returned to India, I spent almost three decades overseas. No place I worked lived in was as profoundly diverse as London and celebrated its immigrants quite as thoughtfully. This ranged from trivial courtesies—my decision to wear a *bandhgala* jacket to work as often as I wore a suit was

routinely complimented—to profound actions such as a commemoration for victims of the tsunami in 2004 that included flower petals representing each country affected by the calamity in Asia and Africa. The far-right riots may have grabbed headlines, but in fact it was the peace rallies

in Belfast and elsewhere that were far more numerous, with people marching this past weekend calling for tolerance and condemning racism. Opinion polls show that the vast majority in the UK condemn such violence and those fanning its flames. The majority of those arrested who appeared in court, meanwhile, had past records of violent attacks and football hooliganism.

For these reasons, I remain optimistic that the UK will get past these terrible weeks with its commitment to multiculturalism intact. X and other social media, however, if they fan incitement to violence, must face legislation and court prosecution. A former Twitter executive, writing in the *Guardian*, recently called for an arrest warrant to be issued against Musk if "he keeps stirring unrest." Musk drew criticism for his appalling comment on X that in the UK "civil war is inevitable." In a telling comment in his biography of Musk, Walter Isaacson wrote, "He thought of it as a technology company when in fact it was an advertising medium based on human emotions and relationships." Given this reality, more governments would be wise to police and on occasion prosecute X and other social media platforms on issues of hate speech. Perhaps the UK and the EU should lead the way.

The role of such platforms in stirring up people and fanning the flames is hard to overlook

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Happy Independence Day

As the proud nation celebrates the 78th Independence day it is time to ponder over the journey so far

As we celebrate 78th Independence Day, the air is filled with pride, nostalgia, and hope. This day is not just a commemoration of freedom from colonial rule but a reflection on the journey that has shaped the country. The path to where we stand today, has been nothing short of a roller coaster-marked by triumphs and challenges. As the nation looks back on its accomplishments, it must also cast its eyes forward, contemplating the road that lies ahead. India's post-independence journey has been a remarkable tale of resilience and growth. From the ashes of partition and the burden of colonial exploitation, the nation emerged with a spirit of unity and determination. The early years were fraught with challenges – economic instability, social unrest, and the monumental task of nation-building. Yet, India persisted. The Green Revolution transformed India from a food-deficient country to a self-sufficient one, while the White Revolution made the country the largest producer of milk. It made great strides in space exploration and reached the moon. The nation also saw the rise of a strong industrial base. However, the road was never smooth. India saw wars, political turmoil, and economic crises. The Emergency period in the mid-1970s was a dark chapter, testing the resilience of its democracy. The 1991 economic liberalisation marked a turning point, propelling India onto the global stage, but it also brought new challenges in the form of inequality and social disparities.

The turn of the millennium saw India making strides in various fields. The IT revolution positioned the country as a global technology hub, while advancements in space exploration and nuclear technology showcased India's scientific prowess. Social progress was evident in the growing emphasis on education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. Landmark legislation such as the Right to Education Act and the decriminalisation of Section 377 reflected the country's commitment to social justice. Yet, there was no dearth of challenges. The rise of communal tensions, growing environmental concerns, and the struggle for inclusivity have reminded the nation that the journey is far from over. The COVID-19 pandemic, the most recent challenge, exposed vulnerabilities but also highlighted India's resilience, as the country emerged as a global leader in vaccine production and distribution. The nation today stands at a crossroads. The country must tackle environmental degradation, and ensure that economic growth is inclusive and sustainable. India's youth, now the largest demographic group, will play a crucial role. We must continue to uphold the democratic values and secular fabric. As the tricolor flutters in the wind this Independence Day, it is a reminder that this was achieved with many sacrifices and efforts on the part of millions of people who make it what it is. The road ahead may be challenging, but it is also filled with possibilities. No country is perfect; it's always a work in progress. But if the people of India commit to making it a shining example for the world, it will become one. Jai Hind!



Young students participate in a programme on the eve of Independence Day at a school, in Moradabad, PI

Nano technology revolutionises car care

This cutting-edge technology is changing the car detailing process by enhancing protection, durability, and aesthetic appeal of cars

The automotive industry is progressing rapidly, with nanotechnology emerging as a transformative force in redefining car care. This cutting-edge technology is revolutionising the car detailing process and offering unmatched protection, durability, and aesthetic appeal, ushering in an exciting new era for car owners and enthusiasts.



Nanotechnology in car maintenance is based on the atomic and molecular manipulation of matter. Nanoparticles, measured in billionths of a meter, possess extraordinary properties and enhance various aspects of car maintenance. One of the most prominent applications is in the development of nano-ceramic coatings. Nano-ceramic coatings utilise particles in the nanometer range. The smaller size of nanoparticles allows for a denser and more uniform coating, improving scratch resistance

and chemical protection. Nanotechnology offers a revolutionary approach to car detailing, providing superior protection and easier maintenance than traditional methods. There are several benefits of nanotechnology in car detailing, such as: **Enhanced protection:** Nanoparticles form a microscopic barrier that shields the car's paint and glass and protects it from UV rays and environmental problems, such as bird droppings, during weather conditions. This results in a long-lasting shine and reduced risk of fading or wear and tear. **Deeper cleaning and glossier finishing:** Nano formulated polishes and cleaners can penetrate deeper into the car's surface due to the particles' tiny size. It removes dirt and grime more effectively,

revealing a glossier finish to the car's already shining. **Durability & longevity:** Nanotechnology car care products typically offer extended protection compared to traditional waxes and sealants. It translates to fewer detailing sessions and keeps the car looking its best for longer. **easier maintenance:** The hydrophobic coatings created by nanoparticles make future washes a breeze. Dirt and grime slide off, requiring less scrubbing and reducing the risk of introducing swirl marks. While the benefits of nanotechnology in car care are undeniable, it is important to approach its implementation with a clear eye. Not all nano-coated products are created equal, and selecting reputable brands that adhere to stringent quality standards is crucial. Moreover, proper application and maintenance are always vital to maximising the performance and longevity of these treatments. As nanotechnology evolves in the rapidly increasing technology world, there are expected to be even more groundbreaking advance-

ments in the car care industry. The future holds immense potential, from self-healing paintwork to intelligent coatings that adapt to environmental conditions. By embracing this technology, the automotive industry can be poised to deliver cars that look stunning and offer unparalleled protection and convenience. From the car owner's perspective, there will be several benefits, such as enhanced car ownership experiences characterised by less time spent on maintenance and greater pride in the car's appearance, instilling a sense of hope for the future of car care. In conclusion, nanotechnology is ushering in a new era in the car maintenance industry by improving aesthetics, protection, and durability & longevity. By understanding the principles and applications of this technology, car owners can make informed decisions to optimise the care of their cars and enjoy the full benefits of this exciting development. As nanotechnology continues to empower them, it has informed consumers in the automotive industry. (The writer is an expert on car care; views are personal)



KUNAL SETHI

The Bangladesh cauldron is boiling

With New Delhi intensifying border controls, the evolving political landscape of Bangladesh is set to influence regional security and diplomacy



KALYANI SHANKAR

The former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, abruptly left her country a week ago, causing immediate concern in her country and the region. According to the BBC, Hasina's family, not security officials, convinced her to leave due to safety concerns. Her son stated, "We begged her to leave as soon as the violent mob arrived." Crowds entered her residence shortly after her escape. Political, social, and economic issues, external involvement, and unhappy political opposition caused the downfall.

India's Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, has informed Parliament about her visit to India and the potential impact on India's relationship with Bangladesh. The unrest that led to her departure resulted in around 560 deaths and could strain the relationship between the two countries, potentially impacting regional security and foreign relations. Initially, in her long reign of 15 years, Hasina was perceived as a democratic and secular leader of Bangladesh, overseeing an economic turnaround. However, she later became intolerant and authoritarian, cracking down on media critics and imprisoning opponents. She maintained cordial relationships with Indian leaders, which sparked anti-India protests.

Prime Minister Modi mentioned that he had met her ten times last year. The friendship has been mutual, as Begum Hasina also reciprocated by driving out the terrorists who targeted India and allowed concessions for transit facilities. She was the first state guest during the Modi government's third term. India has had a special relationship with Bangladesh since it was born in 1971. After her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, was assassinated in 1975, Hasina spent six years in India. After that, she shifted to Dhaka to lead the Awami League. The current student protests, which started on July 5 release may enable her to lead her party, and she stressed the



and the 56% quota for government positions, have impacted the political situation in Bangladesh. The Hasina government's proposal to expand this quota led to widespread protests and 200 deaths. Bangladesh opposition parties organized a 'long march' to express growing discontent with the government's policies. At the international level, tensions rose between Hasina and the U.S. when her American visa was revoked after she fled the country. The U.S. State Department emphasized the importance of the interim government in establishing long-term peace and political stability in Bangladesh. The U.K. and other countries also took the same stand. The international community is working to support the interim government led by Yunus, who is responsible for restoring normalcy. New Delhi has set up a monitoring committee and increased border control to address the situation. Madam Khaleida Zia and other opposition leaders were released after Hasina's departure. During Khaleida's two terms, Bangladesh-India relations weakened. Her visit to Delhi was also a disaster. Khaleida's release may enable her to lead her party, and she stressed the

“ THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS WORKING TO SUPPORT THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT LED BY YUNUS, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RESTORING NORMALCY. NEW DELHI HAS SET UP A MONITORING COMMITTEE AND INCREASED BORDER CONTROL TO ADDRESS THE SITUATION

need for a democratic Bangladesh and emphasized peace and unity. Hasina and Khaleida's sons are ready to take over their respective parties. The potential returns of these two and the other Opposition leaders could bring significant changes to the political landscape of Bangladesh. According to Hasina's son, she is ready to face any inquiry but has yet to decide on the party's leadership. Meanwhile, Hasina blames the U.S. for her ouster. Her son claims she had no time to resign and is still the Prime Minister. Bangladeshis have protested in front of the White House and the U.K. New Delhi closely monitors the situation, especially concerning border and regional security, as well as the security of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. The Modi government is apprehensive about the safety of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Modi has called for the protection of Hindus in Bangladesh after violent incidents targeted them. The Hindu minority also protested on the streets. Bangladesh's economy, which was looking up, is declining due to Hasina's intolerance, violence, unemployment, and inflation. The country relies on India for essential commodities and

infrastructure. India needs to reconsider its Bangladesh policy after the leader's departure. The third issue concerns the porous border between India and Bangladesh, with allegations of Bangladeshi infiltrators and refugees entering India. A friendly Hasina government helped check this problem while Khaleida was in denial mode. New Delhi's decision to adopt a wait-and-watch policy is a positive step. The situation depends on the elections' timing and the two Begums' potential return. If new leadership emerges, New Delhi will need to take a stand. To maintain regional peace, India's role in assisting Bangladesh in returning to normalcy is crucial and urgent. A peaceful, stable, and prosperous Bangladesh is in India's best interests. India should do everything to ensure it. The situation is still evolving, and the uncertainty of the future political landscape of Bangladesh is palpable. We will know more once the elections are announced and the plans of the two begums are revealed. The potential return of the dynastic rule adds an element of intrigue to the situation. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Har ghar tiranga!



The 'Har Ghar Tiranga' initiative has sparked a nationwide movement, awakening the spirit of patriotism across the country. This campaign has united people from every corner of India, creating an atmosphere

of pride and respect for the national flag. It fosters a deep sense of unity and encourages active participation, bringing neighbors and fellow citizens together. By embracing this movement, people are enhancing their understanding of the significance and values embodied by the Indian flag. The campaign has revolutionized the nation's ideology, symbolizing our independence, pride, and commitment to a developed India (Vishit Bharat). It underscores India's rise as a global power, moving swiftly from a nation once seen as economically challenged to one poised to become the third-largest superpower in the world. As citizens, we are reminded of our duty to uphold the guiding principles enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy, the Preamble, and the Constitution of India.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

India, cricket is often considered a religion, overshadowing other sports. This narrow focus, compounded by political shortsightedness, has hindered the growth and encouragement of athletic talent across other disciplines.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

WAYANAD TRAGEDY COULD BE AVERTED

Madam — The picturesque Wayanad, a hilly district located in the Western Ghats Mountain range in Kerala, is prone to landslides during heavy rains. In Kerala's history, the landslide that occurred recently there and claimed over 400 lives was the deadliest. According to the Geological Survey of India half of Kerala's land area is vulnerable to landslides. Wayanad region has had many tea and coffee plantations. The first landslide occurred in an uninhabited forest area with no access road. The torrent of water carrying mud and boulders swept away or buried the villages of Puchirattam, Mundakkai and Chooramala, and wreaked havoc in Meppadi, Attamala and Kunhome.

Mundakkai is a village located more than a kilometre down from the hill that slid first. Chooramala caved in under the pressure of gushing water from the first landslide and heavy downpour. Irunjiyuzha river split into two raging streams and wreaked havoc along its path. When it comes to discussing the early warning of rainfall, the less said, the better. On July 24, the Agricultural Meteorological Division of the Indian Meteorological Department issued a forecast for Wayanad that predicted only 15 mm rainfall, the day when landslides occurred. Mundakkai, where the landslide hit Wayanad first, got 572 mm of rainfall within 48 hours. However, it shouldn't be overlooked that the Hume Centre for Ecology and Wildlife Biology, an NGO specializing in weather patterns of Wayanad with a network of more than 200 weather monitoring units, had warned of possible landslides two days before the landslide happened.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE DIVINE PARENTAL ROLE

Unlike parents, whose guidance can be flawed, God encompasses all wisdom, power and impartiality



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

The following verse will shed light on this, which is, "You alone are my mother; You alone are my father; You alone are my relative and you alone are my friend; You alone are my knowledge and You alone are my wealth; O Lord of all Lords, You alone are my everything." In verse #7.19 of the Bhagavad-Geeta, Lord Krishna states, "After efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise, and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus as everything is very rare." The answer, therefore, is: that God is very much more than a mother or father can ever be. These entities, i.e., a mother or a father have severe limitations. Their knowledge is very limited. They don't know the Big Picture.

Far from it, they may guide their children wrongly. On the other hand, God is omniscient. He knows past, present and future also. Lord Krishna informs us what He can do. "By being specially kind, I, situated within, destroy the darkness, born of ignorance, by the shining lamp of knowledge." (10.11) Then, a parent has limited resources that he or she can give to his or her children, whereas God has all the opulence in full. Sanjaya of the Mahabharata fame informs, "Where there is yogeshwara Shri Krishna, and where there is a soul linked to Him, there will be opulences ('soubhagya'), victory (success), wealth, and morality." (18.78) A parent can help only in a limited way. Suppose his or her child is unwell. What can he or she do besides arranging medical facilities and taking care of the best way possible?



A good parent prays additionally for the rapid cure of the child. Because Only God has the power to help us get out of the trouble we get into quickly (18.53); only God has the power to forgive. Parents can be whimsical in their decision-making. They can be partial in dealing with their children; it is natural, but God is always impartial. Lord Krishna states, "I am similarly inclined towards all beings, no one is hateful for Me, and no one is dear; that is God has no preconceived and prejudiced notion towards anyone." (9.29) Many parents are poor role models. They lie but expect their children to be truthful.

What has God instructed us to do? "Whatever a superior person does, other people follow that only. Whatever standard he establishes a common man tries to emulate that." (3.21) What does God do? He always goes by dharma. God is so strict about dharma that He incarnates to reestablish it if it becomes weak. (4.7) Additionally, God is always engaged in doing duties, Lord Krishna says, "I am always carefully engaged in action, because men follow My lead in all respects." (3.34) For parents, only their children are their own, but for God, all souls are His parts. (15.7) He has to consider all of them in all His actions. God is very compassionate towards all of them. Lord Krishna confirms, "I am a well-wisher of all living entities."

Our children are forever competing against children of other parents, but for God, all children are His parts and must be dealt with fairly. That is the reason our selfish prayers are not answered. Many parents do not consult their children about their future and try to impose their desires on them. God has forbidden this, when He stated, "Svadhama (duty) of all souls are according to what their natures are." "The four divisions of the human society, based on qualities and activities, have been created by Me." (4.21)

One can excel in whatever suits one's nature because it comes naturally. What is the message? God is a parent alright but not in a conventional way. He only takes charge of those souls, who take His shelter. Parents should also try to be self-supporting to the end by taking active shelter from God; He will take care. Is God not responsible for keeping the Creation going? Is it not our responsibility as parents to do ours? I take mine towards my descendants very seriously.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

Water crisis and the battle for resources

As the world grapples with the escalating effects of climate change, the urgent need to rethink our approach to water management becomes ever more pressing



B K SINGH

Whenever we face drought and heat waves we are reminded to take a look at efficiency of water management. More than one-fourth of the global population, nearly 2.2 billion people do not have proper access to clean drinking water. United Nations (UN)'s goal in this regard is to provide clean drinking water and sanitation for all by 2030. UN's coordination mechanism on water and sanitation (UN-Water) sets the theme every year. This year's theme was "Leveraging Water for Peace". Air and water are important to sustain life on Earth. The conflicts between the countries, between the states and within society arise when we have to share water for crop irrigation, household purposes, industrial uses and power generation.

The conflict gets often aggravated especially when the availability of water becomes scarce during the pinch period. Treaties between the countries have resolved the disputes. Different forums are also available for the resolution of conflicts at international and national levels. India has 25 major river basins with most rivers flowing across the states. There is the Interstate Water Dispute Act, of 1956 for resolving disputes in the use, control and distribution of river and river valleys. The disputes are continuing challenges to federal water governance in the country. To resolve the disputes, there are water dispute tribunals in India namely the Ravi and Beas Water Tribunal, Vansandhar water dispute tribunal, Mahadayi Water Dispute Tribunal, Mahanadi water dispute tribunal, Krishna water dispute tribunal and Cauvery dispute tribunal etc.

The sharing of water of the Cauvery River has been the source of serious conflict between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In 2018, the tribunal awarded Karnataka to annually release 192 tmc of water in ten equal monthly instalments to Tamil Nadu. 2023-24 was El Nino (Spanish word meaning little boy) year and there has been a deficit in rainfall in the catchment of the river from July 2023 onwards. As a result, the reservoirs were half empty and it became difficult for Karnataka to follow the orders of the tribunal.

Two states started a blame game till early July 2024 when there were good rains in the Cauvery catchment in the latter part of July. As nature was kind, the dispute was resolved and the blame game stopped. The prolonged dispute between the states for sharing water is always traced back to destruction as well as poor maintenance of the catchment of the river and unfavourable weather conditions like El Nino. World Meteorological Organization (WMO) announced that El Nino, a climate pattern associated with the warming of the ocean surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean has impacted the monsoon causing below-normal rainfall last year, has gradually weakened.

This has been one of the five strongest El Nino on record but remained weaker than 1997-98 and 2015-16. "El Nino typically has the greatest impact on global climate in the second year of its development - in this instance 2024," WMO said. This impact has led to above normal temperature in India till June 2024. WMO further added that there is a chance of La Nina (Spanish word meaning little girl) developing later in the year. La Nina is a climate pattern associated with periodic cooling off the ocean sur-



face temperature and brings normal rains in the region. Western World, Canada and the US are experiencing heat wave conditions even in August this year. The underground water table receded during summer. There has been a public hue and cry in many places in central and peninsular India to access potable water for household needs. The Government and Civic agencies are facing the challenge. Karnataka is one such state where there was an acute drinking water problem in the summer.



FORESTS PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN CONSERVING WATER AND MAKING THE STREAMS PERENNIAL. FURTHER, THE STREAMS FLOWING OUT OF FORESTED CATCHMENT WOULD ALWAYS CARRY CLEANER WATER

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah directed the district administration to establish a helpline and control room to enable the public to register grievances and supply water in tankers to all affected areas. He also directed to tender the work of digging more bore wells to tap underground water for public emergencies. Bengaluru too faced a water shortage. Water supply to the city comes through the pipeline from the Cauvery River located 100 km away. The water has also to be pumped up at many intermediate locations to achieve an altitude of 1 km, where the city is. The arrangements have been made to supply water in tankers from adjoining towns.

Water supply to high-rise apartments was also reduced. Residents used disposable cutlery and wet wipes to ration their water consumption. It will generate more waste and agencies may have to step up to the disposal. They have also banned vehicle washing and swimming pool activities. Deepening of the bore wells is another environmental challenge. Every time the groundwater level recedes, we go for the deepening. Is it environmentally sustainable? Recharging the ground through rain harvesting structures has to be adhered to by each Government continuously. Rivers originating from the Himalayas are snow-fed and satisfy the water needs of the people, especially in the northern belt of the

country from west to east. Rivers in the central Indian landscape and peninsular India originate from forests.

Often big rivers originate from the same place and flow in different directions. Jhola, Narvada and Son originate from Amarkantak and flow in different directions. Five rivers namely Koyana, Krishna, Venna, Savitri and Gayatri originate from Mahabaleshwar near Pune. Several important rivers like Tungbhadra and Cauvery also originate from the Western Ghats. Apart from providing drinking water to several villages and towns, there are numerous irrigation and power projects located on these rivers.

Life is fully dependent on these rivers and except the Himalayan Rivers all others originate from forests. Let us be clear that water is not produced by forests, yet the rivers originate there. Forests are the mothers of rivers and are systems to conserve rainwater in the soil and the roots of the trees.

The river source provides a small volume of water trickling from the roots of each of the millions of trees on undulating hills around. As it forms the stream and the flow of water proceeds under gravity, many more streams join to increase the volume of water. Sometimes big streams or even rivers also join to increase the volume of flowing water in the river. The water in the streams is nothing but rainwater. During the monsoon substantial quantity of water is absorbed by the earth changing the underground aquifers and some portion of it is retained in the subsoil and roots of the trees.

The roots hold the water like a sponge and continuously release it during warm weather, making the streams perennial. While traversing in the forests we come across several perennial streams even in summer months when there is no rainfall. Every stream has a catchment and if it is a forested catchment, the

stream would be perennial in the non-rainy season, or else it would be a seasonal stream flowing on rainy days. Forests play a significant role in conserving water and making the streams perennial. Further, the streams flowing out of forested catchment would always carry cleaner water without even soil particles in it.

On the contrary, streams flowing through areas dominated by human activities would be muddy and mixed with chemicals and sewage. Further, the rainwater carries a lot of soil and the reservoirs get silted up losing their water holding capacity.

Reservoirs located closer to forested areas have a longer life. Maintenance engineers have a difficult time in de-silting reservoirs receiving water from human areas. The rainfall pattern and distribution not only depends upon weather conditions and the direction of wind but also depends upon the density and distribution of forests on land. The pledge we must take is to preserve and conserve natural forests. Forests also play a vital role in the maintenance of the water cycle. More than two years ago, at the sidelines of COP 26 at Glasgow, leaders holding 90% of forests on the planet had pledged to end deforestation by 2030.

Of course, India did not sign this pledge. Two more COP meetings have taken place since then, but the issue has not been reviewed by those who pledged. On the contrary there are reports suggesting that natural forests are being lost at an alarming rate unprecedented warming has also taken its toll and forest fires have remained uncontrolled for months in the US, Canada, European countries, Russia, China, Brazil, and Australia. If we don't save our forests, the perennial water streams will become seasonal.

(The writer is retired principal chief conservator of forests, Karnataka; views are personal)

The perils of blind faith and the rise of India's fraudulent godmen

While India has a rich tradition of genuine spiritual leaders, the influence of these charlatans has surged, fueled by politics and societal insecurities

The Mundaka Upanishad warns of the dangers posed by those who, though ignorant, present themselves as wise. The verse (1.2.8) loosely translates to, "Living in the midst of ignorance and considering themselves wise, fools think of themselves as learned. They wander around, bewildered, like blind men led by the blind." This verse serves as a caution against self-proclaimed spiritual gurus who mislead others. India has long been a land of genuine spiritual gurus who have guided millions, providing a path for the masses to follow. However, times have changed. Today, genuine spiritual leaders are often overshadowed by flashy godmen, or 'babas,' who frequently



PRABHA GUPTA

deceive people for personal gain. This trend has become particularly dangerous when combined with the politics of numbers, creating a powerful politico-religious phenomenon. These so-called babas often become demigods with political leaders as their disciples, wielding immense power and wealth, even though they claim to have renounced it. A recent incident in Hathras

highlights the tragic consequences of such influence being allowed. The stampede occurred when the crowd rushed to collect soil believed to have healing powers after Baba's departure. His popularity and wealth have only grown, despite such tragedies. While some of his followers were arrested, Bhole Baba himself was not named in the FIR, and his ashrams remain untouched by authorities.

And he is not alone. Many others are rising just that. A couple of years back a proclaimed baba gave unique recipe for peoples woes: keep 500 rupees in your wallet for prosperity, keep your spouse photo for better relationship and so on. Gurmeet Ram Rahim Insan ran schools for girls in which they had to eat rose petals as prasadam on which he walked. Figures like Asaram Bapu and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Insan are serving prison sentences for serious crimes. The number and influence of such godmen have grown, partly due to the rise of religious politics. This trend is mirrored globally, though it is particularly pronounced in India. The following of these god-



men often stems from the insecurity and faith of their followers, who may feel abandoned by both God and the system. This combination distances them from rational thinking. In countries with less economic and social insecurity, the influence of religion tends to wane, but not entirely. In the United States, faith

healers or Televangelists wield significant influence over their followers, claiming to cure people in the name of Jesus Christ. While the number of those cured remains questionable, these healers amass enormous wealth, owning Caribbean islands and flying in private jets. Addressing the influence of these Babas is a significant challenge. The Indian Constitution's Article 51A emphasises the duty of citizens to develop a scientific temper and humanism, which these fake godmen often ignore. While organizations like the Andhashradha Nirmulan Samiti in Maharashtra work to expose fraudulent practices, activists like Dr. Narendra Dabholkar have paid the ultimate price,

allegedly at the hands of conservative groups like Sanatan Sanstha. Similar forces were responsible for the deaths of Govind Pansare, Gauri Lankesh, and Professor Kalburgi. Following Dr. Dabholkar's murder, the Maharashtra Assembly passed a law against superstition and miracle cures. To curb the influence of fake godmen, a combination of education, awareness, and strong legal frameworks is essential. Promoting critical thinking and spiritual education can empower individuals to discern genuine spiritual guidance from deception. Educational institutions, community programs, and media can play a crucial role in spreading awareness about

the characteristics of false gurus and the dangers of blind faith, encouraging open discussions about spirituality and ethics can help people recognise the difference between authentic spiritual leaders and charlatans. Additionally, it is crucial to strengthen laws and regulations to hold fraudulent godmen accountable. Publicising such cases can also serve as a warning to potential victims. Ultimately, by encouraging critical inquiry, supporting victims, and ensuring justice, society can reduce the influence of fake godmen and safeguard the integrity of spiritual practices.

(The writer is a freelance writer, social activist and business coach; views expressed are personal)

Narrowing the divide

Banks need to adjust to lower margins

Both Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das recently expressed concern over the wide gap between credit and deposit growth in the banking system. In fact, Mr Das has been categorically pointing out this anomaly in his public appearances. For instance, in the statement announcing the monetary policy decision last week, he noted that alternative investment avenues seemed to be becoming more attractive for retail customers, resulting in challenges for banks on the funding front. Consequently, banks depend on short-term non-retail funds and other instruments to meet the incremental credit growth demand. This can expose the banking system to structural liquidity issues. Deposit growth has been trailing lending growth for some time, with potential systemic cause and effect. On their part, as reported by this newspaper on Wednesday, some banks are adopting innovative strategies to attract deposits.

It remains to be seen how such measures would work in bridging the gap. In the last financial year, for instance, while credit expanded at about 20 per cent, deposit growth lagged at about 14 per cent. The gap was also highlighted in the RBI's latest Financial Stability Report. This trend is reflected in the credit-deposit ratio, which has increased since September 2021. It peaked at 78.8 per cent in December 2023 before moderating to 78.8 per cent at the end of March 2024. The ratio is particularly high among private-sector banks. Although there have been instances of divergence lasting about 2-4 years, both the finance minister and the RBI governor have done well to highlight the issue and nudge banks to take corrective action.

While there is no immediate risk to the banking system, the reasons for divergence and what could be done before it becomes a bigger problem are worth debating. With the recovery in the economy after the pandemic, the increase in credit growth, which is higher than the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) growth, is understandable. However, there could be a variety of reasons responsible for lower deposit growth. Households might have shifted to other avenues as the RBI kept a negative real policy rate for a while to support the economy. The better performance of the Indian stock market in recent years could also have attracted household savings. Another reason could be the decline in incremental net financial savings in the household sector. The latest available data showed that it fell to a multi-decade low of 5.3 per cent of GDP in 2022-23.

While the recovery in household financial savings remains critical for the economy at large, banks can do more to attract additional savings. The net interest margin of scheduled commercial banks at the end of March was 3.6 per cent. Given the competition for funds, banks would have to sacrifice some of the margin from their deposits to keep their balance sheets more stable. Private banks are usually in a better position to do this because of higher interest margins. However, a bigger and longer term issue is that of a sustained high general government Budget deficit. To keep the borrowing costs down, banks are expected to keep a part of deposits in liquid assets or mainly government bonds. Progressively reducing this requirement will allow interest rates to align with the demand and supply of savings and encourage household savings. Since this process requires large economic adjustments, it may not happen anytime soon. For now, banks will need to adjust to lower margins and offer higher deposit rates.

Rural aspirations

India needs equitable growth

With a youth population of 378 million, India is one of the youngest nations in the world at present. Two-thirds of this youthful demographic reside in rural areas, which account for 70 per cent of the nation's total population, but contribute only about 46 per cent to the country's gross domestic product. A significant 80 per cent of the rural workforce is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Given the demographic and economic context, it is imperative to thoroughly understand the aspirations, challenges, and status of this segment. In this context, a recent report "State of Rural Youth Employment 2024", launched by Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, could be useful. Prepared by the Development Intelligence Unit with other organisations, the report is based on a survey of 5,169 young people across 21 states.

The report indicates that a substantial majority — 75-80 per cent of the current workforce — are seeking a change in their employment situation, with many expressing a desire for self-employment. However, they encounter obstacles such as limited access to financial resources, lack of moral support from immediate family members, and insufficient technical knowhow. Young women primarily prefer salaried government jobs, but many end up managing small businesses. Further, a concerning insight is that a significant proportion of the youth aged 18-25 years (around one-fourth) who have never been employed express no aspiration to join the workforce. One possible explanation could be the challenging state of the rural economy, particularly the limited opportunities in non-farm sectors, which may have discouraged young people from seeking employment.

Additionally, as Dr Nageswaran highlighted during the report launch, extensive expenditure on social schemes might also play a role in dissuading youth from actively seeking jobs. This observation aligns with recent findings in the United States, where a similar pattern has been noted, underscoring the need for policymakers to closely examine the issue to understand its implications and address the underlying causes effectively. Another significant finding is that over 60 per cent of respondents preferred to find work in or close to their village, even when income was 20-30 per cent lower. This preference is rational, considering the additional costs associated with working in urban centres, such as higher living expenses and commuting costs.

Therefore, to resolve this issue, the report recommends bringing the economy to the village people by planning labour absorption at the district level. This approach has been tested in two rural districts — Rangaraj in Jharkhand and Barwani in Madhya Pradesh — with early impact already benefitting over 50,000 youth across these districts. This shows why economic opportunities need to be spread across the country. A few urban centres driving economic activity can have limitations. Besides, given the constraints of civic bodies in India, the carrying capacity of large cities has not improved significantly over the years. Labour absorption is crucial, requiring the development of opportunities in both entrepreneurship and employment across farm and non-farm sectors. A renewed focus on investing in infrastructure, skill development and financial services could significantly bolster nano and micro enterprises. Such investments would support industries like textiles, footwear and food processing, along with other semi-skilled trades, thus boosting the rural economy.

Jobs & growth: Good news and bad news

Our potential for decades of high growth demands the creation of millions of high-quality jobs in labour-intensive industries

Our aspiration is to become a developed economy by 2047. A "developed" or "high-income" country has a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) above \$14,000, about five times higher than our current level of \$2,700. Getting there demands a 2 per cent higher rate of growth (8.5 per cent) for the next quarter-century than we are achieving now (6.5 per cent). Growth and jobs are linked. As countries develop, the most dramatic growth driver is the movement of people from low-productivity agriculture into higher productivity occupations: manufacturing and services. When a farmer's child migrates and goes to work for Zoho in Chennai, Zomato in Pune, or Tata Electronics in Bangalore, the jump in family earnings directly shows in GDP. More income multiplies through the economy as the family begins to consume everything from holidays to processed food. Consumption has been our driver of GDP growth for the last 30 years. Equally, when we see reverse migration from cities to villages, economic growth suffers. Over the last four years, we have added 20 million jobs in agriculture and informal rural self-employed services. We need to see decadal migration from low-productivity rural occupations to higher productivity urban ones; the reverse trend we have recently seen is not a failure of development.

Last month's Economic Survey tells us that of our total workforce of 565 million, 46 per cent work in agriculture, 11 per cent in manufacturing, 13 per cent in construction, and 29 per cent in services such as trade, hotels and transport. Agriculture employs 46 per cent but produces 18 per cent of our GDP. We do not need so many in agriculture. Romantic notions of an idyllic rural life aside, most farmers would prefer to move away. We could produce as much food as we do now with a quarter as many farmers and little change in technology. Looking forward, the survey makes a powerful case for creating 8 million non-agricultural jobs a year. It makes a set of reasonable assumptions. Men's labour force participation will stay where it is, at 54 per cent (a low rate by international standards). Women's labour force participation will increase by 1 per cent a year, from 27 per cent (about the lowest in the world). That may sound modest, but the last 30 years show that we have done very poorly in creating urban jobs for wom-

en. And each year should see a movement of 1 per cent of the workforce from agriculture to manufacturing and services. This again sounds modest, but repeated over 23 years has a great impact. We do not know just how many people live in rural areas. The 2011 census said 70 per cent. Given the hugely delayed 2021 census, an educated guess would put the rural population today at around 60 per cent, with most of the 10 per cent who have migrated heading to smaller towns, not the metros.

This projection is good news. New entrants to the labour force and a shift away from farming directly add to GDP. The Survey also shows that the most vibrant job growth has been in construction and what it calls the flexi-economy, contractual jobs in logistics and contract labour in firms. Our jobs in construction are heavily contractual. These construction and flexi-jobs are not great jobs, but they are much more productive and pay a lot more than agricultural jobs they replace. Eight million more manufacturing and service jobs would add between three-quarters and a per cent to GDP growth for each of the next 23 years. That will bridge half the gap to becoming rich enough to count as a developed economy by 2047.

The bad news is that we have never created 8 million non-farm jobs in one year. The survey points to the potential in agri-processing and the care economy. Both are worthy sectors with much need, but we must go further.

This year's Budget tries three ways to incentivise job creation in existing firms: Subsidising the first month's salary, providing the provident fund contribution of firms for new employees during their first two years, and a large internship programme with a modest stipend. All these are useful, and will support firms that are already hiring people. Whether they will prompt firms to hire more people is another question. I would suggest a different approach, one that focuses on labour-intensive industry (also tourism, but that's for another column).

The Economic Survey shows where we employ people in our factories (see table). A note on this data. Of the 60 million (11 per cent of 565 million) people employed in manufacturing, just 17 million work in

JOB DISTRIBUTION

| | % share in factory employment 2022 | % share in GVA 2023 |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Textiles and apparel | 17 | 10 |
| Food products | 11 | 8 |
| Metals | 7 | 17 |
| Auto/transport | 7 | 11 |
| Chemicals & pharmaceuticals | 11 | 16 |
| Machinery | 6 | 7 |
| Rubber & plastics | 6 | 4 |
| Other non-metallic minerals | 6 | 6 |
| Computers, electronics, etc | 2 | 5 |
| Others | 27 | 16 |

Source: Economic Survey

factories (defined, in Edison-era terms, as employing over 10 people using power or 20 people not using power). The remainder are presumably in tiny enterprises. But it is a reasonable assumption that factories constitute the modern manufacturing jobs we should be after. Where can they be?

Three manufacturing sectors can create jobs by the million: Apparel, food, and electronic assembly. Our apparel sector has long languished with little attention paid to it. Let's talk to them and ask them what it would take to scale by a factor of ten. Just as we have attracted Foxconn to India, let's try to do the same with Li and Fung, the world's largest apparel company that indirectly employed 1 million people in China. A large garment factory in Bangladesh employs 30,000-50,000 people; in India, it is only 3,000-5,000. What would help them grow? Design and technology? Skills on the shopfloor? Tariff-free access to markets through free-trade agreements? Labour reform? Hiring seasonal labour more easily?

In food processing, we are still a small player by international standards. We grow over 20 per cent of the fruit and vegetables in the world but process, Deloitte tells us, 4.5 per cent of our fruit and 2.7 per cent of our vegetables. We could dominate world markets for both.

Electronic assembly is a new success story. We are finally seeing large labour-intensive factories being set up by Tata Electronics, Foxconn and Pegatron. Set up under the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme, electronics assembly is the only one of the 11 PLI sectors that is labour-intensive. Machining iPhone cases, assembling phones, knitting garments and processing oranges may not be as glamorous as drones and semiconductors, but unlike drones and semiconductors, these activities can employ millions. An effective jobs strategy demands a sectoral focus on labour-intensive industries.

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INDIA'S WORLD?

NAUSHAD FORBES

Revising the consumption basket

Food inflation continues to be in the news. A research article published in the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) January 2024 monthly bulletin made a strong case for understanding the behaviour of food inflation and why it needs to be taken into account for the conduct of monetary policy. Speaking after the meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee in August 2024, the Governor of the RBI opined that "food inflation pressures cannot be ignored". For reasons outlined below, discussions on food inflation will become more nuanced once the consumption basket is revised in line with the patterns observed in India's Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23.

The consumption basket
The consumer price index (CPI) is the ratio of the value of consuming a fixed basket at today's prices to that of the same basket at a past reference period, known as the "base year". To ensure meaningful cross-country comparisons of inflation rates, National Statistical Offices around the world, including India, follow the manuals on constructing and revising important indices, including the CPI, prepared by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (IWGPS), which includes multilateral institutions as members.

The current CPI basket reflects the consumption pattern observed in HCES 2011-12. With the release of data from HCES 2022-23, the basket of goods whose prices would be tracked will be revised. The rural CPI basket comprises the following groups: Food and beverages, pan, tobacco and intoxicants, clothing and footwear, fuel and light, and miscellaneous. Unlike the rural CPI, the urban CPI basket includes housing rent. The revised CPI basket will reflect the consumption patterns evident in HCES 2022-23.

Importance of CPI

Measuring inflation precisely is of utmost importance

to the RBI, which is mandated to target an inflation rate of 4 per cent, plus or minus 2 per cent. The higher the inflation, the higher would be the nominal interest rate or yields in the secondary debt market. Further, with the inclusion of Government of India bonds in the JP Morgan Government Bond Index-Emerging Market, there is increased global interest in India's macroeconomic indicators. The CPI is also constructed for each Indian state and major urban centres. The CPI basket reflects the inflation experience of the universe of households covered in HCES. Subject to availability of data, it is possible to construct CPI for sub groups of population like the elderly who have a different consumption basket, or construct an index based on online prices.

Change in the food basket

Over the period from 2011-12 to 2022-23, the share of food in monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCCE) declined from 52.90 to 46.38 per cent in rural and from 42.62 to 39.17 per cent in urban India. In rural India, the share of cereal declined from 10.69 to 4.89 per cent and pulses and pulse products from 2.76 to 1.77 per cent over this period. In urban India, the share of cereal declined from 6.61 to 3.62 per cent and pulses and pulse products from 1.93 to 1.21 per cent in the same period. Because households got free rice, wheat and coarse grains from the public distribution system (PDS), the decline in value share was more pronounced than the decline in quantity consumed. In 2022-23, a person consumed 9.6 kg and 8.0 kg of cereals in rural and urban India, respectively, in a month, compared to 11.2 and 9.3 kg in 2011-12. Given that the share of items consumed free from PDS in the index is 0.80 in rural India and 0.25 in urban India, there is no reason to expect that consumption from the PDS would have any effect on inflation per se.

It is equally important to focus on other compo-

nents of the food basket. The importance of beverages and processed food has crept up steadily over time. In 2022-23, its share in the overall rural and urban MPCCE was 9.62 and 10.64, respectively, compared to 7.4 and 8.03 per cent in 2011-12. Hence, accurate measurement of the price of cooked meals and snacks purchased is now extremely important. For the first time, in both rural and urban India, the share of beverages and processed food in the consumption basket is more than the share of spending on milk and milk products. In urban India, the share of spending on cereals, vegetables and fruit is comparable to that of beverages and processed food. This implies that any discussion on food inflation will no longer have a singular focus on the prices of fruit and vegetables.

Devils in the details

Chapter II of IWGPS' manual is worth a read, as it talks about tackling many interesting scenarios — such as free items, seasonal products that are imported when out of season, internet purchases, owner-occupied housing services, second-hand goods, and own-account production. What is the price of an item that is part of the CPI basket but is provided free to the households? Since food grains are distributed for free through the PDS, their weight will be distributed to the other paid cereal items in proportion to the importance of each of them. In the future, if consumption from PDS is no longer free, the redistribution of the weights to other cereal items will be discontinued. However, it is far from obvious how one should account for the receipt of free health services under government schemes or free education. Many judgement calls will go into the revision of India's CPI basket and in determining the sources from which price information will be collected. Whether it is the RBI, bond traders, or foreign investors, they need to pay attention to how each cog in the CPI wheel will be fine-tuned.

The writers are, respectively, professor, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai, and deputy director general, survey design & research division, National Sample Survey Office, Kolkata. The views are personal

Just another brick in the wall



BOOK REVIEW

NEHA KIRPAL

New Delhi-based independent journalist Neha Dixit's debut book *The Many Lives of Syeda X* is the story of a faceless Indian Muslim working-class woman. Syeda X moved from Varanasi to Delhi with her husband and three children after the riots triggered by the demolition of the Babri Masjid. A poor migrant in Delhi, she juggled multiple jobs a day, and moved from Chandni Chowk to Sahabgarh Karawal Nagar.

With over 50 jobs in almost 30 years, working more than 16 hours a day, she still ended up earning abysmal wages. In fact, each of the book's chapters is named

after the various industries that are highlighted through the different jobs that she did — and the many lives that she lived within them. "From a chatterbox who loved films, music, colours, she had become an irritable, bitter, quiet woman who kept to herself," writes Ms Dixit.

Ms Dixit provides a rich backdrop to Syeda's story, supplementing it with facts and details about important historic events that were taking place in India at that point in time. Through the story, one encounters a varied cast of characters, including corrupt policemen, cheerful home-based women workers and *gaw rakshaks*. Other issues that find place in the book include demonetisation, protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens, the horrific Nithari case, "love jihad" and the banning of Valentine's Day celebrations by various conservative organisations. As the story moves along, the prose is also peppered with many quotes as well as lyrics of Bollywood

songs that were popular then.

This, in a sense, makes the book eye-opening not just for Syeda's story but also that of India, — particularly Delhi, in the last three decades — as seen through the eyes of the roughly 35,000 poor migrants who come to the city, never to return. "It shows the macro changes in India through micro lens. Syeda's life is a portal to a harsh, often brutal, world hidden away from elite Indians. It is the story of untold millions and an account of urban life in New India," Ms Dixit writes.

The book begins in Varanasi, where Syeda's father, Rashid, worked as an assam weaver. Later, he began working in a *Nautanki*, a popular travelling theatre that incorporated dialogue and singing and originated in the early twentieth century. In 1973, Syeda was born. When she was nine, Rashid died. After her mother's death five years later, no one wanted to take care of her "responsibility". "It is considered okay to let a poor migrant in an Indian girl all her childhood that her parents' house is not hers. Her husband's home is supposed to be hers — except

that it hardly ever is," Ms Dixit points out.

Having studied in Class 8, Syeda was married off at the age of 15 to Akmal in 1988. "Syeda realised that the only way to get any respect in India as a woman was to get married and become a mother," Ms Dixit points out. Within a year of marriage, a son was born to her when she was only 16. This was followed by another boy and a girl. Like most husbands, Syeda's too turns out to be "a sad drunk", putting most of the burden of running the house and looking after the children on her.

Syeda is a composite personality drawn from Ms Dixit's exhaustive fieldwork. The book, which took nine years to complete, is the result of her interactions with around 900 people. "A combination of hundreds of hours of unstructured interviews, group discussions, informal chats and structured questionnaires," she explains in the Author's Note.

Most of Ms Dixit's fieldwork was conducted in factories, police stations, markets, relief camps, courts, hospitals, malls, industrial areas, slums, highways, urban villages and unauthorised colonies among other public places. Many of the events described in the book — such as disparate wages paid to the informal sector, the number of abortions conducted at a private clinic, and frequent detention of the poor in police stations for questioning — do not have public records.

With several national and international awards towards her credit over the years, it is hard to believe that Ms Dixit had never read a non-syllabus English book till she attended college at Delhi University's Miranda House, where she completed her bachelor's degree in English literature. Twelve years ago, she quit the media house in which she was working as an investigative journalist when a

significant stake in it was bought by a big corporate. She worked in call centres, extensively on sexual violence in urban areas, organised and unorganised sectors, during periods of communal violence and within domestic spaces. During this time, she met and interacted with a number of Dalit, Muslim, Adivasi and other working-class women, chronicling their experiences.

After the Delhi riots in 2020, Ms Dixit's visits to Karawal Nagar in northeast Delhi increased. During this time, she began to be stalked for over five months, receiving incessant acid-attack and gang-rape threats for her fearless reporting on the riots and Hindu supremacist organisations. After hundreds of threatening phone calls, there was also a break-in attempt at her house. "There is an unequal space where you are always supposed to give, if you are a woman... As a woman you are supposed to be a permanent victim. Never a hero or survivor." That is how Radhawi, one of the characters in the book, somewhat sums up its essence.

The reviewer is an freelance writer based in New Delhi. She writes on books, art, culture, travel, music and theatre

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

— Ramnath Goenka

BENGALURU MUST BE MADE MORE LIVEABLE WITH SUSTAINABLE PLANS

BENGALURU, which has a high concentration of IT companies and scientific institutions, is inevitably troubled when it rains. Life gets paralysed, parts of the city get flooded, roads including flyovers become streams, homes get inundated, overpasses threaten to become death traps for motorists, trees get uprooted, and the traffic—terrible even when it does not rain—breaks its own congestion records. This was 62 mm of rain in the early hours of Monday which brought the city to a halt and left four school kids and two adults injured from tree falls. About the impact of flooding on the traffic, the less said the better: This is the sorry state of India's IT capital, one of its most global cities.

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also minister for Bengaluru development, harps on developing Brand Bengaluru. But seeing his project taking off is difficult even after he has been in office for more than a year. Opposition parties and a large section of citizens blame the spending on the guarantees—nearly ₹60,000 crore a year—for the lack of funds preventing some dream projects from seeing the light of day. Urban experts have blamed the flooding on mindless concretisation. They demand removal of encroachments of lakes and stormwater drains, and of constructions obstructing the natural paths of rainwater. They advocate following in the footsteps of Shanghai, which realised its mistake of high concretisation and launched the 'sponge city' initiative of replacing concrete with permeable pavements and improved green cover to allow water to drain into the soil.

The surge in Bengaluru's reputation as an IT hub has far outpaced the infrastructure growth needed to sustain a city expanding in every direction. It got congested despite the expansion. Unfortunately, government actions—irrespective of which party ruled—added to the city's woes. For example, the now-infamous Hebbal flyover, meant to solve traffic problems at a key junction on the road connecting the city with its international airport, has itself turned into a "mother of all bottlenecks". The issue easily gets politicised. But now, it's time to sink all political differences and come together with experts to not only make Bengaluru liveable and sustainable, but also to remove the blemish on its global reputation.

STOP ATTEMPTS TO TEAR KERALA'S SECULAR FABRIC

THE secular psyche of Kerala has watched two recent developments with trepidation. Both had Muslim girl students on one side and Christian institutions on the other: One incident started with a few girl students in a central Kerala college demanding a special room to offer namaz. The issue escalated as the college management refused to yield to the demand, saying it could allow the students to step out to pray in nearby mosques. But conventionally, mosques do not allow women to enter. Things got more agitated with some Muslim groups supporting the students' right to pray. Though all political student groups including SFI and KSU initially supported the students, they changed their tunes sensing that the general sentiment in the state was against the demand. The students withdrew their demand after Muslim religious leaders intervened.

Barly two weeks later, a similar situation occurred in a Catholic school nearby. This time, two parents approached the principal demanding time and space for their child to offer namaz. Their argument was that they were from a conservative family in which it was important to pray regularly. When the school refused, the parents insisted on picking up their kid everyday and taking her to a mosque. But the management refused permission, stating it would affect the institution's timings and discipline. They also cited the Kerala education rules, which allow worship time for Muslim students in public schools only on Fridays. The issue is still on the boil.

These developments are worrying because they bring back memories of the infamous hand-chopping incident—a permanent tear on the collective secular fabric of the state. Religious fanatics belonging to the now-banned PFI chopped off the hands of a Malayalam professor teaching in a Catholic institution for naming a character Mohammed in a question paper. Such incidents are clearly instigated by a few with vested interests. But they put the entire Muslim community under a scanner. We must remember educational institutions are a space to learn, understand and evolve—a space where a child would hopefully go to know people from other cultures. In a state where each religion is politically and financially almost as powerful as the others—a rarity in the national context—attempts to vitiate learning spaces must be nipped at the bud.

QUICK TAKE

MICRO ATTENTION TO PLASTICS

A study has found fibres, pellets, films and fragments of microplastics in salt and sugar brands commonly available across the country. Toxics Link, the Delhi-based NGO that published the finding, tested 10 types of salt and five types of sugar and found microplastics sized between 0.1 and 5 mm in all of them. Plastic traces have been found earlier in other kinds of food, but this is the first link with ingredients as essential as salt and sugar. Microplastics can harm reproductive systems, impair learning and increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases. The government must start industry-wide consultation to make our food safe from plastics before it causes a health crisis.

LOOKING at the state of the nation after 77 years of independence, I will start by conceding that, compared with their parents and grandparents, millions of Indians are much better off today. Many travel to far continents, build second or even third homes in India for themselves and their families, and do other things their forebears could not have imagined.

That's one part of the picture. Grimmer parts reveal gaps in employment, young people committing suicide, a frantic search for jobs anywhere in the world, even in war zones, and other hurtful realities. Let me highlight two troubling features that get poor notice.

The first is India's silence. "What?" Surely India is lively, bustling, noisy? Of course it is, and much of the audible energy is heartening. Some of it is admirable, too. Through meditation and yoga, some Indians not only transcend unwelcome sounds, they find spiritual advance. Yet there is a disturbing silence.

I speak of the silence from platforms of prestige when hatred and contempt towards particular groups of people is openly advocated, when the supremacy of the strong and the humiliation of the weak are brazenly demanded, and when even murder is explicitly asked for.

I used to hear such poisonous calls a long time ago. That was in 1946 and 1947, when I was a boy of 11 or 12. Growing up in Delhi and going to school there, I breathed the fumes of fury and folly that accompanied the partition of what then was the huge undivided province of Punjab until its August 1947 split into India's East Punjab and Pakistan's West Punjab. (Later, East Punjab would split into Punjab, Haryana and Himachal.)

In relative terms, Bengal, the only other province that was cut into two halves, saw fewer killings in 1947, through Bangladesh's liberation struggle of 1971 would exact a great carnage.

To return to my boyhood in 1946-47, I also heard those calls of venom being immediately and fearlessly denounced, above all by Mahatma Gandhi, but also by other remarkable leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajaji, Rajendra Prasad, Sarojini Naidu, Jayaprakash Narayan and Amrit Kaur. In October 1948, when the small, new part of Bangladesh, erupted with Hindus as victims, Gandhi went there to stand, walk and live with the Hindus. To Noakhali's Muslims he spoke the blunt truth. From Noakhali, he went to Bihar, where Muslims were the victims. Gandhi walked,

Though some Indians have prospered 77 years after independence, there has also been an alarming increase in hatred. We need leaders who speak up for everyone including neighbours

THE DEAFENING SILENCE OF A NOISY NATION



RAJMOHAN GANDHI

Historian, former professor and Sahitya Akademi winning author of 70 books, most recently *Violently: Constitutional Moments in Human History*

stood and stayed with Bihar's Muslims, and spoke bluntly to Bihar's Hindus. In September 1947, when Delhi saw violence, Nehru once stormed out of his government vehicle on a road close to where I was growing up. He ran into the rioters and told them: "Hit me first before you hit a helpless Muslim." Not seeing or hearing anything even remotely like that in the last 10 years from leaders of the government in New Delhi, I have felt hugely let down and also profoundly sad. Moreover, the leaders' extraordinary silence in face of threatening speech and oppressive conduct has been matched by a similar silence, or even open approval, on the part of others, including among those who control TV channels and newspapers. The men

of prestige who occupy Hinduism's religious platforms have also stayed mum. My second disturbing reality is the popularity of the "curse thy neighbour" doctrine. This doctrine is fervently preached within India for relationships between states, between regions within a state, and between adjacent caste or linguistic groups. It is not easy to think of two governments of neighbouring states in India that enjoy a high degree of mutual trust and respect. The doctrine of limiting any warmth for the neighbour is also often kept in mind, though seldom openly spelt out, when it comes to India's relations with adjacent countries. Isn't it astonishing that our ancient land, so rich in wisdom, and blessed with

FOLLOWING THE FAR-RIGHT FLIGHT PATH IN BRITAIN



SHYAM BHATIA

Former diplomatic editor of *The Observer* based in London and author of *Blatney and Blythes*

a country devastated by the Second World War. Few felt welcome and rising politicians like Enoch Powell were quick to exploit concerns of the majority white community that they could soon be overwhelmed. A former minister and MP, Powell's infamous speech in 1968 stoked racial tensions: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Ro-



racism has been a part of British life for a long time. As the type of immigrants flocking into the former colonial power has changed, so has the flavour of bigotry. The recent riots across the country also show that more people come out against such violence today

of reporting from Belfast in 1982. My new editor in London sent me to the capital of Northern Ireland to report the annual Orange Day marches that commemorate the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II. These raucous events, fuelled by plenty of alcohol, often turn out to be excruciating for listening out at the minority Catholic community of Northern Ireland.

When leaders of a rally spotted me on the fringes writing notes, they suddenly turned on me. All I remember are the shouts "Grab the coon" as I ran as fast as I could and hid under the cash counter of a nearby newspaper shop. A handful of the marchers came looking, even banging their way into the shop, but fortunately failed to see me covering between the legs of the shopkeeper and his cash machine. Since those early days, when workers from South Asia and West Indies arrived in relatively small numbers, kept their heads down and avoided eye contact with whites, the nature of immigration has changed. The South Asian immigrants of the 1960s were followed by large numbers of better-educated and more prosperous East African Indians in the 1980s, then low-paid East Europeans from countries like Poland and Ukraine and, more recently, by waves of asylum seekers from the Middle East, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya.

Currently, an estimated 9 million foreign-born UK residents account for 14 percent of the population and about 9 percent are non-UK citizens. The resulting pressure on subsidised services like health, education, housing and unemployment allowances is massive. Such foreigners are also easy targets for Powell's successors—leaders of the far-right—who use social media to falsely claim migrants and asylum seekers have denied the country's white deprived classes of a better life. Finchley and other targeted hotspots will continue to need backup and local support for the troubled times ahead. (Views are personal) (shyambhatia@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Intersex discrimination

Ref: The indignity of questioning female athletes' femininity (Aug 14). It is high time international sports organisations make way for men, women and transgender people to compete in their own categories, without discriminating against those with intersex characteristics. **Nalini Santham Ayyar, Chennai**

Scientific approach

The article is getting provoking, but no solution can be arrived at unless a scientific process is evolved. It is unfortunate that female athletes are the losers on issues connected with intersex traits. As long as there is a disparity in the treatment of sex, considering females as low, this problem cannot be solved. **Kribus Anul, Palayamkottai**

Benzai's dream

Ref: The other child of midnight strives to grow (Aug 14). Even after 77 years of independence, Pakistan is getting entangled in a triangular dilemma between the army, fundamentalists and the elected government. Adding fuel to the fire are terror outfits operating covertly and overtly in different names. The late Benazir Bhutto's dream of modernism in Pakistan may remain a mirage. **Venkat Desikan, Chennai**

Yunus gesture

Ref: Yunus reaches out to Hindus, cites institutional decay for the violence (Aug 14). Bangladesh chief adviser Muhammad Yunus made a good gesture by visiting the Dhakshwari temple and urged people to exercise patience before judging by government. The visit to troubled areas and consoling minorities subjected to atrocities will have a soothing effect on the victims. **M Hanef, Kottayam**

Insurance tax

The present 65% on health insurance is 18 percent, which is too high. Health insurance taken by individuals is not a luxury, but a basic necessity in these uncertain times. Even Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee have voiced their views on this matter. **Raghu Joshi, Davanagere**

Trump falsehoods

Ref: Kamala more incompetent than her boss Biden. Trump tells Elon Musk (Aug 14). It was no surprise that Donald Trump, in a very one-sided conversation with his wealthy backer Elon Musk, indulged in boasting, making insubstantial claims, uttering falsehoods and ridiculing his rivals. **C G Kurukalesh, Kothamangalam**

In Praise of a More Free Market India

Push for free trade and investment

The freedom India most evidently lacks on the eve of its 78th Independence Day is that of its markets. Three decades of reforms initiated and executed by New Delhi have pushed the state back from most productive activity. The need now is for the economy to free up its factor markets for labour and land. This particularly tough bit of reform cannot be pushed through without bringing the states on board. Cooperative federalism is the necessary stepping stone in this direction, but it has been elusive. The fallout is India's recent burst of economic growth is stacking the gains in some parts of the country and among a section of the population. Uneven development adds to India's pre-existing conditions of low income and high unemployment.

Factor market freedom is vital on two counts. It would allow greater mobility of labour to cities that have become

the engines of economic growth. It would also bring down logistics costs that dull India's export competitiveness. Once these internal constraints are addressed, the economy can set its sights on the larger objective of employing its immense workforce to make goods for the rest of the world. That is, if China and automation have not already raised the raw bridge on low-skilled labour-intensive manufacturing.

Indian producers cannot reach scale through domestic consumption that's limited by persistently low purchasing power and chronic lack of jobs. Exports are the only available alternative and India needs to push for free trade and investment. Bilateral trade treaties deliver bigger benefits, but need more work to create a patchwork replicating the scale of market access regional blocs provide. They also come with expectations among trading partners of a freer capital market in India. New Delhi still has its work cut out to unify the Indian market by coaxing states to whittle down land and labour immobility. It also has to prise open foreign markets for Indian producers in order to overcome their competitive disadvantage. This calls for a 'freer' India. Happy Independence Day!

Being Diverse Is to Be (Politically) Free

Independent India's first law minister B.R. Ambedkar often argued that the core purpose of the Constitution was promoting social inclusion. Although he focused on caste hierarchy and didn't address challenges faced by sexual minorities, his words and the Constitution have helped many fight their social, economic and political exclusion. The pace of social change has been glacial since then, but also promising, at times. If the decriminalisation of Section 377 was one such moment, the recent appointment of Anish Gawande, an LGBTQ+ rights activist and first openly gay person to join the Indian political landscape, as NCP/SP's national spokesperson is another example of India becoming freer in accepting and normalising sexual diversity. The NCP/SP leadership must be congratulated for this appointment.

Gawande, who founded Pink List India, a database of politicians supportive of LGBTQ+ rights, has his work cut out. He'll be representing the party in the media at the national level, but also sharing the leadership's views on manifestos and election strategies. With Maharashtra going to the polls later this year, it'll be a busy first season for him. NCP/SP's decision will hopefully, as Gawande says, have a cascading effect, giving 'queer kids who feel they need to be in the closet the chance to come out and dream big. This is no taken appointment.

Democracy is a fragile construct, often a messy affair. To make it work—and sustain it—all hands must be on deck. This means active representation of all citizens in democratic institutions and processes. The quality of democratic practices—fair elections, protection of civil liberties, rule of law and affirmative actions like Gawande's appointment—matters more.

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Majuli's promotion from subdivision to district made national headlines. However, such news is an outlier. While creating new states grabs attention, formation of a new district—a vital third-tier of governance where government schemes take root and vast sums of public money flow—rarely stirs interest beyond the local level. Yet, since Independence, districts have seen their fair share of bifurcations, trifurcations, mergers and re-namings.

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and Bihar and Maharashtra—have 75, 38 and 36 districts, respectively.

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AZADI Both 'freedom to' and 'freedom from' should liberate a still-inhibited 77-year-old India

How to Enjoy Independence



Indrajit Hazra

Once upon a time, there used to be disagreement among Indians. One lot thought it was better to not be ruled by outsiders with retractable stakes in India. The other lot thought that it was well to live under a benign ma-baap colonial regime—considering it through India's 'Indi'—the railways, the English language, among other tech 'trade goodies'—as long as they could carry on with their own business.

If there was television in the run-up to August 15, 1947, I'm sure there would have been 'tricky' debates, one side accusing the freedom-seekers of being stupid, immature, dangerous, doom-seers, or—god forbid—disloyal. Freedom fighters may have vilified on air (as they did, were in many newspapers) for upstaging the peace, clogging traffic and reducing the ease of doing business-as-usual.

Pro-British Rajwals may also have had their arguments challenged, to what extent being determined by how much the media was willing to test the perceived patience of the authorities by having anticolonial/antinationals' disturb the peace.

Last this was thought as a purely bohemian exercise, let's take the case of the biggest scam in living memory: the B3 Bengal Famine. An estimated 2.5-3 mn Indians died because of British policy made during World War 2 that saw food supplies diverted to the military, bureaucrats and the 'priority classes'. But it wasn't just the administration that exacerbated the problem. Local hoarders also did their bit to drive food out of the reach of millions, while lining their own pockets.

If there was a Pew Research survey then, it would have pointed out that even with another four years of British occupation left (that we know only by hindsight), there were enough Indians who believed that things would have been worse—for them—if India was



Freedom's not just another word for nothing left to lose

even if it's not always, the key reason to love one's own country, regardless of whether it's the only country one is a citizen of or not.

Most of us do love this country, love being a many-defined, many-splendoured thing. For many of us, this love is representational—of particular dishes, songs, weekend getaways, habits... But patriotism requires a leap of the imagination. JFK may have asked his fellow Americans to ask not what their country can do for them, but what they can do for their country. But the truth is, he was saying it from the position of reminding (White) Americans of a social contract. Here in India, it's time we ask what our country can do for us. By which what is actually meant is society which promises relief from uncertainty even if it deprives the individual of his freedom.

While it's true that mass media is providing many of us the template of social behaviour and moral judgement—including how to display your competitive 'loyalty' to this country—an increasing number of In-

dependents find themselves in the 'freedom from' category. They feel prescribed, less able to do what they are capable of. Thus, the liberating feeling when they move to less proscribed climates where they study ply their profession, or just live.

But in circa 2024, even 'freedom from' remains scandalously short—the scandal also being that it's not considered a scandal. From the banal 'freedom from' discomfort and hazards of stepping outdoors with its dystopic landscape, alien civic sense, 'Third World' hygiene and maintenance standards, to the horrific 'freedom from' class-caste-religious discrimination and sexual violence for women—Kolkata Police's investigation ('sic) of the heinous rape-murder of a junior doctor at RG Kar Hospital in the 'City of Joy' last week has been a sadist's joke—'freedom from' remains an unfinished project. Strange optimists will call it 'aspirational'.

As for 'freedom to', while much lip service is paid to things like innovation, imagination, disruption, 'freedom to fail' and such liberating ideas, August 15, 2024, remains a place where counter-views, differences of opinions, outside-the-box ideas are tut-tutted, frowned upon, trotted or worse. The 'mai-baap' state's herd instinct renews national socialist India's default screensaver.

In his 1941 book, *Escape From Freedom*, Fromm writes, 'If the economic, social and political conditions... do not offer a basis for the realisation of individuality... while at the same time people have lost those things which give them security, this makes freedom an unbearable burden... Powerful tendencies arise to escape from this kind of freedom into submission or some kind of relationship to man and the world which promises relief from uncertainty even if it deprives the individual of his freedom.'

It wouldn't be totally off-the-mark to think that this Independence Day, many of us find relief from the uncertainty that freedom brings by sticking to the standard script. It's time we muster up the courage to see what we can do by using our own agency. Independence Days should be so passé.

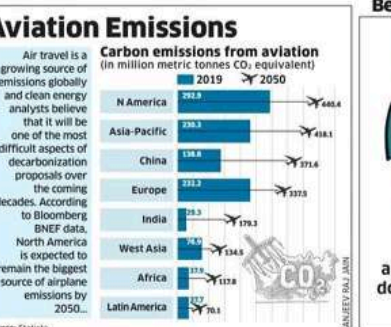
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self-revolutions. Stockholm syndrome has tropical antecedents. But even in very late colonial India, a category of people existed who believed in gaining, in social psychologist Erich Fromm's words, 'freedom from' foreign rule—and the attendant was arising from it.

Seventy-seven years after Friday, August 15, 1947, one would have thought that in Indian-ruled India, the balance would have significantly shifted to 'freedom to'—at, think, do, earn, speak, love, etc. But we may still find ourselves obsessing about gaining 'freedom from' things—many imagined, many real—while forging the 'freedom to'. The truth is, both are important for a country that truly internalises independence, a criterion that should be,

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

On Independence Day, what a plight, Not a soul in the flag-raising ceremony in sight. They've all hit the road, Leaving national duty to implode, While you hold down Red Fort out of spite!



Bell Curves

by R Prasad

We don't offer apprenticeships, but we do have a short-duration slavery programme.

District-Making, Get Invested, People



Kumkum Dasgupta

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► What drives formation of districts? Where this is not answered, crisis happens. In 2003, the Congress government in Rajasthan created 19 new districts, taking the total to 50 'improve governance'. The present BJP government is now reviewing the decision.

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better governance? A new research initiative, India: State and District Evolution, led by Shivakumar Jolad and Mehr Kalra of FLAME University, Pune, is trying to answer these questions. "When districts are formed, governments rarely offer a rationale. Is it the demographic, geographical, historical or cultural reasons? The usual response—"administrative reasons"—masks political undertones. Like creation of districts is also a political move, often serving the ideology of the party in power," explains Jolad.

The project involves digitising political and administrative maps at provincial, state and district levels, segmented by decades, and systematically tracing and mapping changes in provincial and district boundaries over each decade. It focuses on splits, mergers, and creation of new provinces and districts in public and postcolonial India.

While in most cases, public consultation is absent, Jolad argues citizens must remain involved for several reasons:

► Devolution of power: Most government schemes devolve at the district level. District development officers, for example, conduct development plans and projects, act as chief liaison officers of the state, and anchor the implementation of Gov's programmes.

► Public finance: Each new district requires significant investments. New district courts must be established, bureaucrats appointed and offices and buildings constructed. Citizens must be consulted on the money comes from.

► Dead notifications Often, announced districts remain uncreated. Hnahthial district, announced in 2006 in Mizoram, remained non-functional until 2020. Citizens must demand their right to know if this happened.

► Lack of data: British India governed its district gazetteers offered insights into a district's geography, politics and administrative history, demo-

graphy, natural resources, industries and revenue administration. But post-Independence, many gazetteers have not been updated for decades. With the last census in 2011, it's unclear how such policy decisions are being taken without basic data.

► True devolution involves a shift of power to additional units. District collectors, however, largely operate as state agents, and the state government exercises supremacy over local governments (like zilla parishads), undermining true empowerment. If improved governance is the main motive behind creating new districts, specific steps must be taken:

► Create a common and differentiated criteria should be followed based on a combination of demographic indicators and relevant social and historical parameters. A dedicated committee to the public, should review proposals.

► Demarcate funds: Make provisions for infra changes and ensure the new district has trained personnel.

► Show data: Invest in data-backed research to determine whether new districts can improve governance.

► Undertake public and stakeholder consultation before creating new districts.

With several assembly elections this year, district-making could become a handy political tool. But carving out new ones without rigorous and meaningful public participation will serve no real purpose, except a cartographic change. Governance—and a 77-year-old independent democracy—will suffer.

JUST IN JEST

Whether on Independence Day or not, we're suckers for free-dom

There IS Something Called a Free Lunch

Let's be honest. When you read and hear all those homilies today celebrating 78 years of freedom — from the top of this pink page or the ramparts of the Red Fort — you're not really going to be thinking of freedom fighters or White people in black-and-white film reels, but of the value of the free-don. Not liberation, emancipation, non-dependence — no, but the other variety of free-don: that phenomenon where you can get something for free. Don't you believe the cynics — or the economists — when they say that there is nothing called a free lunch. Rubbish! When you're standing in front of a spread of office samosas, biscuits and coffee that you're not paying for, economic theories seem a bit academic, don't they?

Even today, on Independence Day, despite it being a dry day, you must be going in the evening to a friend's place — for drinks and khana that you won't have to pay for. Ergo, free. The trick to enjoying a free lunch is to embrace the guilt-free delight of getting something for nothing. No need to consider that maybe the 'tandoori treat' could be the bait for yet another 'team-building' exercise. Or that a free Day gift will mean listening to a bureaucrat speak about the nation, or — god forbid — the future of this country. But free things do exist, even in an India's generosity that is dependent on your credit worth and standing.

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THE SPEAKING TREE

Is Freedom A Numen?

SUMIT PAUL

Freedom is not just a word or an idea. It is a state of mind. It's an individual spirit, nay, a numen. Rumi says in *Pahlavi*, 'Choon azadim zhan zhan meen tasavvur-e-azad'—you're free the moment you think that you're free.

We condition ourselves to be free or enslaved. To be free of all ideas, beliefs, ideologies and isms is actual freedom. A country's independence is not necessarily an individual's freedom or independence. One can remain mentally, subconsciously and psychologically enslaved, even in a so-called free or independent country.

Once Buddha's disciple Sariputa asked Buddha, 'When can an individual feel complete freedom?' Buddha said, 'Prityamani, Pali for 'this very moment'. We must choose and act freely in every situation we are in. Every thing we do is a result of being free because we have a choice.

It's great to celebrate Independence Day, but it's also a moral obligation to ask ourselves: 'What if I do to ask oneself whether one is really free. Freedom from all social and individual ills as well as negativity coupled with a clear and fearless conscience can make us free. A free and independent person calls the whole world his family. Unless we imbibe the universal spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the whole world is a family; true freedom will elude us.

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Dhamaka NYC

Indian cuisine, especially the Gujarati and Bengali varieties, is set to zoom in NYC. If you're craving a taste of non-'mainstream' dishes, like those from Meghalaya, Dhamaka is the place to be. Run by restaurateur Ravi Mahapatra and chef-partner Chintan Pandya, this classy eatery offers a culinary journey through India that goes beyond the usual fare. Located in the newly revamped Essex Market on the Lower East Side, Dhamaka's menu showcases the diversity of Indian cuisine. Pandya brings regional specialties to the table, including rural dishes like gurga Kapoor (spicy goat kidneys and testicles),



Kashmiri gosht chump, lasoon lobster, and a Rajshahi shikara (hunting) feast featuring whole rabbit. Or go north and try Naga pork and Misa Machu Pora (grilled shrimp wrapped in banana leaf, a delicacy from Mizoram). And, of course, there is India's favourite rice, Biryani, and, more importantly, goat biryani.

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Chat Room

Not for Granted, Independence

Time flies — our nation turns 77 today. Our glorious past and incredible present form the foundation on which an ever-dynamic and resilient nation can continue to be built. We are at the cusp of change that will propel India into an even higher orbit of development. As active citizens, let's all participate in this process and keep the flame of progress burning. Let our women be more empowered, our farmers be more equipped, our scientists revolutionise medicine, R&D and scientific exploration, and our youth be the crusaders of change. The vision for 2047 is realisable with development across social, economic, ethical and political spheres. Let's give our nation our best.

KIRTI WADHWAN
Kangur

Opinion



TOAST TO SOVEREIGNTY
Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar
This momentous day is a solemn reminder of the indomitable courage and selfless sacrifice of countless heroes that laid the foundation of sovereign Bharat. It is also a celebration of the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity that remain the bedrock of our vibrant democracy

The real freedom

Even if India is doing relatively well, all too many Indians aren't. The young wants to know how this can be corrected

SINGAPORE'S FIRST PRIME Minister Lee Kuan Yew had once said, "China does, India talks." But there is enough data to suggest that India has also been doing a lot, apart from talking a lot. As the country enters the 78th year of independence, there is indeed much to celebrate — it is set to become the fourth-largest economy and could become the third-largest by 2027. India has improved its scores on several global indices, is an information technology services major, has doubled the number of places in many higher education institutes, and has made great strides in connectivity — both physical as well as digital. More importantly, contrary to the predictions of its imminent demise as late as the 1950s, the country has emerged as a consequential player on the world stage whose voice is heard with respect.

The Indian republic has survived as, by and large, a united, vibrant, multicultural democracy. That's a tremendous achievement in a world which is becoming increasingly divisive and volatile — for proof, look at what has been happening in our immediate neighbourhood. The success of India's democracy has been, in large part, because of its institutions, which have held up and continue to hold together this nation — with the Constitution as the guiding light, showing the way forward, and erecting the guardrails for a safe journey.

The problem, however, is that even if India is doing relatively well, all too many Indians aren't. In nominal dollars, India's per capita income is lower than that of all but one (Bangladesh) of the 50 largest economies, and slightly ahead of Cambodia, which is not flattering company. According to the 2024 UNICEF Child Nutrition Report, 40% of children in India suffer from malnutrition. The nation also faces a crisis with two-thirds of its unemployed youth being educated. India's richest people now have a larger share of national income than in more than a century. The top 1% of Indians earns 22.6% of the national income compared to 15% earned by the bottom 50% of the population, according to a study by the World Inequality Lab. Two decades ago, the top 1% accounted for 25.4% of the wealth and the bottom 50% held 6.9%. This only goes on to show that India remains a deeply unequal society.

This can't continue as such growing inequality can rip apart the country's social fabric. Some deep introspection is required on issues such as progressive taxation, employment generation (not the type proposed in the latest Budget), and improved access to health and education. It is crystal clear that government handouts are no substitute for jobs, and religion cannot for all time serve as a mass opiate. These are the issues that the lawmakers should debate and discuss. Instead, an average day in Parliament still remains all about the I-me myself personality cult, chaos, demonisation of the other, which all but drowns out any substantive discussions on critical areas. India must frame policies of allowing entrepreneurial energies to flourish while relying on comprehensive welfare with a rights approach as it's obvious that neither a statist nor a market-only emphasis on development and growth is ideal. Political leaders need to come together to articulate a vision for the future that embraces the aspirations of the young who need to hear what we can do for them. The prime minister's Independence Day speech this morning could be a good starting point.

RESTORING PRODUCTIVITY GOVT AND PRIVATE SECTOR HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN UPGRADING TECH IN THE LAGGARDS

Stasis in productivity growth

DESPITE ECONOMIC REFORMS, the GDP share of agriculture (16-19%), manufacturing (17-19%) and services (50-53%) have largely remained range-bound. This stickiness has been largely due to poor productivity growth. KLEM data set indicates that over 43 years (1980-2024) when the overall growth of gross value added (GVA) averaged 5.80%, total factor productivity (TFP) growth contributed to just 10% of this and the remaining 90% came from the growth of inputs and their quality improvement. A real upsurge in GVA growth was observed from 2000-01 to 2010-11 when it averaged 6.6%, yet the TFP growth was only 0.4%.

Average annual growth of capital was 7.69% in 2001-11, the decade of the highest GVA growth. The average TFP growth of only 0.4% was due to negative figures in the first two years. During the five-year period of 2003-2008, TFP growth averaged 1.19% with GVA growth averaging 7.6%. TFP growth shows continuous moderation from 1.13% annually during 1980-1990 to 0.1% in the most recent period of 2011-24, averaging 0.58% for 43 years. During 1982-83, 1988-89, 1995-96, and 2021-22, TFP growth exceeded 3%. As a residual growth not based on resource accounting, fluctuations in TFP growth have been significant with a standard deviation of 2.33 and a coefficient of variation of over 400%.

In the last three years, TFP revived to average a growth of 2.13%. There is a strong correlation between TFP and GVA growths. Average GVA growth exceeded 7.7% in years when TFP growth was above 2%. During the 15 years which witnessed negative TFP growth over the entire reference period of 43 years, not only did GVA growth not exceed 6% but the average was only slightly above 5%. We observe a significant correlation between GVA growth and the ratio of capital stock to GVA and TFP. Inter-industry and sectoral differences in capital intensity, TFP, and employment growth have significantly varied over 1980-2023 (see graphic broadly sum-

R GOPALAN MC SINGHI
The authors are former civil servants



marising the sectoral outcomes). Capital stock to GVA ratio is low in manufacturing sectors of machinery, petroleum products, transport equipments, and TFP has been negative in these sectors. This indicates there is hardly any innovation over acquired technology. These have a sizeable presence of public sector entities (railways in transport equipment). We believe technology levels in these sectors have rather been static.

In metals and fabricated metal products and non-metallic mineral products (primarily cement), the sheer volume may have been a trade barrier. Therefore, despite a moderate capital intensity as reflected by the ratio of capital stock to GVA, TFP is negative. Here too the acquired technology may not have seen any further breakthrough.

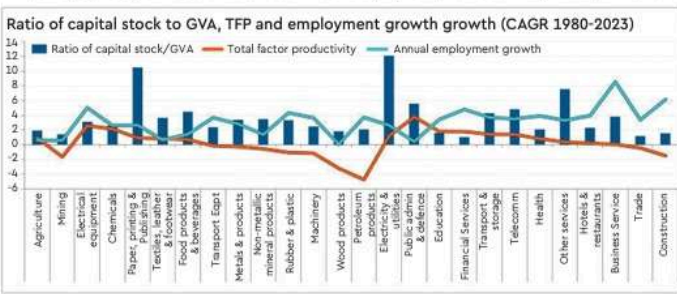
The highest or positive TFP within manufacturing is observed in electrical and optimal equipments; chemical prod-

ucts, paper, printing and publishing, textiles, and food products. These products, like medicines, drugs and pharmaceuticals, have not only entered the common man's consumption basket, but may have seen innovation, technological upgrade and strengthening against open competition. Textiles, leather, and food products have also seen reasonable employment growth. These are the strong resilient sectors with positive TFP. Policies must focus on their development.

In services, the best performer in terms of TFP is public administration and defence. Digitisation seems to have helped. Education, health, financial services, trade, hotels and restaurants, have also seen low capital intensity but varying TFP growth. Trade and construction have negative TFP, which is understandable for trade but somewhat perplexing for construction because it has seen mechanisation in a big way. Perhaps

the cheap labour moving away from agriculture has given it the scale and TFP may improve with time. Further, a sharp negative growth of over 1.4% in the Covid year, equally sharp negative growth in 1982-83, and negative TFP growth during the 2008-09 global meltdown were contributing factors. Another surprise is in business services, recording the highest employment growth but with zero TFP. Business services have an embedded element of product and it can be traded over long distances. Surprisingly it shows a consistent negative TFP during 2008-12 and a reduced overall TFP growth in 2017-18. The 2008-12 period witnessed a global meltdown and 2017-18 saw domestic structural reforms.

We believe the government and the private sector have a role to play in upgrading technology in the laggards. Where consumer penetration is important, without better TFP growth higher GVA growth may not be feasible. The ministry of heavy industries' initiative of Common Technology Development and Service Infrastructure or performance-linked incentive scheme would need continuous fine-tuning with emphasis on onus addition. Consistent growth in technicity of 7% will be feasible only with a good TFP growth and increase in capital stock per unit of GVA.



New Starbucks CEO could finally tame Howard Schultz

INCOMING STARBUCKS CORP. CEO Brian Niccol is a star executive who is widely considered the best in the business. Quite frankly, it's surprising the company was able to hire him. Despite the coffee giant being one of the world's most iconic and powerful brands, Starbucks has a problem for any incoming CEO. And that problem is named Howard Schultz.

As Starbucks' long-time CEO who became synonymous with the company he all but founded, Schultz can't seem to let go. He's twice boomeranged back into the top job when the company hit turbulence. And since he departed from the board a year ago, he has become a meddler — criticising his successor Laxman Narasimhan and the board, even though he handpicked Narasimhan, trained him, and set an aggressive growth plan on his way out the door.

It's only the latest example in Schultz's long history of undermining his replacements. He wrote in a leaked memo in 2007 that said under then-CEO Jim Donald the company's stores "no longer have the soul of the past." After Kevin Johnson left the company as CEO in 2022, Schultz said that he had returned to the helm because Starbucks had "lost its way."

Schultz seems to have orchestrated his latest official departure from company leadership to make it impossible for Starbucks to disentangle itself from his grasp. He is the company's largest individual shareholder and has negotiated to be chairman emeritus for life. A piece in the *Financial Times* earlier this month detailed Schultz's ongoing ties to the company: he can attend and observe board meetings; he has a badge that gives him access to headquarters — where he also has his own parking space; the board reimburses him for the use of his private jet for corporate purposes; and he owns a stake in a business making olive oil for one of the company's coffee drinks. The piece also cited a recent Bernstein analyst report, which notes, "Decision-making processes are still heavily influenced by the presence of Howard Schultz, albeit informally."

That dynamic even played out in the selection of Niccol. Melody Hobson, Starbucks board chair, said she ran the choice by Schultz a week ago, who gave his approval. However, the two known activist firms that are circling the company — Elliott Investment Management and Starboard Value — reportedly were not given a heads up.

It's all more than enough to give any CEO candidate pause, especially a highly coveted one like Niccol, who could take his pick of companies. In addition to his track record executing a massive turnaround at Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc., his last there gave him experience dealing with activist investors as well as iconic founders. In 2018, Niccol replaced Chipotle co-founder and long-time CEO Steve Ells, who struggled to replace the company after a slew of food safety disasters. Ells stepped away as executive chairman two years later, saying at the time, "Brian has proven that he is absolutely the right person to lead Chipotle forward and I've never been more confident about the future of this great company."

With Schultz still lurking in the background, Starbucks likely had to make some serious concessions to lure Niccol — among them naming him chairman as well as CEO. Niccol had joined the chairman title at Chipotle in 2020 and probably made it a requirement for joining Starbucks. But it also raises more governance issues for a board that is already under scrutiny. Corporate America has increasingly moved away from having a single person hold both titles. Just 4% of new S&P 1500 CEOs were also named board chair upon appointment last year, according to executive search firm Spencer Stuart, which has also reported that 41% of S&P 500 companies had a CEO with the dual title in 2023 — down 25% from a decade ago.

Schultz built Starbucks into a retail juggernaut over four decades, so it's understandable that the board and executive team would want to keep someone like him on speed dial. But Starbucks is now turning into an example of why long-time CEOs need to make cleaner breaks with their companies. Otherwise, they risk tarnishing their legacies by turning themselves from an asset into a liability.

Education can't be political capital

BADRI NARAYAN
Director, GB Pant Social Science Institute

EDUCATION IS ONE of the biggest desiderata in a developing country like India. Post-1990, the Indian economy transformed into one that is neoliberal, centred around education, technology, and development mobility among both the rural and urban population. Education is a big dream, especially among the marginal, deprived, and poor sections of the population. Bhim Rao Ambedkar inspired these communities "to educate, agitate, and organise." Gauging the deep desire of education among a large section of the populace, many parties developed their electoral politics around it.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), led by Arvind Kejriwal, came to the political scene around 2010, and wielded its politics around the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare. It formed government in Delhi in 2013, and has constantly remained in power since then. After first coming to power, it organised its electoral politics around providing access to quality education and healthcare for the masses. Mobilisation worked well in the party's favour. To show education as an attractive mobilisation constituent of its politics, the state government proposed a design of the Delhi model of education after 2015, describing it as the "Delhi government revolution". The central focus of this over-asserted model is on school education.

The AAP favoured developing physical

infrastructure, preparing a trained and innovative teaching community, and a novel course restructuring for school education in Delhi. The Delhi government also enhanced its budget for the education model. Education as an emancipatory project for the poor and marginal communities also attracted intellectuals and journalists, both domestic and international. The Delhi government made special attempts to project its model of education prominently through the media and educational surveys by foreign rating agencies. It seemed to have paid off, providing an electoral dividend to the party in a big way. But just after a few years, the model started getting exposed by various agencies through their evaluation on multiple indicators.

On the indicator of school-classroom ratio, this model crumbled. It is reported that many Delhi government schools have 190 students in each classroom. Through various news reports, it came to light that some schools have a strength of 100 students in every classroom. However, Right to Education norms suggest that only 30 and 35 students should be in each primary and secondary classroom respectively. Owing to these big numbers, many

stays are forced to sit in the verandahs or stay at home during the monsoon. In one of the petitions filed in the Delhi High Court, it is argued that students get access to only two hours of teaching a day or are told to attend school on alternative days.

These factors affected the entire system of Delhi schools. It decreased the quality of teaching, making students disinterested. In recent years, the percentage of failures among students has increased — in a recent report, it was discovered that in Class 9th of Delhi government schools, 36% of students failed, and in 2022, 42% of such students dropped out. The collapse of the system of education which the AAP tried to build ended up making the students feel disillusioned.

These facts highlight the ground reality of the AAP's claims on Delhi's school education; however, it is still used as electoral capital. It is common knowledge that present-day politics mostly has nothing to do with ground realities, and everything to do with perception and narrative-building. Following this, "the Delhi education model" is being used by the party as one of the important constituents in its perception politics. Its IT cell, narrative-building groups, intellectuals, and media

are still propagating the Delhi model as empowering and emancipatory. However, according to various media reports, studies, and petitions filed in courts, it has several known problems, contradictions, and failures. Education should not be used as political capital. It is supposed to transform the present and future of communities. We, as citizens, need to follow the advice of eminent educationist Paulo Freire, who wrote the fundamental book on educating the masses, titled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He wrote, "The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality, so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it." Using education as merely political capital may be disastrous for the future of the people, society, and the nation itself. The AAP and other political forces, who project themselves as the messiahs of educating the masses and changing lives of the oppressed and marginal communities, should start with reviewing the social impact of their claims, and ensuring that they live up to what they promise. As advocated by Ambedkar, education is one of the foundational elements for empowering people, especially from the marginalised communities. We need to embrace this dream delicately and sensitively. More importantly, parties should avoid using education for their political means and ends.



BETH KOWITZ
Bloomberg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Healthcare for all
Apropos of "Health cover for all" (FE, August 14), reforming goods and services tax (GST) on health insurance policies is crucial to enhance healthcare affordability and accessibility. A multi-layered approach can be adopted, where lower premium policies are taxed at a reduced rate and senior citizens are exempt from GST. This will encourage individuals to invest in health

insurance and also shield vulnerable demographics from financial burden. To amplify the impact, the government can introduce GST incentives for policies that prioritise preventive care and streamline filing processes to minimise administrative burdens. Concurrently, public awareness initiatives can be launched to educate people about the benefits of health insurance and the revised GST framework. By periodically reviewing and refining the GST structure, India

can foster a more inclusive health insurance ecosystem, aligning with global standards and propelling progress toward universal health coverage by 2047. —Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

Storm in a teacup
Several state governments under the Congress and other opposition parties have given colossal projects to the Aadi group. The repeated revelations of suggested lapses in the

Hindenburg reports implicating the group and now the Securities and Exchange Board of India have failed to destabilise either entity. The oft-repeated suggestive allegations in the Hindenburg reports are now pointless and inconsequential in the public eye. The moot question is, what has Hindenburg achieved in India by such disclosures? —Vinod John, Delhi

Write to us at letters@financialexpressindia.com

Oven no bar: extremophile bacteria have learnt to survive microwaves

Scientists have isolated microbes from volcanoes, permafrost, acid mines, deep-sea hydrothermal vents, and dark lakes kilometres under polar ice. They have also been found thriving on the exteriors of spacecraft and around nuclear waste storage sites. Such microbes are called extremophiles

Sridhar Sivasubbu
Vinod Scaria

Microorganisms have mastered the art of surviving on earth. They are found practically in all niches where life can possibly thrive. Over millions of years of evolution, they have developed mechanisms to adapt to diverse habitats. They are very flexible and able to colonise extreme environments, even those off limits to more complex life-forms.

Scientists have isolated microbes from volcanic vents, permafrost, acid mines, deep-sea hydrothermal vents, and dark lakes kilometres under polar ice caps. Microbes have also been found thriving on the exteriors of spacecraft and around nuclear waste storage sites. Microbes that live in extreme natural conditions are called extremophiles. Many researchers believe that life began on earth in an extreme environmental niche, in the form of an extremophile, before spreading and adapting to more temperate ecosystems.

Microbes adapt to extreme environments by incorporating unique biological and biochemical processes. More complex life-forms, like humans, have evolved to have one set of proteins with which they navigate life. Extremophile microbes, on the other hand, have multiple sets of proteins, each customised for life in a specific environmental niche.

They 'activate' each set depending on the conditions around them and what they need to survive: say, one set for the super-high temperature during a volcanic eruption, one for the debilitating lack of water during a prolonged drought, and one for the gruesome acidity of a volcanic crater lake.

A key to biology itself

Our knowledge of microbes, especially in the earth's various environmental niches, is still in its infancy. Many global initiatives are currently trying to map, organise, and understand this diversity. One is the ambitious 'Earth Microbiome Project'. It was founded in 2010 to sequence 200,000 genetic samples and assemble 500,000 microbial genomes. Another is the 'Earth Biogenome Project' – to sequence the genomes of all of the planet's eukaryotic organisms to create one of the largest and most comprehensive maps of organisms on the earth in a decade.

A further advantage to understanding how extremophiles adapt lies in a number of biological and industrial applications. For example, in the 1960s, U.S. researchers isolated a new species of bacteria from a hot spring at Yellowstone National Park and named it *Thermus aquaticus*. This microbe is able to produce a heat-resistant enzyme called Taq DNA polymerase. This enzyme is an important and valuable workhorse of molecular biology because of its application in the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Readers will recall that this is a technique to identify the presence of certain DNA in a biological sample, popularised during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the discovery of Taq, researchers have found a number of other polymerases from a variety of extremophile microbes and have reengineered them for various applications in molecular biology with



Since the bacterial communities found in microwave ovens were selected by frozen to survive repeated rounds of radiation, they may have applications in the bioremediation of toxic waste. Representative image. LILIANA DREW/UNSPLASH

remarkable success.

What life can look like

Our rapidly expanding ability to 'read' the genomes of organisms – thanks in turn to the increasing throughput of sequencing machines and their dropping costs and our ability to synthesise DNA nucleotides in the lab – has spawned a new era in utilising biological processes at scale to solve human problems. Unravelling the biological rules governing extremophiles could thus enable researchers to engineer organisms to have new abilities, like helping poultry resist an infectious disease or creating synthetic biological systems that can augment the immune system.

Knowledge of new mechanisms can also help scientists determine the limits of habitability on other planets. For example, in 2011, scientists in Japan reported growing microbes in a centrifuge subjected to a g-force of more than 400,000 (1 g is the force you experience at rest on the earth's surface). They also found that some of these microbes didn't only survive: their population grew, meaning they thrived. It was a significant finding because it proved microbes are not deterred by hypergravity, of the sort found on large planets and stars.

In a 2020 study, scientists reported that *Deinococcus radiodurans*, an earth-born bacteria, could survive in outer space for more than three years, stuck to the outside of the International Space Station and being blasted with ultraviolet radiation.

These studies hold promise not just for life beyond the earth but for such microbes to have colonised extreme conditions that humans might think twice about entering.



Microbes adapt to extreme environments by incorporating unique biological and biochemical processes. Extremophile microbes have multiple sets of proteins, each customised for life in a specific environmental niche

On the earth, researchers have found bacteria living in elevator switches, personal grooming devices, home cleaning machines, and cooking appliances. These devices have their own microscopic ecosystems subjected to specific selective pressures and thus a well-defined microbiome. In fact, researchers have already found that coffee machines and dishwashers have their own distinct microbial communities.

The coffee-machine-based community is interesting because caffeine is an alkaloid and has well-known antibacterial properties. In spite of this, researchers found a microbiome rich in coffee-adapted bacteria in the machines. Caffeine-degrading microbes provide insights into developing strategies for decaffeination and bioremediation. Similarly, microbial communities isolated from the dishwashers have included both bacterial and fungal species; some of them were also opportunistic pathogens – they cause disease in people with weakened immune systems – and thus could have a wide medical impact.

The meaning of safety

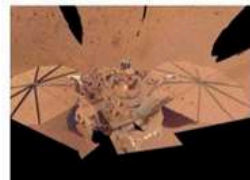
Speaking of medical impact: on August 8, researchers at the University of Valencia in Spain reported in the journal *Frontiers in Microbiology* the results of their

investigation into bacterial communities in microwave ovens installed in domestic settings, large shared spaces, and in molecular biology research facilities. They used a combination of culturing methods and genome-sequencing to document hundreds of strains of bacteria from these ovens. Many of them were bacterial species often found in human skin, while a few others were known to cause food-borne illnesses. But there is no need to panic: the bacterial communities found in the ovens were still not very different from those found on kitchen surfaces and thus didn't pose a higher risk of any diseases.

One interesting detail in the study was that domestic microwave ovens were enriched in food-associated microbial communities, in line with their primary utility, whereas the ovens in research facilities housed bacterial communities that were more resistant to radiation, desiccation, and high temperature, in line with those found in environments like the surfaces of solar panels, which are constantly exposed to (favourable and unfavourable) radiation. This difference could reflect the differences in the selective pressures imposed by the microbes' environments – that is to say, not all extremes are the same.

Since the extremophile communities found in microwave ovens were selected by evolution, in a manner of speaking, to survive repeated rounds of radiation, they may have applications in the bioremediation of toxic waste. It seems they may never cease to amaze.

(The authors are senior consultants at Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation and adjunct professors at IIT Kanpur and Dr. D.Y. Patil Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Pune.)



This image provided by NASA shows the InSight Mars lander in a selfie photo composite on April 24, 2022, the 1,211th Martian day, or sol, of the mission. AP

Huge reservoir of water under Mars, seismic data indicates

Reuters

An immense reservoir of liquid water may reside deep under the surface of Mars within fractured igneous rocks, holding enough to fill an ocean that would cover the entire surface of Earth's planetary neighbor.

That is the conclusion of scientists based on seismic data obtained by NASA's robotic InSight lander during a mission that helped decipher the interior of Mars. The water, located about 11.5 to 20 km below the Martian surface, potentially offers conditions favourable to sustaining microbial life, the researchers said.

"At these depths, the crust is warm enough for water to exist as a liquid. At more shallow depths, the water would be frozen as ice," said planetary scientist Vashan Wright of the University of California, San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography, the lead author of the study published on Monday in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

"On Earth, we find microbial life deep underground, where rocks are saturated with water and there is an energy source," added planetary scientist and study co-author Michael Manga of the University of California, Berkeley.

The InSight lander touched down in 2018 to study the deeper interior of Mars, gathering data on the planet's various layers, from its liquid metal core to its mantle and its crust. The InSight mission ended in 2022.

The water lies about 11.5 to 20km below the Martian surface and offers conditions favourable to sustaining microbial life

"InSight was able to measure the speed of seismic waves and how they change with depth. The speed of seismic waves depends on what the rock is made of, where it has cracks, and what fills the cracks," Mr. Wright said. "We combined the measured seismic wave speed, gravity measurements, and rock physics models. The rock physics models are the same as the ones we use to measure the properties of aquifers on earth or map oil and gas resources underground."

The data indicated the presence of this reservoir of liquid water within fractured igneous rocks – formed in the cooling and solidification of magma or lava – in the Martian crust, the planet's outermost layer.

"A mid-crust whose rocks are cracked and filled with liquid water best explains both seismic and gravity data," Mr. Wright said. "The water exists within fractures. If the InSight location is representative and you extract all the water from the fractures in the mid-crust, we estimate that the water would fill a 1-2 km deep (0.6-1.2 miles) ocean on Mars globally."

The Martian surface is cold and desolate today but once was warm and wet. That changed more than 3 billion years ago. The study suggests that much of the water that had been on the Martian surface did not escape into space, but rather filtered down into the crust.

Water would be a vital resource if humankind ever is to place astronauts on the Martian surface or establish some sort of long-term settlement. But the depth of the apparent underground liquid water would make it difficult to access. "Drilling to these depths is very challenging. Looking for places where geological activity expels this water, possibly the tectonically active Cerberus Fossae (a region in the northern hemisphere of Mars), is an alternative to looking for deep liquids," Mr. Manga said.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Modern India's foundations of science, scholarship

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

In the early 1900s, this chemist published a famous work called 'A History of Hindu Chemistry' in two volumes. He was noted for his work on the synthesis of various nitrites and as an industrialist, philanthropist, and nationalist. The British called him a "revolutionary in the garb of a scientist." Name him.

QUESTION 2

Some scientists were instrumental in adapting what was still a European science to India's needs. For example, A published the book *Applied Nutrition* in 1909 – an important text that adapted the precepts of nutrition science to Indian conditions. Name A.

QUESTION 3

In the late 19th century, when Jamssetji Tata and B were travelling together from Yokohama to Chicago, a conversation they'd had inspired Tata to later help set up the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). Name B.

QUESTION 4

In 1933, IISc director C.V. Raman declined to admit C for an MSc because she was a woman, prompting C to protest outside his office. He finally relented, albeit with some shameful conditions. After graduating, C left the country for the U.K. and became a noted biochemist, returning in 1939 to participate in the freedom struggle. Name C.

QUESTION 5

In 1904, public health activists D and

John Andrew Turner founded the Bombay Sanitary Association to advocate for "sanitary consciousness". D was also among India's first medical researchers who conducted clinical trials. Name D.

Answers to August 8 quiz:

1. Cause of firestorms in which air rises in a hot column – **Ans: Stack effect**
2. Germany city firebombed on February 13-15, 1945 – **Ans: Dresden**
3. Name of cumulus clouds created by large fires – **Ans: Flammagenitus**
4. Name of February 7, 2009, bushfire in Australia – **Ans: Black Saturday**
5. Features created when eddies trap combustible substances – **Ans: Fire whirl**

Visual: **Great Fire of Rome**
First contact: Shreya Arora | Seema Das | Athira B. Anil | K.N. Viswanathan



Visual: Name the woman shown in this bust. She helped found a girls' school in Pune in 1848 that taught science and mathematics, among other subjects. ASHISH BHATTAGAR/CC BY-SA 3.0

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Illusory blip

The decline in inflation offers no respite for households

India's retail prices rose 3.54% in July, the slowest pace for almost five years, easing sharply from 5.1% in June. Food inflation, that has been high for about three years now, slid to a 13-month low of 5.4%. This is also the first time since August 2019 that inflation as per the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has aligned with the Reserve Bank of India's median inflation target of 4%. Last week, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to maintain status quo on interest rates for the ninth consecutive time as it awaits a durable decline in the inflation rate. July's pleasant inflation numbers will not trigger a rethink, as the MPC has in fact, hiked its projection for this quarter's inflation average to 4.4% from 3.8%. So it expects price to rebound to well over 4% through August and September. There is good reason to see through July's print as a purely statistical outcome of base effects from last July — when the CPI was up 7.4% and food was 11.5% dearer — rather than a tangible softening of persistent price pressures for households.

Vegetable inflation, the biggest driver of last month's decline, slid from June's 29.3% spike to just 6.8% in July. But this was on top a whopping 37.3% rise last July, when prices of tomato, which played a key role in last month's vegetable price trend, had hit around ₹10 per kilo. Moreover, households do not feel the pinch of living costs on a year-on-year basis alone, as they need to readjust spending plans depending on how every passing month plays out. While vegetable (and tomato) prices were already high in May amid a heatwave, July's price levels are over 30% and 14% higher than May and June, respectively. Moreover, inflation in some food items, such as pulses and cereals, remains stubborn despite base effects. The prices of pulses rose in double digits for the fourteenth straight month, by 14.8% on top of 13.3% recorded last July. On the other hand, core inflation (excluding food and energy prices) rose for the first time since January 2023, primarily led by pricier services, including transport and communication that spend thanks to telecom tariff hikes. Private surveys on manufacturing and services signal a hardening of price pressures beyond food, which in turn is expected to see a meaningful reprieve only by October when the next harvest hits the market. While *khairif* sowing progress holds some hope, the September monsoon spurt predicted by the weatherman may yet hit standing crops. With the prolonged spate of high inflation cramping consumption levels, and in turn, hopes of fresh private investments, the latest optical blip offers neither comfort nor room for complacency.

Violence, most foul

The government should not wait for public outrage before it acts

Some excesses are more excessive than others; it is fair to count rape among the most egregious violations of human rights. The recent horrific rape and murder of the Kolkata postgraduate medical student in what should have been a haven for her — a State-run hospital she was working in — must give the nation pause. The state and circumstances in that the body was found leave no room for any doubt that it was a most distasteful violent act, and brazen in that it occurred within a hall in the supposedly safe confines of the government medical college hospital. Every rape, unfortunately, is measured in severity by the amount of attention it garners from the public, and the outrage beast is selective. That is where the problem lies: even enforcement authorities seem to gauge public outrage before acting upon crimes against women. The Kolkata case was a classic example: the parents of the slain doctor were reportedly told that she had committed suicide initially, a blatant lie. Whereas, it could not have escaped the attention of anyone at the scene of crime, but particularly so medical professionals, that here indeed was dreadful assault and murder. Was the wilful cover-up necessitated by the fact that both the home and health portfolios are being held by none other than the Chief Minister of the State? Or to avoid responsibility for the administrative lapses that allowed such a crime to take place? The government, sadly, preferred to wait until the public outrage over the grisly crime became impossible to contain politically. Indignant protests broke out in Kolkata and across the country, bolstered mostly by medical students and post graduates in hospitals, demanding safety and security as they engaged in healing people. Multiple acts of violence against doctors have marred the peace between doctors and patients, in the country, for years now. The murder, last year, of Dr. Vandana Das in Kerala by a patient with mental illness is recent history, but the frequent attacks on doctors and nurses during COVID-19, or when there are adverse health outcomes, have been recorded too. The Indian Medical Association has said that for doctors, pedestrian working conditions, an inhuman workload and harassment in the workplace are the reality, even without violence queering the pitch. The move to drop the 200-page proposal to introduce legislation to protect doctors and their workplace was a lapse, and it should be remedied forthwith. Above all, the state should proactively take steps to prevent rapes, making the punishment a deterrent. The nation cannot afford to fail one more doctor or hospital caregiver. Those tasked with saving lives should not have to fear for their own.

Seventy-nine years ago, a sunset accompanied the dawn of Britain's victory in the Second World War. Having cast the shadow of her domination over a quarter of the globe for much of the previous three centuries, Britannia, shattered by the rigours of war, began descending into darkness. The sun was finally setting on the British Empire. Winston Churchill lost the general election of 1945, which swept Clement Attlee and his Labour Party into 10 Downing Street. Plans were soon afoot to facilitate, as King George VI announced, "the early realisation of full self-government in India".

Churchill chafed at this, but he and the Tories could do little to prevent it. So isolved was Britain after Second World War that John Maynard Keynes, the chief architect of Britain's postwar economy, acidly told Attlee that the country, trapped in infrastructural breakdown and soaring national debt, was facing a "financial Dunkirk". Her Treasury having run dry, Britain had no option but to seek aid from the United States — and cut her losses by divesting herself of the Empire.

The Red Fort trial

The process moved rapidly towards Independence — and Partition. In the Indian general elections of 1945-46, the Muslim League, which had expanded and consolidated its support while the Congress leadership was in jail during the war, secured 75% of all Muslim votes — a colossal increase from the less than 5% it had mustered in all previous elections. India's freedom struggle was splintering on the question of whether religion should be the determinant of nationhood. Despairing for the future of their plural and progressive idea of India, the Congress began searching for an issue that could not only reinvigorate the freedom struggle but also rekindle the flame of religious harmony in the hearts of all Indians.

Almost on cue, the British, after practising the cynical politics of *divide et impera* for nearly a century and enabling the demand for Pakistan, unwittingly provided that issue. In a gesture so counter-productive that it could almost have been an act of expiation, the Raj clumsily gave the clashing factions a last chance of unity. Charging the Indian National Army with treason during the war, they placed on trial at the Red Fort three valorous soldiers — a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Sikh — of Subhas Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauj/Indian National Army (INA), thus indicting representatives of 98% of India's population, and uniting all of it.

The result was a national outcry that spanned the communal divide. Whatever the errors and misjudgements of the INA men (and Nehru



Shashi Tharoor

the fourth-term Lok Sabha Member (Congress) for Thiruvananthapuram and the bestselling author of 25 books, including the Sahitya Akademi-award winning 'An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India'

Decades after the Red Fort trial, it is hoped that India's leaders find the wisdom to commit themselves again to what unites us citizens as a people

believed freedom could never have come through an alliance with foreigners, let alone foreign fascists), they had not been disloyal to their motherland. Each of the three defendants became a symbol of his community's proud commitment to independence from alien rule. "The punishment given them," thundered Jawaharlal Nehru on August 20, 1945, "would in effect be a punishment on all India and all Indians... a deep wound would be created in millions of hearts." Delhi's Red Fort had been an enduring symbol of India's quest for freedom ever since the Revolt of 1857. This is why the East India Company, upon crushing the resistance, decimated two-thirds of the Fort's spectacular inner structures, displacing them with a hideous cantonment, complete with barracks, office buildings, sheds, and godowns. In a rousing speech delivered in Singapore in July 1943, Bose had spurred his Azad Hind Fauj to march onward, immortalising in the battle cry, "Chalo Dilli!", his aspiration of seeing the Indian tricolour flutter over the Red Fort. But when the heroes of the INA finally reached the Red Fort, it was to face charges of treason, punishable by death.

Protests that spread across India

The historic court martial commenced on November 5, 1945. On trial — charged with waging war against the King-Emperor, murder, and abetment of murder — were Captain Shah Nawaz Khan and Lieutenant Garbakh Singh Dhillon of the Punjab Regiment, and Captain P.K. Sahgal of the Baluch Regiment. As the hearing proceeded, throngs of Indians encircled the walls of the Red Fort, demanding justice for the lionhearts and roaring on and on: "Laal Qila se aayi aarwaz, Sahgal, Dhillon, Shahawazz!" Condemning the trial and demanding that all INA soldiers be exonerated, the All-India Congress Committee had, in September itself, constituted an INA Defence and Relief Committee, which ultimately formed the triumvirate's glittering 17-member defence team. This dream squad of eminent Congress barristers included one whose disinclination to practise law had coincided with the nationalist rejection of such institutions of the Raj as its judiciary. Donning after 25 years his barrister's gown and wig, Nehru leapt to the defence of these men, who had fought for India's liberation alongside Bose, his former comrade. Both the Congress and the League rose to the trio's side; as slogans of "Death to British Imperialism!" and "Hindu-Muslim Unity *Zindabad!*" suffused the air, the flags of both the Congress and the Muslim League waved above the protests. Pro-INA protests, spearheaded

primarily by the Congress, fanned out across India. Holding aloft banners that bore such slogans as "They are Patriots, not Traitors", Indians of all faiths marched shoulder to shoulder, hurling clenched fists into the air and thundering "Jai Hind!". While in Madras the police opened fire on protesters, killing five, Calcutta, Bose's hometown, became the epicentre of these protests, with students from several political organisations virtually encamping in the streets for four days in late November, only to be joined afterwards by factory workers and Sikh taxi drivers. Eventually, the police opened fire and 97 protesters perished. The students of Delhi, Lahore, Bombay, Patna, and Lucknow turned out in droves to support the triad on trial at the Red Fort.



Beginning of the British end game

But the moment passed: the defence of three patriots was no longer enough to guarantee a common definition of patriotism. The ferment across the country made the conviction of the trio almost irrelevant: freedom was inevitable, but so was Partition. By the time the trial got under way, it was apparent that the ultimate treason to the British Raj was being contemplated in its own capital, London, under the Labour Party, exhausted by war, was determined to rid itself of the burdens of its Indian empire. In February 1946, Prime Minister Attlee announced the dispatch of a Cabinet Mission to India "to discuss with leaders of Indian opinion the framing of an Indian Constitution". The endgame had begun.

Today, as we mark the 77th anniversary of our Independence, facing again an India that some politicians would divide on religious grounds, let us not forget that glorious flicker of national unity that marked the Red Fort Trials. The Empire descended into discredit from that moment, its extinction made inevitable by its own failing attempt to assert itself over rebellious Indians.

As Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru thought the tricolour over the Red Fort for the first time in free India, against the dazzling sky in which fluttered the flag of freedom — he was standing at the site of a glorious failure — a testament to what we, the people of India, are capable of aspiring to when we stand together, united and undeterred, in the service of a larger cause, and yet a moment of rebirth that was also an abortion, with the nation torn into two. Let us hope that, eight decades later, our leaders find the wisdom to commit themselves again to what unites us as a people, rather than promote the forces of division. This time at the Red Fort, all of us are on trial.

Freedom from dependence, a new era in health care

India's Independence Day, on August 15, is a time for reflection on the nation's remarkable journey across various sectors.

One of the most profound transformations we have witnessed, is in the health-care sector. From a time when Indians had to travel to the western world for advanced medical treatments, to today, where India stands as a global health-care hub, we have come a long way. This evolution not only signifies our medical prowess but also our economic resilience.

Until the 1980s, it was a common practice for affluent Indians to seek advanced medical treatments abroad, especially in western countries. This dependency was not only a drain on our financial resources but also a testament to the gaps in our health-care system. However, the landscape of Indian health care has undergone a seismic shift. Today, India is recognised globally for its world-class medical services, attracting patients from over 147 countries. This transformation is a testament to the relentless efforts of our medical professionals, the strategic vision of our policymakers, and the resilience of our health-care institutions.

Heal in India, a global care hub

The shift from medical tourism to being a preferred medical destination has had significant economic implications. According to recent studies, India saves billions in foreign exchange annually as fewer Indians need to travel abroad for medical treatments. The cost of treatment in India is significantly lower than in western countries, with the same, if not better, quality of care. This has not only helped in retaining valuable foreign exchange but has also positioned India as a cost-effective health-care destination.

Moreover, the inflow of international patients contributes to the economy, creating jobs and fosters growth in related sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and pharmaceuticals. The influx of medical tourists is estimated to generate revenues of over \$9 billion annually, further boosting the nation's economy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarion call of "Heal in India" is more than a slogan. It is a vision



Dr. Preettha Reddy

Executive Vice Chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Limited

The landscape of Indian health care has undergone a seismic shift

for positioning India as a global health-care leader.

With a concerted effort, India has made significant strides in medical tourism, though there is still room for growth when compared to our neighbouring countries. Our state-of-the-art hospitals, skilled medical professionals, and cost-effective treatments have made India a preferred destination for medical tourists. Patients from across the globe come to India for a wide range of treatments, from complex cardiac surgeries to advanced oncology.

India's health-care system has emerged as a beacon of hope and excellence. This is not just about treating ailments; it is about providing holistic care that addresses the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of patients. Our health-care professionals are not merely doctors and nurses; they are healers who embody compassion, dedication, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

Challenges and opportunities

While we celebrate our achievements, we must also acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead. India continues to import a significant portion of its medical devices, which adds to the cost of treatments and impacts our self-reliance. According to a study by the Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), India imported medical devices worth over \$6.24 billion in 2021-22. However, the "Make in India" initiative is gaining momentum, with increasing investments in the domestic production of medical devices. This shift not only aims to reduce dependency on imports but also to enhance the affordability and accessibility of medical care.

The journey towards self-reliance in health care is ongoing, and the progress we have made is a testament to our collective resilience and innovation. The burgeoning medical device industry in India is a symbol of our growing capability to produce high-quality, affordable health-care solutions. This progress is a clarion call to our young innovators and entrepreneurs to

step into the health-care arena and drive further advancements. As we look to the future, it is imperative to inspire Indian youth to consider careers in health care. The health-care sector is not just about medical treatments; it is about service to humanity and nation-building. The purpose of health care is universal, transcending boundaries and touching lives in profound ways. By choosing a career in health care, young Indians can contribute to the nation's growth and make a meaningful difference in the lives of millions, across the world.

The youth of India hold the keys to our future. Their energy, creativity, and passion are essential in driving the next wave of innovations in health care. By embracing careers in this sector, they can play a pivotal role in

transforming our health-care system into one that is not only self-reliant but also a global leader. Health care offers a unique opportunity to blend science, technology, and compassion to create a lasting impact on society.

Celebrating Independence with a vision

As we celebrate India's Independence Day, let us take pride in the strides we have made in health care. From being a nation dependent on the West for medical treatments to becoming a global health-care destination, our journey is nothing short of remarkable. Let us continue to build on this foundation, striving for excellence and self-reliance in health care.

The journey from dependence to independence in health care is a microcosm of India's broader path to self-reliance and excellence. It embodies the spirit of innovation, resilience, and service that defines our nation.

In this spirit of independence and progress, let us commit to a future where India is not just a healer for its people but for the world. Let us strive for a health-care system that is inclusive, innovative, and inspiring. Together, we can build a health-care system that is a source of pride for every Indian and a beacon of hope for the world. *Jai Hind!*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Murder in Kolkata

The gruesome murder of a lady doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata is shocking. Now that the CBI has taken over the investigation, one hopes that we will get to know the truth. The reason for the

slovenliness on the part of the authorities needs to be explained. Police pickets in hospitals are a must.

Mani Natarajan,
Chennai

We live in a society where humanity has almost expired. The case is a

chilling reminder of the Nirbhaya case of 2012. Do we deserve to live in a society where there is no protection for girls? Do we need to wait for a decade or more to punish the perpetrators?

Chandran Das,
Jamnau

The brutality numbs the heart and soul. Keeping politics aside, the perpetrators must be brought to justice soon.

There has been a total failure on the part of the administration, including the authorities of the medical college in providing

adequate security for the staff.

Dr. Biju C. Mathew,
Thiruvananthapuram

Need for stability
If undressed, instability in the South Asian region could have a catastrophic impact. As the global power

equilibrium has shifted to the Indo-Pacific region, the stability of South Asia is inevitable to counter the assertiveness of China. India could take a cue from ASEAN and its triumphant regional cooperation.

M. Rishidev,
Dindigul, Tamil Nadu

The seductive trap of the civil services

Two lamentable tales unfolded in India recently. Both of them, about young aspirants, made telling headlines and made one sad, even angry. The first story from Maharashtra brought a cloud over the stellar reputation of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), which has selected government officers based on merit for over seven decades without any major controversies. The second story from Delhi laid bare the struggles of thousands in India in trying to achieve single-minded success in being able to crawl through an aspirational miasma. The civil services is the major seductive trap, which can be detoxified by some readjustment of public policy and popular perspective.



Ashok Lavasa
Retired IAS officer
and former Election
Commissioner

The underbelly
The attraction for the civil services is historical; the obsession seen in recent times unprecedented. About five decades ago, when we were students, preparing for the civil services was considered a national pastime driven by the dignity and security of a government job and by the dearth of employment opportunities. Economic liberalisation changed it all by opening up job options in the market. The government too reduced intake for its services in its zeal to downsize. However, as this was not accompanied by the shedding of government functions and reduction in the authorised strength of the service cadres, a huge deficit was created in due course. With the revision in government salaries recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission implemented in 2008, when there was an economic downturn and the private sector was benching or retrenching its staff, the government re-emerged as a preferred employer.

Public service neither has the monopoly nor does it provide any extraordinary opportunity to serve the nation

The national pastime of yore has assumed epidemic dimensions. Its underbelly was recently exposed first when a trainee officer in Maharashtra was found to have faked her identity and documents and then by the terrible and

entirely avoidable deaths of three aspirants in Delhi.

Questions have rightly been asked about the acts of omission and commission that led to both these incidents. While the first incident relates to the psyche of an individual, who was gaming the system to qualify to be termed the 'cream of society', the other relates to the collective psyche of a society enmeshed in chasing stereotypical aspirations. An entire industry capitalises on this pursuit even though it is aware that the rate of success is small.

One such aspirant has been sending me mails for the last seven years, sharing his repeated failures. I could not succeed in persuading him to change course despite his qualifying for the now-discredited National Eligibility Test. Such is the allure of the civil services, and the Indian Administrative Service has come to represent that fatal attraction. I once interacted with 28 aspirants who had qualified for the interview. Only one of them was appearing for the interview for the first time; the others were taking their fifth or sixth chance.

The catastrophe of the drowning of the three aspirants has raised a clamour for regulating the coaching institutions and for stricter enforcement of urban regulations. The irony is that the demand is being made of the same bureaucracy whose ineptitude is responsible for this calamity. The entry of the floodwater mixed with overflowing sewer into the basement is not the only calamity; nor is the arrest of the SUV driver accused of being the main culprit the only farcical response of the system. The rot is deeper.

Some suggestions
First, the upper age limit for candidates needs to be reduced. After the Kothari Commission's recommendations and subsequent changes, and with age relaxation for various special categories, a candidate can be nearly 34-35 years old at the time of entry into

service. Given that the lower age limit for eligibility is 21, the upper age limit should be reduced to 25 with a relaxation of two years for all special categories. The number of attempts may be restricted to three, with an additional attempt allowed to the special categories.

The wide age band and the many attempts allowed has created an enormous market for the notorious coaching industry to thrive on.

Millions of aspirants join these centres every year. The success rate is so small that it is difficult to calculate. An analysis must be done to show how many candidates keep repeating their efforts and eventually give up after exhausting their chances. Why should our public policies promote a race in which so much energy and resources are spent? The only beneficiary of this insane pursuit is the mushrooming coaching industry, propagated by those who have occupied respectable positions of authority while in government.

Those who qualify after such a long and arduous struggle are bound to feel a sense of unrealistic attainment in qualifying for the exam. But when they are so overwhelmed by their repeated attempts and hard-earned success, how much fire is left in their belly to excel while in service? For some, it would be the time to enjoy the fruits of their labour and luck rather than toil to discharge the responsibility that follows their entry into public service.

It is equally important to disabuse the younger generation of the notion that government service is the only way of serving the nation. Being a good teacher, an ethical accountant, a conscientious chemist, and an honest contractor are also ways of serving society and contributing towards nation building. All honest hard work goes into building a nation. Public service neither has the monopoly nor does it provide any extraordinary opportunity to serve the nation.



Independence Day

India, a beacon of democracy

It is time to move towards the goals of modern aspirational India

Kamal Haasan

Today, India is one of the last beacons of democratic hope among the nations of the Global South. Despite the rise of global pessimism towards liberal democracies, the re-emergence of anti-democratic forces in South Asia, and India's own ongoing confrontation with polarisation, the Indian experiment with democracy that began this day 78 years ago boldly sustains.

India and its neighbours
But as India's democratic journey modestly thrives and the country looks to play a larger role in the world order, its own backyard is riddled with problems. Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bangladesh all find themselves on the brink of political and economic disaster accompanied by breakdown of democratic rule of civilian authority.

Unlike the neighbourhood, the Indian state's constitutional setup has withstood the complications that an independent, democratic society with diverse castes, linguistic groups, and religious communities, faces. The diversity of our electoral politics represents the system of social and cultural asymmetry in the region.

India succeeded, unlike its neighbours, in successfully bringing substantive democracy to its polity as opposed to other nations where only procedural democracy was established. Elections alone cannot ensure genuine democratic movements. India's society has faithfully imbibed the democratic spirit of its constitutional order. Independent India has built successful robust welfare delivery mechanisms such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee



Scheme and the Public Distribution System, constituted affirmative action programmes to overcome historical inequities of the caste system of the Indian sub-continent, succeeded in the partial devolution of governance to local institutions such as the Panchayati Raj system, and given enormous freedom to the masses with free trade.



The armed forces have also played a storied role in the democratic journey of independent India. Time and again, our brave hearts at the borders have beaten back threats to India's territorial integrity. But unlike its counterparts in the region, the Indian military has maintained its sacrosanct faith in the constitutional and democratic ideals of the nation. The Indian soldier has been a guardian angel both at the border and internally, in maintaining the constitutional setup of the Indian state.

An incomplete journey
Despite these successes, India's democratic journey as yet is incomplete. The promise of the Constitution remains unfulfilled. A gradual erosion of rule of law continues unabated due to widening economic inequality, religious-caste based identity, polarisation, corrup-

tion, and the subsequent apathy among the youth towards our democratic values.

It is time for the nation to move beyond the goals of early independent India to those of modern aspirational India. It is time for a renewal and strengthening of the social contract between the Indian state and its citizens. We must re-frame our national ethos to replace the culture of silence with a culture of transparency, the culture of violence with a culture of peace, and the culture of exclusion with a culture of inclusion.

India's politically astute electorate has become hyper focused on electoral politics and has forgotten issue-based politics. From the Dandi March to the recent farmers' protest, issue-based movements have had a critical role in improving our governance models and societal values.

We must engage proudly as citizens of an inclusive and inspirational Indic civilisation, which has crossed its original hurdles and shall now take flight to the zenith of the global order. The writ of state should never be allowed to be replaced by the writ of the economic, political, or majoritarian elite.

Today we should celebrate farmers in their fields, teachers in rural government classrooms, soldiers on the border, Anganwadi workers, railway clerks, and brave emergency service providers who are all playing their part in ensuring that the benefits of a democratic and independent India are reaching every citizen of the country. They keep a constant vigil on India's journey as a democratic superpower.

Happy Independence Day to you all.

Kamal Haasan is an actor turned politician and founder, Makkal Neethi Mission

More graduates but fewer relevant jobs in Bangladesh

The decision to bring back the quota system even as educated youth were not able to secure jobs may have intensified protests

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Astaggering rise in the share of urban Bangladesh youth who finished college and no commensurate increase in the share of 'white-collar' jobs could be a major reason for the violent protests by students in the country's cities, data show. The mass protests, which started in Dhaka and spread across Bangladesh, were led by students. They initially protested against the return of the 30% quota in government jobs for the descendants of those who fought in the 1971 War. When the regime responded with a harsh crackdown, they began demanding Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation. On August 5, she resigned and fled the country.

Chart 1 shows the share of the urban population in Bangladesh aged 15 or above, who completed tertiary education, in FY17 and FY22. In just five years, the share of those who completed tertiary education surged from 11.5% to 18.3% among men and from 5.9% to 11% among women.

Chart 2 shows the occupation-wise share of the employed population in Bangladesh aged 15 or above, in FY17 and FY22. 11.8% of those employed were managers and professionals. This barely increased to 12% in FY22. The share of those employed in 'blue-collar' work such as craft and related trade (including garments-related work) and elementary jobs came down slightly (a 2.3% point decline). The only commensurate increase in 'white-collar' work was among technicians, clerks, and associate professionals (by 3.8% points).

The share of those employed in skilled agriculture and allied work and as plant and machine operators increased in the period. Put together, while the share of those

who completed college surged in recent years, not many students got jobs proportionate to their level of education. **Chart 3** shows the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of those aged 15 or above and who completed tertiary education, in FY17 and FY22. LFPR is the share of the working age population that is either working or looking for work. The LFPR among men who completed college decreased from 88.6% to 77.5% and for women, from 50.9% to 34.9%. This hints at the possibility that college-educated youth stopped looking for work due to the lack of relevant jobs.

Chart 4 shows the share of unemployed college-educated urban youth (aged 15-29) in the total unemployed population, in FY17 and FY22. The share of unemployed college-educated urban men in the total unemployed population increased from 20.8% to 27.3%; and for women, from 16.9% to 40.1%. So, not only did the LFPR among the college-educated decline, but their share in the unemployed population increased too.

Chart 5 shows the average monthly income in urban areas, by occupation (in Bangladeshi Taka), in FY17 and FY22. The average income of professionals and technicians/associate professionals decreased between the two periods, even in absolute terms, while the income levels of all other groups increased. So, even those college-educated youth who managed to find 'white-collar' jobs in urban areas in 2022 were earning less than what college-educated youth earned five years ago, even in absolute terms, without considering the effect of inflation.

Chart 6 shows the share of urban youth (15-29) Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), in FY17 and FY22. It nearly doubled among men (from 7.4% to 14.4%). This shows that the share of urban youth who are neither getting education nor gainful employment is surging in Bangladesh.

Graduated and jobless

The data for the charts are based on the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Labour force survey 2016-17 and 2022



Chart 1: The share of urban population who completed tertiary education

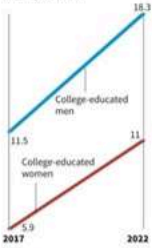


Chart 2: The occupation-wise share of the employed population in Bangladesh aged 15 or above in FY17 and FY22

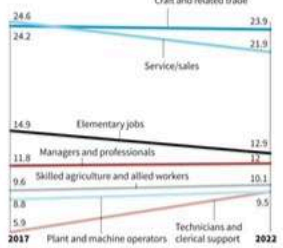


Chart 3: The LFPR among those aged 15 or above and who finished tertiary education

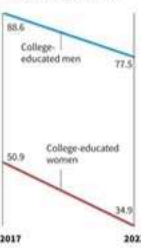


Chart 4: The share of unemployed college-educated urban youth (aged 15-29) in the total unemployed population

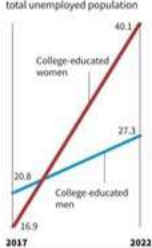


Chart 5: The average monthly income in urban areas, by occupation (in Bangladeshi Taka), in FY17 and FY22

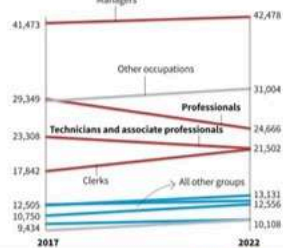
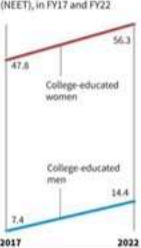


Chart 6: The share of urban youth (15-29) Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), in FY17 and FY22



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 15, 1974

Giri asks political parties to take steps to end corruption

New Delhi, Aug 14: The President, Mr. V.V. Giri, to-day deplored strongly what he described as the "dominant role", that money power had come to play in recent years in the elections to legislatures, which, in his view, was the root cause of "corruption and corruptive influences in our public life." In his traditional Independence Day broadcast which was also in the nature of a farewell address to the nation on the eve of his relinquishing office, Mr. Giri warned that the people would lose faith in democratic values if leaders of all political parties did not take "prompt corrective measures" to remedy the situation by "joint consultations". The President's broadcast, which was full of anguish over the havoc that was being wrought by what he called "the man-made evils of corruption and inflation", was in a way reminiscent of the reproving note with which Dr. S. Radhakrishnan had spoken in his last Republic Day message in 1967, when he spoke about not only the Government's failures in various spheres but also the rapid decline in the country's moral values. It is customary for an outgoing President to be more outspoken about the state of the nation at the end of his term than during his tenure of office when he has to function, as Mr. Giri himself pointed out, in full awareness of the constraints imposed by the Constitution. The President said that, within these constitutional limits, he had striven in his own humble way to place before the nation certain ideas from time to time in the belief that they would help in finding solutions to some of the difficult problems facing the people.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 15, 1924

Khadi hawking in Punjab

Sabarmati, August 14: From the "Young India" to-day it appears that Sjt Bharucha has carried on during the last few days a campaign of brisk hawking of Khadi in the Punjab. He has hawked over Rs. 6,000 worth of Khadi in Lahore and Amritsar in less than ten days. I understand the hawking is still continuing. Mahatmaji, congratulating Sjt. Bharucha on his successful Khadi hawking, writes that "the moral of Mr. Bharucha's visit is that every province, if it wills, can dispose of its own Khadi. The people are willing if the workers are ready."

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The CO2 emissions released due to wildfires last year

8.6 in billion tonnes. Emissions worldwide between March 2023 and February 2024 were 16% above average. Only a relatively calm fire season in the African savannah prevented the 2023-2024 season from breaking a fresh record. *AFP*

The Israel weapons package approved by the U.S.

20 in \$ billion. The sale comes as President Joe Biden has pressed Israel and Hamas to reach a ceasefire after 10 months of bloodshed. Israel's retaliatory military offensive in Gaza has killed at least 39,929 people. *AFP*

Prison sentence handed out for blasphemy in Pakistan

25 A Pakistani court has sentenced a man to 25 years of rigorous imprisonment for blasphemy after he allegedly declared himself to be a prophet. Pakistan's blasphemy laws carry a potential death sentence for anyone who insults Islam. *PTI*

Flag will be hoisted for the first time in these Chhattisgarh villages

13 Remote villages in the Naxalite-hit Bastar region of Chhattisgarh will witness the hoisting of the national flag for the first time on Independence Day. Security camps at these places were established after the Republic Day last year. *PTI*

Amount Harris campaign is spending on ads for three weeks

90 in \$ million. Kamala Harris' presidential campaign is launching advertising efforts to introduce the Democrat to voters and sharpen the contrast with the Republican candidate Donald Trump. *PTI*

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Al-Shabaab: growing from Somalia's ruins

The group, an affiliate of al-Qaeda, has been waging a war against the Somali government for the past 17 years. In a nation fraught with authoritarianism, clan war, famine, piracy, and corruption, al-Shabaab adds another chapter — terror

WORLD INSIGHT

Adithya Narayan

In August 2, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device at the entrance to the Beach View Hotel on Lido Beach in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, which is often frequented by government officials, businesspersons and youth. Before the shock could abate, five attackers stormed the site and started shooting at civilians indiscriminately. By the time security officials had neutralised the attackers, at least 37 lives were lost and 210 were wounded. The strike was subsequently claimed by al-Shabaab, an affiliate of al-Qaeda, which has waged a war against the Somali government for the past 17 years.

For al-Shabaab, this operation was just another leaf in its playbook, having conducted similar strikes in the Horn of Africa. In March, the group had laid siege to another hotel in Mogadishu killing 27 people, including three members of parliament and three soldiers. The deadliest attack in the country's history was the double car bombing in October 2017 killing 358 people and injuring 228 in Mogadishu. The attacks have spilled over the border to Kenya too.

But as far as Somalia goes, al-Shabaab is merely a chapter in the nation's history that is fraught with authoritarianism, clan war, famine, piracy, corruption and resource crunch, all of which had prompted the U.S.-based The Fund for Peace to call the country in 2011, a failed state for a fourth year in a row. That is slowly changing with the UN stating in 2021 that the former failed state is on a fragile path to progress.

On forming the state of Somalia
From the seventh to the 19th century, Somalia and neighbouring regions were ruled by a series of Sultanates, with Islam's Sunni subset being the primary religion. The 19th century witnessed the arrival of colonial powers, and the region was shared between British, Italian and French forces — the first two taking up the lion's share of the area.

Upon the withdrawal of British and Italian forces from the northern and southern regions in 1960, the two regions came together and formed modern-day Somalia. Democracy prevailed for a brief time until 1969 when Siad Barre came to power through a military coup.

Siad Barre propounded an administrative policy called 'scientific socialism' through which he nationalised banks and insurance companies, promoted literacy and strengthened ties with the Soviet Union. Despite Somalis being a largely homogenous group, different clans had ruled the roost. However, Barre saw to it that loyalty to major clans such as Isaaq, Darood, Dir and Hawiye remained outlawed.

The first signs of the authoritarian leader's downfall emerged with the Ogaden war that Somalia fought with its neighbouring Ethiopia in 1977.

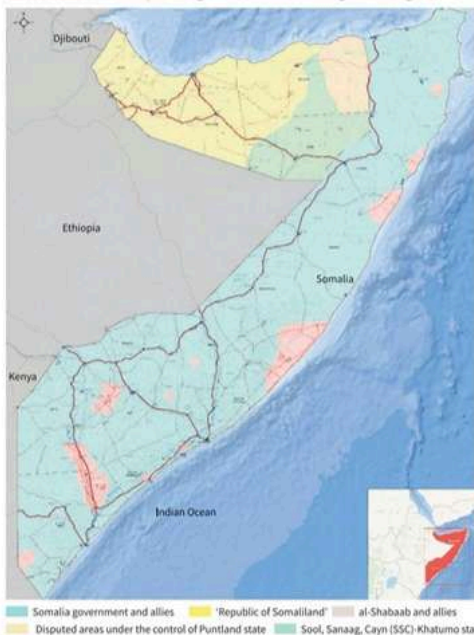
The Ogaden war
Imperial European powers had gone into the Horn of Africa and drawn up arbitrary boundaries to carve out territories to suit their convenience. Much like what happened in other parts of the world, this process upended the lives of the natives, who were plucked from their societies and cultures and thrust into alien living conditions. Ogaden was no different. A portion of the region, which fell under the Christian-majority Ethiopia, was home to

Multiple players, one state

Somalia follows a federal system of governance which makes the loyalty of clan leaders crucial. However, the hostility between clans has made it difficult to run the country. Although a parliament came to power in 2012, this did little to improve people's lives



Horrific attack: Hundreds of protesters gather at the Lido beach in Mogadishu on August 5. *AFP*



many Muslim Somalis.

Additionally, notwithstanding colonial legacy, a second factor contributed to the region's complicated history — the area was a breeding ground for Cold War politics. The conflict began in July of 1977 with Ethiopia acting as a U.S. ally and Somalia backed by the USSR.

But by the time the war ended in March 1978, Ethiopia and Somalia were receiving assistance from the USSR and the U.S. respectively.

Despite the initial gains, the war proved costly for Somalia as it had to

retreat from the Ogaden region and grapple with the influx of Ogaden Somali refugees.

Depleted of finances and resources, Barre began to lose his grip on the country's administration. Certain policies did not sit well with some clans, who turned against each other. By 1991, Barre fled Somalia following an uprising by clans supported by Libya and Ethiopia. The northern part of the country proclaimed independence as Somaliland; and clan wars were rife, killing close to 3,00,000 Somalis in a year.

Whatever international food aid came Somalia's way was siphoned off by local gangsters and militia leaders.

The U.S., the UN and other international troops took turns coming into the country to fix the situation but to little effect. In October 1993, U.S. Marines tried to arrest the officers of one of the clan leaders, leading the militiamen to shoot down two U.S. Black Hawk Helicopters (depicted in the 2001 film *Black Hawk Down*). Trying to retrieve the helicopter crew cost 18 U.S. lives and led to 300 Somali deaths.

Efforts to establish transitional governments also proved futile, so much so that by 2004, at least 14 attempts had been made to establish a central governing authority. Although a parliament came to power and elected Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as President in 2012, this did little to improve people's lives. Somalia follows a federal system of governance making the loyalty of clan leaders crucial. The hostility between the clans made it impossible to govern the country. The role of Ethiopia too has not gone unnoticed. It has been accused of meddling in Somalia's affairs trying to protect its interests.

The rise of al-Shabaab

As a famine started spreading in many parts of the country, al-Shabaab, a militant group preaching the Salafist version of Islam, had spread its roots in Somalia by seizing Mogadishu in 2006.

Its origins can be traced back to the al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AI), a militant group that gained prominence in the 1990s after the fall of Barre's regime. Its chief members were trained in West Asia and funded by the al-Qaeda.

However, hardline younger members of the AI sought a stricter Sharia rule and swore allegiance to the Islamic Courts Union, ultimately becoming its armed wing, al-Shabaab.

To win back Mogadishu from al-Shabaab, Ethiopia's help was sought by Somalia's transition government in 2006. Though the city was eventually retrieved, al-Shabaab's numbers started to swell because the operation was perceived as an invasion by a foreign force — a narrative that would be peddled by al-Shabaab in the future to rally support. Despite carrying out suicide attacks and terror strikes inside Somalia as well as in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, al-Shabaab draws legitimacy by positioning itself as an alternate form of governance for the people of its home country. The militant group has stepped in to fill the void left behind by a government machinery rife with corruption.

The Somali government, with the help of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA), managed to drive away al-Shabaab from Mogadishu and other port cities such as Kismayo and Barawe.

With the southern city of Jilib as its defacto capital, al-Shabaab relocated to the south and has now focused its activities in rural areas of Somalia where it offers protection services and plays mediator to disputes.

The terror group also obtains revenue from illicit charcoal trade.

The curtailed nature of al-Shabaab's activities and its confinement to rural areas have been largely hailed as victories of the armed forces. Even then, the occasional attacks planned by them cost 4,000 lives between 2010 and 2020, making it surpass Boko Haram as Africa's biggest terror threat.

More importantly, these attacks land a psychological blow to a population that has not tasted peace in a long time.

THE GIST

▼ On August 2, a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device at the entrance to the Beach View Hotel on Lido Beach in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. Before the shock could abate, five attackers stormed the site and started shooting at civilians indiscriminately. By the time security officials had neutralised the attackers, at least 37 lives were lost and 210 were wounded.

▼ From the seventh to the 19th century, Somalia and neighbouring regions were ruled by a series of Sultanates, with Islam's Sunni subset being the primary religion. The 19th century witnessed the arrival of colonial powers.

▼ The curtailed nature of al-Shabaab's activities and its confinement to rural areas have been largely hailed as victories of the armed forces. Even then, the occasional attacks planned by them cost 4,000 lives between 2010 and 2020, making it surpass Boko Haram as Africa's biggest terror threat.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



An abandoned house in the southern part of the Connemara National park in Ireland. GETTY IMAGES



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"What is teflon quality?"
"Teflon quality? You know Ramu?"
"Yes."
"He has teflon quality. You abuse him, you criticise him, you do a lot of things to provoke him. He remains unaffected. He goes his own way. When a person continues to do what he wants to do in the face of criticism, abuse, etc. you say that he has teflon quality. The word does not have a good connotation."
"Teflon" is actually 'a material that is used as a non-stick coating for kitchen utensils'. When preparations are made in teflon utensils, nothing sticks to the utensils. You throw criticisms at a person and you find that they don't stick to him. Such a person is said to have teflon quality.

"I wish I had teflon quality. I am very sensitive. What is the difference between a cynic and a sceptic?"
"A cynic is one who has little faith in human sincerity, goodness, integrity, etc. He believes that everyone is motivated by some selfish desire. He finds it difficult to believe that anyone can be innately good or sincere. Such an attitude is a cynical attitude. 'Cynical' also means scoffing, mocking, sneering. He made cynical remarks about our political system. 'Cynical' also means 'contemptuously selfish and concerned only with one's own interests.'"

"She denounced the ministers' cynical disregard for the future of the party."
"Cynic" is pronounced 'sɪnik'. A sceptic is one 'who doubts all accepted opinions'. He is also a cynic in that he doubts the accepted opinion that some human beings are good, sincere, etc. But a sceptic distrusts, doubts everything.

Ramu says that he pleaded for me. I am sceptical about it.
"There are two 'c's in 'sceptic'. Both are pronounced 'k'. The 'e' is pronounced like the 'e' in 'end' and the 'i' is pronounced like the 'i' in 'it'. In American English, the word is spelled 'skeptc'; but the pronunciation is the same."

"So the word is not pronounced 'septik'.
"No. There is another word 'septic'. It is an adjective which means 'caused by or causing infection with harmful bacteria'. He cut his finger with a knife. The small cut became septic. The 'e' in the word is pronounced like the 'e' in 'end', the 'c' like the 'c' in 'cat', the 'i' like the 'i' in 'it'. A septic tank is a tank into which body waste matter is carried by pipes for chemical treatment. Don't confuse 'septic' with 'septic'. Shall we discuss a spelling rule?"
"Yes, for a short spell."
"Words ending in ee do not drop the final 'e' before a suffix. The suffix may begin with a vowel or a consonant. Examples: see, sees, seeing; agree, agreed, agreement, agreeing; free, freed, freeing, freedom. That is enough for the day."

"Thank you."
Published in *The Hindu* on January 12, 1993.

Edna O'Brien, a trailblazing Irish novelist who was her own unique water-diviner

Her books shocked Ireland, and her first three novels were banned. But O'Brien showed the way for future generations of writers with her fresh look at family violence, religious hypocrisy, female friendship, defiance of convention, and the interior lives of young Irish women

Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta

“When I was a child in Ireland, a spring would suddenly appear and yield forth buckets of beautiful clear water, then just as suddenly it would dry up. The water-diviners would come with their rods and sometimes another spring would be found. One has to be one's own water-diviner."

In six decades of writing on love, loss, and Ireland, Edna O'Brien was her own unique water-diviner. In terms of the lovely nature-based metaphor she used in a celebrated *Paris Review* interview, her prose was an endless spring: clear, deeply felt, and often very funny.

Yet her debut novel *The Country Girls* (1962) and *Girls in their Married Bliss* (1964). All the novels in the trilogy spoke with fresh and clear abandon about family violence, religious hypocrisy, female friendship, defiance of convention, and the interior lives of young Irish women. All the novels were promptly banned in Ireland.

Her response to that was she wrote two sequels in quick succession, *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and *Girls in their Married Bliss* (1964). All the novels in the trilogy spoke with fresh and clear abandon about family violence, religious hypocrisy, female friendship, defiance of convention, and the interior lives of young Irish women. All the novels were promptly banned in Ireland.

The bans did not stop Edna O'Brien from blazing a new trail. Her lyrical prose,

intensity of feeling, and candour had a major impact on writers who came after her. For Anne Enright, O'Brien was "the great, the only, survivor of forces that silenced and destroyed who knows how many other Irish women writers."

It is a measure of the distance travelled by Irish society that last month, after Edna O'Brien's death at the age of 94, Irish President Michael Higgins paid tribute to her work for "the moral courage to confront Irish society with realities long ignored and suppressed."

Ireland as theme
Ireland was O'Brien's great theme. As an exile who lived in London for most her life, she nevertheless chose to be buried in Ireland in her home village. In an interview about her archive, she explained her intense relationship with the country of her birth: "First of all I'm Irish. I was born in Ireland. My remains will go to Ireland. As a young child and as a girl Ireland fed me imaginatively and emotionally."

Josephine Edna O'Brien was born in 1930 in a religious farm family in the Irish village of Tuamgraney in County Clare. It was a strange, repressive childhood in a strange, repressive time, one that she would later describe with words like "fervid," "enclosed," "bigoted," and "suffocating." Her father drank, gambled, and was profligate with land and property. Her mother had once worked as a maid in Brooklyn. They were an oddly matched couple. It was not a home that

supported her love for reading; her mother once found a Sean O'Casey novel and wanted to burn it. This was the troubled soil in which O'Brien's imagination was nurtured. She responded with resilience: "Unhappy houses are a very good incubation for stories."

As a girl O'Brien went to a convent school run by Irish Catholic nuns, studied pharmacy, and worked as a pharmacist in Dublin. In her *Paris Review* interview, she spoke sardonically about this phase of her life. "There was a sort of Irish literary scene but I wasn't part of it. One reason was poverty, another that I didn't have an entrée; I was just a chemistry student in a bed-sit. I had to do my apprenticeship alone." Dublin is also where the *Country Girls* escape to. Cait buys herself black nylons, having read that they were "literary." Worldly-wise Baba also advises Cait to be more sensible: "Stop asking fellas if they've read James Joyce's Dubliners. They're not interested. They're out for the night."

Life moved rapidly for O'Brien in Dublin. In her early twenties, she met and married a much older writer Ernest Gebler. They moved to London, had two sons, and settled in suburbia. Within weeks of arriving in London, she wrote *The Country Girls*. As she began to achieve literary success, Gebler grew envious. Their imaginations were not in congruence. The marriage broke up.

Complicated reactions
Critical reception to O'Brien was

complicated. Ireland was deeply suspicious of the act of writing, more so if its themes were childhood and the secret lives of families. Many literary men dismissed O'Brien's work; some feminists dismissed her. She was criticised for going too far, also for not going far enough. Some critics regarded her as a superficial socialite. She shrugged through it all: "You can't write all these books and rear children and earn your living and have a gilded life."

She continued to write. The spring ran clear and true. "When you are young, you have boundless energy – you run the house, mind the children, and write your despair." She wrote about other writers: Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Byron. She wrote plays, screenplays, and children's books. She wrote about Irish traumas: such as in *Down by the River*, where a teenage rape survivor tries desperately to get an abortion. She interviewed Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams for *The New York Times*. Her last work, *Girl*, was about a young Nigerian girl abducted by terrorists. In her eighties, she travelled to Nigeria to research the book. But then, she knew a bit of what it was like to grow up as a girl in a repressive, suffocating environment. The novel begins on a powerful and unforgettable note: "I was a girl once, but not any more."

O'Brien's work, women fight to express themselves. Sometimes they fight to survive. They come through, wounded but undefeated.

Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta is in the IAS.

THE DAILY QUIZ

On India's 78th Independence Day, a quiz on some revolutionaries and freedom fighters

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1
His name, a title, means commanding officer. He was from Yeola, Maharashtra. He collaborated with Rani Lakshmi Bai to seize Gwalior. Who is this freedom fighter, a key figure in the 1857 rebellion?

QUESTION 2
This Parsi revolutionary was private secretary of a man who is sometimes referred to as the 'Unofficial Ambassador of India'. An area in south Delhi that houses the EPFO, SAIL, GAIL, etc. is named after her. Who was she?

QUESTION 3
Fifty years before the Sepoy Mutiny, a chieftain in the south opposed the British East India Company and was hanged. He was immortalised by Shivaji Ganeshan in a film whose title was his name. Who was he?

QUESTION 4
Upset with the Doctrine of Lapse policy, which did not recognise her adopted son's right to rule Kottur, she fought the British and registered initial victory. The Kottur Revolt of 1824 was one of the earliest women-led anti-colonial struggles. Name this queen of Kottur.

QUESTION 5
She was an officer of the Indian National Army and one of the founding members of the All India Democratic Women's Association. She was also presidential candidate but lost to A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Name her.

QUESTION 6
A market in Delhi, established to give opportunities to refugees of Partition, especially those from the Northwest Frontier Province, is named after this man. He was born in today's Pakistan, awarded the Bharat Ratna in India, and buried in Afghanistan. Name him.



Visual question:
These three men were hanged in Lahore Central Jail in 1931. One of them is Bhagat Singh. Name the other two.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This was a political movement in the first half of the 20th century that aimed for the creation of Pakistan. It was led by this barrister and politician. **Ans: Pakistan Movement; Muhammad Ali Jinnah**
2. The present-day equivalents of West Pakistan and East Pakistan. **Ans: West Pakistan is the present day Pakistan, and East Pakistan is the present day Bangladesh**
3. The Dominion of Pakistan became this in 1956. **Ans: Pakistan became the first Islamic republic in the world**
4. This was the boundary demarcated by the two boundary commissions for the provinces of Punjab and Bengal during the Partition of India. **Ans: Radcliffe Line**
5. In 1940, this formal political statement called for the creation of an independent state for Muslims. **Ans: Lahore Resolution**
Visual: Identify this man. **Ans: Liaquat Ali Khan; he served as the first Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1947**
Early Birds: Prashant Nain| Jyot Prakash| Joseph Nelson

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

Word of the day

Spendthrift:
someone who spends money prodigally, recklessly wasteful

Synonyms: prodigal, profligate, extravagant

Usage: He hasn't mended his spendthrift ways.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/spendthriftpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈspɛndθrɪft/

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



The Free Press Journal Founder Editor: S Sadanand



Insight

BHAVDEEP KANG

Ugly bid to underplay murder

The Calcutta High Court decision to transfer the case of the alleged rape-cum-murder case of a junior doctor at the R G Kar Medical College to the CBI is yet another blot on the reputation of the Trinamool Congress Government of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. In the heart of the West Bengal capital, the police sought to place a tight lid over what was a particularly heinous crime of rape-cum-murder of a young resident doctor. There was an attempt to show it merely as a case of an unnatural death. The court rebuked the city police for seeking to misdirect the probe. On Tuesday, a division bench of Chief Justice T S Sivagnanam and Justice Hirannay Bhattacharya ordered the police to hand over the case to the premier central investigative agency, observing that the state administration 'is not with the victim... There appears to be no significant progress in the investigation'. The strong remarks came on a petition filed by the victim's parents. Five days ago the body of their 31-year-old post-graduate trainee doctor daughter was found in a seminar hall in the premises of the government-run hospital. The suspect, one Sanjay Roy, was taken into custody a day after the crime. A civil volunteer, he used to visit the hospital regularly, ostensibly to assist patients.

Right from the word go, the local police seemed hell-bent on downplaying the enormity of the crime. They did not register it as a case of rape-cum-murder, choosing instead to register it as a case of an unnatural death. Nor did the principal, or any other senior functionary in the hospital, deem it fit to lodge even a FIR. Neither did the State Government think it proper to transfer the principal of the hospital to the college following the murder so that an independent investigation could be undertaken. Under public pressure, he was later transferred out but to another hospital. Only because the victim's parents had the means to pursue the case vigorously from the moment they learnt of the gory circumstances of her death did the authorities care to conduct a proper post-mortem examination. Which indicated that there could be more than one attacker involved in savaging her. The cuts and wounds on her body, before she was strangled to death indicated that she had fiercely resisted her attacker(s). As the news of the gruesome crime spread the outraged junior doctors at government hospitals went on spontaneous protest strikes. Normalcy at several hospitals in the national capital as also in other parts of the country was disrupted due to strikes by the resident doctors.

It is to be noted that almost all government run hospitals are managed at the ward level by junior doctors. Resident student-cum-junior doctors are the lifeline of the country's healthcare system. They are the first ones patients are most likely to come in contact with at government hospitals. Unfortunately, periodically they have to bear the brunt of the ire, in quite a few cases wholly misplaced, of the family and friends of the patients when things don't work out. While the fault may lie with the system, or the destiny may have willed otherwise, but invariably junior doctors take the heat as they man the front lines of the healthcare system.

Meanwhile, back to the Kolkata horror it came as no surprise when the division bench of the High Court transferred the case to the CBI. It also ordered the state government to suspend the college principal. News reports spoke of the close proximity of the principal to several ruling party politicians. Reportedly, despite complaints of high-handedness and malfeasance nothing was done to discipline the principal. The court noted that the principal sought to underplay the tragic death of the resident doctor, failing to not only lodge a FIR but going along with the police when it had sought to turn it into a much lighter charge of unnatural death. Hopefully, the CBI will be able to thoroughly investigate the crime and apprehend all the accused involved. Corrupt linkages of the principal and the state government's efforts to put a lid over the crime too ought to be brought out fully. The investigating agency needs to avoid any hint of a partisan agenda while professionally going about its work. Without doubt, strong political overtones have already come to be attached with the case, but this should not deter the CBI from apprehending the perpetrators.

Normally, any attempt to make political capital from such acts of sheer criminality is to be frowned down upon regardless of which party may be guilty of showing such crass insensitivity. Unfortunately, the system of governance has become so opaque and unresponsive that without the media and the Opposition parties taking up such cases these remain under the cover, with the police readily conniving with the ruling politicians in a bid to put a tight lid over them. It will be wrong to think it is so only in West Bengal. No, it happens in every state in the country wherever the party in power can get away with it. We have to thank the courts for intervening in all such cases.

Sub-quotas within the existing reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the exclusion of the 'creamy layer', are prima facie consistent with the logic of affirmative action. Given that the size of the quota pie is limited, surely it must be distributed in a manner that addresses those most in need.

Opposition to the Supreme Court judgement providing for sub-classification of SC/STs, and for excluding the more 'forward' among these castes, is founded on three arguments. First, that sub-classification will divide the Dalit community (presumably undermining the clout of political leaders such as Mayawati and Chandrababha Naidu). Second, that economic and social progress are two very different things. Third, that excluding the 'creamy layer' requires data that is presently unavailable, and is not within the ambit of the Constitution.

Sub-quotas already exist in the OBC category, and its political left hasn't suffered as a result, so that takes care of the first argument. In Bihar, Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) enjoy an 18 per cent share within the overall quota for OBCs, with another 3 per cent for OBC women. In Andhra, there are five such categories. Last year, Haryana approved a quota for OBCs belonging to the 'A' category in civic bodies, acting on the finding that the socially and economically better-off 'BC-F' communities had the advantage over 'BC-A'.

Problems arise when a new community seeks reservation, because the size of the pie is indeed limited. The courts have consistently maintained that reservation – at least caste-based reservation – cannot exceed 50 per cent. Last month, Bihar's attempt to take caste-based quotas to 65 per cent failed by the Patna High Court. In 2021, the apex court struck down a separate quota for Marathas. Its reintroduction earlier this year has already been challenged in the Bombay HC.

Evidence suggests that certain castes, who happen to be more 'forward' than others lumped into the same category, benefit more from reservation than others. Their representation in the civil services and local self-government, for example,

Reservation sub-quotas must address those most in need

Politicians and civil servants who have faced no disadvantages throughout their lives still get the benefit of reservation

is disproportionate to their share of population. In other words, they get a larger slice of the quota pie than other, more disadvantaged castes.

This reality prompted Jitan Ram Manjhi, MSME minister and leader of the Hindustani Awam Morcha, to suggest (back in 2017) that the benefits of reservation should cease after two generations, i.e. that the 'creamy layer' should be excluded. As Justice B R Gwal, himself a Dalit, pointed out, those more in need of quota entitlements should get them. The idea behind sub-classification and exclusion of the well-off is that the most marginalised among the Dalits should have access to education and employment, and no particular sub-caste should corner all the entitlements.

The Congress has yet to clarify its stand on sub-quotas, although the CPM of Karnataka and Telangana have welcomed it. The move accords well with its slogan of 'Jimi abadi uha maq' (quota according to population), but the party may be sounding out Dalit organisations and activists. That said, not all Dalit organisations are opposed to sub-classification. The Dalit Sangharsha

Samithi (DSS) of Karnataka, for example, has halted the apex court's order.

On the other hand, the political class to a man have denounced the idea of excluding the 'creamy layer'. In 2018, the apex court extended the concept, applicable to reservation for OBCs, to quotas for SC/STs in government employment. The Centre promptly asked for a review! Even now, it sticks to the stand that there is no provision for a 'creamy layer' in quotas for SC/ST.

The argument is that SC/STs cannot be equated with OBCs because the former suffer an exaggerated level of social discrimination, which has nothing to do with their economic advancement. In effect, equal economic status does not translate into social parity. But there's no denying that a well-off person who happens to hail from a subaltern caste is a lot less likely to face discrimination than one who is economically weak. Politicians and civil servants who have faced no disadvantages throughout their lives still get the benefit of reservation, often at the cost of someone who needs it far more.

Perhaps the best expression of

the argument that social status follows from economic empowerment comes from businessman Milind Kamble: 'Defeat Caste with Capital'. What door can remain closed to Rajesh Saraiya, billionaire-CEO of Germany-based Steel Mont Trading Ltd, who owns his Dalit status? In any event, if 75 years of reservation has made no difference to social status, then there's no guarantee that the next 75 years will – not unless the weakest among the Dalits are empowered.

The lack of supporting data to enable sub-classification and identification of the 'creamy layer' is certainly a concern, but not an insurmountable one. After all, enumeration is the job of governments and UIDAI will make it much easier. It may take time, but state governments can set up commissions to collect and analyse caste-specific data, and apply it so as to benefit the most socially and economically challenged – the 'last man' in the queue.

Bhavdeep Kang is a senior journalist with 35 years of experience in working with major newspapers and magazines. She is now an independent writer and author.



Here There & Everywhere

SAVANTAN GHOSH

Bengal horror: Is there no safe space at all for women?

The time for empty promises is over. Our leaders must act decisively to create a society where safety is not a privilege but a guarantee

Twelve years have passed since the horrific Nirbhaya case shook the conscience of India, yet here we stand in 2024, haunted by the same grim reality: women in India are still not safe. The recent brutal rape and murder of a young doctor within the premises of R G Kar Medical College in West Bengal underscores this harrowing truth. This was not just any rape; it was a government-run medical institution, a supposed sanctuary of care and healing. The victim was not just another statistic; she was a doctor, a professional dedicated to saving lives. Yet, even within the walls of a hospital, her life was savagely taken.

This tragedy raises a burning question: If a woman is not safe in her own workplace, surrounded by colleagues, where can she possibly be safe? The answer is a bitter pill to swallow, revealing the collective failure of our society, our politics, and our policies. India has failed yet another daughter, and this failure is on full display for every Indian to see.

Disturbingly, the response to this heinous crime mirrors the regressive attitudes we saw during the Nirbhaya case. The principal of the same medical college, a figure of authority and influence, blamed the victim, echoing the rhetoric that has plagued our society for far

too long. Twelve years may have passed, but the mindset remains unchanged. Instead of demanding justice, some still question the victim's actions, as if the responsibility for such brutality could ever rest on her shoulders.

This incident is a stark reminder that despite the passage of time, the progress we claim to have made remains superficial. India must confront its deep-seated misogyny and urgently re-evaluate its commitment to protecting its women.

In a scathing rebuke, the Calcutta High Court has laid bare the egregious failures of Mamata Banerjee's government in the horrific rape and murder case. The Kolkata police's investigation was a travesty, marked by staggering ineptitude and callous disregard for the victim's family. The force's failure to disclose the true nature of the crime, instead peddling a false narrative of suicide, is a damning indictment of their competence.

Banerjee's belated intervention, replete with hollow assurances, only served to underscore her administration's cluelessness. Her stunning volte-face, advocating for a CBI probe after years of railing against the agency, betrays a stark lack of faith in her own police force. This duplicity raises fundamental questions about her leadership and the trustworthiness of her government.

The chief minister, who wields

unprecedented power as police minister, home minister, and health minister, stands exposed as a leader bereft of conviction or competence. Her administration's failures are systemic, reflecting a deep-seated rot that threatens the very fabric of governance in West Bengal.

This case is a searing indictment of a government in disarray, a political system in tatters. The government medical college, entrusted with protecting its students, has failed abysmally. Banerjee's own words, hinting at internal complicity, only serve to further erode trust. The stench of administrative failure hangs heavy, while the political intent behind this tragedy remains shrouded in suspicion. One thing is clear: Mamata Banerjee's government has been found wanting, its credibility is in tatters. The people of West Bengal deserve better.

In the progressive world of 2024, where India aspires to be the Vishwaguru, we are faced with a harsh and undeniable truth: women are still not safe in their workplaces. The right to a safe working environment is fundamental, yet it remains elusive. This case lays bare the failures of our society, our institutions and our government.

We must confront the grim reality: workplace safety for women in India is a mirage. Despite the existence of policies like the Vishakha

Guidelines and the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, their effectiveness is questionable. The number of incidents involving molestation, verbal abuse, and other forms of harassment by powerful men in the workplace is staggering. How many more women must suffer before we recognize that these policies are not enough?

The situation is exacerbated by the appalling practice of victim-blaming. In 2024, when we claim to be a progressive nation, the scourge of victim-shaming persists. Too many still believe that a woman's actions or choices somehow justify the violence inflicted upon her. This toxic mindset must be eradicated, and there is a growing demand for victim-blaming to be criminalised. The outrage is palpable, and it is time we listen.

The case at R G Kar Medical College raises urgent questions about the state of security in our public institutions. A civil volunteer, Sanjay Roy, now in custody, had unrestricted access to the hospital, despite lacking training and authority. How can such a person be entrusted with security? The misuse of civic volunteers by political parties to control their territories has compromised the safety of our cities. This is a failure not just of law enforcement but of political governance.

In a world where women in-

creasingly work night shifts in industries ranging from IT to healthcare, the safety of these women is under severe threat. If such a heinous crime can occur in Kolkata, how safe are women elsewhere? What is the government's policy to protect those who must travel and work during the night? The answer, it seems, is woefully inadequate.

The accountability for this failure is clear. The West Bengal government, led by Mamata Banerjee, has handed over the case to the CBI, distancing itself from the responsibility. But deflecting blame will not solve the problem. Political leaders must be held accountable, and justice must not become a casualty of political rhetoric.

As protests erupt across the nation, led by thousands of trainee doctors and civil society, one thing is clear: the demand for justice is not just about this one case. It is a demand for a safer India, where women can work, travel, and live without fear. The time for empty promises is over. Our leaders must act decisively to create a society where safety is not a privilege but a guarantee. It is their duty – a duty that cannot be shirked or deferred.

The author, a columnist and research scholar, teaches journalism at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata. He tweets at @savantan_gh. Views are personal.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Need more than nakabandis

The report 'More than 9-fold rise in drunk driving cases' (Aug 5) is very serious, and increasing nakabandis is not the only solution. The bars, restaurants, clubs which

provide drinks must help in this cause. A client who drinks heavily should not be allowed by them to drive his car and they should provide him with a driver. The rule should be made by all the bars and restaurants that heavily drunk people will not be

allowed to drive and should take driver or cab, otherwise they will intimidate the police. But this does not happen because bars and restaurants don't want to take the responsibility of drunk clientele. If we want to stop drunk driving all the

MIRKA MATRIK

places where drinks are provided should insist on clients not driving vehicles after getting drunk.

Maya Bhatkar, Mumbai

China's FDI

The political fallout of allowing China in FDI will hit any political party very hard. After mounting every effort to boycott Chinese goods during Indian festivals, it would hurt the patriotic sentiments of many ultra-nationalists who are ready to take on anybody who opposes their sentiments on China. Anybody with the slightest knowledge of economics will understand that it makes sense to allow Chinese FDI as it would help the nation economically. However, there are bound to be security concerns and that matter should be sorted out. Money has no colour and unless it is proceeds of crime or money-laundering, all FDI should be welcome.

Anthony Henriques, Mumbai



HASAN ZAKI

Cutting across quota system

Social and economic equality as a national project seems to have faltered badly. As it is, the creamy layer for the OBC reservations has not been implemented properly. Income criteria for exclusion too has posed problems, with some sections demanding higher income cap for denial for reservations benefits. In this regard, one generation having been uplifted socially and economically out of poverty must make way for the other far more disadvantaged whom they had left behind. In other words, those who have made it through reservations must make way for others less fortunate. With judicial nod for quotas within quotas it would now be the state governments and the centre as well to arrive at an amicable solution. In the final analysis there should no longer be any doubt that the gains of reservations amongst the underprivileged sections since the founding of the Republic have been most haphazardly distributed.

Anandambal Subbu, Trichy



CRIME AGAINST WOMEN

Politically free, India pines for many a freedom

TODAY marks the 78th Independence Day of this proud nation. Tricolours flutter across the length and breadth of the country and patriotic songs blare out from loudspeakers. Patriotic fervour pervades the country. Among its top merits, India is forecast to clock an average annual growth rate of 6.7%, potentially turning the world's third-largest economy by 2031, trailing behind the US and China. Today, it is the 5th largest with a GDP of \$3.7 trillion, eclipsing UK economy. With 1.4 billion plus numbers, it is also the world's most populous country. Still, it is not forging heavy and ankhing like an elephant, but making rapid strides in terms of economic growth, achieving food self-sufficiency and breaking new grounds in science and technology, including IT. An economic powerhouse, it is a nuclear-armed state

with a formidable defence. Despite humongous diversity in languages, religions, traditions and practices, India truly exemplifies unity in diversity. No other country can boast of so vast a treasure trove of music and dance, gastronomic delights, historical places, tourism sites and architectural splendours. Home to the most ancient drama in the world - Sanskrit - the country also gave birth to religions like Buddhism, Jainism, besides fostering major civilisations, since as far back as 2,600 BC, such as Indus Valley civilisation, the Vedic Age. Empires have been many and the vast sweep of various foods, cultures and traditions, including those from its embrace of every other religion in the world, is unrivalled in the world. It is not an iota of exaggeration if one says that India has been the cradle of civilisation. It

gifted apostles of peace such as Buddha, Mahavir, Nanak, and Gandhi to the world. Indians' propensity for a democratic system never fails to baffle political pundits. In a world beset with wars and conflicts among races or nations, India remains a beacon of hope, fit to play a global peacemaker as lofty values sustain its standpoints on many a global issue. At no point of time one should assume that peace loving pacifist India is weak and meek; the harsh reality is that it can strike against disruptive trend designs with alacrity and swiftness. Yet, dismaying realities confront the nation. Tragedies like train mishaps, bridge collapses, human-induced landslides, continue to jolt the nation's conscience now and then. Truth be told, notwithstanding claims of rulers - Central or State - on this day, the country is not faring

at the rate it should be, in job creation, health, nutrition, sanitation, diseases control or prevention, or even protection of human rights. It continues to grapple to stave off many fatalities such as rising crimes against women, religious bigotry, burgeoning corruption due to politico-babu nexus et al. Justice is long denied for a large number of people, including thousands of poor under-trials, incarcerated for inability to secure bail. When shall India celebrate freedom from so many ills plaguing the country, run as it is by a political system steeped in corruption, nepotism, indifference, and inefficiency? If it has cannot look beyond pecuniary benefits of their positions, who's to blame? Here, one and all must contemplate why India ranks 126 out of 143 countries on the World Happiness Index, behind even Libya, Iraq,

Palestine, and Niger. And why has Finland become the happiest country for the seventh successive year? Law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal had recently told Lok Sabha that while the 25 High Courts were burdened with over 61 lakh cases, lower courts were groaning under about 4.4 crore cases for trials. Routine bail rejections by judges and HC are a big concern. Add to the gravity of the situation agrarian catastrophes, dam collapses, civic nightmares and flood mismanagement. Each one of us needs to espouse and practise brotherhood, peace and tolerance, religious unity, and nationalism. As the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru asked from the ramparts of Red Fort 78 years ago: Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future? Happy Independence Day!



LETTERS

A day to rededicate to nation-building

INDEPENDENCE Day is the day to pay tributes to the sacrifices of our valiant leaders and freedom fighters, who fought for our Independence. India is a nation of diverse cultures, traditions and customs and amid this diversity there is a thread of unity which binds us all together. The day also reminds us of our responsibility towards nation building, while respecting the basic principles that are laid in our Constitution. The secular fabric of our nation has to be protected. Independence Day means to celebrate our brotherhood, love, harmony, our heritage and also upholding the democratic values of our country.

Parimala G Tadasi, Hyderabad

EVEN as India enters the 78th year of independence on 15th August, it is sad that two important sectors viz., education and health sectors are in pathetic state on account of illiteracy ruling high on one side and government hospitals remaining in abysmal condition. In fact, we are faced with such a situation most of the time that even to buy basic commodities for running household, it needs thinking multiple times because it has practically gone beyond the reach of common man due to rising inflation. Notwithstanding religion has practically polarised the nation and caste tearing its ugly head to further divide the society, it is clear the days and years ahead appear gloomy.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

INDIA crossed the threshold of 77 years and stepped into 78th year. One should not forget the sacrifices of freedom fighters right from 1857 till the end of British rule. August 15, 1947 commemorates India's liberation from colonial rule following a prolonged struggle. Any country's progression depends on its past history which is the main foundation root for future endeavours. We are enjoying the fruits from the seeds sown by selfless patriots without aspiring anything from the country except freedom to the people. Former US President John F Kennedy said "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." This spirit was exactly imbued in the blood of our freedom fighters that ultimately culminated India's Independence.

NSK Prasad, Hyderabad

A tribute to our national flag

To me, my friend The national flag you hoist At the nook and cranny of India Is not a mere piece of cloth With its tri colours Scintillating and splendid To parade your patriotism. It is a symbol sacred of your nation With a saga of spirit-stirring sacrifices From time immemorial. When your flag soars high You feel the heart beats Of those great patriots Who laid down their lives at the altar. The flag you hoist, dear friend Is not a piece of cloth In Saffron, white and Green. With the wheel of Dharma at the centre It is the mighty Bharat Maatha With her iridescent dreams Of sculpting a new brave world of Peace, progress and fraternity And holding aloft the eternal values of Of Supreme dedication and sacrifice For your sacred nation.

S M Kempella, Kakinada

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

6 women gram panchayat heads invited for Aug 15 celebrations at Red Fort

BENGALURU: In a proud moment for Karnataka, six women presidents of Gram Panchayats from the state have been invited as special guests to participate in the national flag hoisting ceremony at the Red Fort in New Delhi as part of the Independence Day celebrations on August 15. The honoured invitees include Kumari Lakshminarasamma, president of Gadesra Gram Panchayat in Chikballapur taluk, Nafeeza, president of Peruwai Gram Panchayat in Dakshina Kannada taluk, Rajeshwari Gutti, president of Kantarur Gram Panchayat in Belgaum taluk, Jayashri the Vice President of Tal Siltanpur Gram Panchayat in Kalaburgi district, Deepa PT, Chairperson of Kanur Gram Panchayat in Ponnampet taluk, and Shivamma, Chairperson of Attalupur Gram Panchayat in Chamarajanagar taluk. These six women have been recognized for their exemplary contributions to their respective communities, particularly in areas such as good governance, environmental care, sanitation, solid waste management, tax collection, and water supply. Their dedication to social responsibilities has earned them this prestigious invitation to the national event. The team will be led by Bangalore Rural District Panchayat Deputy Secretary TK. Ramesh. The recognition of these women leaders highlights their significant role in local governance and the positive impact they have made in their villages.

Read more at https://epaper.thehansindia.com

Looking back at special moments

TALKING OF MANY THINGS



DR MOHAN KANDA

CIVIL servants are expected to be self-effacing, anonymous, unseen and unheard. And, as I often pointed out to the political leaders with whom I worked, while in service, bureaucrats are there to be ready to face the blame, should something go wrong, and willingly gliding to concede the credit to their political masters, when a decision proves successful and popular. I abided by that arrangement throughout my service. But, now that I have retired and there are fewer restrictions placed upon my speaking and writing, I feel free to recall some of my experiences which, hopefully, will interest the readers. Having successfully overcome the handicap of premature birth, I became an almost normal child by the time I was three months old. One afternoon, I was sipping grape juice at Himalaya Cool Drinks, a shop situated at Luz Corner, a little distance away from our home, in Mysipore in the then Madras. I was six years old, and as was my wont, I was chattering non-stop with the owner of the shop. A couple of gentlemen connected with the movie production industry were also present. Apparently, impressed by my exuberance and talkativeness, they asked

me whether I would like to act in films. When I most enthusiastically replied that I would, they suggested that I go for an audition and I readily agreed. They took me home and, after obtaining my mother's permission, took me to a nearby movie studio for an audition, which apparently proved satisfactory. Soon, I signed up for a role in a movie called 'Manohara', and thus began, at age six, my career in acting, which was to last for the next three years.

Directed by the legendary film producer and director L. V. Prasad, 'Manohara' was shot in three languages, namely Hindi, Telugu and Tamil, and I was to play the role of a prince. The shooting took place in Pakshiraja Studios in Coimbatore. My mother and I travelled to Coimbatore by train. It was an overnight journey and I remember how I spent a sleepless night, nervous and frightened as on the same train had been derailed by terrorists, a couple of days earlier. The movie featured in the lead, the legendary Sivaji Ganesan. It was there that I first saw the legendary Travancore sisters, Lalitha, Padmini, and Ragini.

Another incident which I recollect vividly, from my acting days, is that of L. V. Prasad accidentally hurting me in a shot in another movie of his, 'Pempudu Kodaku'. He, as my father in the movie, was to pretend to hit me while I protected myself with my palm, which the camera would not catch. The arrangement, however, failed at the last moment,

Theoretically speaking, it was possible for me to have asked for an exemption from personal appearance, which request may have been granted. But I really saw no reason to do so. So there I was in a court presided over by an officer of far lower rank, standing in the witness box and offering testimony under oath. But that is the law of the land



and I received a resounding slap on my cheek! Angry and upset, I ran away home, and refused to go back for shooting until Prasad called on my mother and appeased me by giving me the game of 'Trade', so popular with children those days. Yet another incident I remember is from a movie called 'Marudalu Pellu', on the sets of which, in Neptune Studio in Madras, the famous South Indian character actor Mukkamma used to carry me around on the palm of his hand! One scene in the movie had the lady portraying my mother's role passing away. I was supposed to cry over her body, which I stubbornly refused to do, until my mother was called to the studio, and I was assured that all was well. I portrayed the role of a prince, once again, in a Telugu movie called 'Dharma Devata'. As a measure of punishment, for the crime of throwing a stone and ac-

identally hurting the king, the prince is asked to be fed to lions. The interesting part was that, reality being accorded such a high priority in those days, I was actually taken to the Madras zoo, where I had to go through the harrowing experience of actually walking into a lion's cage. Nothing untoward happened, of course, but it certainly was a chilling experience.

In 1954, the Andhra state was carved out of the erstwhile composite Madras state, to cater to the demands of the Telugu speaking people of the erstwhile dispersion. My father decided to move to Guntur, where the High Court of the new state was to be located. We travelled by train and, at many wayside railway stations, crowds thronged the platforms, in order to take a look at me as I was still some sort of a child star in their minds. Father would joke for years later, saying that he

thought that he would actually come to see him! As an Assistant Collector (under training), as a Sub Collector, and later, as a Joint Collector, one of my functions was to hear appeals preferred over the judgments of various subordinate functionaries. When I became a District Collector, I was hoping that I had, finally, reached the stage when that tedious, and, somewhat unappealing, chore would no longer be performed. But, then, I had not reckoned for the possibility that I, myself, may have to be at the receiving end one day! Some matter pertaining to a decision I had taken earlier, when I was Sub Collector, Ongole, had come up before a Sub Judge, at Chirala, a part of my earliest jurisdiction in the neighbouring Prakasam district. I was summoned to appear before that court, and duly obeyed the summons. Theoretically speaking, it was possible for me to have asked for an exemption from personal appearance, which request may have been granted. But I really saw no reason to do so. So there I was in a court presided over by an officer of far lower rank, standing in the witness box and offering testimony under oath. But that is the law of the land. One thing I have always failed to understand about the procedures followed by the courts in our country is why witnesses, the defendant and the complainant are all made to stand while deposing. Not the case, certainly, for instance, in the US. After all, witnesses and defendants have committed no crime and even the accused is expected to be held

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

WHY FREEDOM AT MIDNIGHT?

B P ACHARIA

ON the occasion of our Independence Day, inevitably, one is reminded of the celebrations during the Golden Jubilee Celebrations 25 years ago. One tends to remember the many midnight functions organised then to mark our 'Freedom at Midnight' and the concomitant inconveniences one had to go through groggy-eyed! Mercifully, this time around, we are spared of such nocturnal celebrations, but the question continues to be asked: Why on earth did we choose to be free at an unearthly hour? Was it by choice or by compulsion? What was special about that midnight hour for our 'Tryst with destiny'? Why, you ever wondered? And thereby hangs a little tale, not widely known, that I will recount below.

To answer these questions, I need to jog my memories back to 1980s, when as a research scholar in JNU, I had a gap year. Having completed the course work for M Phil with a high grade point, I was eligible for direct Ph D (for which I registered, though not a priority for me then), but was under a year for the Civil Services Exam. As I was relatively free, my Professor and guide asked me to help the internationally celebrated authors Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre (of 'Freedom at Midnight' fame) to edit the personal papers and private documents of Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last

Viceroy, which they had collected for their best seller publication. That's how I was swamped by huge loads of material which I had to ferret out for new publications, later brought out in two separate volumes, viz., 'Mountbatten and the Partition of India' and 'Mountbatten and Independent India'. That is when I stumbled upon an interesting interview of Lord Mountbatten by the authors of the book during their course of research for the international best seller, 'Freedom at Midnight'. The recorded interview was published in the first part of the new publication 'Mountbatten and the Partition of India'. Let's hear from the horse's mouth, as it were, as Mountbatten reflects in these excerpts from his interview, characterised by his trademark arrogance and insouciance:

"Q. The ceremony of August 15 had no precedent. Who invented it, engineered it? A. Well, I discussed it with Nehru. The first and most amusing thing, of course, is that I had selected August 15 because it was the date of the Japanese surrender - which had only taken place, don't forget two years ago - but I hadn't consulted the astrologers. As you know, the Indians are riddled with astrology. I didn't realize it. On an auspicious day one could do nothing. Well, Nehru didn't believe in astrology, but he did choose a no problem day, and that I'd chosen an unpropitious day, I suppose it was silly of me not to consult the astrologers, but I had forgotten. He said, "Never mind. If you agree that we can have a midnight meeting and just before the midnight strikes, we'll transfer power, that'll be all the more auspicious." And I thought - what a marvelous, dramatic idea, having a midnight meeting while the rest of the world sleeps - and you'll remember ... This was done, not because we wanted a dramatic moment, but because I'd chosen the wrong day because the astrologers said it wasn't propitious! So there you are... That is how we were saddled forever by freedom at midnight, as an uncomfortable compromise between Viceroyal arrogance and astrological adjustment or 'upay', as it's often called. While the date was fixed arbitrarily by an egotistical



broached it with other leaders, apparently there was stiff resistance, particularly from Sardar Patel and J B Kripalani who wanted to avoid the inauspicious day. Eventually, it was left to an ingenious astrological subterfuge to resolve this conundrum

While the date, August 15, was fixed arbitrarily by an egotistical Viceroy, what is surprising is that the Indian leaders rather meekly submitted to his whims and fancies! When Nehru broached it with other leaders, apparently there was stiff resistance, particularly from Sardar Patel and J B Kripalani who wanted to avoid the inauspicious day. Eventually, it was left to an ingenious astrological subterfuge to resolve this conundrum. This is how it was done. As per the Hindu calendar, tithis (days as per solar/lunar cycle) begin at the sunrise, while as per the Western (Gregorian) calendar, the date begins at midnight. This crucial difference afforded a slim window of opportunity to work out an astrological solution (upay) to this difficult dilemma. As per the astrologers, the 15th August, 1947, which fell on the 14th day (chaturdashi) of dark fortnight (Krishna paksha), with

the most inauspicious new moon day (amavasya) setting in, too, had to be avoided by all means. Thus, as per the innovative compromise formula this could be achieved by avoiding the sunrise of the 15th August, thereby avoiding the inauspicious dark chaturdashi amavasya. But as per the Gregorian calendar, the 15th would begin after midnight. So, it was an ingenious tightrope walk that necessitated this midnight ceremony and the rest is history... his apparently win-win formula was actually a difficult compromise that was more out of compulsion than choice. We had no choice when confronted by a supercilious Viceroy's arbitrary choice of date, which smacked of scant disregard of people's sentiments... But what was, indeed, disappointing was the meek submission of Indian leaders to his whims and fancies and going out of the way to adjust to his peccadilloes. Thus, freedom at midnight became our 'tryst with destiny', and over time, became a symbol of dramatic transfer of power emulated in some other colonial countries like Hong Kong. For us, however, it remains a story of queer compromise that defined the dilemma of our country during the initial years after independence, that lingers on in more ways than one.

(Author is a retired Special Chief Secretary of Telangana and the views are his personal. He can be reached at bpacharia@gmail.com)

The Tribune ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Bail under UAPA

Apex court rules in favour of personal rights

THE Supreme Court has been repeatedly asserting that bail is the rule and jail is the exception. However, law enforcement and investigation agencies, in their occasional overzealousness, have apparently been under the impression that this legal principle is somehow not applicable to special statutes like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967.

Considered draconian particularly by human rights activists, UAPA has often been associated with high-handedness and repression. It was in August 2019 that the Central Government amended the Act to include the provision of designating an individual as a terrorist. Prior to that, only organisations could be given the 'terrorist' tag.

All these distressing factors make bail under UAPA highly significant. In the instant case, the court punched holes in the chargesheet, saying that there were no reasonable grounds to conclude that the charge of commission of offences punishable under the Act was prima facie true.

A stain on justice

The face of Ram Rahim's frequent furloughs

THE repeated furloughs granted to Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, the convicted leader of Dera Sacha Sauda, highlight a troubling pattern of leniency towards a man who has been convicted of heinous crimes. Over the years, Ram Rahim has been granted multiple paroles and furloughs, raising serious questions about the integrity of the judicial and political systems that enable such decisions.

This leniency is not just a legal issue; it's a moral failing. It sends a dangerous message that those with political connections can evade full justice, undermining the victims' suffering and the principle of fairness. The law must apply equally to all, regardless of status. Anything less damages the credibility of our judicial system and the public's faith in it.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 1924

Slandering a nation

IN spite of the ingenious defence that has been set up by the Anglo-Indian Press, we are constrained to say that the Dacca speech of Lord Lytton, which has caused a feeling of profound indignation in Bengal and, in fact, all over India, does amount to a libel both on the womanhood and manhood of India. The words of His Excellency... we hope our readers will forgive us for publishing this slander just once — ran as follows: 'The thing that has distressed me more than anything else since I came to India is to find that hatred of authority can drive Indian men to induce Indian women to invent offences against their own honour merely to bring discredit upon Indian policemen.' On the face of it, this is a racial generalisation which is even more offensive and insulting than that in which Lord Curzon allowed himself to indulge in a famous convocation speech against which Bengal recorded its protest by a meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall, presided over by Dr Rash Behari Ghosh. If Lord Curzon impugned India's standard of veracity, which is dear to her heart, Lord Lytton has gone one better and impugned the honour of her women, which is still dearer to her. It is all very well to say that his Excellency's remarks do not refer to all Indian men and women. Of course, they do not. But neither did Lord Curzon say that the standard of veracity of every single Indian or Asiatic was inferior to that of every single European. That, in fact, is not the way of the racial generaliser at all. He knows his business far too well to make so palpably obvious a mistake.

Humanism on the Olympic scale

Mothers of champion athletes Arshad Nadeem and Neeraj Chopra belittle India-Pak hostility



TRYS AND TURNS JULIO RIBEIRO

FOR me the biggest takeaway from the Paris Olympics was the voice of two women — two mothers, one an Indian and the other a Pakistani. Raziah Parveen, whose son Arshad Nadeem belted our hero Neeraj Chopra for the gold in the javelin throw, on being informed that her son had won the contest, said Neeraj was also her son and she would have been equally happy if the result had been the other way round.

That was a brave thing for a mother to say. But the other woman, too, expressed something similar. Suraj Devi, Neeraj's mother, said Arshad was also her son. Two mothers from two neighbouring countries, separated by a barricaded border and mutual hostility built up over 77 years or so, were not merely happy and proud of their respective son's performance at the Games but, even more importantly, exhibited a dignity and grace that only wisdom and gentility can evoke.

Anshad and Neeraj have given their nations a lot to cheer about ahead of their respective Independence Days. If common citizens of the two perpetually warring countries can unite and drive some sense into the thoughts and actions of their rulers, poverty and misery — which is presently the lot of a sizeable proportion of their respective population — can be fought and conquered. Such a transformation may not result in top positions in the comity of nations but will certainly be good enough to assure both of a place at the high table. India, with a stronger economy, would



GLORY: Javelin throwers Arshad Nadeem (right) and Neeraj Chopra have given their nations a lot to cheer about ahead of their respective Independence Days. (1)

most certainly get there. Pakistan has invited Neeraj to her home at Mian Channu village in Khaneval district of Pakistani Punjab. Will the government of Pakistan give him a visa if he does accept the offer? That is a million-dollar question, very difficult to answer.

Pakistan's Ambassador in Romania during my tenure there had a schoolgoing daughter whom I had met when my wife and I were invited for dinner at their home. Thirty years later, I received an e-mail from the girl saying that she was employed in a foreign country where she met and married a Hindu colleague from India. They wanted to meet the parents of their spouses but were finding it difficult to obtain visas. Could I help?

I wrote to the External Affairs Minister Suhma Swaraj. She was an old acquaintance of mine from my Punjab days. A gracious lady, she replied by the next day that she had instructed her ministry to expedite the process. I heard nothing about that request thereafter, neither from the ministry nor from my young Pakistani friend. Moving on to Bangladesh,

If common citizens of the two perpetually warring countries can drive some sense into their rulers, poverty and misery can be fought & conquered.

micro-credit wizard Muhammad Yunus, now tasked with the difficult task of running a government in his native land, knows that his primary task is to restrain the proclivities of the religious extremists intent on decimating the minority Hindus. He has inducted their representative in his interim administration, probably to humour the hotheads. I doubt if that will work. Religious extremists of all creeds are a menace in any country and the Bangladesh ones find themselves unchained after 15 years of Sheikh Hasina's rule. That makes them doubly dan-

gerous. The Nobel laureate has his work cut out.

It is emotionally gratifying to humanists the world over that when these extremists threatened to destroy Hindu temples and homes, the students who propelled the ouster of India's friend Hasina took it upon themselves to mount a vigil and deployed volunteers to defend the temples, homes and shops from religion-inspired vandalism.

The student protesters of Bangladesh alleged that Hasina was an autocrat, a minor dictator who favoured her own party operatives with jobs in the government. These are as prized in Bangladesh as jobs are in ours. Government jobs ensure security of tenure even while the quality of service rendered is well below par.

Many commentators from Bangladesh mentioned the close relations between their country and India as a grouse against Hasina! That comment was not well received in India. Here, the common man's view has always been that Bangladeshis should perpetually be beholden to India for helping them achieve inde-

pendence from Pakistan. Those of us who harboured such misconceived expectations know better now. Like blood is thicker than water, religion can also replace blood in the Islamic view of life.

The Bangladesh imbroglio presents grave problems for India. We wait and watch. Some intrepid Congress leaders have pointed to parallels between what has happened there to what is happening in our country. They forget that it requires a popular upheaval of the type that emanated from students in Bangladesh to force any ruler's hand. That is nowhere near the horizon here. What is eminently possible, though, is that a resurgent Opposition can and should curb autocratic tendencies born of sycophancy and over-the-top imagination. The tendency to imprison political opponents who refuse to defect should be firmly opposed and put to slumber. There was public awareness already of such measures being employed which a more pugnacious Opposition can easily exploit.

The lessons learnt from Bangladesh will perform have been studied by our rulers. They have no option but learn therefrom. If they neglect to do so, they will do so at their own peril. The happenings are so very close to our doom that lessons from past history could have been forgotten but not this one. The fallout of troubles in a neighbouring country are sure to destabilise settled positions in numerous spheres of concern. Inaugural groups that operate in the North-East will again try to find safe havens in Bangladesh, just like they were able to do before Hasina bottled them up.

If that happens, it will be a major headache, but not the only one that could follow Hasina's ouster. Another round of migration by Hindus from Bangladesh is also a possibility — unless Yunus can convince them to stay on by assuring them of their safety.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession. — Mark Twain

Shatabdi journeys and fragile egos

CHITVAN SINGH DHILLON

PASSENGERS onboard the executive-class coach of the Shatabdi Express from New Delhi to Chandigarh make for an interesting case study on the fragility of the human ego. The travellers typically consist of the movers and shakers of the bureaucracy, 'My Lords' and kurta-clad netas — not to forget lawyers and journalists.

It baffles me that those who frame and execute policies, supposedly shouldering a gigantic responsibility, find it impossible to lift their own bags. While the apex-level 'Bura Sahib' from Punjab will typically be accompanied by his protocol staff, courtesy the Resident Commissioner, the more self-effacing counterpart from Haryana will manage things by herself — without a whiff of arrogance. They will walk past each other and may not exchange pleasantries, even if they may be batchmates!

At the railway platform, one can spot some officers, sporting their colourful 'ID cards', which have become more of a fashion accessory and an obvious assertion of their seniority. Occasionally, one may spot a retired baba, still wearing the *lol patta* with the expired ID card deftly tucked inside the pocket.

Inside the coach, dishevelled and young couples are often found making a quick dash for their coaches after helping agent advocates remove their black coats and grabbing their files. The servility in their body language is hard to miss.

'Keep the change!' the northern-sector auntie dismisses the humble coolie and quickly gathers her shopping haul from Charakya Mall and Dhan Market. An entitled *mesanahib* and her badly behaved progeny, accompanied by their personal staff, enter soon after. A confusion over seat numbers erupts, which quickly escalates into an argument, but stops short of a brawl. The staff is summarily rebuffed, and deservingly so, by the auntie. It turns out that the *mesanahib's* ticket is for the following day! The helpless but snooty lady is rescued after a speed dial to the rail maitreys by a fellow traveller who walks down the aisle, presumably her husband's batchmate.

My co-traveller is an affable auntie from Karol Bagh. She is the quintessential *shikanyasta* Indian auntie you don't want to mess with. And so, I just cowered up on her juicy *cooly* gossip. I gather that the menu at Mrs Chaudhri's recent kitty party was awful. Later, over hot, cardamom-scented *chai*, we get talking. She manages only a smattering of the Queen's English but insists on carrying the conversation forward only in that language.

In less than 15 minutes, she is flipping out *rishras* for me from her phone. 'Puttar, at least have a look! She's from LSR (Lady Shri Ram College), *yaar!*' she chimes. Alarmed, I steer the conversation towards books, but her acquired taste for literature leaves me unimpressed. And, before we realise, the train chugs into Chandigarh. I humbly ask her to upgrade from Shobha Dé to Jackie Collins, at least.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ensure drains are not clogged

With reference to the editorial 'The sinking feeling', heavy rains have exposed the lack of preparedness on the part of the civic bodies concerned. Roads have caved in, residential and commercial areas have been inundated, and many localities have been reeling under power outages. The local civic officials' failure to blunt the impact of rainfall has caused grave inconvenience to residents and commuters. It is time for the authorities concerned to conduct an audit to ensure that storm water drains and tanks are not clogged up with debris and garbage or blocked by encroachments. This could help prevent flooding and recharge groundwater and surface storage. In order to minimise the accumulation of water, we must improve the way city roads are constructed and repaired.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

Kolkata's shame

With reference to 'Kolkata horror', doctors across the country are on strike to lodge their protest against the brutal rape and murder of a trainee medic at a state-run hospital in Kolkata. The ghastly incident throws the spotlight on the risks — from physical assault at the hands of patients to sexual abuse — that medical professionals face every day. While the prompt response of the state government is welcome, there is a need to ensure that the perpetrator is brought to justice. A moot question is: will the Kolkata horror pave the way for much-needed reforms to protect women from sexual violence?

GREGORY FERNANDES, MUMBAI

Patients bear brunt of strike

Refer to the editorial 'Kolkata horror'; attacks on healthcare workers have become increasingly common. From physical assault to rape, doctors are often at the receiving end of abuse and violence. The chilling murder of an on-duty doctor at a government medical facility in Kolkata has jolted the whole nation. It has become abundantly clear that stringent laws to deal with such heinous crimes are often not enough to ensure justice. Such cases drag on in court for years, much to the dismay of

the kin of the victims. And the perpetrator is often let off despite the presence of incriminating evidence against him. The need of the hour is to make sure that such sensitive cases are disposed of within a fixed time frame. Besides, the government authorities must pay heed to the concerns being raised by the protesting doctors so that they call off the strike, which is only adding to the patients' plight.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

No let-up in crimes against women

The horrendous rape and murder of a trainee doctor at a state-run hospital in Kolkata bring back memories of the 2012 Nirbhaya case. But the most shocking part of the episode is not the gruesome nature of the offence but that the act was committed on the premises of a government medical facility brimming with people at all times. It is supposed to be a safe place for medical professionals, patients and other visitors. What is the point of having stringent laws in place if there is no let-up in such heinous crimes? It seems like criminals don't even fear the law. Did things get any better after the spine-chilling sexual assault on young nurse, Aruna Shanbaug, at Mumbai's KEM Hospital decades ago? The answer is sadly an emphatic 'no'. But hopefully, the Kolkata horror will spur a positive change.

RAMESH K DHANRAJ, CHANDIGARH

Adapt to changing times & climate

Refer to 'Climate-resilient crops'; such crops, designed to withstand these challenges, can be the way forward. After all, the changing monsoon patterns and intensifying heatwaves are not distant threats. These are urgent crises that need to be addressed on priority. The launch of several high-yielding, climate-resilient crop varieties is welcome. However, the success of such endeavours hinges heavily on a number of factors, ranging from an effective outreach to small-scale farmers to scientific inputs. A collective effort, rooted in science, is essential to ensuring food security in the face of climate change.

GAGANPREET SINGH, BY MAIL

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

MICROWAVE OVENS HOST THRIVING COMMUNITIES OF MICROBES: STUDY

 EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14

MICROWAVE OVENS used in homes, offices, and laboratories host thriving communities of microbes, according to a new study. The findings challenge the long-held belief that microwave radiation used to warm food completely kills bacteria, which can cause food-borne illnesses.

However, this does not mean that the microbes found in microwaves present a unique or increased risk compared with other parts of kitchens. Previous studies have shown that kitchen appliances such as coffee makers and dishwashers host distinct communities of microbes.

"What is clear is that one cannot trust a microwave to be a cleaner environment in terms of microorganisms compared to another kitchen surface. They must be cleaned like the rest of the kitchen," Manuel Porcar, a microbiologist at the University of Valencia in Spain and co-author of the study, told *New Scientist* magazine in an interview.

The new study, *The microwave bacteriome: biodiversity of domestic and laboratory microwave ovens*, was published in the journal *Frontiers in Microbiology* last week.

How was the study carried out?

The team of researchers took samples from 30 microwave ovens in homes, scientific laboratories, and shared kitchens, such as in office spaces and cafeterias. The researchers then cultured its samples—a method of multiplying microorganisms to determine the type of organ-

ism in the sample being tested—in Petri dishes, and identified the genera or groups of the microbes that flourished. They also sequenced the DNA in the samples to get further information about bacteria found in the microwaves.

What were the findings of the study?

The researchers found 747 different genera of bacteria in the cultured samples. "The dominant ones belonged to the *Bacillus*, *Micrococcus* and *Staphylococcus* genera, which commonly live on human skin and surfaces that people frequently touch. Human-skin bacteria were present in all three types of microwave ovens, but were more abundant in the household and shared-use appliances," according to a report on the study by the journal *Nature*.

Some bacteria found in domestic microwaves, such as *Klebsiella*, *Enterococcus*, and *Aeromonas*, may pose a risk to human health. Samples from lab microwave ovens contained the most diverse bacteria, including "extremophiles" or microbes that can withstand high radiation, high temperatures, and extreme dryness.

Belinda Ferrari, a researcher at the University of New South Wales (Australia) told *New Scientist* that she was not surprised that the researchers found bacterial living in microwaves. "They can survive in almost any extreme-exposure environment and they can adapt to everything," she said.

Ferrari also underlined the importance of cleaning microwave ovens regularly with disinfectant products. "Some workplace microwaves are disgusting and no one cleans them," she said.

 ARJUN SENGUPTA
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14

MUHAMMAD YUNUS, head of Bangladesh's caretaker government, visited the Dhakeshwari Temple in Dhaka on Tuesday, and assured leaders of the Hindu community that "we are alone people" and "justice will be given to all". Bangladesh's minority Hindus have faced more than 200 attacks in 50-odd districts since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5. As policing collapsed, at least five people were reported killed in attacks on Hindu families, institutions, and temples.

The largest minority

Bangladesh's 2022 census counted a little more than 13.1 million Hindus, who made up 7.96% of the country's population. Other minorities (Buddhists, Christians, etc.) together constituted less than 1%.

The share of Hindus in the population varies widely across Bangladesh's eight divisions— from just 3.94% in Mymensingh to 13.51% in Sylhet. (See map.) In four of Bangladesh's 64 districts, every fifth person is a Hindu—Gopalganj in Dhaka division (26.94% of the district population), Moulvibazar in Sylhet division (24.44%), Thakurgaon in Rangpur division (22.11%), and Khulna in Khulna division (20.75%).

Hindus were more than 15% of the population in 13 districts, and more than 10% in 21 districts, according to the 2022 count.

Declining share in population

Historically, Hindus had a much bigger share of the population in the Bengali-speaking region that makes up today's Bangladesh. At the beginning of the last century, they constituted about a third of the population of this region (See chart). There has been a significant demographic shift since then.

Every census since 1901 has indicated a decline in the share of Hindus in the population of what is today's Bangladesh. This decline was the steepest between the censuses of 1941 and 1974, i.e. when Bangladesh was East Pakistan.

Notably however, only the 1951 census reported a significant fall in the absolute numbers of Hindus compared with the previous (1941) count—from about 11.8 million to about 9.2 million. The number recovered gradually to reach the pre-Partition level of 11.8 million in the 2001 census.

The population of Muslims in this region rose from about 29.5 million in 1941 to 110.4 million in 2001. The increase in the proportion of Muslims in the population—from an estimated 66.1% in 1901 to more than 91% today—corresponds to the percentage decline in the Hindu population during this time.

Multiple factors—including some that predate the Partition—are behind this change.

 SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14

THE MINISTRY of Information and Broadcasting on Monday withdrew a fresh draft of the Broadcast Bill which it had privately circulated among a handful of industry stakeholders. The draft had triggered widespread criticism from several quarters.

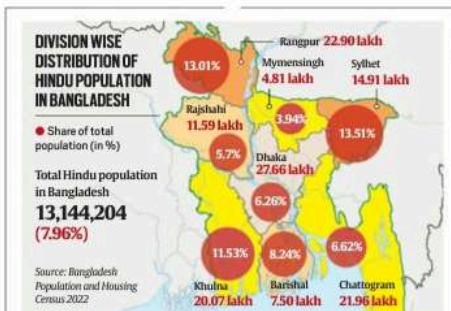
Why was the Bill withdrawn?

The *Indian Express* has learnt that the government withdrew the Bill following a major difference of opinion within the ministry on whether the Bill should apply to non-news online content creators. As per the draft Bill, such creators would have fallen under the category of over-the-top (OTT) broadcasters.

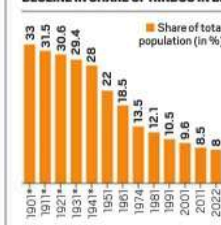
While the ministry did not respond to requests for a comment on the matter, in a statement posted on X on Monday night, it referred to an earlier draft Bill placed in the

Hindus of Bangladesh

Where does the minority community, under attack in the post-Hasina period, live in Bangladesh? The share of the country's Hindu population has been determined by factors including Partition, migration



DECLINE IN SHARE OF HINDUS IN BANGLADESH POPULATION



Fertility rates differential

According to estimates by scholars, the fertility rate among Muslims has historically been higher than that of Hindus in Bengal. Data from the first census of India (1872) onward support this hypothesis, primarily based on a comparison between Hindu-majority West Bengal and Muslim-majority East Bengal.

The American anthropologist David Mandelbaum argued that the impact of religion on the differential fertility rates in Bengal was indirect, and acted primarily through educational and economic factors. (*Human Fertility in India*, 1974) Muslims across Bengal belonged to the lower socio-economic strata and lagged in education—both factors associated with higher fertility rates. They were also more rural, and engaged in agriculture, again a factor associated with larger family sizes and consequently, fertility when compared to urban households.

This trend continued after Partition. The total marital fertility rate (a lifetime measure of marital fertility) of Muslims was 7.6 children per woman compared with 5.6 for

Historian Gyanesh Kudaisya wrote that 11.4 million Hindus (42% of the Hindu population of undivided Bengal) remained in East Bengal after Partition. "In 1947, only 344,000 Hindu refugees came into West Bengal, and the hope lingered among the minorities of East Pakistan that they could continue to live there peacefully," Kudaisya wrote. ("Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and Their Rehabilitation in India, 1947-79" in *The Long History of Partition in Bengal: Event, Memory, Representations*, 2024)

The movement of refugees took place through the 1950s and 1960s, and volumes varied based on community relations between Hindus and Muslims. Even when major riots were not taking place, Hindus in Bangladesh faced what scholars Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Anusua Basu Ray Chaudhary called "conjunctural violence" caused by the specific circumstances of Partition. This did not amount to "more than verbal abuse and minor physical intimidation, prompted by an unusual resource crunch and severe scarcity of space caused by the steady flow of Muhajir migration from India" (*Caste and Religion in Bengal: The Story of Dalit Refugees, 1946-1962*).

Kudaisya wrote: "1948 saw an influx of 786,000 people into India, and in 1949, over 213,000 Bengali refugees crossed over the border into West Bengal... An estimated 1,575,000 people left East Bengal in 1950... another 187,000 refugees came in 1951, followed by another 200,000 in 1952... 76,000 persons coming to India in 1953, 118,000 in 1954, and 240,000 in 1955... In 1955, when Pakistan adopted an 'Islamic' constitution, the number of incoming refugees again mounted to 320,000... This process of gradual displacement continued throughout the 1960s."

Assam (including present-day Meghalaya before the Liberation War in India), West Bengal, and Tripura recorded unprecedented increases in population between 1951 and 1961, which scholars attribute entirely to the arrival of refugees from East Pakistan.

Another wave of migration took place in 1971, as the Pakistani Army and its collaborators went on a murderous campaign against Bengalis before the Liberation War in India. According to Indian estimates, approximately 9.7 million Bengalis sought refuge in India during the conflict, around 70% of whom were Hindu.

"The West Pakistani generals had calculated that by forcing millions of East Pakistani Hindus to flee to India they would weaken Bengali nationalism as a political force," Sanjay Baruah wrote for *The Indian Express* in 2021.

Since the formation of Bangladesh, migration of Hindus into India has decreased. Porous borders, well-established familial and kinship networks in India, and periodic inter-religious tensions in Bangladesh are drivers of this migration.

Partition and migration

Bengal and Punjab were the two provinces of British India that were divided between India and Pakistan on the lines of religion. The division was haphazard, often arbitrary, and left a trail of violence and trauma whose reverberations can be felt even now. However, in Bengal, unlike Punjab, there was no massive, state-facilitated exchange of population across the new border in 1947.

"But knowing that the government's intention changed significantly in the latest version, are people supposed to send in their comments with that in mind? It also begs the question, if a provision is not included in the 2023 version but was present in the 2024 version, how can we make comments specific to that?" a second industry executive said.

How was the 2024 draft different? Why?

The draft Broadcast Bill, which seeks to replace the 1995 Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, sought to consolidate the legal framework for the broadcasting sector, and extend it to OTT content and digital news.

"There were a number of instances where creators made videos on current affairs which made some sensational claims about the government and its senior leaders... That's when it was decided that there has to be an accountability measure for these creators as well," the official said.

PL filed by lawyer Gantayya Gulati. The petitioner argued that "Section 377 of IPC in its absence poses threat to every individual but especially LGBTQBI persons". The petitioner also said the BNS does not contain any protections for a man who is sexually assaulted by another man.

The Centre, however, argued that the court could not direct the legislature to enact a provision even if there was an anomaly in the law. The government counsel pointed out that a representation had already been filed flagging this issue with the Union government, and was pending consideration.

The Bench directed the Centre to return on August 28 to clarify its stance on non-consensual sexual offences following the deletion of Section 377.

TELLING NUMBERS

29 US VPs have sought presidency, only 10 have won

Vice President Kamala Harris is the presumptive presidential nominee for the Democratic Party. This makes her the latest US Vice President to try for the top job. According to data from the Pew Research Center,

49 people have served as the Vice President of the US.

29 Vice Presidents have gone on to formally seek a party's presidential nomination, either immediately after their vice presidency or later on.

10 of these vice presidents have successfully secured the top job.

THE TREND of Vice Presidents seeking the presidency has become more common in modern times.

15 of 18 Vice Presidents have launched presidential campaigns, since the first term of President Franklin D Roosevelt began in 1933.

5 of these 15 have emerged victorious. They are Democrats Harry Truman, Lyndon B Johnson and Joe Biden, and Republicans Richard Nixon and George H W Bush.

THIS LIST does not include Gerald R Ford, who took over as President following Richard Nixon's resignation, but lost the subsequent election to Jimmy Carter. This is unlike Truman (FDR's successor) and Johnson (Kennedy's successor) who won subsequent presidential elections.

3 modern Vice Presidents—Henry Wallace (1948), Walter Mondale (1984), and Gore (2000)—have won their party's nomination but lost the general election.

5 modern Vice Presidents—John Nance Garner (1940), Alben Barkley (1952), Hubert Humphrey (1972), Dan Quayle (2000), and Mike Pence (2024)—have failed to secure their party's nomination.

ENS

Why Delhi HC is hearing a plea against exclusion of PC Sec 377 in BNS

 AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
 NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14

THE DELHI High Court on Tuesday asked the Centre to clarify its stance on non-consensual sexual offences against LGBTQIA+ persons and men under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS). The new criminal law came into force on July 1, 2024, and replaced the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC).

Issue before the court

The Supreme Court in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) decriminalised homosexuality by ruling that Section 377 (unnatural offences) of the IPC would not punish people in same-sex relationships. This provision punished anyone who "voluntar-

ily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal". Despite the SC's reinterpretation, however, Section 377 remained in the text of the IPC until the BNS came into force—where it was deleted entirely.

However, this may have had unforeseen consequences, according to the petitioners who have approached the Delhi HC. They have argued that Section 377 provided protections to men and LGBTQIA+ individuals from non-consensual sexual intercourse even after the *Navtej Singh Johar* verdict.

Rape in BNS, IPC

Chapter V of the BNS is titled "Offences against women and child" and provides the definition and punishment for the crime of rape under Section 63. But the language of

the section is gendered—it only considers rape in the context of a man committing the crime against a woman. On the other hand, Section 377 (while it was still on the books) punished non-consensual intercourse "with any man, woman or animal".

The SC's 2018 verdict referred to those areas of Section 377 that criminalised consensual unnatural sex as "irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary". The court noted that the section was used as a weapon to harass and discriminate against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. However, the court clarified that its judgment was limited to decriminalising consensual sex between adults. This is why, in its 2023 report on the

public domain last November, and said it was offering stakeholders "further additional time" till October 15 to provide their comments. "A fresh draft will be published after detailed consultations," it said.

Why has the statement triggered confusion?

The ministry's statement has left some questions unanswered. It makes no mention of the 2024 draft, confusing stakeholders, especially those who with whom the government did not share this version. "Are we supposed to send our comments on the November 2023 version of the now-withdrawn draft, because a copy was never formally shared with us?" said a person from the industry requesting anonymity.

The second key question is around the secretive nature of the consultations that the government has engaged in since July this year. Consultations regarding the 2024 draft

have been held with only a handful of stakeholders including some industry bodies, telecom companies, and tech companies. Those who received the 2024 version were given watermarked documents with unique codes to discourage leaks.

"But knowing that the government's intention changed significantly in the latest version, are people supposed to send in their comments with that in mind? It also begs the question, if a provision is not included in the 2023 version but was present in the 2024 version, how can we make comments specific to that?" a second industry executive said.

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EXPLAINED LAW

In BNS, alternative protections

That said, Section 36 of the BNS provides every person with the "right of private defence" to protect their own body or the body of another person "against any offence affecting the human body".

Section 38 details the situations where the right allows the "victim any cause of death or of any other harm to the assailant".